

The Intellectual Conquest of the Orinoco: Filippo Salvatore Gilij's *Saggio di storia americana* (1780–1784)

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While much attention has been paid to the events and debates following the Jesuit expulsion in 1767 from the Spanish territories, one cannot disregard the full impact of the Jesuit missionary campaign at the ragged frontiers of the Spanish empire in South America.¹ Members of the Society of Jesus were the main protagonists in the so-called “pacification” of indigenous groups and natural transformation of the extensive network of tropical river regions. Indeed, pre- and post-expulsion missionary accounts contradict anti-Jesuit allegations of self-interest and complete disregard for Spanish policies—charges that were used as legal pretext for the expulsion from the Portuguese and Spanish territories. The Church-State conflict between the Society of Jesus and the Court of Charles III (1759–1788) had at its core how these *operarios* (operators) of Christ became a major obstacle for the expansion of Bourbon political and economic power.² During a period of intense rivalry among European nations, Spanish strategists such as Pedro Rodríguez de Campomanes and the Counts of Floridablanca and Aranda worked to undermine both Jesuit doctrine and institutional legitimacy. Among other official documents, the final *dictamen* (report) authored by Campomanes enumerates damning evidence that include alliance with enemies of Spain, excessive political influence through their religious and educational institutions, and, worst of all, motives of self-enrichment.³ Jesuit colonial practices helped the Order to become a dominant economic force through their agricultural estates and commercial undertakings. In sum, they were charged with establishing, “their own state within the state,” pressuring Spanish officials, and even enslaving Indians (Stein and Stein 104). The total suppression of the Order followed these events, in 1773.

The extensive chain of Jesuits missions and *haciendas* (estates) established along the Orinoco River region dominated the regional economy with their surveillance and control of main waterways for the benefit of the colonial state and private stock companies who oversaw trade and commerce between the region and Spain. For Joseph Gumilla (1686–1750), the Orinoco represents an open door,

que ofrece passo franco a lo más interno de las provincias de Cumaná, Caracas, Maracaybo, y a todo el Nuevo Reino de Granada. Todas aquellas provincias tienen el pecho guarnecido con fortalezas, reducciones etc. pero las espaldas de todas aquellas provincias descubiertas con el paso franco que da el Orinoco. (“Informe” 60)

(that offers unfettered access to the interior of the provinces of Cumana, Caracas, Maracaibo, and to the entire New Kingdom of Granada. All of those provinces are protected at the chest with forts, reductions, etc., but the backs of all those provinces are exposed, what with the free access provided by the Orinoco.)⁴

According to Jane Rausch, “their reductions served as the bulwark of Spanish defense against Dutch and Portuguese incursions” (55).⁵ Missionary writings, such as those authored by Gumilla, testify openly to the manner in which Jesuits led the vital defense of Spanish-controlled spaces against hostile Guahibos and Caribs and from incursions by Dutch and Portuguese slavers.

Jesuit historical accounts, *cartas principales y edificantes* (principal and edifying letters) for public consumption, and private communications to their superiors, constitute a key colonial discourse that provided well-crafted arguments influencing knowledge on science, geography, education, and linguistics. Not surprisingly, these texts also deliver a celebratory assessment of the Jesuit role in the development of a new socio-economical order on a frontier dominated by waterways. This essay analyzes the hermeneutic character of the river and its surrounding *llanos* (tropical plains) in the missionary account *Saggio di storia americana, o sia storia naturale, civile e sacra* (1780–1784) (Essay of American History, or Natural, Political, and Sacred History), by Filippo Salvatore Gilij (1721–1789). I argue that Gilij’s discourse on nature and colonial rhetoric sheds light on the understudied issue of Spain’s new colonial policies toward nature under the Bourbon Reforms.⁶ A primary objective was to increase revenues with large-scale initiatives aimed at stimulating trade and commerce across the Iberian global empire. However, this economic agenda depended not only on the expansion of routes for navigation but also on the expansion of the empire’s frontiers and the systematic exploitation of its resources. Gilij’s *Saggio* offers a central testimony to this imperial project; at the same time, it celebrates the

Jesuit missionary campaign as a vital support to the colonial state through its leading role in the transformation of nature at the empire's territorial edges. In eighteenth- and nineteenth-century natural histories, nature is not conceived as a neutral domain but rather as a resource awaiting transformation and exploitation. "Ordenar para controlar" (Impose order, so as to control) expresses the ideological axis of late-colonial imperial practices on the New Granada frontiers, as Marta Herrera argues. In Gilij's pre-expulsion natural history of the Orinoco, this axiom is firmly implied in the language, approach, and selection of themes, which convey that politics and conditioning of nature and human interactions cannot be separated from these central discourses of the Enlightenment.

After the publication of Joseph Gumilla's *El Orinoco ilustrado* (1741–1745), Gilij's *Saggio* became one of the most important references on Jesuit missionary activity on the frontiers of the Viceroyalty of New Granada. It was precisely Gumilla who recruited him for the last and most intense missionary campaign to unfold along the Orinoco and its tributaries. The first three volumes of Gilij's *Saggio* intertwine colonial politics with detailed observations on biodiversity, climate and the environment, and indigenous lifeways in the Middle Orinoco region. A concluding fourth volume is devoted to the foundation of the Viceroyalty, Spanish military achievements, and a general description of Tierra Firme. Writing in Rome thirteen years after the expulsion, during a period of intense Jesuit intellectual activity, Gilij caught the attention of some of the most prominent *criollos* (Creoles) writing from exile (Juan Ignacio de Molina, Francisco Javier Clavijero, and Juan de Velasco, among others). Natural historians rebutted Gilij's geographical assertions and his understanding of tropical nature and native populations. Because the *Saggio's* volumes were not published all at once, Gilij was able to respond to these *criollo* objections, thus demonstrating his allegiance to the Bourbon monarchy and his support of a Eurocentric moral and environmental order. His efforts were rewarded by the Spanish monarchy, which granted him a pension (IV: xxv). Between 1770 and 1790, the Crown devoted considerable resource to supporting the articulation of geographical and historical knowledge in a way that would refute foreign critics. In the same manner, they sponsored the publication of *criollo* works in support of their cause, such as Antonio de Alcedo's *Diccionario geográfico-histórico de las Indias Occidentales ó América* (1786–1789, Geographical and Historical Dictionary of the Western Indies or America) and Juan Ignacio Molina's *Compendio de la historia geográfica, natural y civil del Reyno de Chile* (1782) (Compendium of the Geographical, Natural, and Civil History of the Kingdom of Chile). Gilij's efforts were welcomed and praised because of his engagement with the "dispute of the New World" (Gerbi) or philosophers's theories on the degeneration of the continent—used as a basis for the eighteenth-century resurgence of the anti-Spanish "Black Legend."⁷

Gilij's approach to historical writing, shared by many European historians and thinkers of the Enlightenment, was based on the empirical discourse of objectivity and truthfulness; of his work, he asserts: "No es ni buffoniano, ni de Linneo sino verdadero." (IV: 77) (It is not derived from Buffon or Linnaeus but truthful). Neil Safier notes that Rousseau "in his *Second Discourse* famously criticized European explorers for their lack of objectivity" (99). Gilij best displays his empiricism, and his claims as a critical and objective thinker, through his treatment of legendary and fabulous representation of rivers, such as El Dorado, Amazon warriors, and the persistent cartographic location of Lake Parime.⁸ The text incorporates a critical review and, due to the lack of proof, the Jesuit refuses to lend credence to these deeply entrenched beliefs; and yet he notes that "America se distingue por sus maravillas" (I: 15) (America is distinguished by its marvels). Nevertheless, *maravillas* are linked to a realizable geographical reality of paradise interwoven with a new economic and social perspective. In addition, he inscribes cultural traits, languages, healing, and material practices observed in the Maipures, Tamanacos, and Pareques in the discourse of otherness and marvels. While Gilij recognizes Amerindian cultural difference, he assumes a perspective colored with notions of the marvelous that voids Amerindian cultural agency. Native societies are judged by European standards, thus justifying the imposition of "civilization" and the transformation of nature for the benefit of the Catholic Church and the Bourbon Empire.

Sponsoring Empire

In order to craft a tropical landscape of productivity out of the former representations of continental degeneracy upheld by European thinkers, Gilij represents indigenous peoples as useful colonial subjects. In this framing, reconsideration of the local topography is key to envisioning the natives' potential to help secure the fluvial frontier in the Bourbon-ruled region. Gilij constructs a hegemonic geographical imaginary that isolates two distinct spaces: the wild territories of the pagan Indians and the civilized spaces occupied by Spaniards and new converts coexisting in the "cities," settlements, and *reducciones*. There is no space in between, but a vast expanse awaiting transformation. Referring to the tropical regions, he states: "Hay la salvaje y hay la civilizada. La primera es aquella en que viven solos los americanos. La otra es aquella que por medio de sabias leyes, introducidas allí por usos civilizados y cristianos, ocupan los españoles junto con los indios reducidos." (I: 17) (There is a savage one, and there is a civilized one. The first is the one in which the aboriginal Americans alone live. The other is the one where, by means of wise laws introduced there

through civilized and Christian customs, Spaniards live alongside the Indians in reductions). The depiction of indigenous populations in the second volume emphasizes that they are spiritually untended and ignorant; nonetheless, examples abound of their openness to receiving the Christian faith. He emphasizes that, once converted to Christianity, Amerindians living in a wild state are transformed into valuable colonial subordinates; they become curious and grateful, possess great patience and memory, and, despite their laziness, promptly respond to missionaries' instructions (III: bk. 3). As repeatedly stressed in accounts of early colonial development projects, the purported lack of indigenous religion, culture, or morals empowered colonial social actors to deterritorialize subjugated groups and impose new rules on them.

Reordering the diverse populations to defend the riverine frontier from raids and contraband traffic was paramount for colonial officials in the New Kingdom of Granada. To accomplish this, the Spanish empire reinforced the frontier with missions, a strategy initiated in 1650 for the Hispanization and conversion of natives (Rausch 58). Among early eighteenth-century accounts following the opening of the Orinoco, the 1720 "Informe" and "Relación" by missionaries Juan Capuel and Juan Romeo are particularly significant.⁹ Ordered by the new viceroy Antonio de la Pedrosa y Guerrero, the missionaries surveyed the river regions toward the Atlantic while the defense, fortification, and the geographical demarcation of Guyana became a pressing issue for the newly established viceroyalty (Rey Fajardo, *Los jesuitas* 769). Protection of indigenous groups from the Caribs and securing trade with Spain and Mexico turned Guyana into a key spot (MacFarlane 144). In his "Informe," Capuel listed nine points to justify fortification between the Orinoco delta and its confluence with the Caroni River. The accompanying map to his "Informe" [Fig.1] shows the mouth of the river, leaving aside the actual labyrinth of islands, branches, and canals of the oceanic waterway to the Atlantic. Instead, he provides a map of the course of the river with simple visual elements. The Island of Fajardo with the recommended fortress dominates the riverscape visually, demonstrating its proximity to adjacent missions and the important settlement of Guyana. Taking on the role of military engineer, Capuel, via his text "Informe," clearly sets in motion the Jesuit military conquest of the Orinoco. The fort was never completed; however, decrees and orders followed his survey and recommendations to protect and missionize the area of the low Orinoco [Fig. 1].

The politics of the eighteenth-century missionary campaign were defined quite early by the work of Jesuits, such as Capuel, and by the conscientious efforts of Philip V, who under the advice of his counselors recruited Spanish and foreign Jesuits for the tropical South American regions. Jesuits Bernardo Rotella, Roquer Lubián, Manuel Román, and Joseph Gumilla successfully surveyed and settled areas deep in the interior

of the upper Orinoco, establishing contacts for the first time with indigenous groups of this region. Among these Jesuits, Manuel Román in 1744, serving as father superior of the Orinoco River missions, explored the Casiquiare, a main channel connecting with the Rio Negro, a tributary of South America's major watershed, the Amazon. The correction of this geographical error, verified by La Condamine's map, became a major point of debate among critics of Gumilla's map of the Orinoco. According to Gilij, Gumilla knew of the discovery and had drafted an appendix correcting his mistake that was not included in the revised second edition of *El Orinoco ilustrado* in 1745.

During Gilij's years in the tropics (1749–1767), he founded in the Middle Orinoco the *reducción* of San Luis Gonzaga (La Encaramada), where he came in contact with the Tamanacos, Maipures, and, to a lesser extent, Pareque Indians. He also established another mission of Maipures, La Encarnación. When one of the three commissaries of the Boundary Expedition (1750–1764), Eugenio de Alvarado, presented his damaging "Informe reservado" (Confidential Report) on the Middle Orinoco missions, La Encaramada was noted for its strategic geographical location, admirable climate, fertile soils and the successful maintenance of order in the village. His only criticism regarded land use; Gilij dedicated his estates mainly to cultivation of crops such as maize and yucca, rather than to cattle ranching. Alvarado comments that, in addition to these products, the Encaramada Indians collected tree oil and honey and produced crafts that were sold and exchanged for tools from foreigners (311). Observations by this partial observer of the Crown (and critic of the Jesuits) are extremely valuable for understanding Gilij's control of the colonial space.

Jesuit Tropicalizations

Tropicality has been defined as a discursive commonplace that justifies the imposition of Western civilization on the basis of the influence of climate and geography over races (Arnold, Stephan, Driver). Deeply implicated in colonialism, it became a main resource for geo-determinist philosophers confronting the reality of environmental otherness. In the work of these philosophical historians, water, heat, and humidity were the defining elements of the discourse of tropicality. For George Louis le Clerc (Comte de Buffon), Corneille de Pauw, Guillaume-Thomas Abbé Raynal, and William Robertson, travel narratives and missionary accounts became important intertexts because of the manner in which these authors hierarchized tropical places and nature. In France, Enlightenment philosophers arguing about the virtues and classification of nature in the tropics read and commented critically on the 1758 translation of Gumilla's *El Orinoco ilustrado* and Jesuit "edifying letters" often appearing in French

periodicals.¹⁰ Two decades later, *L'esprit des Journaux* of Paris reviewed Gilij's *Saggio di Storia Americana*, a text that had also drawn the attention of the Italian press (Jaramillo 696). While much of the later literature on tropicality focuses on travel writing post-Humboldt, these Jesuit narratives undoubtedly fueled Enlightenment debates on the geo-environmental role in human difference.

In order to construct knowledge on tropical nature, eighteenth-century geo-narratives had to be descriptive, textual, and graphic. In ecclesiastical accounts, these demands were not only a reflection of the aesthetics of the period but also an obligation for missionaries, who responded to formal instructions and royal decrees. Jesuits were additionally duty-bound by Ignacio de Loyola's teachings to provide a full account of their progress and failures as well as geo-ethnographical details that could help strengthen the Society's new evangelizing projects. As natural historians of the Orinoco, Gilij and his predecessors were caught in a very difficult position between aspiration for objectivity and rationalism and Christian dogma. As the intellectual conquest of river advanced, these geo-narratives became less concerned with theology and more preoccupied with their contribution to natural science and geography. Hence, their efforts at charting places and describing indigenous cultures and tropical nature contributed significantly to the universalizing discourse of the Enlightenment.

Jesuit colonial discourses of the Orinoco highlight the geographical, economic, and religious significance of the river. Missionary historians viewed themselves as "hombres de los ríos" (Fajardo 768) (men of the river); their accounts illustrate the key role waterways played in European survival, mobility, defense, and commerce; all of which are practices of deterritorialization. The manner in which Jesuits narrated their newly acquired skills at navigating the rivers with shifting sandbars, twisted channels, and other dangers conveys the central metaphor of their colonial engagement in the Americas. Regardless of the many threats involved in exploration and missionization, negotiating the dangerous flows and sheer magnificence of Orinoquia's network of waterways provided economic and spiritual gain with sacrifice and effort. For Gumilla, for instance, writing itself became another metaphor for traversing these waterways.

In letters to their superiors, annual reports, and eclectic historical accounts, these imperial actors documented their prominent role in the final thrust into the untamed frontier. Nonetheless, Jesuit geo-narratives provided much more: they justified imperial/colonial practices and quenched the European thirst for knowledge about the exotic nature, morals, and customs of indigenous societies. Jesuits tropicality, such as those ideas and images introduced by Gilij and other post expulsion missionary historians, defined and idealized objectivity as an epistemic value of European philosophers. Gilij's recognition by the Bourbon monarchy acknowledged his defense of Spain against European philosophers, though less for his contribution to

geography and natural science than for his use of the standards of natural science to glorify Spain's broad civilizing mission in South America.

Gilij's *Saggio* enters the debate over geo-environmental determinism tardily and at a moment when Spain is searching for a compelling response to the frontal attack mounted by northern European philosophers. His observations refute philosophical histories and also engage with proto-nationalistic narratives by *criollo* Jesuits who were motivated to write by the dispute.¹¹ Toning down *criollo* assessments and often arguing against them, his observations on temperature, winds, rain, and other climatic factors support determinist ideas about the influence of heat and humidity in tropical flora, fauna, and humans: "Mi experiencia no pasajera me induce a poner toda la culpa de las diferencias americanas en el clima cálido . . . Nuestras hierbas, nuestros árboles y arbustos, los animales semejantes a los nuestros nos pueden ayudar a comprender qué extrañas metamorfosis produce el extraño calor de América" (IV: 81) (My experience, far from transient, leads me to place all of the blame for American difference on the hot climate . . . Our grasses, our trees and shrubs, and animals similar to our own can help us to understand the strange transformations the strange heat of America can cause).

In a conscious attempt at objectivity, he points to temperature variations of the torrid zone and asserts that similarly variable climatic conditions exist in other parts of Europe, where one can find humid and dry regions within a single zone of latitude (IV: 180). Orinoquia, irrigated by its rivers, is depicted as a space of fertile soils with barbarous Amerindian groups that could become productive and useful in the new agrarian colonial economy. He explains that high humidity develops in regions with considerable rainfall, an extensive network of rivers, and thick forest areas. There are advantages to regions with diverse climates: "Tiene allí sin cambiar las estaciones, un lugar donde rehacerse del calor buscando el frío si le conviene, donde sudar perpetuamente como en una estufa, donde gozar, si más le agrada, de una eterna primavera amable" (IV: 180) (Without a change of seasons, one has there a place to recover from the heat by seeking out the cold if suitable, a place to sweat interminably as if in a stove, and a place in which to enjoy, if so desiring, an eternal, gentle spring). Gilij's remarks on the philosophers' ignorance of the geography and climates of the Americas also highlight the benefits of high humidity and diverse climates. He supports Capuel and Gumilla's assessments by explaining how these river regions in close proximity to the newly established viceroyalty of New Granada represented a valuable commodity that would benefit economic development. For Gilij, souls as well as soils were in much need of domestication.

The multivolume work includes eight engravings, which highlight the economic potential of tropical nature. They demonstrate the close collaborative work between authors, artists, and engravers who were able to

capture Gilij's tropical geographical imagination in order to support his observations. In the engraving "Veduta di un campo indiano" (View of an Indian field) [Fig. 2], the interplay between the verbal and the visual reinforces the American space as a bountiful gift. Contained in an idealized tropical space, the image highlights fertile soils, important crops, and hardworking new colonial subjects who move freely as they work the land. As is well established, agriculture on the Jesuit haciendas was considered one of the most important sources of wealth and material affluence (Cushner). Gilij firmly believed this, and devoted great efforts to agriculture for the Spanish empire on his own estates. In the text accompanying the image, he describes with considerable fascination the enormous diversity of its endemic species: "singularisimas plantas, cocos, tamarindos, guayabos, hicacos, y que sé yo" (IV: 77) (unique plants, coconuts, tamarinds, guava trees, *hicacos*, and others I don't know). The image points to a cornucopia of tropical nonnative crops and celebrates, in opposition to the generalized opinions of European *philosophes*, the potential of the region. Also, the narrative casts the plantation as an idyllic landscape, always surrounded by its waterways, with clouds signaling the region's extreme humidity. For Gilij, the rivers provided the periodic natural irrigation needed for cultivation of these desired tropical commodities. He acknowledges the existence of unsuccessful crops in some places; however, primitive methods and the laziness of the Indians, rather than soil quality, are said to blame. In this manner, Gilij emphasizes once again the influence of climate over bodies—particularly Indian ones—causing "el perpetuo sudar, el cansancio, la palidez del rostro" (IV: 176) (the perpetual sweating, the fatigue, the pallor of the face). The cultivation of exotic products using Indian labor serves, in the *Saggio*, as a signifier of social order and economic gain. Textual and visual images connect the colonial discourse on tropicality with soil productivity, private property, and indigenous subjugation.

The *Saggio* presents a clear statement, free of any ambiguity or contradiction, on the connection between the imposition of social order and the exploitation of nature. In "Veduta de una ranceria" [Fig. 3] (View of a hacienda), the imperial project of spatial transformation is reinforced by amplifying the narrative on the encompassing nature of the river regions and the role of the Spanish *expedicionarios* (expedition members). It illustrates the interaction between Indians and a commanding gentleman, a member of the Boundary Expedition, engaging in the profitable exploitation of one of the river's most valuable natural resources, the manatee. My comments on this image will address two important aspects: first, how neoclassic aesthetics contribute to the representations of tropical landscapes and human bodies and, second, the manner in which the interaction between these opposing actors, Tamanacos and *expedicionarios*, are viewed in terms of a profit-driven activity. Dressed elegantly despite the heat of the tropics, the Spanish settlers stands at the center of the scene clearly giving instructions

to the Tamanaco Indians. In the text, Gilij underscores the Indians' strength and physical beauty, and the artist renders his ideas through his depictions of the indigenous subjects with strong bodies, long, flowing hair, and peaceful facial expressions. Additionally, the illustration places exotic fauna from the tropics before European eyes in a manner that also highlights the exemplary actions of the Spanish in the new settlements. The backdrop is adorned with abundant vegetation, a canoe, a caiman, and, across the river, a traditional hut.

It is an image that points to the challenge of the settlers instructing the Indians on the difficult task of handling the manatees. More than a description of the manatee or the settlements along the river, the image provides a classic example of ecological imperialism with the Spaniard instructing the natives on how to utilize natural resources. For Gilij, the capture of these abundant mammals, widely hunted along the Orinoco for their meat and oil, represented "el triunfo del valor" (I: 98) (the triumph of courage) of those who dared to pursue them. One of the Indians is cutting up a manatee, two prepare to cook the meat, and another rests in a sitting position while listening to commanding orders. Native Amerindians are passive and compliant in a manner that perpetuates the objectifying European vision of their new colonial subjects: as beings in dire need of guidance. Daniela Bleichmar reminds us that eighteenth-century natural histories: "insisted on the centrality of vision but also demanded that views always remain partial . . . Images acted as visual avatars replacing perishable objects that would otherwise remain unseen and unknown by Europeans" (185). Therefore, the image also reinforces the exemplary role of Spaniards in the peripheral regions. In the description of the members of the Boundary Expedition, Gilij praises the settlements established by these superior males who were full of vitality and skill. As Felix Driver explains, one significant aspect of the culture of imperialism is the representation of masculinity: "The heroes of the colonial landscape—the explorer, the hunter, the soldier, the missionary, the administrator, the gentleman—were all gendered in particular ways, providing moral models for a generation of empire builders" ("Geography's Empire" 27).

Landscape art and cartography were common features of Enlightenment historical accounts. Indeed, they adorned early modern publications and made them more attractive in the emerging book market in Europe. Gilij's comments about his own images indicate that authors and publishers were well aware of this fact: he explains that engravings were included to enhance the *Saggio's* sales, and that more were not used because they would have made the book too costly. However, as Nancy Leys Stephan asserts, they were the vehicles that unveiled the tropics to the European reader, thus allowing for the construction of an identity for tropical nature through their images (18).

It is precisely in the selection of images where I find that Gilij emerges as a distinctive interpreter of the Orinoco. He celebrates the river's resources and critically describes indigenous practices in the exploitation of natural resources, proposing new methods instead. The discourse on nature is connected to the Spanish moral mission at the frontier and in its transformation. For him, Spain could transform *America selvaggia* with its technology, religion, and civilization; and the Jesuits had the power and know-how to accomplish the tasks put forward by new Bourbon policies. His interpretation of the Orinoco as a tropical region reflects political and aesthetic concerns, which confer prominence to Jesuits in the story of Spain's engagement with European modernity.

Mapping the Tropics

As Noel Castree underscores, discourses on nature not only answer the question "What is nature?" but also articulate "appropriate ways to use it, control it, or alter it" (12).¹² Gilij's discourse on tropical nature addresses the relationships between Enlightenment natural science, geography, and colonial politics. His account contributed to a double agenda with textual and visual representations that gave significance to the situated nature of the missionary campaign and the Spanish imperial project. Gilij, along with many other Jesuits of the pre-expulsion generation, supported the Bourbon's assertion of power with maps: correcting the contours of the network of rivers, the Orinoco delta, and the location of new missions and settlements, which included those established by the colonists from the Boundary Expedition. His commentaries on the maps of the *Saggio* addressed their accuracy and the new object of cartographic authority, thus validating his claims for objectivity.

Conventions of mapmaking assisted in the production of a corporate truth that combined the work of surveyors and engineers, cartographers, artists, and natural historians. In Jesuit geo-narratives, the author was often also the cartographer since Jesuit were missionaries also trained in mapping and in the use of navigational instruments. As mentioned in their *cartas anuas* (annual reports), they were expected to have maps and charts that would illustrate the extent of their missionary work. Nonetheless, Jesuits specialized in different forms of knowledge production in order to satisfy political needs and, therefore, receive the much-needed official sponsorship to continue their missionary work (Harris 222).

Under the rubric of "Noticias generales del Orinoco" (General information on the Orinoco), Gilij opens the narrative with a hydrographical description of the river. He first describes such physical aspects as the volume of water, extensions, depth, and floods. In addition, he includes

historical details about ancient and modern indigenous societies of the river. With three maps, his ecological account points to the relevance of floods, which provide the *llanos* with rich soils for agriculture. The description of the Orinoco is enhanced by the first small-scale map found in the book, which bears the title “Carte dell Fume e Provincia dell Orinoco Nell America Meridionale” [Fig. 4] (Map of the River and Province of the Orinoco in South America). This cartographic representation is supplemented and verified by Luis de Surville’s “Carta Corográfica,” (Chorographic Map), which highlights the course of the river and its connection with the Amazon; the fourth volume includes the map “Carte Geographica di Terra Ferme” (Map of the Mainland) elaborated by Mons. Bonne and Eusebio Vega. The fact that Gilij acknowledges the cartographic efforts of other cartographers points to his insistence on offering a truthful and objective history that has not been tarnished by his own perceptions.

In “Carte dell Fume e Provincia dell Orinoco,” (Map of the River and Province of the Orinoco), which was delineated by Gilij himself, the visually striking cartographic feature is the accurate delineation of the river course in the Middle Orinoco. Besides tracing the course of the Orinoco, he pays attention to topography and the location of the indigenous and Spanish settlements and the networks of missions. The location of missions and Spanish settlements—such as Caracas, Nueva Barcelona, Santa Fe de Bogotá, and Córdoba—have the usual iconic symbol of a church that connects the conquest of political space with the ecclesiastical mission. By using the same icons for missions, cities, towns and villages, Gilij emphasizes their successful campaign in opening unexplored and certainly dangerous regions. Moreover, these visual signs reinforce noteworthy claims of personal experience that justify his authority as a historian and political agent of the empire and the order.

In comparison to the well-known maps made by his mentor Joseph Gumilla [Fig. 5], Gilij does not give prominence to religious territoriality; instead, he locates important features of the tropical physical space that could further the development of the colonial economy. For his first map, the one that he sketched, he relied heavily on the work of “unos eruditos señores” (some learned gentlemen), referring to the cartographers from the Boundary Expedition. Their observations were significant to establish the controversial source of the river at the Parime Lake, the accuracy of the river’s course to the Atlantic, and the important connection with the Amazon through the Casiquiare and the Rio Negro, which were discovered by the Jesuit Román.¹³ The map had a two-fold purpose: on the one hand, to illustrate accurately the river course in order to secure it for military and commercial navigation and, on the other hand, to locate the successful settlements of the Jesuits and the members of the Boundary Expedition, who also contributed to the transformation of the region. The map, the visual art, and the textual descriptions provide a solid narrative pointing to the future.

The river and the *llanos*, in spite of their dangers, offered considerable benefits as a commercial route that had been fortified with the establishment of haciendas and new missions and that was often depicted as a militarized space.

In spite of a cartographer's intention to convey reality accurately, a map always reflects an external power (Harley, *The New Nature of Maps* 22). In this case, it represents the power of the Order and the colonial state. As has been argued, eighteenth-century cartography facilitated the rationalization of space in which physical phenomena, mobility, and history were brought together in order to instruct as well as to justify the exercise of power in all its forms (Whiters, Harley, Edney). Gilij's map represents the power of flows as both a source of "truth" and "objectivity" and painstaking observation. As Harley states, this type of Jesuit map as a mode of visual persuasion "made the conquest believable" ("The Map as Mission" 28). In the study of coloniality, it is necessary to inquire into how these cartographic images that complement the written text are the products of agreements and interpretations that depended on their scale and projection.

Conclusion

The engagement of Jesuit missionaries with well-established European geodeterministic assumptions generated one of most important archives of the colonial discourse on the tropics. In these accounts, the human and natural character of this no-man's-land legitimated religious conversion and the establishment of the chains of missions with their *haciendas* or *rancherías*. These Jesuit establishments became the distinctive mechanism of territorial reconfiguration for the Spanish Empire under the Bourbons. It was not solely a question of "pacifying" indigenous societies with Christian doctrine under the lingering impetus of the Counter Reformation, these accounts constructed knowledge and perceptions of these future colonial subjects, and of tropical bio-geography. These accounts corrected European misrepresentations and demonstrated the potential for profit through an export economy. In this way, missionary knowledge on the tropics would help the Bourbons to attain a leading role in the formation of a new, modern economic order.

Missionaries' complicity with imperial projects and state power is evident in the rhetoric of order and control dominating geo-narratives of the tropics. Riverbanks and surrounding plains became one of the most important theaters of colonialism in South America. The Orinoco facilitated the penetration of *tierradentro* (the hinterland) and economic development in a region perceived to have a greater potential. Yet, the geographical difference of these humid regions with periodical flooding, wild animals,

poisonous plants, and hostile natives shattered the expectations of the Columbian Garden of Eden. The idea and rhetoric of the tropics kept changing: images of an idyllic place turned out to be dangerous and dreadful for foreign travelers and settlers. Then, natural histories of the eighteenth century gave new meaning to the tropics by redefining tropical geography in terms of Enlightenment aesthetics and a Eurocentric utilitarian scheme based on a new relationship between humans and the environment. Defying notions of degeneracy upheld by some European Enlightenment thinkers, Jesuits like Gilij depicted Orinoquia as an underexploited place brimming with economic potential for Spain—if only the rivers could be defended and secured.

As demonstrated in Gilij's *Saggio*, missionary writings reconstituted the tropics and their rivers, infusing them with new meanings. If for Gumilla, the river represented a circuit of knowledge, then for Gilij, the Orinoco reinforced the center of economic power. By articulating heterogeneous perspectives on geography and clearly outlining the river's economic potential, he supported the Spanish geopolitical agenda. As the "objective" natural historian of the Orinoco he claimed to be, he moved away from a vision of nature as a wonder based on the triad God-Man-Nature that dominated medieval and early modern representations of otherness.¹⁴ Humboldt's allusions to the *Saggio* in his *Travels to the Equinoctial Regions of America* illustrate that in contrast to his predecessors, whose point of reference was the ecclesiastical collective autobiographies dominant since the seventeenth century, Gilij stood at the center of natural theology, a major influence on missionaries. There is no doubt that Gilij's discourse on the Orinoco River and natural history provides insight into how Jesuits as knowledge producers reconciled Catholic dogma and imperial politics during a period when Enlightenment rationalism guided the secularization of Spanish colonial institutions.

Charles Withers calls attention to the relevance of geography within the Enlightenment project: "Ideas in Europe about the geographical extent of the World, about human difference, about what it meant to be 'enlightened,' were framed by geographical encounters" (40). "The Enlightenment's originators," he asserts, "are not Europe's nations and prominent individuals—but the people and places they encountered and charted" (40). Hence, the intellectual tradition that shapes the notion of the global Enlightenment remains indebted to these so-called "encounters" with indigenous societies that were brought under European control.

It is in the riverine tropical regions where difference was redefined as the territories were transformed. Historical missionary accounts and natural histories such as Gilij's *Saggio* were multidimensional. As an ecclesiastical and government agent, he positioned himself as a guide on an intellectual journey along the Orinoco. In this space, missions, indigenous groups, and the natural realm conveyed the power of place founded in the omnipresent

fluvial pathways. The important role he assumed, as producer of secular knowledge legitimized by his experience, strengthened the position of the order as he defended the political and economic interests of the Spanish empire. On the other hand, given the divine provision of waterways, for him, the unknown ragged frontier could be transformed, civilized, and Christianized.

Notes

1. For the most recent scholarship of eighteenth century Jesuits see Shore and Ingram; and O'Malley. For the Iberoamerican experience, see Marzal and Bacicalupo, and Millones Figueroa and Ledezma.
2. On the historical context of the reforms, see Gabriel Paquette; for New Granada, see Anthony MacFarlane.
3. On Campomanes *dictamen*, see Stein and Stein 101–7.
4. On Gumilla's writing, see Ewalt's *Peripheral Wonders*.
5. Since 1681, defense and fortification of the rivers counted on Royal financial and military support (Rausch 66); over time, this support decreased and became an issue of contention among the King and his advisors, viceregal authorities, and Jesuits. See Gumilla's *Escritos varios* 112, 310, 312, 293.
6. On the nature and impact of the Bourbon reforms, see Paquette.
7. For scholarship on the "Dispute of the New World," see Gerbi, Brading, and Cañizares-Esguerra.
8. Important accounts reaching Europe, such as the 1744 report by La Condamine, perpetuated belief in El Dorado, Amazon warriors, the legendary Parime Lake figures prominently (see Fig. 3).
9. For a bibliography see Gómez, Gutiérrez and Bernal Villegas. For ecclesiastical history, see Rey Fajardo. Recent contributions from the perspective of social sciences include Negro Tua, Rausch, and Samudio.
10. On the reception of Gumilla in France, see Ewalt "Crossing Over" and Castro Roldán.
11. *Criollo* Jesuit historians such as Clavijero, Molina, Velasco, Felipe Gómez de Vidaurre, and Francisco Iturri criticized Gilij openly. They viewed his observations as an Eurocentric discourse that made sweeping claims about expansive regions of South America based on limited experience and prejudicial knowledge.
12. The notion of nature in social theory as one of the most difficult concepts to define can be traced back to the work of Raymond Williams. See Soper and Escobar for the study of the shifting and contested definitions of nature and the cultural politics that influenced its reinvention.
13. Rey Fajardo (*Los jesuitas*, 478) points to Gilij's use of the work of other cartographers such as those from the Boundary Expedition.
14. Urteaga's *La tierra esquilmada* traces the development of ideas on nature and conservation from Christian theology to anthropocentric views on conservation.

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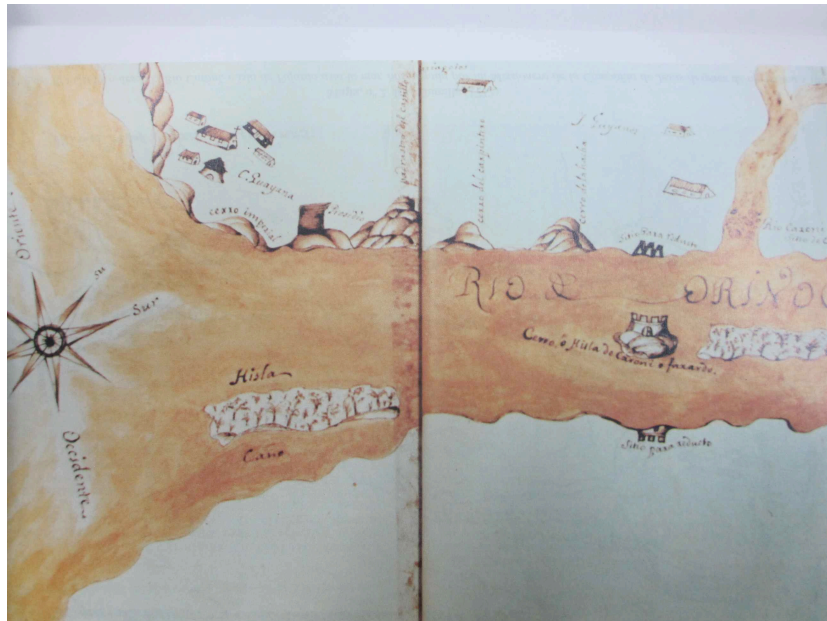


Fig. 1. *Bajo Orinoco*, by Juan Capuel (1719–1720) Archivo General del Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Caracas, Venezuela. Vol. 120, folder 29.



Fig. 2. Veduta di un campo indiano, *Saggio di Historia Americana.*



Fig. 3. Veduta di una rancieria, *Saggio di Historia Americana.*



Fig. 4. Carte del fiume e provincia dell'Orinoco nell'America Meridionale; *Saggio di Historia Americana*; “La imagen de los ‘finis terrae’ en los libros de cronistas e historiadores”; *Biblioteca Complutense*; Web; 15 Mar 2012.

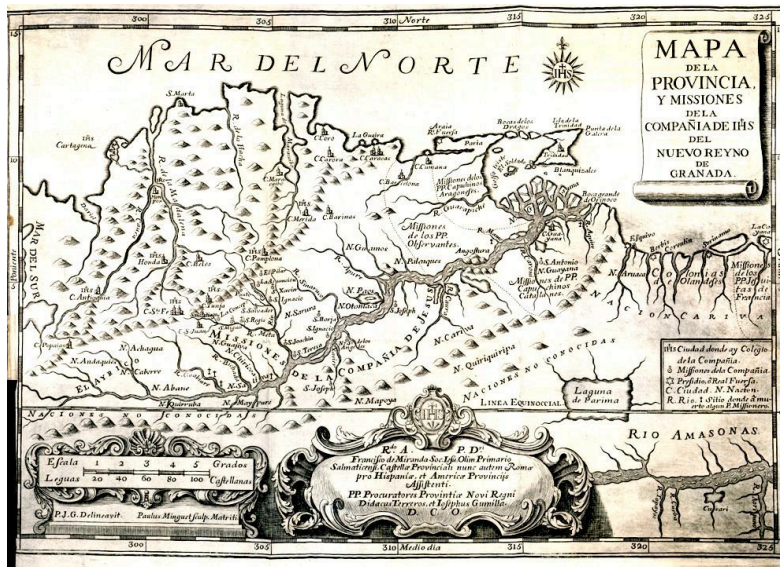


Fig. 5. Mapa de la provincia y misiones de la Compañía de Jesus del Nuevo Reino de Granada; *El Orinoco ilustrado*; “La imagen de los ‘finis terrae’ en los libros de cronistas e historiadores”; *Biblioteca Complutense*, 1 Jan 2012; Web; 15 May 2012.