

Settlement, border and desert: the configuration of a regional space in the center-north of the *Septentrión novohispano*

Poblamiento, frontera y desierto: la configuración de un espacio regional en el centro-norte del Septentrión novohispano

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ABSTRACT

The establishment of the jurisdictional limits of the present Mexican states throughout century XIX separated spaces that, during the colonial period, had been articulated, but that at the independent time happened to comprise different organizations. This work approaches the process of construction of a regional space whose articulation consolidated in the course of century XVIII in the center-north of the *Septentrión novohispano* and that comprised part of the province of the New Biscay. Analysis privileges some variables, among which are the characteristics of process of settlement as well as the perception of Spaniards of the border and desert, which at the same time demarcated the controlled spaces and those that were outside the control of the colonial society, and also the form in which these variables influenced in the process of regional configuration.

KEYWORDS: Settlement. Septentrión. Region. Border. Desert.

RESUMEN

El establecimiento de los límites jurisdiccionales de los actuales estados mexicanos a lo largo del siglo XIX escindió espacios que durante el periodo colonial habían estado articulados, pero en la época independiente pasaron a formar parte de entidades diferentes. Este trabajo aborda el proceso de construcción de un espacio regional cuya articulación se consolidó en el transcurso del siglo XVIII en el centro-norte del septentrión novohispano y que formaba parte de la provincia de Nueva Vizcaya. El análisis privilegia algunas variables, entre las que se encuentran las características del proceso de poblamiento, como así también la percepción de los españoles en torno a la frontera de guerra y el desierto, que demarcaban al mismo tiempo los espacios controlados y aquellos que quedaban fuera del control de la sociedad colonial, y la forma en que estas variables influyeron en el proceso de configuración regional.

PALABRAS-CLAVES: Poblamiento. Septentrión. Región. Frontera de guerra. Desierto.

The establishment of the jurisdictional limits of the current Mexican States during the 19th century separated into spaces that, during the colonial period, had been articulated, but that during the independence became part of different entities. At the same time, transformed and reoriented them, attending to the needs of the construction process of the State in the making, as well as the domestic market and the new constellation of international relationships. Such is the case of a large area which

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spread into the North-Center of the North new Hispanic, and covered the Northwest of the current state of Durango and the portion South of Chihuahua.

The new jurisdictional political organization was accompanied by profound and transcendental transformations that had to be done with the reconfiguration of economic spaces and their internal and external articulations, changes and reorganization of the network of trade and exchange which began to arise with the collapse of the colonial regime. These networks articulated various levels of regional and local economies. through the neovizcaíno territory. One of these levels integrated networks connecting the province with the rest of the new hispanic territory - from the center of the Viceroyalty until New Mexico - through the main axis represented by the real inland track and some transversal routes stemming from it. Secondly, flows of circulation and supply supplied by regional and local production linking primarily the agricultural and livestock environment of the province with the urban centers and the actual miners. Finally, there were flows that articulated outside legal circuits and related to various stages of regional trade and exchange, who were particularly important - as was the case in other Latin American border spaces - trade and exchange networks established with non- submitted indigenous groups.

The genesis of this region dates back from the formation of the province of Santa Barbara founded at the end of the 16th century, which in later decades were consolidated, primarily, from the establishment of important real miners. By 1630, the discovery and implementation of the Real of mines of San José del Parral began to dominate the existing production and continued throughout the century. Then, from the first decade of the 18th century, bonanza moved to the North, San Felipe el Real de Chihuahua - Santa Eulalia, which became the most important site of mineral production, concentrating dynamic economic activity and becoming an important center for the population.

In this work I intend to identify and analyze the elements that contributed to the formation of this regional space articulated in the course of the eighteenth century in the Center-North of the North new Hispanic. We understand that the way in which this space was configured refers to the way as the occupation of the physical environment was organized and that this organization is an essentially historical process, i.e. it is constituted by the forms of exploitation and appropriation of resources, settlement patterns, the trade routes and the delimitation of borders (ABOITES, 1995, p. 18). It was contained, from South to North, between the area of Real del Oro - Indé and Encinillas Ranch, located north of the town of San Felipe el Real of Chihuahua (the current capital of the State of Chihuahua) - and from East to

West, penetrating in the basin between the mountains of Mapimí and it spread onto the eastern slope of the Sierra Madre. Note that the city of Durango, capital of the province of Nueva Vizcaya and all the surrounding area to it are located out of this regional cut. We will seek to rebuild the characteristics of the process of settlement, as well as the perception of the Spaniards of the border, of the war and the desert, which at the same time demarcated the controlled spaces and those remaining outside the control of colonial society, and the way in which these variables influenced the process of regional configurations.

The perception of controlled space and not controlled is closely related to the place that seems to have been, for the Spanish areas that were settled by non-submitted indigenous people and other groups that were thought to have formally integrated into colonial society, but that, however, had a high degree of mobility. The colonial documents represent these perceptions through the image of the controlled area and the settlement established on it, as population internally-located "inside" of colonial society - and uncontrolled spaces and the societies that lived in it, as externally- located "outside" of colonial society-. However, "inside" and "outside" are part of the same construction and regional dynamics. Controlled and uncontrolled spaces were transported, overlapped, and along with them so did people and activities, comprising, finally, the same system and the same spatial organization.

The Process of Population

It has been said that in the Mexican historiography there is the habit of making large theoretical generalizations with regards to the problems of organization of space and the construction of regions, with little empirical evidence. This judgment, that can surely be nuanced when considering specific studies addressed by several regions, has however led me to reflect on my own research in the province of Nueva Vizcaya in the 18th century. In the studied processes there was a spatial representation that is reflected on the maps, but these variables had not been the subject of reflection. Its identification with the northern province of Nueva Vizcaya did not recognize the space cuts that had been built in the heat of the research: in the one hand, it actually addressed to an area bound to the context of the province, and, on the other hand, portions of territory were incorporated, that not only were not part of the province, but also had been something like "no man's land" for historiography.

A fundamental variable when analyzing the construction of this regional area is the process of settlement. In order to do this, it is necessary to go back to the mid-16th century, when the province was founded as a capitulation given in 1562 to

Francisco de Ibarra by Viceroy Luis de Velasco. Until 1733 it included much of the Northwest Coast corresponding to the present-day States of Sinaloa and Sonora, but since that time limits were reduced to the area made up of Durango, most of Chihuahua and the area south of the State of Coahuila, which covered about 255,000 square kilometers in 1786. The region of Parras-Salttillo was transferred to the Government of Coahuila in 1787 (GERHARD, 1996, p. 24, 203, 208).²

This province was located in what Professor García Martínez called the North and, within this aspect, corresponded to the North-Central sector, which ranged from South to North from Zacatecas to New Mexico, and from East to West it was bounded between the desert - represented by the basin between mountains of Mapimí - and the steep slopes of the Sierra Madre Occidental (GARCIA MARTÍNEZ, 1997). The main access route was the real inland track, which stretched over a distance of almost 2,500 miles from the center of the Viceroyalty to Santa Fe in New Mexico. In the 17th century its transit took six months; at the beginning of the 19th century, this period of time was reduced to four months and a half, of which the section between Mexico and Chihuahua occupied three months. In this way there were caravans with wagons or mules whose loads carried products to San Felipe el Real de Chihuahua from the city of Mexico, Michoacan, Puebla and other regions of New Hispanic Viceroyalty . (SUÁREZ, 1994; MOORHEAD, 1995).

Since its foundation and the establishment of its capital in the current city of Durango, this province had covered all the not yet conquered territories, extending north of Nueva Galicia. From that moment on , the Spanish interest in further expanding their expeditions to the North was related to two main reasons: expeditions to New Mexico in pursuit of the famous mythical cities and the search for precious metals. In this context, between the end of this century and beginning of the 17th century some mines in the area of Indé were discovered - Santa María del Oro, in the North of the current state of Durango. Along with these underground mines ,some farms that supplied for them were established, and the deployment of the so-called hunters of slaves, whose motivation was the capture of Indians started - the so-called

² Estimates suggest the population of Nueva Vizcaya had been halved between 1550 and 1800, from 344,500 inhabitants in the first moment to 177,200 on the eve of the 19th century. Such phenomenon responded to the decline of the indigenous population was decimated after contact with Europeans. Meanwhile, the population not Indian (which can include Spaniards, mixed, blacks, mulattos and caste) left no increase over the same period and, particularly, since the mid-18th century. In 1750 the number of inhabitants of the North was estimated at more than 350,000 people, of whom 124,400 lived in Nueva Vizcaya. Of that total, 57,900 were Indian. To 1803 Bonavía Bernardo counts 190,564 inhabitants in the province (Bernardo Bonavía, "List or news of jurisdictions or understanding of the province of new Biscay, 1803 parties"), Florescano and Gil Sanchez apud Peter Gerhard (1996, p. 24, 203, 208).

"pieces" - from the growing need of labor, to bring them to work in mines and farms. Thus, the first settlement of this area was civilian and was dominated by landowners, miners and hunters of native indians (CRAMAUSSEL, 2006).

The Spaniards occupied the mountain foothills of the Sierra Madre Occidental, which housed the silver mines and the best flat, alluvial and irrigable lands. The Fragosas Mountains to the West, and the arid plains in the East were located on each side of this area. A little later, some prisons were founded on the western edge of the Basin between mountains de Mapimí, which, in theory, served to protect Spanish settlements –underground mines, ranches, estates and villas - attacks and incursions of the indigenous groups settled in the desert, known at the time as "abandoned". To the beat of this process, a missionary system, involving primarily Jesuits and Franciscans was structured and was consolidated during the 1620s. At the same time, there was local elite formation, characterized by its strong endogamic tendency, in principle allowing them very soon to weave a dense network of social, political and economic relations and, therefore, ensuring their reproduction. In colonial Northern society functions overlapped and powerful locals had diversified their investments in land, mines, commerce and positions, and, at the same time, took up positions in the military, civil and ecclesiastical administration. The ostentation of military titles by the prominent landowners had antecedents in previous centuries, when many men who came to American soil to fight for the King of Spain, had then diversified their interests and invested in land, mines and commerce (CRAMAUSSEL, 1999). On the other hand, the policy of sale of public office to individuals who carried out the Crown to obtain additional resources, allowed some merchants to integrate Governmental charges with commercial activities, thus achieving extensive benefits (NAVARRO GARCÍA, 1964, p. 57). These men were owners and Lords of the province.

Various regional dynamics can be recognized within this vast territory. The portion corresponding to the South of the region that we identified in the second half of the 18th century has its antecedent in the ancient province of Santa Barbara, which was formed during the 16th and 17th centuries, and was the center of communications with the center of the Viceroyalty, towards New Mexico and Pacific. The province was limited to the South by the Nazas River and to the North by the Conchos, and from West to East lay between the desert and the mountains. According to Cramaussel, at the time "the term 'province' was not a specific jurisdiction as it is today." Thus, in colonial documentation, the countrymen used the term "province" interchangeably to refer to the province of Santa Barbara and the province of Nueva Vizcaya, when in fact the first was part of the second. This province was an important center of

communication, along with the center of the new Hispanic Viceroyalty in the 17th century. A road linking it with New Mexico was also opened, another towards Sonora and various parts of the sierra (CRAMAUSSEL, 1990).

Although, with the passage of time, the mining center of Santa Barbara took precedence in the area and gave the name to the province, and later, in 1631, this relevance became the real of San José del Parral, the first mines discovered in the area were those of Indé in the northeast of the current state of Durango. From these distant beginnings, this area, which then settled some Jesuit missions such as San Jose of the Tizonazo, was more linked to the region which stretched northwards to the capital of Nueva Vizcaya. Still to these days, the inhabitants of the area comment that the main contacts were established to the North, Parral, and to the East by Coahuila. They felt very close to those sites rather than to the rest of the State of Durango, despite being part of such jurisdiction.³ A fact that is worth mentioning in this regard is the pilgrimage that takes place the first Friday of March, for the traditional celebration of the Lord of Tizonazo (CRAMAUSSEL; ÁLVAREZ, 1994), which attracts pilgrims from the South of Chihuahua, as it is the case of the faithful of Valle de Allende, the colonial Valley of San Bartolomé. In fact, the dynamics of that space was historically formed from the province of Santa Barbara, and that construction is seen until today.

As it was already indicated in the North-South extension, regional cuts discussed in this paper are restricted from the North of the current state of Durango (up to the Real del Oro - Indé) up to the town of San Felipe el Real of Chihuahua. The city of Durango, capital of the province of Nueva Vizcaya and surrounding area to it, are out of this regional cut. This area has three major natural regions: the central table or plateau, the Sierra Madre Occidental and the so-called desert area. The Spaniards occupied the intermediate zone of the mountain foothills, known as central table or plateau, where the silver mines were located, and the best alluvial and irrigable and flat lands. This portion of territory is surrounded by mountain ranges or hills of low height and very exploitable, abundant in grass and low vegetation for agriculture and livestock. Towards west the area becomes arid, with little rainfall. The sector corresponding to the Sierra Madre Occidental consists of canyons and slopes of various altitudes reaching 3,000 meters above the sea level in some areas. The most rugged and steepest of the Tarahumara extends to the border with the current state of Durango (ALTAMIRANO; VILLA, 1988, p. 25-27).

³ Personal communication to inhabitants of San José of the Tizonazo, October 2001.

The bonanza of Parral lasted almost to the end of 17th century. But at the beginning of the 18th, the existing prosperity moved slightly more to the north of Eulalia Chihuahua-Santa area. From the province of Santa Barbara - along with some of Cusihuirachi - came most of the neighbors who established the necessary agricultural estates for the supply of mining networks. In this context, while the opening of mines helped speed up the process of settlement, mining on a large scale was only possible when it could secure the supply of agricultural inputs and necessary labor for farming and mining production flow. Chihuahua was nurtured with products from several farms, towns and missions. In addition to grains and flours, there was a network of supply of labor concentrated through the system of orders & supplies and also came from towns and missions in the surroundings. As Salvador Álvarez commented: "Northern colonial society was closely linked to the indigenous world that surrounded it [...] the existence of a large-scale mining society would not have been possible without the competition of missions and villages of local Indians, both in food and labor."

Thus, from the first consolidation of the former province of Santa Barbara the settlement of the area of Chihuahua-Santa Eulalia is fed, with a structure of ranches, farms, villages and missions which provide the supply and facilitate the control of vast sectors of the native population. Because of this mineral wealth, but also agriculture and livestock, the province of Nueva Vizcaya is considered to be, by Viceroy Revillagigedo, the richest and most populated area in the Septentrión in the 18th century

Poblamiento, Mining and Supply System

In these lands, seams of minerals were discovered and this exploration was one of the most productive activities. In the first decades of the seventeenth century, the main developed extractive industry surrounding San José del Parral, was located in the South of the current state of Chihuahua. In the 18th century, the existing silver prosperity moved a little further north, towards Chihuahua-Santa Eulalia which, as we mentioned, dominated the production for several decades and became the largest centre of population in the north of México (HADLEY; 1979, p. 28).

The incidence of mining activity in the process of settlement of San Felipe el Real and its role as an engine of regional and local economic activities, as well as in the configuration of networks and circuits for supply of agricultural products and arms for the job, were analyzed by Alvarez for several years. This study shows that at the beginning of the century XVIII Chihuahua was becoming an agricultural area

consolidated by the support of farms established by neighbors, mostly of former colonization zones: Santa Barbara and Cusihuiriachi. In that context, while the opening of mines helped speed up the process of settlement, exploitation on a large scale only was possible when they could secure the supply of agricultural inputs and necessary labor for mining production flow (ÁLVAREZ, 1999, p. 57). Since its origins, in Chihuahua it was not possible to separate clearly the Group of miners from the agricultural landowners, and within the latter, the great landowners had a nearly complete mastery of mining production. However, although many of them could supply its mines from the production of their own agricultural farms, "not even the wealthiest landowners were able to assure complete consumption of the entire region." (ÁLVAREZ, 1999, p. 61)

The supply of grain and flour for mines was largely provided by the local and regional production. There is not the general hypothesis that it has been sustained to the North of the new Spain, according to which the major mining centers would have led to the development of grain production areas dedicated to their supply, which in general could be located in areas far from the mining districts in Chihuahua (FLORESCANO apud ÁLVAREZ, 1999, p. 61).

In this regard, the appearance of Chihuahua does not seem to have identified important changes in the structure of local and regional agricultural production. Chihuahua did not depend on the supply of any area in particular, they were nurtured with products from several farms, towns and missions. Besides grains and flours, there was the network of supply of labor that formalized the system of orders and supplies that also came from towns and missions in the vicinity. In this sense "Northern colonial society continued closely linked to the indigenous world around it [...] The very existence of a large-scale mining society would not be possible without the assistance of missions and villages of local indians, both for food and labor." (ÁLVAREZ, 1999, p. 61-61).

The characteristics of the system of supply that is described for the first decades of the 18th century – is the same described in the previous decades - and which was fueled greatly by the participation of the people and missions in the region--, lasted during the second half of the century. However, another issue should be added to this aspect, one that has hardly been investigated by scholars and that arises on a recurring basis in the sources: the participation of native indians and missions (as well as other socio- ethnic sectors) in the provision of inputs for the mining sector through illegal circuits, which involved mainly products from farming and were fed from the theft of animals (ORTELLI, 2011).

The commandments, which determined the integration of indigenous peoples and missions with legal circuits of supply in quality of labor, also allowed or encouraged a mobility that was exploited to integrate with illegal circuits. For example, in the second half of the 18th century, in the villages of Babonoyaba and Satevó, native indians were transferred by seasons to work on the farms of the Cortes del Rey. Towards 1775, the lands that belonged to the Cortes del Rey, made up of more than twenty farms and ranches (ALATRISTE, 1983, p. 109) that bordered the North by the towns of Satevó and Babonoyaba, and the West by the Mission of Santa María de Cuevas. Labor for farming was obtained from all of them. Indeed, neighbors like Santa Maria de Cuevas and other towns and missions were very active in the theft of animals. The percentages for the participation of people are uncertain because testimonials are isolated and fragmented, and we have not found yet documentation that can give us a serious and systematic quantitative dimension. But in 1785 a list based on all cases to defendants accused of cattle theft⁴ was made and out of 356 cases that made up the list, 25% related to Santa Maria de Cuevas and villages in its vicinity: San Francisco de Borja, Satevó, Santa Ana, Carichi, Baquiachi, and Nonoava. Note that several of them were involved in the networks of supply of agricultural products for San Felipe el Real.

Out of 17 towns and missions involved in the supply of agricultural products to San Felipe el Real, 11 were accused of participating in illegal theft and transfer circuits.⁵ Some of the indicted people were directly linked to the supply of the village, and others that were not listed as providers, were related to agricultural production in the area through the work in the farms of the region, as part of the system of orders & supplies.⁶

Most of the animals were obtained in large estates located in the axis linking Gallo, Indé and Valle de San Bartolomé. Among them, the most important were San Salvador D'horta, San José de Ramos, San Mateo the Zarca, San Juan de Casta, San Isidro del Torreón, la Cadena and San José the Mimbrera.⁷ Farms and ranches in the jurisdictions of San José del Parral and San Diego's new mines, in the old province of Santa Barbara were also identified as victims of armed robbery. While it is very difficult

⁴ "Orders of the Commander general José Antonio Rangel for the apprehension of those accused of disclosure and lists of the accused", 1785, file history of Parral, Guerra, G-13, Parral.

⁵ The total number of people accused of involvement in the illegal circuit in the 1770s were Babonoyaba (with their visits Guadeloupe and Concepción), Baqueachi, Carichi, Chuvíscar, Coyachi, Huejotitán, La Joya, Nonoava, Norogachi, Papigochi, San Andrés, San Francisco de Borja, San Ignacio, San Javier, San Lorenzo, San Mateo, San Miguel las Bocas, San Pedro, Santa Cruz of Tapacolmes, San Isabel Santa Maria de Cuevas, Santo Tomás, Satevó, Tecorichi, Temaichi and Tizonazo.

⁶ Office of the Governor of Durango and commanding general, José Faini, June 19, 1773, archive of the nation of Mexico, internal provinces, vol. 132, fs. 276 and 276v.

⁷ "Dossier formed about collusion and secret intelligence", fs. 281-281v; "Office of Francisco Javier Valenzuela", 1788, General archive of the nation of Mexico, inland provinces, vol. 128, f. 148v.

to measure the amounts of this flow of products, because they are not legal circuits and therefore poorly recorded - the list of buyers of the stolen cattle included several prominent characters in Chihuahua, among whom were Miguel Sandoval, Jose Barriga, innocent Lascano and Martín Mariñelarena.⁸

The participation of the indians and missions that integrated the legal supply circuits of San Felipe el Real, circuits which the authorities considered to be located outside the framework of legality, is an aspect that has just begun to be investigated. Among the first, there is a reference to the involvement of Indians as producers and suppliers of agricultural products, mainly flour, corn and wheat, and their integration into the circuits of flow of labor as part of the injunction of orders & supplies system. But part of this supply-related people, at the same time, participated in the clandestine circuits of appropriation, transfer and exchange of mules and horses, that partly delivered to not reduced indigenous groups, also used for their subsistence and minor exchanges, and channeled towards the mining Center. Participation in these circuits, linked to Indian towns and missions with large networks, some focus on local levels and others exceeding the limits of the province, through the transfer of animals to not reduced small indigenous groups, item that exceeds the limits of this work.

Settlement and War Borders

An element that is often mentioned in colonial sources and that has been reproduced by some authors is the idea of seeing the steepy mountains and the desert as "natural" boundaries that surrounded from East to West the highlands and the foothills. However, as we know, there are no "natural" limits when it comes to explain social phenomena. It would, rather be more about representations and spatical cuts of the way a society understands the space in which they develop. In this sense, one of the elements that contributed to the configuration of the North-Central is the idea of "war border" which has strong connotations in the Western tradition.

Limes imperii, as they called the peripheral area of actual Roman territory, which separated it from the world of "barbarian" peoples and whose purpose was not only to establish or mark differences between various societies, but to also to have interest in the military and customs; more than a limit, it was a strategic area which demarcated the adjacent territory of the Domain of Rome and that could serve as a base for further

⁸ "Proceedings followed by higher Commission from the Governor Lord captain general of the Kingdom on accomplices in steals made goods field to don Macario Vázquez Borrego", 1767, historical archives of Parral, Criminal, SMU, fs. 8V-10.

conquests. A little later, the medieval *brand*, did not allude to a line precisely defined, but it pointed to an area of separation. With regards to the emergence of modern States, it acquired a similar meaning to the one that appears in the current dictionaries that define it as "border line of a State" and "the dividing line of the territory of States, whose exact pricing has great importance, because it indicates the extension of sovereignty with the limits of the action of laws." (DICIONÁRIO ENCICLOPÉDICO, 1960, p. 156-157; GRAN ENCICLOPEDIA, 1978, p. 9). In the 18th century the boundary between European States was defined in the *Dictionary of Authorities* such as: "the strip or term that parts and divides two kingdoms being one the frontier of the other" (DICCIONARIO DE AUTORIDADES, 1984, p. 80) *boderline* and *borders* referred to as "what is put and placed in front of something else" and related terms from Latin *contrarius*, *contrapositus* and *adversus*. (DICCIONARIO DE LA LENGUA, 1780, p. 483).

As mentioned by Roulet, the border word had a root of unequivocal warrior connotation from its origins. The experience of the early days of Spanish expansion in America was influenced by the advance on the Muslim world, which had been consolidated on the Peninsula just a few decades before the start of the colonization of the "new world". In fact, the Spanish medieval border was one of war of reconquest, expansive momentum which was moved to the American continent with the vocabulary marked by warlike meaning. (ROULET, 2006)⁹ A glossary of the Spanish language lists precisely the word "border" as the boundary between the Christian Spain and the Moors in Spain. (GLOSARIO, 1888, p. 233) Therefore, for the Spanish who colonized the American territory, borders were areas not known or dominated, inhabited by people who appealed to the war to maintain or achieve spaces, or to protect resources and sources of survival. Chronicles and documents which emerged during the colonial experience in America presented to the border as a different space and, at the same time, opposed to the physical characteristics of the territory, both for the physical characteristics as well as the way of life of the societies that inhabited it. These spaces are defined, in most cases, such as "borders of war" that limited the territory occupied by the "indians of war".

From such conceptions, in the historiography, the nineteenth-century and the Latin American colonial border dominated, for many years, a perspective which emphasized the conflict and ignored the analysis of other social events, or subordinated them to the dynamics of the wars by territory. In this sense, the border was seen as a limit or line of separation that demarcated the transition between worlds with

⁹ Notes this author that border derives from the Latin front, from which come both front (the first line of people camping in a militia or on a battlefield) as its archaic synonym front (used in the terminology of the fortifications) and lingers in the terms confrontation and showdown (ROULET, 2006).

practically irreconcilable differences. In the specialized bibliography, violence and war were frequently referred to as inherent aspects of social relationships that developed in these environments.

However, the arguments defined the province of Nueva Vizcaya as a border of war against the not reduced Indians in the second half of the 18th century, reported benefits and advantages that the powerful had used over the decades. At the time of the Bourbons towards the reforms which attempted to apply the colonial rule on the overseas territories, these traits of the neovizcaína company deployed in its maximum expression and the province seemed to be devastated by enemies and in imminent danger of disappearing (ORTELLI, 2005). Thus, the powerful men of the province drew advantages of the location of his properties near the neighboring areas to the plains, and of the Indians of war that the official discourse of eighteenth-century defined as boundaries. While this speech presented to those properties that were far from legal control, such as isolated and marginal, this position was convenient in a space in which landowners could organize its productive and commercial activities with greater freedom, evading taxes, selling at higher prices and controlling access to the region's main roads (CRAMAUSSEL, 1998, p. 17-18-26).

The most powerful warlords were those who had properties in the vicinity of the plains. The location of their land in the margins - the territories of the 18th century colonial discourse defined as border - allowed them to control the main roads of access to the region (CRAMAUSSEL, 1998, p. 99). These properties, far from legal, far from being isolated and marginal, enjoyed a position that allowed landowners to organize their productive and commercial activities with greater freedom, evading taxes and selling at higher prices. In general, these strategies were part of a system of alliances which were held between long or short distance merchants, the commissioners of towns close to the Indian lands, military chiefs, lay or ecclesiastical administrators of the missions and landowners (SANTAMARÍA, 1998, p. 17-18-26).¹⁰

In this sense, there is a contradiction in the local speech between the bonanza that seems to characterize the province in the 18th century, and the one that can be seen from the demographic growth and the growth of economic activity, and descriptions of imminent depopulation, the dismantling of the regional economy and the dislocation of the colonial order by the presence of the border of war with the not reduced Indians mostly coming from the basin of Mapimí.

This idea of border of war and the potential danger in these indigenous groups blurs and undermines, however, the dynamics that developed in the area and that was

¹⁰ Santamaría poses a similar picture in the case of the Chaco. See "Apóstatas", p. 17-18 and 26.

characterized by the establishment of relations of trade and exchange, and even of patronage among some indigenous leaders and captains of the prisons that took care of the entrance of el Bolson, the desert, "the mouth that vomits cruel and barbarous Nations" (MORFI, 1935, p. 60). These same masters, masters and local lords, were the ones who held, to Viceregal and metropolitan authorities, a speech which promoted and defended the existence of the border of war as a line of defense and separation. The invocation to the border of war actually served to maintain some legal and political autonomy, as well as it reported several economic advantages and tax benefits. This way, the basin between mountains that appears as an empty space in the cartographic representations, responds to the idea of desert as it was understood at the time, i.e., not necessarily for the physical factors of the landscape but for the dryness of the ground or the absence of water and abundant vegetation.

Settlement and Desert

The idea of desert responded, ultimately, to the absence of "civilization" and the western lifestyle, represented in the "we" Spanish. The desert was home to the "other", "savage", of the "barbarian", i.e. of not submitted indigenous societies or formally integrated into the colonial system (ORTELLI, 2011). An image that is associated with this space is of a very vast, arid and desolate territory. This characterization was historically conceived and survives to the present days in the collective imagination. It is the image that has permeated the historiography discourse and which is not only a cultural bias which has consequences on the ideological character towards the way of life of societies which are reproduced in such medium, but that it gives the region a coherence which does not exist in reality (RHOADES NEEL, 1994, p. 496). Images and representations of the desert that were part of the cultural background of the Spaniards who colonized America, were ancient roots in the Western European tradition. The history of the desert was always formed of intertwined material and spiritual realities, of a constant coming and going between the geographical and the symbolic, between the imaginary and economic, the social and ideological (LE GOFF, 1996).

In the case of the basin between mountains, it is often found in colonial documents expressions that referred to it as the site through which their enemies come in, i.e. the non-submitted indians or barbarians. There were also places through which these groups came out and which could, or not, coincide with the first. This space was crossed by a series of cultural and symbolic meanings determined by the western worldview and was perceived by the discontinuity that indicated the difference, an area

through which they entered and came out through "doors", imaginary openings that undercut it artificially, as if they penetrated another dimension.

In this region, the area which presents higher rates of aridity is the basin between mountains de Mapimí, a surface of 114 thousand square kilometers which forms part of the biogeographical zone of the Chihuahuan desert, large area between the south of New Mexico and the north of San Luis Potosí. The basin between mountains, which was often referred to by the Spaniards as "depopulated", (DANIEL, 1968; POWELL, 1980, p. 28) lay on the southeast of the current state of Chihuahua, northeast of Durango, and part of Coahuila. The main characteristics of this area is to be an endoheic basin, i.e. where the influx of water occurs towards the interior of the territory, without draining into rivers or the sea. This basin is composed of a series of mountains and hills in the periphery, whose pendings stretch onto alluvial fans to reach the lower parts, the so-called beaches. The basin between mountains is circumscribed to the South by the mountain ranges of Jimulco and vines, to the Southwest by the sierra del Rosario, to the West by the Zarca plateau, to the Northwest by the Conchos River to the North by the Rio Bravo and to the East by the Sierra del Carmen or Capulín Sierra (HERNÁNDEZ, 1995, p. 14). In the mid-1740, Don José Antonio Villaseñor y Sánchez wrote. at the request of Viceroy Count of Fuenclara, one of the richest descriptions that we have for the New Spain of the 18th century. In his work, he described the location of the famous basin as "more than a hundred leagues from North to South up to the banks of Rio Grande, and more than fifty leagues wide, getting narrower, or the earth basin from the Rio Conchos and San Pedro up to the boards with the Grande River and the lands of the province of Coahuila" (VILLASEÑOR Y SÁNCHEZ, 1987, p. 348-349).

Winters are dry and Summers are warm, with Summer rains. The average annual temperature is 21° C, which corresponds to a warm climate, but with a large seasonal variation. The minimum average temperature of January is the coldest of the year, 4° C. The maximum reached in June is 36.1° C. The annual natural cycle contains three distinguishable seasons: the rainy season, the dry season and the intermediate time between rain and drought (GONZALEZ ARRATIA, 1992, p. 29). The geographer Henri Barral identified three climatic seasons, which he considers: the precipitation, average temperatures, the presence of water on the sites of accumulation and the presence of green pastures: dry and warm season (April, may and June), the wet season (July, August, September and October) and dry and fresh season (November, December, January, February and March).

Between June and September there is 71% annual precipitation (approximately 185 mm) and between December and February, during the dry and fresh season, 9% of the

annual total was registered.. The remaining 20% corresponds to erratic rainfall of a cyclone type and an average annual rainfall of 264 mm. Although some rains are reported from June on, this month is included in the dry and warm season because these first precipitations do not have an immediate effect on the vegetation and the accumulation in the bodies of water. In addition, there is a significant decrease in average temperatures due to the rains. On the contrary, October is included in the wet season, in spite the fact that these are months in which rainfalls are not registered, grasslands are green and water bodies still retain the rain (HERNÁNDEZ, 1995, p. 21).

Although the basin between mountains of Mapimí is the area registers higher incidence of aridity, even this space does not respond fully to the idea of desert in its two main meanings: it was not an entirely arid ground, nor was it an uninhabited area. On the contrary, it is likely that the characteristics that the colonial discourse granted to this space responds more to cultural and ideological bounds than to environmental limits, at least for societies accustomed to this type of environment and that developed in it. In fact, the area does not seem to present insurmountable obstacles to their occupation, as pointed by ecologists Henri Barral and Hernandez Lucina "curiously, this region, which was perhaps the last to be explored in North America... was at the same time one of the most formerly populated, as is estimated at less 9700 years B.P. the beginning of their settlement" (BARRAL; HERNÁNDEZ, 1992). This idea was understood by some colonial officials to assess and characterize the northern territories. Therefore, the Governor of Nueva Vizcaya, José Faini, pointed out in the early 1770 "in these shelters, less than impenetrable, we have a surplus of water sources, wild fruits and hunting".¹¹

The desert then was populated by groups whose social organization did not respond to the demands of Western civilization, but retained various types of relationships along the routes of trade and exchange and relationships which were established with the Hispanic world and the various socio-ethnic sectors who lived in the province. The basin between mountains, had very little in common with the desert painted by colonial sources. Some of the groups who steal animals from farms rich in grasses and herds located in the vicinity of the basin between mountains, directed them towards the Rio Grande North and beyond by the basin between mountains, taking advantage of the mountain ranges and demonstrating a thorough knowledge of the environment, the presence of permanent and temporary water sources. In this manner they form through the basin between mountains, real circuits of relocation of animals in farms. The theoretically settled and reduced Indians in the communities and

¹¹ "'Report of the Governor of new Biscay Faini José", 1773, archive of the nation, internal provinces, vol. 43, exp. 1, fs. 186v-187.

missions also participated in this movement, but that in fact presented an extensive mobility, being away temporarily or permanently.. And it was not only the Indians. Abandoning farms and mines was very frequent, and this fact helped the formation of groups that moved to less accessible places and participated in these circuits.

The Representation of Social Relations in the North-Center of the Sepetentrión

The processes of conquest and colonization, and the formation of the New Spain society were characterized by the interaction of ruptures and continuities between the prehispanic organization and the needs of the new colonial order. The forms that this complex and dynamic combination of new and pre-existing elements acquired were profoundly influenced by the characteristics of native societies with which the Spaniards made contact. In the Centre of the territory they identified the contrasts between the Aztecs and the Michoagues or Tarascan - of agricultural tradition - with regards to groups located in the North. Progress towards the North represented a different business (GARCIA MARTÍNEZ, 1987, p. 66). Apart from the terms of the areas occupied by farmers the "Gran Chichimeca" began and it was different not only for their physical traits but also for the forms of socio-political and economic organization of its inhabitants and it faced the conquerors with a different experience from that they had conducted so far. (McGUIRE, 1999, p. 285).

Bernardino de Sahagún reports about the way as the Aztecs described the *chichimecatlalli* or region where the Chichimecas dwelt: "it is very poor, very sterile and it lacks food" (SAHAUGÚN, 1955, p. 478). The word **chichimeca** had several interpretations. The translation of the Nahuatl is "dog rope", which has been interpreted as sons of dogs or, in a metaphorical sense, lineage of people who, like dogs, have no home. It relates also to the belief that these groups descended from a dog who after the flood became a woman. Torquemada interprets it as "suckers" (from the verb *chichi* or breastfeeding) and suggests that this name was applied because they sucked the blood of the animals they hunted. There are those who believe that it derives from the adjective *chichico* (bitter) related the concept with the description of "harsh and bitter people". For Kings and Odena would be an adjective which means "the people who live in Chichiman" or "the place of the dogs" (REYES; ODENA, 1995, p. 241).

For the characteristics of their economic activities, based on hunting and collection, the Chichimeca had no fixed residence and were in rather constant movement for the pursue and achievement of those resources. Such mobility is

embedded within some territorial limits that should respect the different groups and the rhythms of nature, as well as the seasons of the year and the access to their sources of provision of water. This was one of the features that mostly caught the attention of the conquerors that contradicted the need to control and organize the new territory. In this context, mobility was interpreted in a simplified and schematic way as nomadic. In short, the chichimecas presented a different form of work organization and way of life, (BRANIFF, 1995, p. 229) which made it difficult for the Spaniards both to develop formal war strategies to submit them, as well as to put into practice a policy of alliances and agreements, as the peoples of the Centre had materialised. One of the ways which allowed control over that territory was the extermination - be it physical or cultural - of the native inhabitants, (GRIFFEN, 1992, p. 48-49) without forgetting the quiet but devastating collaboration of epidemics that arrived with the conquerors and decimated the indigenous population. (REFF, 1991).

Some research in recent years claimed the Chichimeca was as a locative term that identified people who came from the North (the Mesoamerican chichimeca can be identified with the tolteca-chichimecas or "Mesoamerican originating in North") (HERS, 1989, p. 196)¹² and also a cultural term that referred to the mode of subsistence, which with the experience of conquest and colonization of the North used to characterize "all those who live in the wild and live on hunting and who also make cruel attacks and massacres onto the people of peace" (DEL RÍO, 1992, p. 179)¹³. Thus, chichimeca alluded to the set of groups that were installed outside the boundaries of Aztecs and michoagues and characterized them against the "people of peace", supressing the linguistic and cultural specificities of the groups involved. The contrast between indians of peace and of war remained in the North during the colonial era and was one of the criteria used by the Spaniards to understand and organize the space.

In the North of new Spain, as in other colonial borders, the guiding principle of the Spanish on native societies was based on counterpositions that intended to give an account of indians of war against the indians of peace, the nomadic versus the sedentary, of friendly indians and enemies. In the province of Nueva Vizcaya, differences were established between the inhabitants of the mountains and the plains which received an extensive range of denominations For their way of life and

¹² Chalchihuites (in the current state of Zacatecas) groups that would introduce the Mesoamerican world throughout the Postclassic period and are referred to as tolteca-chichimecas. Evidence of this process are aimed at considering that Mesoamerica incorporated influences from northern societies, with the consequent provision of Chalchihuites to Tula and Chichen Itza (HERS, 1989, p. 196).

¹³ Quoted by Ignacio del Río of tlaxcalan historian Diego Muñoz Camargo, "chichimeca war and the Baja California mission" (GUTIÉRREZ ESTÉVEZ et al., 1992, p. 179).

organization prior to colonial times, the first were considered likely to be organized in missions and towns, so were understood as integrated into the system implemented by the conquerors. The major mountain groups included the Tepehuan and the Tarahumara. Compared to these groups, the nomadic inhabitants of the Plains are identified as apostates, gentiles, barbarian and Indian of war, who were difficult to organize or reduce. The primary target of such characterizations changed in different periods. Thus, from the second half of the 18th century, the differences were expressed among the Indians of the sierra - Tepehuanes and Tarahumara - against the apaches (ÁLVAREZ, 1989, p. 62).

These criteria of general classification constituted a schematic view of those native groups of the province of new Biscay. From the point of view of the progress of the settlement and the incorporation of indigenous peoples to the colonial system, indians who had settled in towns and missions became part of the reduced indians, who were under the colonial authority and, therefore, internal actors of the system. On the other hand, not reduced, groups which fell outside the system, became external actors to the same.

Civil and religious authorities of the province wanted to see in those peoples and missions settlements that were stable and inhabited only by Indians. This ideal construction contrasted with the real dynamics of the province, where reduced indians communicated frequently with the gentiles and the communities of indians were not exclusively inhabited by these groups, what did not prevent that they continued to operate as such.

The mobility and the mixing processes which derived from it had taken place since the beginning of the colonial organization and were chronic problems for the authorities. The natives of the Septentrión, those who had different cultural traditions, were not defined by static characteristics, nor were isolated among themselves or with respect to other socio-ethnic sectors. The Serranos and those of the plains, the nomads and the sedentary, farmers and hunter-gatherers maintained exchange relations and continued doing it in spite of adjustments and transformations characterized by the Spanish presence. The space and cultural boundaries that drew up the colonial domination defined external players from the internal, the inside and outside of the colonial society, based on the idea of controlled and uncontrolled space which had no support in the dynamics of the region. Throughout the times, sectors emerging from more and more complex ethnic and social realities were incorporated to such dynamics.

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