

Editorial

MISSION, FROM THE LATIN MISSIO, -ōnis (to send something) is a noun that has a long history. We find its origin in the first globalization of the 16th century, the spearhead of the colonial expansion campaigns that Spain and Portugal will lead. Let us remember that Pope Alexander VI granted both crowns the right to extend their power over all those territories that they were “discovering”, under the understanding of establishing political and ecclesiastical power. Therefore, mission was born under a pastoral mandate, in the midst of a context of colonial expansion.

The use of mission transmuted to other spaces of power, providing new instruments to the colonial power led by France or England during the 19th and 20th centuries, over large territories such as Egypt, Algeria and Mexico; or to the technical assistance programs for the development of the second half of the 20th century, promoted mainly by the United States towards the so-called “Third World”. It is clear that today mission, in a category that is far from being exclusively identified with the Christian world, it has a plasticity that has allowed it to readjust to new historical, political and social circumstances on a global scale.

In this volume we want to explore, from the studies of the history of sciences with different methodological approaches, the following questions: what made it possible for the category of mission to gain prominence over time and space? How did it provide ideological support and material to the colonial expansion of the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries? How did it become an instrument and a fundamental practice for the construction of the welfare, scientific, anthropological or health policy of the national states of the 19th and 20th centuries? All the articles share that missions are itineraries, movements, material culture, and that the fundamental agents for these fall on the missionaries, the expedition members and the experts.

The first article that opens this dossier belongs to Siobhan Guerrero, who undertakes a historical/philosophical reflection on the historiographic possibilities that explain the mission as a process of dissemination and that opens the doors to undertake new debates on how knowledge is an instrument and part in domain structures. Angélica Morales’ work takes place throughout the 18th century, in which she explores how the Company of Jesus conceived a particular model of mission in northern New Spain. The missionaries, in addition to being *provo* in matters of faith, had to have knowledge of botany, astronomy, natural philosophy, among others, fundamental in the construction of mission territories. Locat-

ed in nineteenth-century Mexico, Haydée García studies two religious explorers (French and Belgian) who led expeditions at different times. It is clearly shown how, to carry out their work, they used the colonial administrative structures, including the Jesuit mission system of northern New Spain. There, routes, contacts, but also colonial practices and discourses overlap with a supposed secularizing discourse of the liberal state. In both expeditions, the mission is to collect and send anthropological and naturalist collections to Europe, where they will be classified under the colonizing principles of the agraph and the good savage.

In the first decades of the 20th century, the newly formed USSR proposed to advance its project of the so-called food sufficiency, which implied a financed based strategy for an expedition led by the scientist Nikolai Vavilov to multiple distant territories such as Mexico or the United States. Through his instruments and his practices, he extracted agrobiological knowledge from local practices, all of it immersed in a solidarity mission project. It is in 1945, at the end of the war, when the problem of hunger and poverty, also understood as a problem of food sufficiency, acquired a preponderant role at the world level, being a central discourse of the recently created United Nations Organization. In this new facet, which Joel Vargas analyzes how the Rockefeller Foundation, which already had a long tradition in international Public Health campaigns, finances a new nutritional mission where evangelistic discourses overlapped with apparently secularized discourses of modernity. The author shows how the Mexican State already had a long history in national health policies that facilitated the incursion of the North American missions. The last case study, by Gisela Mateos and Edna Suárez-Díaz, covers the missions of the International Atomic Energy Agency in the middle of the Cold War, to promote nuclear technologies, through technical assistance programs for development, in countries considered as “underdeveloped”. In these geographies, such technologies were neither relevant nor necessary. The creation of need, where clearly there is none, and the establishment of a dependency relationship, are characteristics that strongly link these missions with those of the 16th century. The collective result is to show the process of transformation and in a certain sense of permanence, of the meanings and uses of mission in different contexts and geographies, where knowledge plays a fundamental role as an ally of power and justifies interventions, dispossession and invisibility of people, territories and practices. At the same time, it reveals how the construction of empty continents, proposed by Eduardo Subirats, by missionaries, expedition members and experts, comes into tension with local communities that permanently implies negotiating and remembering that the continents have been inhabited. ■

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Guest Editors