

AUSTIN, Shawn Michael. *Colonial Kinship. Guaraní, Spaniards, and Africans in Paraguay*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2020.

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At the beginning of the Seventeenth century Paraguay was still a border territory of the Spanish Empire where colonial authority was neither extended nor consolidated. The Paraguay province was a laboratory for studying cultural change and inter-racial amalgamation between local and invading cultures in a time when the colonial project itself was at stake. In *Colonial Kinship* Michael Austin delves into the intricate relation between colonizers and the Guaraní, one of Paraguay's main Indigenous communities, from the early sixteenth to the late seventeenth century. Austin attends to Guaraní agency in their transformation of social dynamics and Spanish institutions. By stressing Guaraní concepts of kinship, Austin provides a different narrative of the invasion and the colony's development in a local context wherein indigenous agency shaped the new social, economic and political order.

Austin's research focuses on the Spanish settlement of Asunción, "the hub for legal and juridical management of the region" (8), and its encomiendas and reducciones, as well as frontier territories with indigenous rival communities and Portuguese colonies. He reveals the critical roles of Guaraní women, including their exchange and marriage with Spaniards to develop kinship relations in colonial Paraguay. Spaniards adopted polygamy and the Guaraní language and customs, challenging their very cultural and religious identity. These marriages created family and solidarity bonds of reciprocity upon which both groups depended. The *Cuñadasgo* model offered Spaniards indigenous tributaries, personal service, and loyalty networks through Indigenous communities. For the Guaraní, *Cuñadasgo* with Spaniards provided them mestizo descendants, exchange of valuable products such as iron utensils, and family relationships with the invaders that eventually turned potential enemies into brothers-in-laws. Spaniard's fluency in Guaraní also made them "the most important cultural intermediaries" (9).

The book is organized into eight chapters divided into three parts. These three sections (beginnings, challenges, and communities) serve as the lenses through which

Austin analyzes colonial Guaraní kinship and *Cuñadasgo*. Each chapter includes a well-constructed historiography that situates the reader in a theoretical framework. The first part, “Beginnings,” explores the origin of Guaraní kinship and colonial institutions established with first conquistador’s arrival to Paraguay’s periphery in the 1530s. Austin illuminates the genesis of Guaraní kinship to persuasively narrate Spaniard’s adoption of Guaraní social codes such as polygamy to become active players in the perpetuation of local ethnic identity. Austin specifically addresses the controversial use that the conquistadors made of Guaraní women. Far from considering these women as sex slaves, Austin argues that these practices must be understood in the Guaraní social context. For Austin, James Lockhart’s “double mistaken identity” is incompatible with Paraguay since “most conquistadors were partially aware of the differences between concubinage, tribute and Guaraní polygynous *cuñadasgo*” (33). His interpretation is based on Spaniard’s understanding and use of Guaraní kinship terms. However, he does not use Guaraní language sources. He aims to “denationalize some of the historiography of Paraguay” (255) by breaking from archetypes that this nationalist history is based upon.

The second part of the book, “Challenges”, explores Guaraní resistance to colonization. Austin analyzes two Guaraní rebellions organized in 1625 and 1660 whose patterns were overlapping and divergent. Cuaraçi was against Catholic doctrines that threatened the Guaraní’s “social regeneration”, whereas Arecaiyá attempted to uproot Spanish power. What is significant here is that none of these uprisings were successful because of a general Guaraní opposition, who in the seventeenth century were still forming bonds of family, reciprocity and solidarity with the invaders. These uprisings reveal the complex political factions within indigenous communities. Both movements advocated religious syncretism that appropriated Catholic symbols into Guaraní cosmology as with the Mayas or Aztecs in Mesoamerica. Guaraní formations of militias also demonstrate a mutual sense of community between them and Spaniards. They simultaneously show that Indigenous contributions were rooted in their own cultural practices, for which they expected reward from Spaniards in the form of goods and tribute exemption. However, Austin’s comparison of Guaraní’s military support with the European phenomenon of the “economy of the exchange” could be problematic, since the European exchange was not based on “solidarity” as Austin states, but rather, in power relations. These militias also

indicate the insufficiency of Spanish authority in this region, confirming that “Natives were the most important factor in explaining the conquest and continued existence of the Spanish colonial society” (187). Austin focuses in the third part on one of the book’s most relevant aspects: the inter-ethnic relations between Encomenderos, Yanaconas and Africans in the shaping of colonial Paraguayan society. Chapter 8, “Beyond Mestizos”, breaks with traditional historiographical assumptions that have erased the African presence in the construction of the Paraguayan national history and identity. Austin discusses the codependence of Africans and Guaraní. They “labored together, soldiered together, fought with and robbed each other, married each other and snubbed each other” (253). Using African slavery in Paraguay, Austin tries to degeneralize slavery and its consequences. Since Africans did not acquire the same rights and freedoms as Guaraní, Austin states that Guaraní could not be identified as Spaniard’s slaves.

Austin's monograph is based on anthropological and ethnographic analysis. His corpus of primary sources consists of legal documents such as litigations and wills, but it mainly draws “350 heretofore unexamined litigation files from Asunción and Villa Rica” (8). This legal documentation is supplemented by “hundreds of other sociohistorical records”, (*visitas*, *actas capitulares*, and further administrative documents, etc.). Austin justifies his decision to omit Guaraní sources by affirming that they were “produced under the auspices of the Jesuits or by Jesuits themselves” (9). Austin’s skillful analysis of many Spanish colonial documents provides valuable interpretations of Guaraní social concepts. He reads between the lines “with an eye toward contradictions and gaps in Spaniard's knowledge” (157).

Ethnohistorians, anthropologists, scholars of South America, and graduate students will all benefit from this book that rounds the complexity of social interactions between local indigenous communities and invaders in Paraguay during the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries.