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Indigenous bodies, gender, and sexuality in the Jesuit Missions of South America (17th–18th centuries)

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Many studies tend to apply categories of gender and sexuality to indigenous peoples in the same way as they are used in the West. This ignores the fact that indigenous peoples have their own notions of people, which are often at odds with Western binary standards. The issue at stake in this article is the inclusion of the analytical categories of gender and sexuality in South American communities, starting with the Jesuit Missions that spread across present-day Brazil, Paraguay, Argentina, and Uruguay during the 17th and 18th centuries. To this end, it uses as historical sources a set of 1212 Jesuit writings, including manuscripts and books, as well as architectural, sculptural, and pictorial remains. Using techniques specific to paleography to read manuscripts, the project's methodology makes use of ethnohistory guided by Content Analysis, thus producing a reading that starts from contemporary indigenous problems in order to build an Indigenous History. The study's discussion considers that indigenous bodies, once produced by village collectives made up of extended families, were forged in the Jesuit missions according to the parameters of the colonial project. The article therefore demonstrates the genealogy of the bodies of *indigenous men*, *indigenous women*, and *abject indigenous people*, concluding that the current scenario of gender and sexual violence in South America has its origins in the colonial process, and not in indigenous cultures.

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Introduction

In historical, anthropological, archeological, and museological studies, among others, it is quite common to find the use of Western categories of gender and sexuality applied in an isonomic way to Amerindian peoples. These readings not only produce a certain ethnocentrism but also a continuation of the colonization project. On the other hand, when we problematize the relationship between indigenous bodies, gender, and sexuality, we can see analytical possibilities concerning the genealogy of the processes of gendering and sexualization that currently constitute South American cultures.

Two paintings from 1643 by the Dutchman, Albert Eckhout, illustrate this conception (Fig. 1):

As can be seen in the painting “Tupi man”, the masculinized character is wearing a pair of shorts with a knife attached to the waist, a clear reference to the fact that we are looking at a body dating back to colonization, as well as carrying a bow and multiple arrows, with an uncivilized setting in the background. In the case of the “Tupi woman”, we also see the insertion of new colonial objects, such as a petticoat, as well as a body encumbered by baskets, jars, and a child, with a domestic and cultivated space in the background.

The indigenous people were therefore a reproduction of the conservative binary models of gender and sexuality that existed in the Western world: for men, adventures in the forests; for women, domestic care—between the bow and the basket, nothing else would flow.

For us, an indigenous queer couple descended from evangelical families facing the most varied attempts at subordination by the mostly heterosexual and white academia of South America, the colonization of our ancestors’ bodies needs to be intellectualized not only out of mere scientific interest but above all due to the need to improve our communities. In fact, the study of our ancestors’ bodily transformation since the first centuries of the European invasion can shed light on the harsh reality we experience, particularly expressed in alarming South American

social indicators. Here in Brazil, for example, gender¹ and sexual² violence are part of the country’s fabric.

The project *Between the Bow and the Basket*, developed since 2019, focuses on the genealogy of colonial indigenous bodies based on the Jesuit introduction of content related to the Western analytical categories of gender and sexuality. As such, it chooses from the many Jesuit experiences in South America those that have become known as the *Guarani Missions*, even though these included different South American indigenous peoples, such as the Minuano, Charrua, Yaró, Guenoa, Jê, and Tupi. The first mission was founded in 1609, and flourished in more than thirty indigenous towns until the beginning of the 18th century, only to be plunged into upheavals that would liquidate the project, such as the famine of the 1730s, the indigenous revolt against the Treaty of Madrid known as the Guarani War (1753–1756) and the expulsion of the Jesuits from Spanish America (1759). The surviving populations continued to live in the same cities or abandoned them, in some cases inflating both physically and culturally the formation of the countries of Brazil, Paraguay, Argentina, and Uruguay.

In this study, the analytical categories of gender and sexuality are not regarded as natural phenomena or determinants of fixed identities, but rather as “fictions”, in a dialogical sense in line with Paul Preciado (2018, p. 166). These fictions are expressed in repeated performances that imprint gender and sexuality roles on a “heterosexual matrix”, as Judith Butler (2003, p. 38) points out. All the other bodies that escape this matrix make up the group of “abject bodies”, those that matter less, which are subject to punishment and oblivion (Butler, 1993, p. 9–10). Since gender and sexuality are formulations at the service of power, as already shown by Michel Foucault (1984, pp. 242–276; 2011, p. 17; 2022, p. 80–91), it was the masculine—and its version of “hegemonic masculinity”—that was the fiction that has sustained Western imperialism since the colony. (Connell, 2005, p. 71–89; Connell, Messerschmidt, 2013).



Ethnographic Collection. The National Museum of Denmark, Copenhagen

Fig. 1 Ethnographic collection. The National Museum of Denmark, Copenhagen.

This fictional matrix landed in the Americas along with the European invasion. Here they found collectively constructed bodies, where performances were more important than biological organs in defining each person's social role. This, at least, can be seen in the wide range of studies that consider the relationship between indigenous ethnicity and gender and sexuality, such as ethnologist Pierre Clastres (1978), indigenous historian Will Roscoe (1988, 1991), indigenous transvestite philosopher Giuseppe Campuzano (2013) and, more recently, the research by Estevão Fernandes and Bárbara Arisi (2017)—examples of the journey of Queer Indigenous Studies, or rather, the “out of Native Studies closet”, as Chris Finley puts it (2011).

On the other hand, the original way of producing people was not indifferent to colonial novelties. As research by Marilyn Strathern (1988), Maria Lugones (2008) and Cecilia McCallum (2001, 2013) has shown, although non-existent among non-Western societies, the contents that are currently included in the analytical categories of gender and sexuality were received by the Amerindians with curiosity, creativity, and negotiations interested in updating their bodies. It is precisely this “opening to the other”, as Lévi-Strauss (1991, p. XVII) calls it, or rather, “this way of being attracted to one another”, as indigenous intellectual Ailton Krenak (2019) suggests, that is important to this study.

In other words, throughout the project, we tested the hypothesis that the production of people and Amerindian corporealities, especially when confronted with colonization, opened themselves up to active negotiation with the contents related to Western gender and sexuality. In these negotiations, new bodies were invented, different from their ancestors in order to be especially viable in the new world that was opening up: the bodies of *indigenous men*, *indigenous women*, and the *indigenous abjected*—the genealogy of these bodies being the subject of this article.

Therefore, we do not just perceive indigenous peoples as receptacles for the content related to the analytical categories of gender and sexuality that the colonial project heavily imposed on them, but also as participants in the forging of South American gendered and sexualized culture.

In order to construct a genealogy of colonial indigenous bodies, the discussion in this article is divided as follows: introduction to the methodology used throughout the project; analysis of the invention of colonial indigenous bodies, such as the marginalization of *abject indigenous people*, the promotion of *indigenous men's* centrality and the subalternization of the female body through the creation of the *indigenous woman*. At the same time, this paper seeks to demonstrate what is presented in the final considerations: that the gender and sexual violence experienced today in South America has its roots in the colonial world, and not in South Amerindian cultures.

Methodological considerations

The Jesuit Missions studied here have left abundant traces of their experience. In order to better study them, we have used methodological principles specific to ethnohistory, considering it as a multidisciplinary methodology interested in cross-referencing different types of documents with contemporary indigenous demands in order to build an Indigenous History. As such, we are not only using our own intellectual demands to understand the ancestry of our people. As Fernandes (2015) demonstrates, while in the North of the Americas the indigenous movement that recognizes itself as two-spirits has created a pan-indigenous identity, in South America, like Brazil, sexual dissent from the heterosexual matrix has come to be seen as a “cultural loss” in different communities, which has led various individuals and collectives to search for historical evidence of this ancestry.

Even though we are often accused of pursuing an intention in our research due to an “excessive proximity to the subject”, an argument that only legitimizes the continuation of studying us “rationally” as objects (see Seth, 2021), the commitment here is exactly to construct an Indigenous History directly linked to issues of our reality.

The aim is not to establish linear connections between past and present since studies such as Erminie Voegelin's (1954) have already problematized the fact that indigenous narratives from the past may well be distant from those of the present. In this sense, when we promote a rapprochement between data from the past and contemporary indigenous demands, we are looking for dialogical relationships, bringing together knowledge rather than similarities. As the 1960 meeting of the American Indian Ethnohistorical Conference noted, ethnohistory is an important multidisciplinary methodology for promoting possibilities concerning indigenous perspectives on their past. From then on, the development of an Indigenous History, proposed by contemporary indigenous problems that have colonial roots, has become a relevant theme in a wide variety of studies (Santos, 2017).

That said, this research focused on Jesuit documents from that process, the *Manuscritos da Coleção De Angelis* (Manuscripts from the De Angelis Collection) which are today kept at the National Library in Rio de Janeiro and at the Center for Historical Research at the Pontifical Catholic University, as well as having recently been made available online by the Luso-Brazilian Digital Library—which makes it easier to check the data presented here. Books published by Jesuits active in that experience were also included. It is worth pointing out that the constitution of archives and the production of historical discourse in Latin America took place in a colonial manner, without considering the indigenous perspective and that of their descendants. As a result, our bodies are strangers in the archives, often not recognized as researchers and even mistaken for members of the cleaning crew. This very difference makes us read the manuscripts in search of demands that are unknown to whites, but which are essential to us.

Using techniques specific to paleography, we used the Content Analysis methodology to synthesize the information from the handwritten documentation over the five years of research. During this period, we collected and synthesized data from 1212 documents related to the analytical categories of gender and sexuality based on the following words: “mujer” (woman), “hombre” (man), “niña” (girl), “niño” (boy), “muchacha” (teen girl), “muchacho” (teen boy), “sexo” (sex), “sodomia” (sodomy), “nefando” (nefarious), “varonil” (manly), “aborto” (abortion), “pecado” (sin), as well as including other entries that arose over the course of the research, such as “machorra” (lesbian) and “afeminado” (effeminate). Of these documents, 324 provided significant content for the study of the analytical categories of gender and sex and 27 of these had content with a high degree of relevance for the analysis of these categories.

In addition to analyzing written documents, we also tried to organize a series of pictorial documents and field trips to the mission settlements that are now archeological sites open to visitors. Three field trips were made to the São Miguel Archanjo Archeological Site and the São João Batista Archeological Site (2017, 2018, and 2019), architectural remnants of the missions considered World Heritage Sites by Unesco. By cross-referencing the data from the field trips with floor plans of the 18th-century missions, we built a cartography based on queer studies. This was an innovative methodological procedure for indigenous queer studies: firstly, we started from the Foucauldian perspective of cartography, where imagined “heterotypes” create lines that divide spaces (Foucault, 2001, p. 414–415); then, we sought to draw a “political spatialization of the body”, according to Paul B. Preciado (2017), which generated queer cartography of a Jesuit



DE BRY, 1997.

Fig. 2 “Balboa expels several Indians guilty of the terrible sin of sodomy to dogs”.

mission by identifying spaces that standardize heterosexual masculinity and exclude femininity, as shown below.

The invention of indigenous abjection

The first episode in which indigenous people were abjected for content related to the analytical categories of gender and sexuality took place in 1513, in present-day Panama. There, the army of the Spaniard Vasco Nunes de Balboa burned fifty indigenous people considered to be practicing “sodomy” and threw as many others to the dogs, as recorded in 1562 by the chronicler López de Gómara (2003). This event led to a print by Theodor De Bry (Fig. 2):

Note that the picture has a division at its center: in the upper part, there are European men dressed, armed, and collectively brutalizing those who are relegated to the lower margin, naked, miserably broken, and condemned to the dogs because of their long hair, attire, mannerisms and sexual practices contrary to the hegemonic masculinity that was being imposed. Much more than representing the condemnation of “sodomite sinners”, therefore, De Bry’s image is a milestone in the genealogy of abject indigenous bodies.

In the Jesuit Missions studied here, the production of indigenous abjection is inherent to the colonial project. This means that without indigenous abject bodies, the missionary enterprise

as a whole would not have been possible. This can be seen when we study two important documents: the *Tesouro da Língua Guarani* and the *Catecismo da Língua Guarani*, both written by Antônio Ruiz de Montoya, a Peruvian Jesuit who worked in the missions during the first half of the 17th century. Through these works, we can see the effort to colonize indigenous bodies linguistically and, in this way, get a glimpse of the fluidity that existed in those communities.

Ruiz de Montoya was particularly concerned about people he considered to be women, but who “dealt impudently with each other” or who “reached the point of pollution” by “touching each other” (Ruiz de Montoya, 1876b, p. 298; Ruiz de Montoya, 1876a, p. 393). In this sense, the priest investigates the entries used to name such people, finding two: “Cunã Abã”, which could be translated as “man-woman”, and “cuña-cuimbaé”, something like “manly woman” (Ruiz de Montoya, 1639b, p. 107; see Chamorro, 2009, p. 238). The adjective varonil is also used by other Jesuits when they describe episodes where a certain subject, in the 1630s, “forgetting that she was a woman”, “valiantly engaged in the most intense combat” carrying a “spear in her hand” (Boroa, 1929, pp. 602–603). Despite the fact that “cuña abã” and “cuña-cuimbaé” are not terms loaded with abjection and possibly refer to socially accepted people, Ruiz de Montoya chooses to translate them simply as “machorra”. According to the oldest dictionary in Spanish America, “machorra” is synonymous with “manly” and

“sterile” (Nebrija, 2005), while in administrative documents it refers to old and sterile cows (Azara, 1969, p. 455). In South America, “machorra” and its derivative “marimacho” are still used today in a pejorative way to refer to lesbian women.

In this translation operation, two forms of colonization of indigenous bodies can be seen: the first assigning a label related to the Western gender category by naming these subjects “woman”; a second, related to sexuality, by translating original words as “machorra”. Thus, a new body was born, endowed with a previously non-existent abject meaning, that of the *machorra indigenous women*, considered manly and incapable of reproduction.

Ruiz de Montoya performs a similar operation with indigenous people who, in the eyes of the priests, were men, but spoke in falsetto, carried baskets, kept long hair, or had sexual relations with other people who were also recognized as men by the Jesuits. Among the various entries designating these people is “abá-cuña-ekó”, which in classic Guarani means something like “man-woman manners”. For Ruiz de Montoya, however, “abá-cuña-ekó” becomes loaded with abjection when it is translated as “effeminate”, a word that is still used in South America today in a highly derogatory way. Other similar entries are translated as “sodomite” or “nefarious” (see Chamorro, 2009, pp. 237–238; Baptista, 2021a e 2021b).

The efforts to combat the abá-cuña-ekó are very well documented and form part of the entire missionary history. One priest, however, took it upon himself to eradicate them from the missions: the Spaniard Simón Ojeda, Provincial during the year 1661. When three young men were caught in the “nefarious sin” at the mission of San Ignacio, Ojeda ordered that “a punishment more noisy than bloody” be applied, to which the indigenous men responsible for security tied them up, then took them to a procession where they were lashed while a preacher proclaimed the sin committed. At the end of the procession, a large bonfire was lit where live animals were thrown, which, in full view of the community, “turned to ashes” in an allegory of the flames of hell. Ojeda rejoiced at the success of the punishment:

“... Desirous of banishing this vice from their children, and astonished by the wickedness of the delinquents, the parents followed their children, flogging many of them, even the married ones with children (...). As a result, not only were they afraid of another punishment, but many made amends and all were grateful for what they had been taught.” (Ojeda, 1661)

Ojeda also writes about a young man “seduced by another lascivious man” who “valiantly resisted” his advances by beating him until he “terrified” him. It’s clear that Ojeda’s aim is to popularize physical punishment against the “nefarious” in order to institutionalize a previously non-existent fear.

Ojeda is also one of those responsible for inserting the topic into the sermons and catechesis of each mission. From this, he assures us, good results were reaped from the very first exercises: a young man “up to his eyebrows in sodomy” was only convinced to marry a woman after hearing a sermon about the “vice of Sodom” and God’s punishment of the city—and “it was never heard of that he had returned to such a vice”, assures Ojeda (1661, p. 198). As you can see, the embryo of “compulsory heterosexuality”, a phenomenon identified as a “political institution” that concentrates “forces that range from physical brutality to the control of conscience”, according to Adrienne Rich (2012), can also be found in Indigenous History.

In the following documents, such as the *Regramento Geral* (General Rules) (Dondivas, 1913), we can see the construction of a penal system that would treat “sodomy” as a heinous crime, punishing its practitioners with public scorn and imprisonment for long months accompanied by food restrictions and 25 lashes a day.

The invention of the colonial indigenous man

Note that the people who lashed the “nefarious” were not Jesuits, who were prevented by a series of guidelines from using physical force against the indigenous, but people recognized in the documentation as *indigenous men*.

It is taken as read that the *indigenous man* is a colonial invention. This proposition is based on a set of documents in which it can be seen that among the different peoples of South America, there was no centrality to the masculine as it is conceived in the European patriarchal system. As will be shown, the original communities of South America were not the property of male leaders, but an intrinsic part of their bodies, and vice versa. Even so, the colonizers heard echoes of their kings and emperors when among them.

One example illustrates this type of leadership: in the very first decades of Jesuit presence in the territory in question, in 1629, Father Simão Masseta negotiated with a Guarani village to become a mission. This would be a huge gain for the expansion of Christianity since the community’s position was strategic due to its family connections with other villages in a vast region. The negotiation was intensified by the pressure brought by the Portuguese settlers, who were keen to enslave the villagers, a force against whom Masseta assured he would protect them if they chose to convert. The village was in an uproar, with an atmosphere of fear and doubt in the face of the colonial scenario that had overtaken them, and Guiraverá, then chief of the community, was called to various meetings with the priests (Masseta, 1629; Baptista et al., 2022).

From Guiraverá’s first encounter with the Jesuits, you can see the substances that make up his body. The chief is accompanied by an entourage made up of his many “very well-adorned” wives, possibly the daughters of other chiefs in the region. In addition, Guiraverá appears with his face and legs painted, wearing a feathered cloak, with a spear in one hand and his smoking pipe in the other, props manufactured by his community (Ruiz de Montoya, 1639a, p. 45). In this encounter and the following ones, it is possible to see the community’s commitment to producing Guiraverá’s body “always in new costumes” (Masseta, 1629).

However, the priests’ perception of Guiraverá was profoundly negative: “I have never seen a more arrogant man”, exclaims Ruiz de Montoya, “he is reputed to speak with demons” (Anônimo, 1631); “He claims to be the creator of Heaven and Earth”, denounces Masseta, and speaks to the priests with “haughtiness and arrogance” (Masseta, 1629). Being able to have spiritual visions, Guiraverá carries in his body the ability to metamorphose into animals, celestial forces, and even his enemies, powers considered demonic by the priests. His very name indicates that the distinction between humanity and nature does not apply to the substances that make up his body: “Guirá” (bird) and “verá” (brightness, lighting) could be translated as “resplendent bird”.

As Father Masseta attests, Guiraverá is called *Mburubichabete* by his community. Not only does Guiraverá call himself this, but other leaders encountered by the priests are also recognized in this way. As can be seen from the documentation, this word refers to collective subjects endowed with shamanic powers, but was initially translated by the Spanish as “king”, “emperor” or “governor” (Ruiz de Montoya, 1639, p. 172). This was a “semantic adventure”, to borrow the expression of anthropologist Bartomeu Melià (1988, pp. 17–29), who points out that the priests focused too much on bodies considered to be male, since for them, a collective body constitution was inconceivable.

Guiraverá’s collective substance comes into open conflict with the context. Wanting to update his body in the face of the colonial fronts, the chief turned to Father Masseta in search of Spanish clothes. The priest even promised them, but the truth was that he did not even have any for himself. It didn’t take long for

Guiraverá to become impatient and, armed with a club, he raised his voice demanding “a good outfit”. Masseta wouldn’t let it go and haughtily replied that he was there to “protect them from the demons and the Portuguese, not to give them clothes”. Guiraverá insisted that he give him the altar cloths. The priest, perplexed, refuses, saying that the fabrics were used to praise God, an answer that is certainly offensive to someone who rightly considers himself a god. Guiraverá loses patience and prepares to hit the priest with a club, insinuating that he would not only kill him but also devour him but is interrupted by an “old woman”, who swears at him loudly and pushes him away from the scene (Masseta, 1629).

The possibility of Masseta leaving the village because of Guiraverá’s threats caused a commotion in the community. The village truly believed that the presence of a priest was capable of curbing the slavers. Since the Guarani may be seen as a people who seek consensual deliberations (see Reedy et al., 2020), in a brief meeting the community decided to remove Guiraverá from the leadership position and elect a new one. This is followed by two significant moves by the collective: first, they seek out Masseta to signal their interest in him staying in the village; then, they go to Guiraverá’s hut, and of this last move we have no way of knowing what was discussed due to the lack of testimony from a priest. But the result is deeply satisfying for the Ignatians, as not only do they find the mission of Jesus Mary, but Guiraverá presents himself the next day “like a sheep”: “he who used to think of himself as god”, Ruiz de Montoya mocks; when “asked who god is”, he answers “what the catechism says, with great humility.” (Ruiz de Montoya, 1951, p. 344).

Guiraverá thus goes from being the “most arrogant man” to the “obedient sheep” in the eyes of the priests. This is a narrative arc in which the semantic change from “man” to “sheep” represents a new production: it includes him in the masculine category belonging to the Western genre (“man”), a first stage of colonization; it then subordinates him to white men through his docile and domestic animalization (“a sheep”).

On the other hand, it is possible to infer that Guiraverá’s transformation has other terms in his community. The imposing figure opposing the missionary project, adorned and projected as an expression of that collective, proved to be ineffective insofar as he threatened the agreement with the Jesuits. The community thus declared that between the slave-owning settlers and the Jesuit proposal of living in a mission, they opted for the one that apparently caused the least damage. To do this, they needed to update the figure of their chiefs, subordinating them to the priests.

In this way, the Jesuits and the community agreed that in order for the community to prosper in the new colonial context, it would be necessary to re-dimension the performances of the leaders, inserting them into the colonial relations of gender and ethnicity: the newly invented indigenous men would submit to the newly arrived white men.

A violent swerve

What matters here for studying the genealogy of indigenous men’s bodies is their material substance, first of all, and then analyzing their symbolic dimension. If before the bodies of certain people were produced socially based on the interests of their communities, as was the case with Guiraverá, after the European invasion their bodies became the product of the colonial system.

With regard to the materiality of indigenous men’s bodies, there was a commitment to updating them in the context they faced. This is why the priests were surprised by the incessant requests for Spanish-style clothing, such as shirts and pants. In the accounts from the end of the 16th century by the Tyrolean

Jesuit Antón Sepp, it can be seen that clothing represented an additional possibility for the men’s insertion into the colony so that they wouldn’t be mistaken for non-Christianized natives and therefore liable to slavery (Sepp, 1980, p. 129). There are, however, two peremptory refusals: indigenous men keep their hair at shoulder height and don’t wear shoes—“here all the natives walk barefoot”, the priest, Sepp assures (1980, p. 246).

Several sculptures on display today at the Museum of the Missions, an institution located inside the São Miguel Missions Archeological Site, depict this new body, such as the one below (Fig. 3):

As you can see, the man with an upright posture, bare feet, and shoulder-length black hair materializes the body of the indigenous man raised in the Jesuit Missions.

In addition to this new materiality, Father Pedro Romero, a Jesuit who worked in the region during the first decades of the project, proudly recounts the changes in relations between these men and their communities since the arrival of the Jesuits. One “young man, among others solicited by a married woman”, says Romero, “not being able to get rid of her with words, slapped her so many times that in his entire life, no temptation will ever come to him again” (Romero, 1970, p. 124). Romero also talks about a man who “flogged his wife because she hadn’t gone to Mass”, as well as another who, on finding his sister with a man who wasn’t her husband, tied her to a log as punishment (Romero, 1970, p. 124). Given so many episodes in which indigenous men beat women, Romero concludes:

All this shows that [the indigenous people] already have some fear of God, hatred and abhorrence of sin, for which they carry out these excesses, whereas before they would not have touched their wives and relatives for as many cases as there were in the world, and so these are miracles of the mighty hand of God to which we entrust the finishing and perfecting of this work of his (Romero, 1970, p. 122, our underline emphasis)

As you can see, Romero makes it clear that violence by men against women was something new in those societies, even calling it excessive, but he ends up recognizing it as a miracle that aids the work of conversion. Just as Ojeda saw the hand of God in the punishment of the “sodomites” by the indigenous men, for Romero it is also employed against women.

A century after Romero, indigenous men loyal to the priests enjoyed full hegemony over the other bodies in the missions. This symbolic transformation was accompanied by the emergence of a new geography. In fact, from the end of the 17th century, the settlements began to resize considerably, moving away from the format of communal villages to become opulent indigenous cities. This surprising dimension can be seen in the field trips that this project made to the archeological parks/sites of São Miguel Arcanjo and São João, two missions that are now UNESCO World Heritage Sites. The ground plan of the settlement of São João in 1756 also attests to this development (Fig. 4):

The distribution of the mission spaces appears to conform to Cartesian layouts, with simple urbanistic intentions. However, in addition to the field trips, reading the ground plans of the missions using the analytical categories of gender and sexuality allows us to produce a queer cartography in which it is possible to identify the feminine spaces (in black) and the masculine spaces (in gray) (Fig. 5).

As we can see, the missions were gendered in the 18th century through the affirmation of masculinity, the peripheralization of femininity, and the exclusion of dissident sexualities. Let’s take a look at each of the mission spaces: only men produced sculptures, paintings, bells, musical instruments, or any other goods in the workshops; indigenous teachers, all men, taught writing, reading,



Museu das Missões/ Museum of the Missions

Fig. 3 Indigenous man. Museum of the Missions.

mathematics, and the arts in schools for boys only, knowledge which was then considered synonymous with masculinity and which would be vital for them to maintain power; the cloister, farmhouse, and sacristy were only accessible to priests, choirboys, cooks, gardeners, among other specialized trades required to live in close proximity to the priests; the nave of the church, the cemetery and the hospital were divided between men and women; Cotiguaçu, or *Casa das Recolhidas*, was the only space exclusively for women, as we will see later.

Note that sexually dissident people had no territory at all, except for the prison.

There are also two spaces where the centrality of the male determines the dominance of the other bodies: the Cabildo, with an uncertain location, a kind of town hall/council responsible for the town's problems, made up only of men; and the cacicados, i.e., the families now led only by the chiefs who were aligned with the priests.

Finally, the central square may be considered male territory, since it served as a stage for daily celebrations in which, at least since the General Regiment of the Doctrines of 1680, “no women, no muchachas, no men in women's clothing may enter” (Dondivas, 1913, p. 596).

It was in this square that a large table was set up each year with staffs, banners, signs, badges, medals, and other insignia to be distributed to the men loyal to the priests, so that they could occupy positions such as councilors, inspectors, guards, nurses, teachers, among other posts that regulated the day-to-day life of the towns.

In one of these ceremonies, in 1690, at the Mission of La Cruz, when handing over the staff of Inspector, an important position of moral vigilance, to a cacique, the Jesuit priest urged him to punish sinners. In front of all the spectators, the new Inspector said he had heard that one of his sons had set “a bad example through certain antics” and asked the priest for permission to begin his mandate by punishing him in an exemplary manner. The priest authorized him, whereupon the man proceeded to flog his son in the presence of everyone (Anônimo, 1960).

This shows the transformation that certain bodies underwent in the missionary project over the course of just one century. At

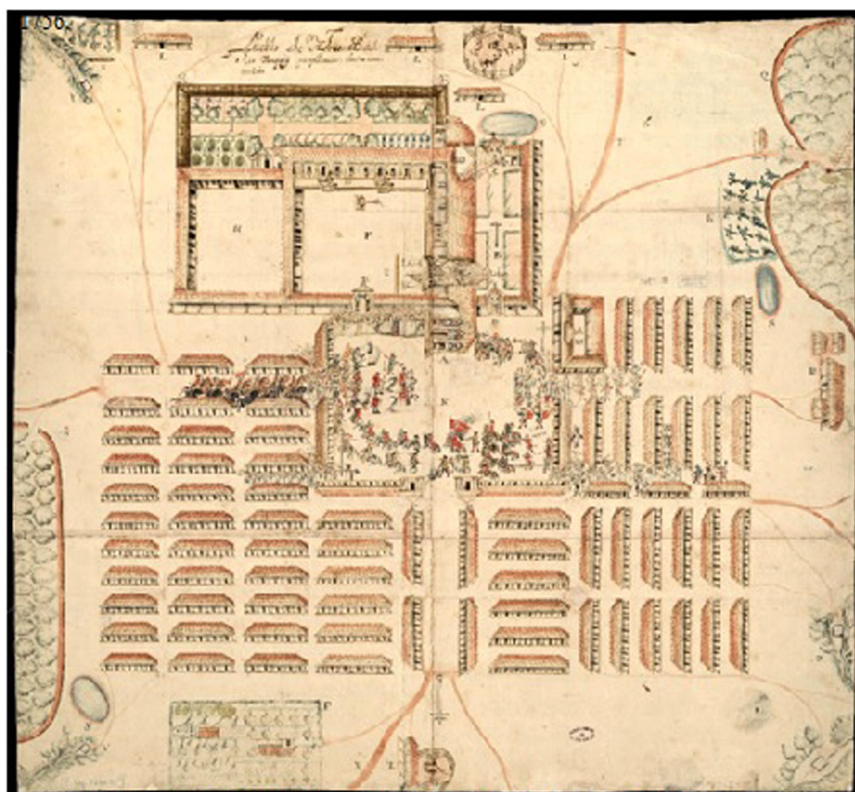
first, there were people like Guiraverá, haughty in the face of the colonial forces and adorned with body paint, feathered cloaks, and traditional weapons, in a material expression of his kinsfolk, then made up of dozens of women and their original families. This was followed by the demobilization of the traditional families and the disappearance of the aforementioned items, which were subsequently replaced by Spanish-style clothing, ropes, whips, a closed fist, and a rough voice, all of which were used in a series of punitive exercises against women and men who were in their shadow. As Díaz-Cervantes (2014) rightly points out, the colonial indigenous man was far from constituting a single materiality.

Subaltern to white men, at the same time as hegemonic in relation to women and other indigenous men considered less male, the bodies of indigenous men in the missions are therefore a colonial production.

The invention of the colonial indigenous woman

One of the much-studied aspects of the Guarani groups present in the missions refers to the prohibition of what Westerners call “polygamy”. We have not used this word in our studies for three reasons: Firstly, because in most Latin American countries this word refers to a crime since it is forbidden for men to have more than one wife—it, therefore, imputes an illicit practice to our ancestors, without them even knowing about such laws or morals; secondly, because this word suggests that the chiefs were the focal point of the relationships it purports to describe; and finally, because it implies that dozens of women in a clan were sexually subjugated to a chief, ignoring the fact that these ties did not always include sex. These three aspects refer to the idea of an orgiastic harem that speaks much more to the Western imaginary related to male power and the objectification of women than to the Amerindian peoples themselves.

If the focus is not on the body recognized by whites as male, what we see in the Guarani families portrayed in the research documentation are broad networks of alliances and affections. Each woman there, as well as her children, siblings, and parents, form a web with the others, which seeks to ensure the system of



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Fig. 4 San Juan, 1756: ground plan. Plan de la Reducción de San Juan. 1756.

exchange and reciprocity expressed in the perpetual safety of children and the elderly, as well as in maintaining the peace and prosperity of interrelated communities.

The idea of Catholic marriage disrupted this traditional network, collapsing indigenous families. As well as producing endless extramarital affairs on the part of the men (the colonial indigenous man is considered by the Jesuits to be a habitual adulterer), a new body emerged, that of the colonial indigenous woman, now seen as a unitary thing, unattached and therefore vulnerable. It was only by breaking up traditional indigenous families that it became possible for the colonizers to treat indigenous women like cattle, or even a commodity to be managed (Todorov, 1983, p. 46; Garcia, 2019).

Women who couldn't find husbands to form new family units, considering that the male population throughout missionary history remained significantly lower than the female population (Baptista et al., 2022), knocked on the priests' doors demanding a place in the mission. Ironically or intentionally, by fighting extended families because they saw Western sins in them, the Jesuits were taking on board the symbolic content of traditional kinship relations. On one occasion, as Ruiz de Montoya records, a Jesuit was awakened by his "Guardian Angel" warning him that there were two women in the room, and he managed to expel them, thus ennobling his vows of chastity (1997, p. 153). Ruiz de Montoya himself fenced off his cloister "with sticks to prevent women from entering our house" (1997, p. 56). In these and other similar cases distributed throughout the documentation, we can see women's efforts to insert the priests into the traditional kinship system, pressuring them to build a place where they could take refuge from the new reality.

The first document dealing with the creation of Cotiguaçu, or the *Casa das Recolhidas* (Shelter for women and girls), dates from 1699 and refers to the villages of Candelária and São Cosme e

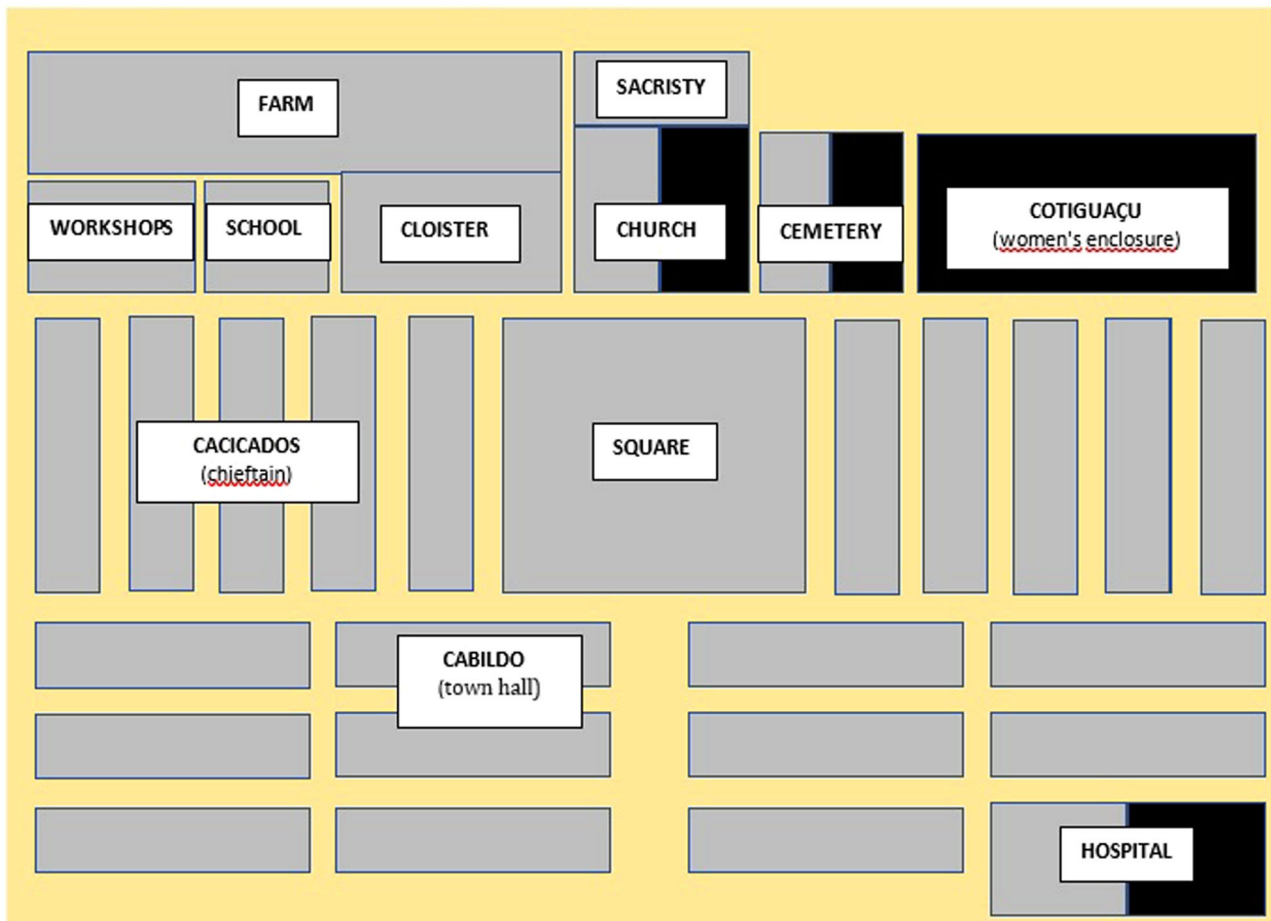
Damião: "In each of the two villages, the orphaned muchachas have been placed in a separate house, living in community", as well as the "women whose husbands are on the run, with special care being taken of them to avoid instances of offense against Our Lord" (Anônimo, 1699). From this point on, this colonial tradition became a fixed feature of each village. A floor plan of the mission of Our Lady of Candelaria illustrates well the location and shape of this building (Fig. 6):

As you can see, Cotiguaçu is a large square in line with the church, part of the priests' administration area. With no windows to the outside and only one locked door, the building is divided into multiple modules facing a large central courtyard. In many parks today, you can see the immense architectural remains of Cotiguaçu, which explains why in some cases it housed up to 500 women and children inside (Baptista et al., 2022).

According to Father José Cardiel (1989, p. 58), a missionary who worked in the missions until the Jesuits were expelled in 1773, in Cotiguaçu the laws that applied to the settlement were significantly adapted. In Cotiguaçu, there was a Director who was in charge of controlling the village and penalizing the "delinquent" women who lived there, punishing any man who entered the village and strongly advising the residents not to leave the village at any time. From an economic point of view, it was an important institution, as it produced textiles and food.

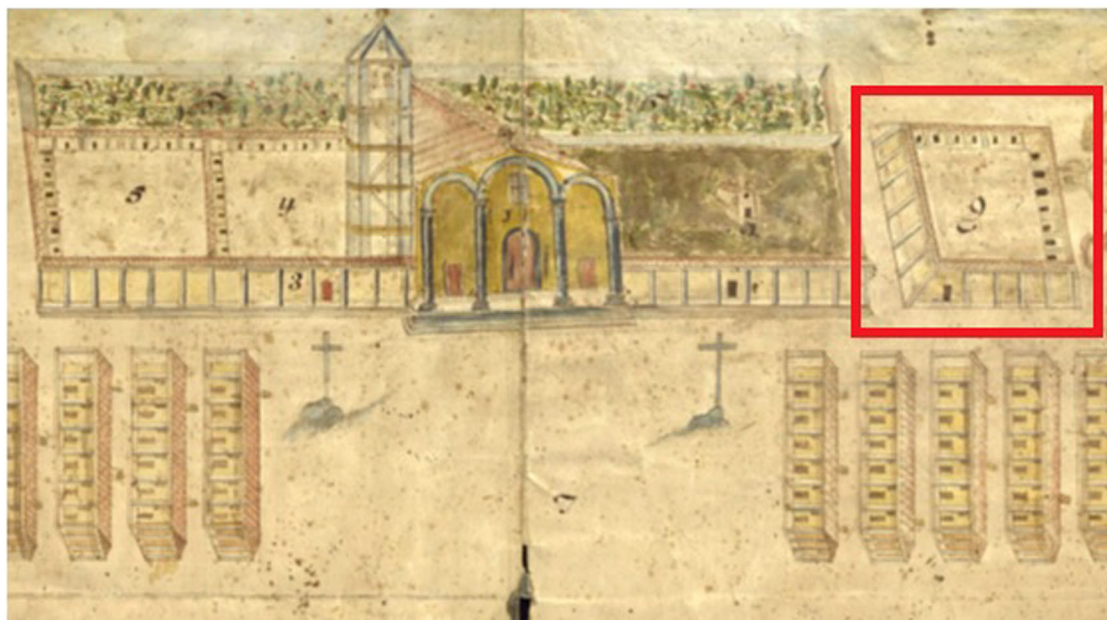
Cotiguaçu is also where children and orphans are raised (Anônimo, 1699; Cardiel, 1989, p. 58), which indicates that looking after children had become the exclusive responsibility of women and no longer of large groups as was previously the case in the villages.

With the emergence of Cotiguaçu, there was a significant material change in the female bodies inhabiting it. The *cuñias* (women) whom the first Europeans encountered when they landed on what are now Brazilian lands were painted and



Personal archive

Fig. 5 Queer cartography of mission: spaces feminine (black) and spaces masculine (gray). Ground plano f a mission based on a queer cartography.



AECID Digital Library (<https://bibliotecadigital.aecid.es/bibliodig/es/consulta/registro.do?id=4440>)

Fig. 6 Nuestra Señora de la Candelaria: ground plan highlighted in red for Cotiguaçu. Plan de Nuestra Señora de la Candelaria [marked in red].



Museu das Missões/ Museum of the Missions

Fig. 7 Indigenous woman. Museum of the Missions.

adorned with various paints and feathers, as well as with “their shame so naked and with such innocence uncovered, that there was no shame in it”, as described by the Portuguese Pero Vaz Caminha (1500).

Evidently, dressing this body or symbolizing it with signs such as shame went beyond adherence to a new morality, and was an attempt to achieve physical security in relation to the colonists. In fact, the use of crucifixes around their necks and the covering of their bodies with a white tunic served to signal to non-Indians that their bodies were under the protection of the Society of Jesus, a warning against the intention of kidnapping or rape.

A sculpture on display today in the Museum of the Missions illustrates the transformation of native bodies through the invention of a body specific to colonial indigenous women (Fig. 7):

With long black hair covered by a veil, a long white tunic down to her bare feet, her legs closed, her spine erect, and her hands in the shape of a prayer, the indigenous woman’s body, unlike that of her ancestors, was now produced by the colonial world.

In 1756, after the Battle of Caiboaté, which resulted in the extermination of at least 1500 indigenous men opposed to the implementation of the Treaty of Madrid, the Portuguese and Spanish armies entered the Mission of São João, as can be seen in the aforementioned floor plan. In one detail, a group of indigenous missionary women can be seen (Fig. 8):

Immediately, a woman in a dark cloak stands out in contrast to all the others wearing white coats—could she be the head of Cotiguaçu? This woman is holding a child in colorful clothes who we know is a boy because he is wearing short pants. When you look around, you might see other boys and some girls, who are different from the others in height, but there’s no way of knowing. In general, the women seem to be cowering, as if covering their

mouths, others with their long hair in disarray, one or two squatting down. When we look at the collective as a whole, they are huddled together in such a way that they seem to form a single frightened, mute, and anonymous body.

“Visions of old native Indians”

So far we have seen that the contents of the Western analytical categories of gender and sexuality were set in relation to the South Amerindian peoples who lived in the Jesuit Missions, a process that resulted in the invention of colonial indigenous bodies. It was not, however, a linear or coherent process, nor was it dogmatic, as can be seen in a qualitative way in one particular episode.

At the end of the 17th century, a Jesuit wrote about the great mortality caused by a measles epidemic (Anônimo, 1695). In the midst of various edifying cases, the priest discusses that of “a frivolous girl” who “did not observe the laws of marriage well” even though she had already been “punished”. Placed in the home of “a virtuous and mature woman” who would teach her by word and example, the young woman ended up dying of the plague. The “virtuous woman”, however, began to see “a black figure everywhere” which she thought was the young woman. Informed of the apparitions, the Jesuits didn’t believe them, “thinking that they were the visions of old native Indians to be ignored”. The figure, however, began to haunt the village, and a second woman witnessed the appearance of the “frivolous girl” being “carried by a troop of demons” while lamenting that she was “eternally condemned for having killed two children in her womb and for her carnalities”. The priest astonished yet rejoicing, claimed that “everyone who heard about it was greatly affected”, and the case was added to the catechesis process.

Two important aspects can be deduced from this episode for qualitative analysis.



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Fig. 8 Indigenous women from San Juan: after the massacre of their men, the women are surrendered by Spanish and Portuguese troops. Town of San Juan from the river Uruguay [detail].

Firstly, the “frivolous girl” and the “virtuous woman” escape colonization: the former practices abortion and chooses sexual partners other than her Christian marriage, thus contradicting the norms that are implanted, which demonstrates that the rigidity dreamed of by the Jesuits was not unanimous among women despite widespread physical punishment; the latter participates in a network of “visions of old native Indians” with ancestral traits, opposing the regulation of spirituality by the priests, even though they perceive such visions as harmless.

It can then be seen that the two characters are also at the service of colonization: the first has her body transposed to abjection, serving as an example of punishment for other women since she has abortions and extramarital sexual relations; the second, along with her network of “old women”, offers her visions to the new moralities that have already been taken over by their priests.

Consequently, we can see that the Western categories inserted by the priests into those societies, identified in this study through the analysis of gender and sexuality, no longer correspond to their Christian starting point, any more than they do to the original indigenous categories. It’s about the emergence of a new way of conceiving social relations, including the thin line that separates the world of the living and the dead. From vision to vision—or rather, from body to body—a South American culture was woven where it was better to create than to dogmatize.

Final considerations

The colonial documentation from the Jesuit Missions belonging to the set of manuscripts in the De Angelis Collection, other Jesuit publications, architectural remnants and sculptures, paintings, and engravings from the missions, all point to the transformation of indigenous societies based on Western categories. In particular, it is non-indigenous men such as Antonio Ruiz de Montoya, Simón Ojeda, Simón Masseta, Pedro Romero, Antón Sepp, José Cardiel, among other Jesuits with a keen interest in indigenous bodies, who brought elements of a hierarchical society into their

catechesis, using content from the categories we see today as gender and sexuality.

This is how we view a set of invented bodies: abject indigenous bodies, where subjects who even enjoyed leadership status are now considered criminals and liable to punishment without any trial; those of indigenous men, hegemonic in relation to women and other men considered less of a man, but subaltern when faced with a white man; those of indigenous women, covered from head to toe, subalternized in most spaces, but building a valid place for themselves and the children they raise. These individuals, once part of the same collective, are now trying to find hierarchical paths for their bodies in the new world.

Thus, it can be seen that colonial indigenous bodies are no longer produced by the collective, as they once were in the villages, but by the colonial project’s own delimitations.

On the other hand, the indigenous peoples who negotiated their entry into the missions with the Jesuits did so because they saw them as a space where they could survive and update themselves within the reach of the colonial world. They also made use of Western categories in order to distance themselves from the Spanish and Portuguese slave settlers. In this sense, the original peoples were active participants in the construction of the bodies of indigenous men, women, and the abject.

The legacies of this process can be found today in the countries that inherited the Missions. The “males” who own everyone, the subordinate “females”, the “machorras” and the “effeminate” who are vulnerable to violence—bodies that feed social indicators on gender and sexual violence throughout South America.

Ultimately, what we have tried to demonstrate here is that such violence does not belong to the original communities, as some even believe, but rather to legacies of the colonial project that need to be intellectualized.

Data availability

The handwritten historical documents presented in this article can be consulted at the Luso-Brazilian Digital Library

(<https://bdib.bn.gov.br/>). Simply enter your title in the search field to access and browse the content.

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Notes

- 1 Brazil is the 5th country that most kills women (FLACSO, 2015; UN Brazil, 2016). In this survey, only El Salvador, Colombia, Guatemala, and Russia are ahead of Brazil (Instituto Patrícia Galvão, 2023). According to the Atlas of Violence, 50,056 women were murdered in Brazil between 2009 and 2019, the majority of whom were Black (IPEA, 2022). In a recent publication by the Brazilian Public Security Forum, 230,861 domestic violence assaults were recorded in 2021, an increase of 0.6% compared to the previous year, and 1341 women were victims of femicide (Brazilian Public Security Yearbook, 2022, p.16). The report *Visível e Invisível: A Vitimização de Mulheres no Brasil (Visible and Invisible: The Victimization of Women in Brazil)* points out that, in 2022, 18.6 million women suffered some kind of assault, of which 3.3 million were threatened with firearms or knives and 3.5 million were beaten or faced attempted strangulation, as well as 50,962 women suffering daily assaults (BUENO, et al., 2023). Therefore, different studies and methodologies show that women in Brazil are at risk of death on a daily basis.
- 2 When we analyze violence against queer people in Brazil, we see a brutal scenario. In 2021, there was a 35.2% increase in assaults, 7.2% in homicides and 88.4% in rapes against LGBTQIA+ people (Brazilian Public Security Yearbook, 2022, p.15). The Atlas of Violence points out that in 2019 there were 5330 cases of violence against gays, lesbians, and bisexuals, and 3967 against trans people and transvestites. It is worth remembering that according to the NGO *Trangender Europe*, Brazil remains the most violent country for trans people and transvestites for the 14th year in a row (*Trangender Europe*, 2022). According to the National Association of Transvestites and Transsexuals (ANTRA), 131 trans people were murdered in 2022 alone, and from 2008 to 2022 there were a total of 1864 murders of this type (Benevides, 2022.). Given the data, we can see that Brazil has been strongly active in the extermination of LGBTQIA+ people. It is worth emphasizing that the data presented here is mostly produced by the social movement since the Brazilian state still silently supports the killing of these bodies by refusing to carry out public research on the subject.

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The authors declare no competing interests.

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