

## **Transfrontier Colonialism**

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My topic this evening is a little-studied aspect of the history of the world outside Europe during the early modern period, that is the 16th, 17th and early 18th centuries. I'll be concerned broadly speaking with the profound changes that occurred then among the hundreds of peoples occupying about half of the globe who had at that time not yet been subjugated or incorporated by states and civilizations. These were the peoples of most of North and South America and Oceania, of Siberia and much of southern Africa, as well as of smaller territories located on the fringes of existing state systems everywhere -- peoples who had until then lived more or less satisfactorily in their own countries, without the benefits of cities, or monumental buildings, or written laws and records, or religious orthodoxies or enduring social hierarchies, those who were despised as "savages" and "barbarians" by the Europeans and the other civilized peoples of that day. During the early modern period, most such peoples came under the direct or indirect influence of a distant European colonialism, while only a very few of them were yet subject to European rule.

Let me begin by introducing you to three curious personalities of that age -- men who flourished during the last quarter of the 17th century in the rainforested heartland of South America, in places located many hundreds of miles from the nearest European settlements. These are people barely visible in the documentary record, to whom few if any references can be found in any history book. None of them was an exceptional person, though each achieved a certain eminence or notoriety in his own time and place. But as I hope to

suggest to you, the little that is left of these men's stories can reveal to us some significant things about life in the early modern world, and maybe even today.

### **Three Early Modern People.**

The first of these hard-to-see characters was a Portuguese friar of the Order of Our Lady of Mercy or Mercedarians, Frei Teodózio da Veiga. He sailed from Lisbon to the new colony of Pará at the mouth of the Amazon in the mid-17th century. There he became a respected and popular person among the tiny population of Portuguese settlers living from the labor of Indian slaves. He helped to build a church and monastery in the capital, Belém do Pará, and set up an agricultural estate whose produce fed the friars of his order. Then he organized a large mission village for free Indian laborers on the banks of the lower Amazon, which was later handed over to the more experienced Jesuits for administration. All this was done within the emerging colonial society of Pará, behind a frontier separating that tiny colony from the vast Amazonian hinterland to which adventurers might travel, but where the Portuguese wielded no authority.

In 1686, already an old man, Frei Teodózio was sent along as chaplain to a military force that went forth against the hostile Arawak Indians of the country around Lake Saracá, just east of the modern city of Manaus in the central Amazon, a thousand miles upriver from Pará. As the story goes he was so troubled by the wanton killing and destruction he observed on that occasion, that he decided rather than returning with the soldiers to Pará, to stay behind and try to establish a mission station among the defeated Arawaks. There is no record of the methods he employed to carry out this astonishing feat; but a few months later a commission of baptized Arawaks travelled down the river to ask the Governor of Pará to assign Frei Teodózio to them as missionary on a

permanent basis, because as they said "they knew him, and because he had kept them from being made slaves."

Two years later the captain of an official government Indian slaving expedition reported to the Governor that the missionary at Lake Saracá had proved cooperative with his work. The Arawaks whom he had persuaded to settle there had been diligent in scouring the forests for Indians of other tribes, capturing many and bringing them in to the mission to be kept there for sale as slaves to any visitors from Pará. Frei Teodózio had by then acquired some twenty Indian slaves of his own for personal service -- which freed him from having to cajole the mission Indians into doing the fishing, gardening, cooking and cleaning required for his maintenance.

Not long afterwards a Jesuit mission visitor reported approvingly that Frei Teodózio's followers had built him a cheerful and well-appointed church with its thatched roof at Lake Saracá, and half a dozen outlying chapels for use on his rounds to the nearby villages. They had also installed him in a comfortable house set on a high bluff, from which the friar could survey the mission's outposts. The Arawak converts had devised an efficient system of drum signals by which to warn their neighbors when any strange canoe arrived on the lake, and they would gather quickly when needed for the mission's defense. They were also hard at work producing manioc flour and other regional edibles in the mission's gardens, and salting fish and capturing the giant Amazonian turtles they kept in corrals to eat during the lean months of the annual flood. It is clear here that having established a certain ascendance among the Arawaks, and even involved them as collaborators in the Indian slave trade, this missionary was rather more accommodating himself to the Indians' way of life, than trying to impose his own ways upon them.

Frei Teodózio, by this time quite infirm and nearly blind, was in the habit of saying Mass in his church each day. Afterwards he would instruct his Arawak followers in Catholic doctrine before releasing them to the day's activities and urging them to return for evening services. Unlike other European missionaries of that day, he was little concerned with the fact that his neophytes persisted in going around without clothing as they had always done; and he tolerated their habit of placing what the Jesuit visitor termed "indecent clay figurines" around in the church and chapels. The visitor thought that Frei Teodózio should baptize if possible only the children of these savages, because it was clear that their parents were inveterate idolators. Adults should be indoctrinated where possible, but sprinkled only on the deathbed, or when he was sure they had grown too dependent to think of returning to the forest.

Frei Theodózio for his part complained that his worst problem was the competition from certain Arawak shamans of the neighborhood, who had first told the people that they intended soon to turn the whites into Indians and the Indians into whites. They had blamed a frightening earthquake on the whites, and then had gone to inciting their followers to acts of violence. This problem the friar had solved just in time, by selling the most cantankerous shaman as a slave to Pará.

Another concern was that among the Pará Mercedarians there was no one who could be spared to replace Frei Theodózio at Lake Saracá. He was reluctant to leave the mission, because as he explained he had invested a huge sum of money in the stocks of useful trade goods -- the axes, machetes, knives, fishhooks, beads and mirrors and other items -- with which he had persuaded the Arawaks to settle there in the first place. This had seemed to make sense at the time, because of the great quantities of wild clove bark that were supposed to be found in that region. The bark was a substitute for the East

Indian cloves, long a lucrative item in Portuguese colonial trade, which had in recent decades been made scarce in Lisbon by Dutch competition in the spice islands of Indonesia. "Clove bark" could be cut by the mission Indians, shipped down to the Mercedarians in Pará, and forwarded by them to Europe at a tidy profit. But as luck would have it there had turned out to be nowhere nearly enough of the aromatic bark in the forests near Saracá to cover his initial investment; and the mission had been able to support itself only through the sale of Indian slaves.

Frei Teodózio died peaceably at Lake Saracá in about 1703, though he could easily have been killed there by his Indian followers or their enemies at any time during his nearly two decades in the back country. As he approached death some newly "converted" but already disgruntled Arawaks were plotting to burn down the mission and return to the forest once the old man had gone to his maker. But this plan was nipped in the bud by the older Arawak Christians themselves; and these loyal followers went on to hold a riotous week-long Arawak funeral feast for the missionary, since no Catholic priest was immediately available to put him away. For decades thereafter, some of them preserved the friar's household goods in their homes, revered as holy relics alongside images from their own tradition.

My second individual life story, even less fully retellable than the first, is that of a free African immigrant to Amazonia by the name of José Lopes Espínola. Born and reared as a Portuguese subject on Cabo Verde island off the West African coast, Espínola reached manhood and married there before travelling abroad, maybe as an outlaw or perhaps just in search of adventure, sometime in the 1680's. Proceeding first to Lisbon, he worked there for a time before taking ship as a sailor or domestic servant for Belém do Pará. In that sleepy colonial town he learned the local customs and the Tupían lingua franca

of Amazonian trade and communal life; and after a while he joined an expedition manned by Indian slaves or mission residents that was travelling far up the great river in giant dugout canoes to search for Indian slaves and a cargo of clove bark and wild cacao.

A few months later, rather than returning with his crew to Pará, José Lopes Espínola chose to settle in an Indian village near the mouth of the Rio Madeira, a southern tributary of the Amazon, at what was becoming an important waystation for trade on the great river. There he remained for five years, learning the languages and lifeways of the still-independent Indians in that region, and setting up house with an Indian woman. He lived by serving the traders in Indian slaves and forest products to Pará; and in time he either joined or gathered about himself a small multi-ethnic community which would later be transformed into a Jesuit mission

These poorly documented but representative adventures place Jose Lopes Espínola in the company of the few hundred sertanistas, the illiterate, declass   European or mesti o backwoodsmen or transfrontiersmen of 17th-century Par  -- men who chose to live their lives in comparative freedom beyond the colonial settlement frontier. These men were obliged to survive by dint of their own resourcefulness, hard work and ability to adapt to strange customs; but they might also hope to make new friends and prosper in a modest fashion, far from the many handicaps that were imposed by colonial society on men of their social station. They were the counterparts of the Brazilian bandeirantes, of the French Canadian coureurs de bois and Russian promyshlenniki of the northern fur trade, of the Portuguese lan ados and pombeiros of the West African inland slave trade, or the prazeiro settlers in the valley of the Zambezi river. All of these people were the far-ranging agents of a colonialism which they themselves barely understood and could hardly

represent, to which they were very little beholden and seldom loyal, and which was incapable most of the time of subjecting them to any sort of discipline. Such people nevertheless transported European goods, ideas and diseases to distant places while supplying the people and products of those places to outposts on the fringes of an emerging world market, and in so doing they functioned as catalysts in a process of far-reaching social and cultural change.

Transfrontiersmen were not, however, the representatives of European power. Most of them were viewed as low-lifers and outlaws by European contemporaries; and their activities were often harshly punished when they fell into the hands of the colonial authorities. Even the missionaries among them, though more respectable in colonialist eyes, were generally on their own in the wilds and obliged to survive by adapting. Any influence that any of these men achieve among the peoples of the transfrontier regions was the result, therefore, of their having fitted themselves as well as they could into other people's societies, and making themselves useful to some or to all whom they met there as providers of goods or services that helped to meet other people's needs.

José Lopes Espínola emerges into our view just at the turn of the 17th century, when he joined forces with the aging Frei Teodózio da Veiga to recruit to the Lake Saracá mission a few of the pitiable survivors in that immediate region of several decades of slave-raiding and the devastation of Indian communities by the Old World epidemic diseases introduced from Pará. His fame as an effective "Indian agent" or "catechist" for the Mercedarian missions then spread far and wide. Word of it reached all the way to Lisbon in a letter from the Governor of Pará; and in 1701 the King took the unusual step of having a gold medal struck, and sending it to Pará with instructions that the Governor present it to Lopes Espínola in a ceremony before the Council of Missions. José, he wrote, had earned the royal gratitude by serving many years

without salary in the backlands, "seeking by means of his teaching and example to reduce the Indians to the Catholic religion." So he was appointing him to an honorary post as "Captain of the Back Country & District of the Mercedarian Missions;" and the Governor was authorized if he saw fit to provide him with a salary from the proceeds of the government-run Indian slave trade. If José was willing, moreover, the King would pay his wife's passage from Cabo Verde so that she might join him in Pará. We have no further information, unfortunately, about how or with whom Jose Lopes Espínola spent the rest of his days.

Our third late 17th-century Amazonian was an Omagua Indian chief named Payoreva, born and raised in the country that is now crossed by the Brazil-Peruvian border, some two thousand miles up the Amazon from Pará. His people spoke a Tupían language similar to the lingua franca of Pará, and were thought to have migrated up the Amazon early in the 16th century to escape from European traders on the Brazilian coast, and the diseases they brought with them. The Omaguas had formed a strong chiefdom on the islands and banks of the Amazon, produced bounteous harvests from their fishing, hunting and horticulture, and conducted a vigorous trade with peoples living inland.

As a child Payoreva had his head pressed and bound between boards to produce the flattening and elongation of the forehead that the Omaguas saw as a sign of cultural superiority. He learned to sleep in a hammock, to imbibe the hallucinogenic curupá on festive occasions and to paint his face and torso with the black juice of the jaguá fruit for adornment and to repel the region's clouds of mosquitos. He grew up as a skilled builder and handler of giant dugout canoes, a harpooner of manatee and turtle and the twelve-foot pirarucú fish, a hunter of birds and small game with the blowpipe, and a warrior proficient with the long bow and arrow and the dart-thrower. By the time he was a man his

people were dressing, unlike most Amazonian Indians, in a colorful cotton shirt and European-style breeches made from the cloth they had always woven at home from tree-cotton fiber, and died with natural colors. Like other Omaguas, he looked down on the naked and round-headed, less numerous and prosperous peoples dwelling in the nearby forests who were their trading-partners and traditional enemies; and he would sometimes join in raids to kidnap the women and children from these peoples and assign them to engross the declining numbers of Omagua households.

There had been at least thirty thousand Omaguas in the mid-16th century, when Spanish explorers found them densely settled along perhaps a hundred-mile stretch of the upper Amazon. But by the late 17th they had fallen on hard times --

first from the epidemics of smallpox and measles that had swept downriver from the Spanish settlements or upriver from the Portuguese beginning in the 1630's, and later from annual assaults by the slave-hunters from Pará. Payoreva's boyhood was a time of terrible troubles and of political and of cultural retrenchment for his people, by then reduced in numbers to about five thousand.

In 1682, a Jesuit missionary arrived who had been summoned from Spanish Peru by the Omagua leaders to help by establishing a permanent mission which could distribute the European trade goods on which they had come to depend, while putting a stop to the kidnapping of their people by Portuguese slavers. Payoreva was quick to join forces with this priest, and was one of the first young men whom he accepted for baptism. Then for some time he accompanied the Jesuit on his rounds through the Omagua towns and those of other peoples living further downriver, helping him to organize the construction of chapels and the indoctrination of many villagers. Through this

close contact he observed the affectionate treatment with which the missionary was generally received, and perhaps also winced at the day by day conflicts between the Jesuit's expectations and Omagua custom. In time Payoreva was deeply offended by the heavy-handed manner in which the Jesuit sought to discipline those who were slow to adapt to his expectations -- such as ordering polygamous men to abandon all but one of their wives, in obedience to the Christian principle of monogamy. He was angered as well by the Spaniards' failure to maintain a steady supply of the now-essential European trade goods to the mission. Spaniards were few on the Amazonian side of the Andes; the Amazon missions enjoyed only a low priority in Peru; and the transportation costs from Lima or Quito down the slippery slopes to the mission outposts were prohibitive. So the Spanish missionaries were generally too poor to maintain the loyalty of any Indians settled under their protection.

Despite these difficulties, after eight or ten years the Jesuit with Payoreva's help had succeeded in the remarkable feat of establishing mission outposts in some forty villages of the Omaguas and their neighbors, and appeared to enjoy the support of most of their people. At that point the Jesuit fell ill with chronic fevers and left the area for two years of rest and recuperation. By the time he returned, the Omaguas and Payoreva in particular had cooled visibly in their attitude towards him; and a year or two later their restlessness grew so alarming that he felt obliged to call in a squad of soldiers to intimidate the people, and two additional Jesuits to help run the mission.

During those years of the mid-1690's, Portuguese Carmelite missionaries who were the close collaborators of slave-traders from Pará, had established themselves on the central Amazon. They represented what looked at first like an alternative alliance and source of trade goods for the Omaguas. Some Jesuit mission villagers removed themselves further upriver so as to

avoid the men of Pará; but others including Payoreva and his followers increasingly shunned the Spaniards and sought partnership with the Portuguese. The trade goods were more available in that quarter, and the requirements for religious conformity far less stringent in the Carmelite missions.

In 1701, when a squad of Spanish soldiers visited the Omaguas to help restore discipline, they found that the Indians there had all backslid into apostasy. They had returned to their traditional rituals, festivities and hallucinogenics, were openly practicing their polygamy, and were now making indiscriminate war on their neighbors to capture slaves for sale to Pará. The chapels had fallen into ruins, and people were reluctant to have any further dealings with the Spaniards. The leader of this resistance was Payoreva, who was now formally charged by the Spaniards with having conspired with the Omaguas' old enemies among the forest-dwellers to attack and burn a mission church while its Jesuit missionary was preparing to say Mass, and to kill him with clubs if he came forth alive from the conflagration. The chief was clapped in irons and transported along with some Indian slaves to Spanish Peru; but after a few months he escaped and returned to the Omagua towns.

At this point, and in the very village where he had been baptized twenty years before, Payoreva gathered some friends and persuaded them to abandon the missions and withdraw with him to a place where they might reestablish an Omagua way of life unencumbered by European ways, and where they would kill any Spaniard or Portuguese who dared to approach them. He continued visiting the Omagua towns and counselling withdrawal until sometime in 1704, when as the Jesuit tells us, "either as a prisoner or by his own choice," he joined the great numbers of people from the islands and banks of the Amazon who were being carried off into slavery in Pará. That is the last we hear of

Payoreva; but if his experience as a slave in Pará was at all typical, he must have died within a few years' time from disease, poor nutrition, perpetual forced labor & depression.

### **Colonialism**

These three denizens of early modern Amazonia lived during a portentous period in world history, when important things were happening everywhere and in the histories of all peoples. Theirs was the era of Louis XIV in France, of the young Peter the Great in Russia, of the Manchu emperor K'ang Hsi in China and the ill-starred Mogul emperor Aurangzeb in India. It was the era of Alessandro Scarlatti, Henry Purcell & Jean-Baptiste Lully; of Aphra Behn, John Bunyan & Daniel Defoe; of La Fontaine, Racine & Moliere; of Locke, Spinoza & Leibniz; of the scientists Christian Huygens, Anton van Leeuwenhoek, Marcello Malpighi, Robert Boyle and Isaac Newton; of the architect Christopher Wren, the violin-maker Antonio Stradivarius and the Japanese poet Basho. In what is now the U. S. it was the era of Cotton & Increase Mather in New England, William Penn in Pennsylvania, the Jesuit founder Padre Eusebio Kino in Arizona, the Sieur de La Salle and Pierre Esprit Radisson on the Great Lakes and in the Mississippi Valley, and of Bacon's Rebellion and the revolt of the Pueblo Indians of New Mexico.

Charleston, South Carolina, and Cape Town and Calcutta were founded then, as were the Greenwich Observatory, several great European libraries and scientific societies and the universities of Harvard, Yale, William & Mary & Bologna. In Europe, those years saw the beginning of water closets, newspapers, street lighting, plate glass-making, check writing, property insurance, turnpike tolls, the use of pencils & fountain pens, large-scale canal transportation, census-taking, minuet dancing, cheddar cheese-making, French

horn playing and the opera -- not to mention ice cream eating and the widespread use and abuse of coffee, chocolate and tobacco.

There were twenty million Frenchmen and women in the late 17th century (of whom half a million in Paris), eight million Britons, six million Spaniards, two million Dutch and just over a million Portuguese. All of these nations were actively engaged in colonialist adventures overseas, fighting bitterly with one another for the control of small territories and pieces of the world's trade. The influx of American silver had for more a century both played havoc and generated opportunities for European economies. The lucrative trade in African slaves to America was flourishing; and it involved all of them to one degree or another. Both rich and poor Europeans, at least in the cities, were by that time making daily use of at least a few colonial products. This was the period of the maximum expression of colonialism under Europe's "Ancien Regime."

So what was colonialism anyway? The word means different things to different people, especially today since post-modern cultural theory has come along to dissect the lingering remnants of it as a state of mind. By now, like "democracy" or "fascism", it is a term whose very imprecision may be a condition for its general use. But for my present purposes it must be defined. To begin with, the term refers loosely to a characteristic of international and intercultural relations in the early modern world, after the Portuguese and Spaniards had launched overseas empires in maritime Asia and the Americas, and during the time when Europe already exercised a certain influence around the globe, but had not yet established direct rule over extensive territories in Africa or Asia, or for that matter in most of the Americas.

"Empire" is as old as civilization, and was always accomplished by means of political, economic, cultural and military expansion, and the

incorporation of subject peoples and their territories under the dominion of an established state seeing itself as civilized. "Colonization," or the sending forth of people to establish outposts for trade or settlement in other people's countries, has often been a feature of empire-building; and it had been practiced regularly by Europeans since the Middle Ages -- for example in Iceland and Greenland, the islands of the Eastern Mediterranean and the Canaries.

But "colonialism," still today poorly theorized and not so much as named before the 19th century, was a defining feature of the early modern era. It arose as late medieval Europe, with its moral strictures on political activity, was shaken by humanistic doubts, by the corruption of papal politics, and by the Protestant Reformation. Along with it came the mechanisms for what Marxists know as "primitive accumulation" in Europe, and the slow process of the formation of a world economy fueled by incipient capitalism. Another factor was the rise of the absolutist state, with Machiavelli's ideas about the consolidation and exercise of state power. Reflection on early colonial practice produced the economic doctrine of mercantilism, that "all economic activity should be subservient to the state's interest in power." Colonies, or "plantations" as the English called them, were designed to help European adventurers get rich while serving their metropolitan countries as insurance against future disasters in a world of limited resources. They would enable each newly powerful state to achieve a favorable balance of trade, increase its reserves of bullion and minimize dependence on other countries; and this in turn would fortify the state's position within the delicate balance of power in Europe.

Colonialism was first given life on a modest scale by a few thousands of sea-going adventurers seeking to expand Europe's trade on terms advantageous to themselves, while at the same time propagating wherever

possible the Europeans' state religion. The adventurers were backed by private investors and joint-stock companies, their efforts blessed but seldom financed by the state authorities. Theirs was usually not a state enterprise, or even a matter of central concern to their monarchs; and they all knew that they could never count on the state to back them up in case of any difficulty. Most of them were not experienced soldiers at the outset, but they travelled well-armed and as well-provided as possible with a variety of trade goods that were for the most part no more impressive than those of the other peoples with whom they traded. They looked for the lucrative opportunity, practiced diplomacy, made unenforceable treaties with foreign princes. They established, garrisoned and defended a few dozens of outposts on foreign territory; they governed the small settler and multiethnic native populations of these outposts as best they could; they sponsored the efforts of a few hundred missionaries to carry their Faith to those who lacked it; and they made war incessantly, with extreme brutality and for the most part against other Europeans in faraway places.

This primitive colonialism was slow to transform the world; but it was nevertheless quite useful to the rising European states. It generated substantial trade, organized lucrative production, increased revenues, enhanced military security and made colonies a symbol of national prestige. By the late 17th and early 18th centuries the European states sought to intervene more directly in the administration of colonies, and in the regulation of companies engaged in colonial trade. Thereafter, each great power sought to acquire and maintain an empire on its own account; and rather than following behind the private colonial entrepreneur sought unsuccessfully to control him. So colonialism was a long-term process that accelerated in the 18th century and has continued to comparatively recent times. It may be, lame as it is, that it still has a future somewhere. "Imperialism," its vigorous offspring and the subject of a quite a

rich theoretical literature, arose in the 19th and early 20th centuries from the industrial revolution and the perfection of mechanisms for the exercise of bourgeois power over states, and the rapid accumulation of capital on a world scale. So what I have been talking about here is an aspect of colonialism as it existed after the establishment of the first modern seaborne empires, but before the advent of imperialism.

We have inherited from school-book history and its loose linking of the earlier Spanish conquests in Mexico and Peru with the world's more recent experience of imperialism, the pervasive images of a juggernaut Europe and an all-consuming capitalist world economy that have dominated ever larger parts of the globe from Columbus to the New World Order. This master narrative makes it difficult to think clearly about modern human experience anywhere around the world, and particular to hold the line for what we historians insist rather pathetically on calling "human agency" -- the proposition that human beings, all evidence to the contrary notwithstanding, can still be seen as the subjects and not merely as the objects of our own historical experience. But the early modern Japanese or Persians or West and Central Africans did not experience European power as a juggernaut; and Frei Teodózio da Veiga, Jose Lopes Espínola and Chief Payoreva inhabited a world in which though the changes linked to the operations of colonialism might be catastrophic, no one could understand such developments or foresee any of their long-term outcomes. European institutions were barely present, and when present as in the missions I was describing, were barely recognizable as such. European individuals, though present and sometimes plenty dangerous or influential, were seldom in command. Theirs was a world like that evoked for the same period around the Great Lakes of North America by Richard White's "middle ground," in which natives and Europeans interacted on a more or less equal

basis, and the culturally determined needs and motives of all actors have to be understood as factors in the historical process. A world that functioned in that way for many decades, until the impact of epidemic diseases, economic dislocations and the wars between native peoples finally tipped the balance in favor of European power.

What can we say about colonialism as a human experience for the mostly non-European people who were caught up in its day-to-day operations on the ground in such particular places around the world? First let us note that the system was an exceedingly harsh one, for practically everyone involved. Most Europeans who cast their lives with it met with premature deaths occasioned by war, disease, shipwreck, disease, interpersonal violence or capital punishment. The non-Europeans caught in its traces died in similar ways, in addition very often to being subjected to slavery or forced labor and systematic deprivation. Relatively few were the direct participants from any country who actually prospered from the operation of colonialism. So why did people put up with it?

Colonialism was above all a "system," that mysterious thing like feudalism or capitalism or the state, which appears in history and operates over long periods with inexorable effect -- but which unfortunately for all participants is not a nameable person or group of people, nor even an institution like a government or a corporation or the Catholic Church. So however harsh the system might be to most participants, it couldn't be recognized on the street and poked in the nose, or argued with and taken to court, or fought against systematically and overthrown, or even thought about clearly enough to be analyzed by most of those who found it objectionable. Even today we have a hard time seeing ourselves clearly in relationship to the systems that encompass us, and figuring out how to confront them effectively.

As the system it was, early colonialism had no owner -- even when it appeared to be Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch, English or French. No one was in charge of it. The system included powerful persons as well as powerless, beneficiaries as well as victims. The beneficiaries over the long term included a great number of states, most of them not European -- although a few European states presumably benefited the most from it. They included many tens of thousands of individuals, most of them not European -- although the benefits to European individuals were perhaps greatest and most likely to endure. The system was not, properly speaking, European -- though the Europeans who had received it from Islamic and other predecessors in the 14th and 15th centuries contributed mightily to endowing it with new forms and a wider scope.

People in the 17th century didn't know that colonialism was happening. Dazzled by its moments of glory, they were at best only dimly aware of the destruction it was causing anywhere beyond their own experience; and if they did imagine it they were poorly equipped to explain it. They might offer resistance when the spirit moved them, or look around for opportunities to withdraw from contact with the colonialists altogether. But the majority of the mostly non-European participants in this system -- no matter how brave, wise, thoughtful, energetic or resourceful they might be, never really knew what they were doing or what they were up against. They acted in response to immediate and short-term interests as they perceived them, just as we do today. An effective organized opposition would have required an analysis, an ability to persuade people of truths not immediately evident, and a collective effort sustained over periods longer than the attention spans or even the lives of most people. So colonialism in the 16th & 17th centuries, however primitive and limited in its scope, was a force in history that though resisted could never be effectively opposed.

Colonialism represented a wide variety of opportunities for its hundreds of thousands of participants as well. By widening the scope of world trade, it placed an enormous array of exotic and sometimes useful commodities within the grasp of slowly expanding publics everywhere. The commodities themselves were at first for the most part not European. Among the manufactured goods most sidely traded, for example, were Indian cotton cloth, Islamic steel blades, Chinese silks and porcelains and Mexican silver coins. But trading in these and other goods was a means for peoples and individuals everywhere of acquiring wealth, gaining political power, and sometimes tipping the balance in war. So people around the world, even when they had reason to detest the European adventurers themselves, commonly welcomed any opportunity to join in operations of the invisible colonialist system by dealing with them -- at least until for one reason or another they had cause to regret having done so. By that time the dependence and the damages were usually so great, and the confusion about the real causes of their sufferings so pervasive, that effective responses escaped them.

In the early modern period, direct governance was the necessary means of achieving dominance over societies, the exploitation of their labor and natural resources, and a measure of control over the processes of social and cultural change within them. Generally speaking in the 16th and 17th centuries, Europeans lacked the means to achieve that kind of control over extensive territories abroad. The great exception that proves this rule was the conquest of the densely settled core regions of Mexico, Central America, Peru, Colombia and Chile in the first half of the 16th century -- a fluke made possible by a combination of the Indians' lack of genetic resistance to Old World epidemic diseases, and their own internal political conflicts, with the military technology and determination of the Spanish conquerors, and their resourcefulness in

forming Indian alliances. But elsewhere in America, as in Africa and Asia, the European colonialist adventurers of early modern times were unable to grab more than a series of footholds.

Each colonial territory large or small was, however, an experiment station for the colonial social order. Already in the 16th century, an alien but dominant European minority governed, exploited and asserted racial and cultural superiority over the colonized wherever it could; and could generally it made that regime stick where it held power. Early modern colonialism was reinforced as well by the ancient systems and habits of domination that it brought along with it from Europe (though these already existed wherever there were states and civilizations) : the dominance of the city or town over the village and countryside; of violence over peaceable negotiation (the idea that "might makes right"); of law over custom; of private over communal rights to property; of literacy over orality; of mental over manual labor; of a state religion and orthodoxy over the experience-based animistic folk-belief of the faithful; of an elite class viewing itself as masculine, adult and guided by reason, over a populace viewed as effeminate, childlike and enthralled by the baser instincts.

Working with these purposes and according to these principles, early modern colonialists established and subjected to effective exploitation an extensive territorial empire in Spanish America, whose production particularly of bullion played a large role in the economic development of Europe. In the Caribbean and Brazil they developed the commercial cultivation by transported African and Native American slave laborers of sugar and other crops that could not be raised at home; from outposts in maritime Asia they organized a lucrative business in the long-distance spice, cloth and bullion trades, as well as intra-regional shipping. These were considerable accomplishments, achieved at

what was already by 1750 a great cost to humanity and to nature; and they gave rise in Europe to a sense that the Europeans were destined to rule the world.

Despite them, however, both the hegemony and the territorial scope of early modern colonialism were severely limited -- even in Mexico and Peru. Colonial rule, moreover, was anything but invincible and only partially hegemonic. It was exercised by small numbers of people at a great distance from the colonizers' homelands, a circumstance exacerbated by the slowness of communications which would lead in time to a distancing of colonial elites from the metropolitan control centers and eventually to independence. Rule was accomplished through the cooptation of native elites whose own selfish interests were always a factor. Such fortunes as were made were easily lost. Colonialism succeeded in transferring European culture and institutions to its widely scattered outposts, and establishing them there in a position of ostensible dominance. It created the invidious distinctions that degraded indigenous peoples, cultures, languages, religions, occupations & social systems everywhere. But it accomplished these dubious projects only to a limited degree, in restricted territories, at an enormous cost in European as well as non-European life as well as in treasure, and precariously.

### **Transfrontier Colonialism**

In order to bring our discussion down to the ground on which Frei Theodózio da Veiga, José Lopes Espinola and Chief Payoreva stood, let us imagine a three-way geographical division of the early modern world outside Europe. One segment, by far the smallest, included the territories governed by Europeans and in which the colonial order was fully operative. Each of these far-flung colonial toeholds was surrounded if not by water, by a frontier. The frontier for our purposes was not a "line in the sand" (or the mud) but a shifting, sometimes slowly expanding zone of interaction. Behind it a certain

amount of European settlement and urbanization was occurring, a dependent labor force had been mobilized and put to work on new kinds of production to feed the European demand, the institutions of European governance were installed, a European ruling class was in place, and a colonialist culture was developing. Europeans were in charge. They could lord it over others and have their orders carried out. Violators of European law might be flogged by a European, or hanged on a European gallows.

A second segment of the world we are imagining is the vast realm that was occupied by the non-European states great and small -- the sprawling entities more powerful even than France such as China, Mughal India, Persia or the Ottoman Empire, or the more modest but equally well-ordered polities such as Japan, Korea, Vietnam, Siam, Burma, Java, Ceylon, Ethiopia, Morocco or the Kingdom of Kongo. In those places, large or small, the natives were for the most part quite capable of defending themselves militarily, economically and culturally against the early modern Europeans. Visitors were obliged to deal with them on the natives' own terms, and diplomatically. It was only over the long term that Europeans would come in some instances to be in a position to throw their weight around in such places. Interactions of this second-segment kind may be traced through the early European travel accounts gathered in the vast Hakluyt Society collection and elsewhere, and in a detailed studies such as Maurice Collis' reconstruction of Frei Manrique's encounter with a Theravada Buddhist society in Arakan, or Jonathan Spence's of the Italian Jesuit Matteo Ricci's adventures in Manchu China.

The world of our three late-17th century Amazonians, and of what I am calling "transfrontier colonialism," was that of the third and even vaster segment of the early modern globe, inhabited entirely if sometimes sparsely by the peoples deemed "savage" or barbarian by the Europeans and other civilized

peoples alike. The documentation for the history of this part of the world is very sparse and fragmentary, since there are few indigenous accounts of what transpired there and since many of the European actors who were sporadically present were either illiterate or disinclined to keep records. It is a history whose possibilities are greatly enhanced when there is an oral-historical record in the hands of surviving native peoples, as Richard Price has so brilliantly demonstrated for the ethnogenesis of the Saramacca Maroons of Surinam. This history is marginal today to both national and world-historical narratives, but it has nevertheless been quite extensively studied for a few regions in recent years (most notably for the St. Lawrence valley and Great Lakes) by scholars combining the tools of history with those of archeology and ethnography. Most of it remains to be written, and it has of course yet to be seriously studied on a world-wide comparative basis.

It is clear already, however, that the transfrontier regions of the early modern world were a vast realm of colonialist activity -- one in which though European governments were not in power, European goods, ideas and individuals circulated widely and were sometimes influential as catalysts of change. At the same time it is clear that in that world, much as in the world of the non-European states, the principal "historical agency" remained for a long time in the hands of the natives. Europeans could not subsist, and could often not even find their way without the cooperation of indigenous peoples; they could acquire wealth only in collaboration with indigenous partners; and they rarely controlled the outcome of any interaction.

The indigenous inhabitants of these territories, though generally less advanced in metallurgy and weapons-making or in husbandry and long-distance transport than the Europeans of that day, had all developed advanced techniques for subsisting in their own environments. They were at home where

Europeans struggled to survive. They were also, for the most part, strong enough militarily at the outset of these interactions to expel any unwelcome visitors. So when Europeans gained their footholds on the fringes of these vast territories, they did so to some degree because of their own bravery and resourcefulness, but to a greater degree because of the willingness of the indigenous peoples to allow them to do so.

What were some general characteristics of the operation of colonialism in this transfrontier world? A particularly decisive one was this: that the movement of Europeans around the world had biological and ecological consequences which were unintended and uncontrollable but of enormous historical importance; and that many of these were felt far beyond the colonial frontiers. What Alfred Crosby calls "virgin soil" epidemics occurred everywhere in America and Oceania, and caused huge numbers of people to die before they could so much as meet and interact with any Europeans. Rats, pigs, cattle and horses went wild and proliferated mightily in the same territories, and for each of these and many other plant and animal species there is a separate history to be woven into the whole. Such changes in Africa and Asia were less spectacular and longer in coming; but if we include the conscious world-wide transfers of cultivars from all continents during the early modern period, it becomes clear that the natural environments themselves of most if not all peoples were transformed in ways that might be either beneficial or catastrophic, but were always very influential, as an indirect consequence of the movement of Europeans around the globe.

Peoples everywhere had been involved from ancient times in wide-ranging networks of trade. These were not introduced by the Europeans; but they were both invigorated and distorted by being plugged into those of the European foothold bases on their fringes, from which new commodities were

put into circulation and new demands for goods were exerted. Often the abundant supply of trade goods was unprecedented in its ability to distort indigenous patterns of trade; while the strength and character of European demand were such as to distort ecological and even social relations for indigenous peoples. Generally speaking, both Europeans and the indigenous peoples wanted more of every good than could readily be supplied, as was the case on both sides in the trade in Indian slaves for sharp-edged tools in Amazonia.

Native responses to colonial trade were characterized by a competition with other peoples for advantage in acquiring the Europeans' goods, and sometimes by a feckless belief that their resources were infinite. The indigenous peoples frequently accelerated their war-making traditions to the point of no return in an effort to maximize trade advantage, and they sometimes destroyed the supply of their own resources. But each such story needs to be understood in its own terms; and it is important to keep in mind that participation in external trade was never as important to any people as were its search for subsistence and arrangements for the defense of family and community. It is also the case that culture conditioned attitudes towards the exchange of goods in ways never identical to those of the Europeans, and seldom understood by European observers. Mutual gift-giving was often important to inter-group relations; individuals (including Europeans) might be seen as having spiritual powers that went with their difference. Wealth carried prestige that might be expressed in the redistribution of goods as gifts. Theft might not be seen as dishonorable, and so on.

European power in the transfrontier territories was limited where it did exist to tenuously held and heavily fortified outposts, such as the ostrog of the Russian wilderness within whose walls a fragile semblance of colonial

authority might be maintained. European individuals might sometimes join forces with local leaders to establish a neo-community such as the mission stations presided over by Theodózio da Veiga and Jose Lopes Espínola, in which they might even exercise a measure of leadership so long as the natives were willing to tolerate them. More often the European transfrontiersmen were on their own, and obliged to go to great lengths to adapt themselves to indigenous customs and lifeways in order simply to survive. They had to learn native languages, adapt native subsistence strategies, attach themselves to native communities and native leaders, raise their families with native women. Those who accomplished these remarkable adaptations, moreover, generally paid the heavy price of sinking "to the level of the natives" in the eyes of their colonial compatriots.

Providing military assistance to native groups in wars with their neighbors was a standard tactic of these men, as was the allocation to friends and allies of privileged positions in trade with the outside world. Both military and trade alliances were chronically unreliable for all participants; but both war and trade in the transfrontier regions came to be essential activities for both. The evidence is overwhelming that by and large the peoples of this "third segment" of the early modern world would tolerate the presence of outlanders among them for extended periods, only so long as it served them as a means to guarantee the supply of "trade goods." Sustaining these relationships was a demand for such goods that was equal in intensity to the Europeans' interest in goods to be sold on the world market. Sometimes the goods were sought for utilitarian reasons, as were useful tools and weapons. Sometimes peoples were drawn to them by their beauty and exotic novelty, and would put them to uses never imagined by Europeans, such as the incorporation of glass beads into wampum belts for use as a currency. Either way, peoples everywhere went to

extraordinary lengths to acquire the Europeans' axes, knives, machetes, fish hooks and spear points, as well as brightly colored clothing, hats, glass beads, mirrors and distilled beverages.

Once appropriated by non-European peoples, these goods like the European ideas that sometimes went with them ceased immediately to be European, and were given life anew by the functions and the symbolic characteristics with which they were endowed with by new possessors' cultures. European observers, utilitarian in their own ways and deeply ignorant of the cultural attitudes and values of the peoples with whom they were engaged, have seldom understood this. They could easily see the practical side of a fascination with tools or weapons; and they generally shared the natives' ready appreciation of hard liquor; but they were perennially puzzled by an interest in what they saw as baubles or gewgaws, and in true colonialist fashion they tended to chalk that up to a childlike delight. Europeans have for the most part thought exclusively in terms of cultural dominance in the transfrontier colonial world, of what the early anthropologists would come to understand as "acculturation". But a close examination of the documentary record for these transactions suggests that the notion of "appropriation" works a great deal better as a tool for understanding the processes of early social, cultural and environmental change in the transfrontier colonialist world -- whether the focus is on Christian missions, on warfare, on technological adaptation or on peaceable trade.

As was the case in interactions with the unconquered states around the world, European individuals on the ground played a significant role in the operation of transfrontier colonialism. Especially significant among them were the missionaries, with their specialized and explicitly "acculturative" project. Their story, always kept somehow separate and raised above the other

narratives of colonialism (and usually told by themselves), can now be understood much more clearly than it has been as an integral part of the whole. In particular, mission history is greatly improved by the substitution of the notion of the "appropriation" by native peoples of the Europeans' religious ideas, stories & practices, for the older notion of "conversion." Mission life is much better documented everywhere than the other aspect of transfrontier colonialism; and the rich missionary sources have now been combined in a few places with the results of ethnographic & archeological research to make possible an extraordinarily detailed & sophisticated "ethnohistory" that suggests the long-term possibility of a profound reconceptualization for the whole early modern world of the process of social transformation beyond the borders of states and colonial outposts.

To conclude, I'd like to return to the idea of human beings as subjects of our own history. We all live with this paradox: life teaches us that our own productive and reproductive endeavors, our imaginings and aspirations, are central to our own human experience; and it allows us to presume that it must be the same way for others. But history teaches us that the pursuit of power and the accumulation of wealth are primary, and for the past five hundred years it confines us within a narrative that renders most human experience peripheral to the rise of capitalism and the modern state, and to the ascendance of man over woman, the city over the country, war over peace, and Europeans and their rapacious ways over the rest of humanity. This anomaly has been addressed with marvellous results by the social and cultural historians of individual countries in the last half of the 20th century; but it has barely been approached by world historians.

The story of "transfrontier colonialism," it seems to me, tends to subvert that once-dominant narrative of modern times on a world scale, and to help us

restore our sense of the "agency" of everyone in the making of history. To insist that even the most vulnerable peoples on the planet, those who were headed for actual physical extermination as the "making of the modern world" unfolded, were active and purposeful participants in world history -- to substitute the ideas of "interaction" and "appropriation" for the "conquest," "conversion" and "acculturation" as a way of talking about colonial encounters -- is, I believe, deeply subversive. Colonialism, even its earlier phases and its greatly attenuated transfrontier forms, was a devilishly contrived, very powerful challenge to the health of human communities, the viability of ecological relationships and the sanity of persons -- one which in the long run would wreak terrible damage everywhere. Yet it turns out on close examination that people everywhere, including "savages" and "barbarians," did what we would and could with it so long as we lived -- enjoying and taking advantage of its benefits, resisting its hardships, perhaps hoping it would go away -- day by day and year by year, whatever the costs to our children might eventually be. A life-destroying system might then as now enmesh, confuse and eventually destroy us if we could not contrive to understand and get the better of it; but in the meantime it could not control our lives and thoughts, nor could it construct our futures. That was and is our own exclusive and unenviable privilege, our very daunting challenge and our responsibility.