

# **A Government of Indigenous Peoples: Administration, Land, and Work in the State of Brazil during the Portuguese Empire (1548-1822)**

Bruno Romero Ferreira Miranda<sup>1</sup>

Mariana Albuquerque Dantas<sup>2</sup>

## **Abstract**

The colonial administration and management of the indigenous peoples of Brazil has been a recurrent theme in historiography. However, the Amerindians themselves, important actors in the process of constructing colonial society, are largely absent from the historical literature. This article's objective is to critically debate, using modern historiographic methods and theory, three important aspects for understanding the governance of the Amerindians of Brazil: the religious administration, the control of native lands, and the management of their labor. This requires consideration of the indigenous people as actors in their own history and of their actions of resistance, adaptation, and negotiation when engaging with the colonial powers.

## **Keywords**

Amerindian peoples, Colonial *aldeias*, Amerindian lands, Amerindian labor, Amerindians as historical agents

## **Resumo**

A administração colonial e a gestão dos povos do Brasil foram temas recorrentes de várias análises historiográficas. Nota-se, contudo, a ausência de atores importantes no processo de construção da sociedade colonial: os povos indígenas. O objetivo desse artigo é debater, a partir de historiografia recente, aspectos centrais para o entendimento da governança dos povos indígenas do Brasil: a administração religiosa, a gestão de suas terras e o controle da mão de obra. Serão levados em consideração o papel dos indígenas enquanto sujeitos históricos, bem como suas relações com os agentes da Coroa, balizadas por resistências, adaptações e negociações.

## **Palavras-chave**

Povos indígenas, Aldeamento colonial, Terras indígenas, Trabalho indígena, Agência indígena

---

<sup>1</sup> Department of History at the Federal Rural University of Pernambuco, Brazil. *E-mail:* bruno.rfmiranda@ufrpe.br.

<sup>2</sup> Department of History at the Federal Rural University of Pernambuco, Brazil. *E-mail:* mariana.dantas@ufrpe.br.

## Introduction

As an ever-present subject in historiographic studies of the Portuguese Empire, Brazil's colonial administration has yielded works of varying scope over the past few decades. However, this historiographic production is marked by the relative absence of attention for the indigenous populations and the very limited elaboration of the debate around Amerindian history in Brazil, despite indigenous peoples constituting a significant portion of the colonial population between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Moreover, the colonists were undoubtedly broadly reliant on the Amerindians for carrying out various activities in the colony, most notably those of an economic or military nature.<sup>3</sup>

In this sense, collections in the 1990s such as *Nova história da expansão portuguesa*, edited by J. Serrão and A. H. de Oliveira Marques, have become emblematic—specifically volume VI, coordinated by H. Johnson and M. B. Nizza da Silva (1992), which examines several aspects relating to indigenous peoples. However, the authors' historical interpretations suggest that these indigenous groups were always in a position of subordination in relationships established in the colony, and hence they never had any centrality in historical processes. Volume VII of the collection (Mauro 1991) focuses on the period between 1620 and 1750, with an entire chapter dedicated to the Amerindians. However, like volume VI, it, too, advances a traditional view of the indigenous peoples as passive and conceives the processes of acculturation and rigid resistance associated with colonization as boiling down to cultural and societal devastation and futile resistance, without any opportunity for negotiation and adaptation.

Another collection, *História geral da civilização brasileira* (Holanda 1997), also represents indigenous peoples as obstacles or mere accessories to the colonizers' projects, portraying them as people who resisted, but who were ultimately swallowed up by and subjected to the colonization process. While the next decade was marked by the advent of a new perspective on indigenous peoples, it nevertheless saw the publication of general works such as *Antigo regime nos trópicos* (Fragoso, Bicalho & Gouvêa 2001), *Modos de governar* (Bicalho & Ferlini 2005), and *Na Trama das redes* (Fragoso & Gouvêa 2010), which were symptomatic of and in line with a pattern of research failing to bring indigenous peoples to the fore.

---

<sup>3</sup> Despite some controversy over the numbers, Brazil's indigenous population in the sixteenth century—including the Amazon—ranged in any event between one and over five million, which is relatively high compared to the number of settlers. Over time, their numbers decreased, particularly in the seventeenth century and, above all, from the eighteenth century onwards (Almeida 2010: 29; Carrara 2014: 5; Cunha 2012: 16-17; Marcílio 1999: 313).

However, the 1990s also saw the start of analyses following a different path. These questioned the minor influence previously attributed to the actions of Amerindians in historical and colonial processes (Almeida 2017; Monteiro 1995, 2001) and suggested that the totality of the various processes and periods in the history of Brazil could not be understood without also considering the presence and the interests and actions of the indigenous peoples on those frontiers. One of the main defining characteristics of this new paradigm of studies resided in the reassessment of the idea of “acculturation” and its replacement by concepts such as “metamorphosis” and cultural adaptation, based on the dialogue between Anthropology and History (Almeida 2003; Monteiro 1995). Soon works were being published that began to consider the “agency” of indigenous peoples—that is, that their actions were purposeful, and that they developed political strategies capable of shaping indigenous peoples’ future in the face of the challenges and conditions arising from contact with new civilizations and their campaigns of domination (Almeida & Seijas 2020: 357-358; Monteiro 1995: 226-227).<sup>4</sup>

This invisibility of indigenous peoples in Brazil, which is by no means exclusive to the historiography dedicated to studying the Portuguese Empire, is noticeable in all phases of the country’s history.<sup>5</sup> It is linked with the history constructed for the country in the nineteenth century by the *Instituto Histórico e Geográfico Brasileiro* (Brazilian Historical and Geographical Institute). In addition to the relative invisibility of the Amerindians in the history propagated by these historians, their works were permeated by views claiming the indigenous peoples to be incapable of self-governance, and characterizing them merely as acculturated subjects on the verge of extinction.

This article aims to provide a historiographical overview and a debate on three central aspects for understanding the administration of indigenous peoples in Brazil: religious administration, the control of their lands and, finally, the management of their labor. In doing

---

<sup>4</sup> Collective works seem to have awakened to the subject. These include *O governo dos povos* (Mello e Souza, Furtado & Bicalho 2009), which presents four articles effectively touching on a discussion of the empire’s indigenous populations. However, indigenous agency is not central to any of the debates in that work. It is also worth citing the following collections, in which various chapters contain a contemporary discussion about the Amerindians’ participation in historical processes: *Políticas e Estratégias Administrativas no Mundo Atlântico* (Almeida et al 2012); *O Brasil colonial* (Fragoso & Gouvêa 2014); *Os indígenas e as justiças no mundo ibero-americano* (Domingues, Chaves de Resende & Cardim 2019). It is also important to mention that J. Monteiro was responsible for organizing the *Guia de Fontes para a História Indígena e do Indigenismo* (1994). This guide, a collective undertaking by several historians, mapped collections related to indigenous themes in Brazil and made an important contribution to rewriting the history of Brazil, taking into account the actions of indigenous peoples as historical subjects.

<sup>5</sup> Outside the discussion proposed here, this invisibility was also present in the “Atlantic” debates, as pointed out by Cohen (2008, 394). Similar criticism was expressed by Bushnell (2009, 191-192). Later, the gap began to be filled in research by, for example, Hulsman (2009), Meuwese (2012), and Weaver (2014).

so we will emphatically consider the role of indigenous peoples as historical subjects, while being very aware that the term “administration of peoples” automatically leads to indigenous populations being conceived of in a relationship of subordination to a colonialist regime, and that this implicit bias needs to be reflected on and problematized. We also aim to demonstrate that this management of people, whether by religious authorities or in terms of labor, was not without resistance or adaptation to the rule of law, and that these actions in turn resulted from negotiations between indigenous peoples and the colonial administration.

### Religious Administration and Tutelage

The conversion of indigenous peoples to Catholicism was the original theological and political justification for Portugal’s colonial undertaking in America, with this being presented as the Portuguese monarchy’s main objective. In the context of maritime expansion, it was this policy of the *Padroado Régio* that defined the institutional framework for the missionaries’ activities, with the king being the initial funder of the project. The work of catechesis effectively began in 1549, with the arrival of six Jesuits in Brazil, accompanying the colony’s first Governor General, Tomé de Souza (Castelnau-L’Estoile 2006: 18).

Faced with the specific dynamics of the relationships between different historical subjects, and with the objective of imposing a complete change in the lives of the indigenous peoples, the Jesuits of Brazil then created missions in the form of evangelization villages (*aldeias*), where Indians from diverse origins would reside with the missionaries. The specificity of the conversion of the Amerindians in Brazil meant that the mission, which had by definition been itinerant, became fixed (Castelnau-L’Estoile 2006: 19).

The Jesuits’ missionary activities overseas were accompanied by a theological debate surrounding humanity, the soul or essence of a person, and indigenous customs.<sup>6</sup> The result was the elaborating of parameters for the conversion work that were permeated by the idea of tutelage or guardianship as a means to materializing relationships between the religious authorities and the indigenous peoples under the Crown. The complement to tutelage was work, carried out by indigenous peoples both within and outside the mission villages (*aldeias*).

---

<sup>6</sup> We agree with Cristina Pompa, who says that the guidelines for missionary work in Brazil were almost entirely determined by the Jesuits. Although clerics from other orders, such as the Capuchins, Franciscans, and Oratorians, interacted with different indigenous peoples, the Ignatians elaborated a broad and refined theological contribution on the mission in Portuguese America, also acting in the elaboration of laws and policies of the Portuguese State on the subject (Pompa, 2003: 57).

Many of the debates between Spanish and Portuguese Jesuit theologians, who shared the same experience of training in Iberian higher education institutions, were based on the assumptions of missionary work exposed by Manuel da Nóbrega in various texts and official documents. Zeron (2011) demonstrated how Nóbrega saw it as necessary to institute a “moderate subjection” over the indigenous peoples in a form differing from that imposed on enslaved Africans: since the indigenous peoples were considered in their humanity, they could not be seen only as a means of production, but neither did they have full legal personhood. The idea, therefore, was that they should be made subject to guardianship in a variety of ways, including education, surveillance, and protection. Indigenous people were considered to have a minor civil status, and thus no legal capacity. For the Jesuits, “The activity with the Indian villager must be primarily oriented towards his tutelage, with work constituting the main instrument for its consummation.” Although indigenous peoples had the potential in their soul required to attain a state of grace, their bad customs meant the missionaries would have to provide them with uninterrupted assistance, and this would make them closer to bad Christians (Zeron 2011: 142-143, 150).

Throughout the sixteenth century, theological debates and Jesuit perceptions arising from missionary practice influenced the elaboration of general laws and also those related to indigenous peoples. These included the Regiment of Tomé de Sousa (1548), and the laws of 1570, 1587, 1595, and 1596. In general, this legislation provided the criteria for carrying out Just War;<sup>7</sup> that is, conducting war against groups openly opposed to the catechetical work of the missionaries and preventing the spread of the Catholic faith. Survivors of such warfare were temporarily enslaved while receiving Christian education, with the Jesuits placing themselves in the position of being the “insurmountable intermediaries between the Indians and the Portuguese settlers for everything that concerns the organization of indigenous work” (Zeron 2011: 345).

Thanks to Zeron’s long and detailed analysis, we understand that the tutelary relationship in the sixteenth century was elaborated, established, and defended by the Jesuits in the belief that they had the right and indeed the duty to exercise it. As the indigenous

---

<sup>7</sup> An ancient concept, with theological and legal origins in the medieval law surrounding war, the idea of Just War led to much debate and doubts regarding its application to the indigenous peoples of Brazil. In general, it was seen as a response to the Indians’ refusal to convert, the obstacles they could pose to the propagating of the faith and colonization, their hostility to subjects of the Portuguese Crown and their allies—including other indigenous peoples—and the breaches of agreements. Among these reasons, mere rejection of Christianity does not seem to have been recognized as a central motive. While the Amerindians were not obliged to accept conversion, they could not stop the preaching. Obviously, this was just written rhetoric. For a recent debate on Just War, see *Imbecillitas* by Hespanha (2010). An interesting discussion on the concept, albeit focusing on an area outside the State of Brazil, can be found in Ibáñez-Bonillo (2019), with the author pointing to the natives’ protagonism, their capacity for negotiation, and their resistance to the Just War process.

peoples were seen as incomplete beings, with distorted rational faculties, yet having potential due to their human condition, it was seen as the religious authorities' responsibility to re-educate them in the authorities' customs in order to induce "legitimate ways of exercising social practices" (Zeron 2011: 397). The condition of *indigenas* was understood, therefore, as temporary since once the pedagogical work of re-education had been completed in the supervised space of the *aldeia*, the subject could become sufficiently autonomous and free to be considered a full subject of the Crown.

Having invested in their roles as intermediaries, the missionaries also controlled the organization of indigenous work in the face of demands presented by the settlers. By combining the tasks of educating, converting, and organizing the indigenous populations for work, the missionaries, notably the Jesuits, thus also became representatives of the Portuguese State, constituting a triadic relationship with the settlers and the Indians. It was in this way, therefore, that the initial contours of the tutelage, protection, and repression paradox were defined (Oliveira 1988).

Tutelage or guardianship was the intrinsic mark of the relationships established between the Portuguese State—and later the Brazilian imperial State—with the indigenous populations, with these relationships suffering small shocks through legislation and the actions of the indigenous peoples themselves.

Even after the Jesuits were expelled in 1759, the tutelary relationship survived, having been updated in the role of the Director of Indians, a position created by the Directorate of Indians.<sup>8</sup> The latter was initially intended to operate in the State of Grão-Pará from 1757 onwards, but was extended in 1758 to other regions of the colony, with the objective of assimilating and restructuring the indigenous experience in Brazil. We agree with Heloísa de Almeida (1997), who characterizes this institution as a model of tutelage exercised by the State, and as both a set of rules regulating relations between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples and a settlement plan.

---

<sup>8</sup> Approved in 1755 by D. José I, and published in 1757, the "Directorate that must be observed among the Indian populations of Pará and Maranhão" introduced a set of laws that aimed to change the relations between indigenous and Portuguese peoples in the colony, as well as to guide the first step towards a policy of assimilating the Indians. In short, it established the freedom of the Indians, who were transformed into vassals of the Crown without any distinction between them and other colonists. It also suspended the religious tutelage of the mission Indians, who would henceforth be managed by directors of Indians. In addition it facilitated and encouraged miscegenation between natives and non-natives, as well as making the Portuguese language obligatory and transforming old colonial villages into Portuguese towns and places. However, the Directorate maintained the basic lines of previous indigenous legislation, such as continuing the distinction between "civilized" and "savage" Indians; Indians' mandatory work in villages; the tutelage of Indians that was carried out by non-indigenous peoples, and the maintenance of lands and privileges of indigenous leaders.

This legislation prior to the expulsion of the Jesuits entailed a criticism of the previous indigenous policy, which was considered not to have managed to civilize the indigenous peoples effectively and thus not to have achieved sufficient economic development and progress in Grão-Pará (Lopes 2005: 70). This criticism of the missionary model was one of the reasons for establishing bases for the elaboration of the Directorate of Indians in 1757 and reaffirming the need for temporal government over the Indians to be performed by a non-Indian institution (Coelho 2005: 91).

Thus, a central change was achieved by the establishing of a Portuguese government serving as the temporal administrator of mission settlements, indigenous peoples, and their assets. The missionaries retained responsibility only for the work of converting the indigenous peoples. To make up for indigenous leaders' supposed lack of preparation for self-governance, the director of indigenous peoples would assume responsibility for administration of the village until the indigenous leaders were equipped to lead in a manner according with the colonial regime's wishes. In other words, the relationship between guardian and ward was understood as transitory, as was the very condition of being indigenous, since it was envisaged that the Directorate would result in cultural and identity differences being erased, and in the Indians being assimilated, without any distinction between them and the other vassals of the Crown in the colony.

As Moreira demonstrated (2019), laws were enacted in the eighteenth century that determined the extent of freedom available to indigenous peoples and their opportunities for self-government, with a preference for them to occupy positions in local politics. However, these same laws were soon superseded by the Directorate, with this legislation also being extended to other regions in the State of Brazil. While the dissolution of the Directorate in 1798 restored freedom and self-government for the indigenous peoples, as intended in the legislation of 1757, Patrícia Sampaio (2009) explains how the Directorate remained active until 1822, thus maintaining the institution of tutelage through the figure of the Director of Indians until Brazil became independent.

### **Territories of Colonial Mission Villages: Reconstruction of Indigenous Experiences**

The Portuguese Crown's effective occupation of American territory took place shortly after commercial trading started and the first alliances between the indigenous population and the Portuguese became established. This historical situation was characterized as a trading post by Pacheco de Oliveira, who identifies barter relationships on

the coast, the insertion of Europeans into the dynamics of indigenous societies, and disputes over territory as constitutive aspects of this moment of the conquest project. In this case, the castaways or exiled were raised to the role of intermediaries between Indians and Europeans by establishing marriages with indigenous women, acting as interpreters and, mainly, as “practical operators of alliances” between the groups involved in barter negotiations (Oliveira, 2016: 50-52).

Changes were imposed quickly, owing to the Portuguese Crown’s interest in establishing a colonial campaign along the lines of what was already happening on the Atlantic islands and, therefore, imposing the presence of conquerors and settlers in American lands. This involved gaining administrative control over geographic space; implementing profitable activities, with an emphasis on sugarcane farming; and governing the Indians. At the same time, the initial success of the colonization was attributable to the network of relationships previously established during the trading post regime. In the previous historical situation, designated as the War of Conquest, the religious missionaries became the intermediaries par excellence by changing their relations with the indigenous peoples and imposing Portuguese values and institutions. The missionaries then founded mission villages (*aldeias*), bringing the indigenous people together in well-defined spaces and carrying out the work of converting and “civilizing” these populations (Oliveira 2016: 204-209).

Administering indigenous peoples consequently partly meant administering territories and labor, with these being the Portuguese Crown’s and the colonists’ main expectations of the American enterprise. Legal mechanisms were established to regulate the two issues; these included Just Wars, salvation or rescue, and missions involving secular and religious authorities in addition to the indigenous peoples. As we stated earlier, the establishing of mission villages in specific and well-defined spaces was a Jesuit creation aimed at adapting their activities and policies to the American reality, and with the central function of facilitating fundamental elements of the colonial enterprise, such as the occupation of land and the establishing of a labor force, as well as protecting the Portuguese against foreign enemies or natives in America. Against this background, we see the territory as a central element in the Portuguese administration of indigenous populations.

The process of relocating different indigenous peoples to the *aldeias* must be understood as going both ways—that is, the indigenous people themselves, once they understood the new order imposed, began to create and recreate not only their relationships with the land and natural resources, but also their own identities and cultures (Oliveira 2004: 13-42).



This modality of access to land—that is, the establishment of *aldeias*—occurred at the same time as the Crown was granting conquerors territorial domains as benefits. In many cases, the concession mechanism was, in fact, the same: donations of land in the form of grants (*sesmarias*). After the east coast of America started to be conquered, the Crown imposed itself as owner of the lands, which were then donated to those individuals contributing to the colonial project. This formula was specifically created for and adapted to Brazil, with public property predominating over private, as the Crown determined that the distribution of land considered unused should remain under its domain (Ferlini 2003: 225).

While land was awarded to the first grantees, and workforces were subsequently awarded to the colonists and to those who had demonstrated their usefulness in expanding and consolidating Portuguese domains, religious orders and indigenous peoples in the *aldeias* also received concessions in the form of land, with the result that sugarcane plantations, sugar mills, cattle farms and missionary villages became established side by side.

In the 1530s, many tracts of land in Pernambuco were granted by Duarte Coelho, as a Crown representative overseas. The first people benefiting from these grants included two landowners married to descendants of D. Maria do Espírito Santo Arcoverde, an indigenous Tabajara woman married to Jerônimo de Albuquerque. One of these grants consisted of land in a place called Paratibe, where a water mill was erected by Gonçalo Mendes Leitão, son-in-law of Albuquerque (Costa 1954: 148-150; Mello 2012: 78). The conjugal relations between the indigenous, mestizo, and white populations, which were very recurrent throughout Portuguese America, demonstrate the interdependencies between these historical subjects, as well as the modalities of access to land that resulted from the political strategies deployed by the groups involved.

In the second half of the sixteenth century, land donations and the establishment of plantations increasingly came at the expense of wars waged against indigenous peoples, mainly the Caeté, with conquerors led by Duarte Coelho obtaining support from the Tabajara people, to which his brother-in-law's wife belonged. From 1570 onwards, in the region south of Olinda, where the Cape of Santo Agostinho was located, sugarcane plantations and sugar mills were set up, leading to the emergence, a few decades later, of villages such as Ipojuca, Sirinhaém, Rio Formoso, Gameleira, Água Preta, and Jacuípe (Ferraz 2008: 68-69).

A little later, between the 1580s and 1590s, two large mission villages—Escada and São Miguel de Igua, or Una, as it came to be known in the nineteenth century—became established in this region, with the latter being described by the Franciscan friar Venâncio Willeke as “the first Christian nucleus among the Caetés.” These were created at the request

of Duarte Coelho, with the aim of bringing together the indigenous peoples of this and other groups. While the continued lack of research makes it hard to understand the internal dynamics of these *aldeias* in the colonial period, their location and the very recent history of armed conflicts with the Portuguese means it is not difficult to deduce that demand for indigenous villagers' labor in those areas gave rise to disputes among the settlers, especially with regard to work in the sugar mills (Dantas 2018: 37). In this way, and in addition to offering Indians and settlers access to land and a managed workforce, missionary villages also provided protection against attacks by hostile natives or European adversaries' troops.

Despite the violence imposed, the indigenous peoples of the *aldeia* of Barreiros, as well as the *aldeia* of São Miguel de Iguaçu, claimed responsibility for their collective territory in 1858, claiming that they had received a land grant in 1698 in recognition of their role in repressing the Quilombo dos Palmares (Ferreira 2006: 11-12). Therefore, and contrary to any insistence on the "decimation of the Indians" (Ferraz 2008: 69), as advanced by certain trends in historiography, the indigenous populations of the oldest and richest sugar-producing region of the colony created, through very creative means, their own paths of survival and participation in regional dynamics.

We can see something similar in Rio de Janeiro, where, as demonstrated by M. R. C. de Almeida, most of the mission villages received their land through land grants. Almeida also highlights how, from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century, the colonial authorities sought to draw up legislation designed to guarantee the mission villages' land for the indigenous peoples in the face of continuing occupations by settlers with their farms and corrals (Almeida 2013: 256-257).

This occurred, for example, in the *aldeia* of São Lourenço, which received land grants in 1573 and whose main leader at the time of the village being established was Araribóia, or Martim Afonso. By bringing together indigenous peoples of different nations, the mission village of São Lourenço, as well as others founded later, had the very evident function of guaranteeing the defense of Guanabara Bay against foreigners, mainly the French, and against indigenous peoples hostile to the Portuguese Crown. By ensuring the occupation and sovereignty of the territory for Portugal, indigenous *aldeias* were also seen as a way to ensure access to a workforce able to carry out forced labor for the benefit of individuals and the Crown (Almeida 2013: 91-94).

As the colonial enterprise advanced, the Portuguese targeted new territories in an attempt to consolidate the Crown's domain and map new frontiers. In Serra da Ibiapaba, one of the most extreme points in the captaincy of Ceará, missionary villages were established

between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, with one of the objectives being to contribute to creating an overland path between the State of Brazil and the State of Maranhão and Grão-Pará. It was only after the third attempt to suppress the indigenous peoples of the mountains that the *aldeia* of Nossa Senhora da Assunção was able to be established in 1700, with this process being the result of the advancement of pastoral frontiers in the region during the Açú War (1683-1716) (Maia 2010: 19-23; Puntoni 2002).

Understanding their relevance in the conquest of the region, the indigenous leaders of the *aldeia* groups in Ibiapaba requested land grants for themselves, claiming they needed the land for their and their descendants' subsistence. In other places, such as in the *aldeias* of Paupina and Parangaba, and the mission of Canindés, requests for land grants were made collectively, emphasizing the right of possession acquired by the ancestors and the communities' good behavior under Portuguese administration. Maia's analysis of these regions of Ceará leaves no doubt that "advancing the colonial project in collaboration with the Indians was an imperative need for the Crown, as there were no dense population centers" (Maia 2010: 91-101).

The examples of the centrality of colonial indigenous villages, alongside sugarcane plantations and cattle ranches, in the territorial formation of Brazil, as well as in the delimiting of internal and external borders, are multiplied by consolidating research on the current northern region, such as in the works of Domingues (2000) and Farage (1991).

In the south of Brazil, the practice of seeking alliances with indigenous peoples to expand and consolidate borders against the presence of Spaniards was intensified in the second half of the eighteenth century, after the signing of the Treaty of Madrid (1750). This resulted in seven of the thirty peoples at the missions founded by the Jesuits in Paraguay being forced to abandon their territories and improvements built over decades of work to settle on the Portuguese side of the border and thus help protect the newly established boundaries. After the end of the armed conflicts, known collectively as the Guarani War (c. 1754-1756) and started by indigenous peoples dissatisfied with the new impositions, and the annulment of the Treaty of Madrid, the Portuguese Crown's strategy was to offer indigenous peoples better conditions than they received from the Spaniards. *Aldeias* were therefore established in order to receive relocating Guarani indigenous peoples, with the aim of transforming them into subjects of the Portuguese Crown. These people, in turn, moved and made choices, albeit under very limited circumstances, to meet their own needs and expectations. García's study of the long and dynamic process of the alliances formed between the Guarani and the Portuguese demonstrated that "any research on the establishment of

Europeans in areas of border dispute must necessarily go through the relationship built between them and the Indians” (García 2009: 15).

Throughout the eighteenth century, the mission villages underwent major changes in response to new legislation, specifically the freedom laws of 1755 and the establishing of the Directorate of Indians in 1757. In addition to updating the institution of tutelage, this legislation aimed to transform indigenous peoples into vassals of the king without imposing any conditions differing from those imposed on others, including, for example, the mandatory use of the Portuguese language and the use of first and last names in Portuguese. In this way, assimilationist parameters were established, culminating in what João Pacheco de Oliveira called the “second mixture” (Oliveira 2004: 25). For this transformation to become possible, trade and communications between Indians and non-Indians were needed in order to introduce knowledge and customs considered civilized in the Portuguese settlements. Whites were therefore able to live in the villages and marry indigenous people having access to land (Almeida 1997: 218-220).

The Directorate of 1757 and the laws of 1755, which provided for the removal of the Jesuits from the *aldeias* and the freedom of the indigenous peoples, dealt with the administration of the new villages inserted into collective territories, in which the main indigenous people could assume positions, albeit under the tutelage of the new figure created by the legislation, the Director of Indians (Lopes 2005: 69-70).<sup>9</sup> Constituted to support the integration of indigenous peoples into colonial society on the same terms as other vassals, the villages represented an ideal of civilization in opposition to the *sertões* or hinterlands, and an ideal advocated by Portuguese policy at the time. The intention was for the main public buildings, such as the chamber and public jail, and the homes of indigenous and non-indigenous peoples to be established in these villages, and for these to function in accordance with internal divisions such as the European notions of public and private life (Almeida 1997: 185, 216-217).

The reconfiguring of the mission villages’ space and the lives of the indigenous peoples was extremely dynamic, and varied depending on the dynamics of the localities where the legislation was applied. In Rio de Janeiro, for example, portions of land were leased to non-indigenous people, while the *aldeias* remained in their places of origin. In Pernambuco, by contrast, considerable parts of the mission’s lands transformed into villages were taken over by white residents, while other parts were regarded as the inheritance of the new villages

---

<sup>9</sup> The queen sent letters to the governor of the captaincy of Pernambuco and its annexes in 1758, ordering villages to be created where missions had been administered by Jesuits, thus reinforcing the provisions of the freedom laws of 1755 and the Directorate of Indians itself (Medeiros, 2007: 128).

or sold to fund public works (Almeida 2013: 197-199). On the other hand, the main indigenous leaders negotiated directly with the governor of Pernambuco, who was concerned to develop good relations with them. According to a study by Maia, the implementing of the Directorate and the meetings held by the governor to negotiate the terms of the changes were seen by these indigenous peoples as an opportunity to update their vassalage relationship and to retain certain benefits in exchange for their loyalty and that of their subordinates. Support by the leaders and other indigenous peoples was, therefore, essential for successfully implementing the new legislation (Maia 2011: 23-26, 39-40).

The Directorate and its regional adaptations also held meetings with indigenous groups living dispersed across the land outside the villages. In Pernambuco, for example, the intention was for these Indians to be settled in the new villages, either through persuasion or by force. Many of the indigenous peoples defeated in armed conflicts were handed over to residents so that they could receive instruction and education in exchange for work, or were employed in public works. The process of creating towns and villages was permeated by intense clashes not only with relocated Indians, but also between chambers in the existing towns, and in the new towns, concerning the limits of their jurisdiction with regard to tax collection and access to labor (Medeiros 2007, 136).

Through the application of legal provisions and their regional adaptations, indigenous peoples were able to express their concerns and needs in the face of such accelerated changes. Lopes (2005) identified a reference in the judicial inquiry (*devassa*) relating to a possible indigenous uprising in the Guajiru mission, in Rio Grande do Norte, in 1760. In reaction to the imposition of the Directorate and although denying being involved in organizing the revolt, the indigenous peoples investigated were willing to defend the mission village's lands and their freedom. They were afraid that the new provisions in the Directorate would transform them and their children into captives, given the common practice of humiliating indigenous peoples by forcing them to work uninterruptedly on the farms in the region. In addition, the Indians of Guajiru had been warned by the Indians of Serra da Ibiapaba, in Ceará, that they feared for their lands in the face of white interests (Lopes 2005: 254-258).

In relation to Espírito Santo, Moreira demonstrated how the indigenous peoples of the *aldeias* of Nova Benevente and Nova Almeida, formed by two missionary villages, were able to use mechanisms of the Pombaline legislation to become involved in the administration of their collective lands. This was because the Senate of the Chamber of New Villages had to be consulted on matters relating to the lands and other assets of the

indigenous people and, under the 1757 Directorate of Indians, these people had a privileged seat in the chamber. According to Moreira, “The ombudsmen authorized and even suggested the tenures, but the validation and final approval passed through the scrutiny of the chambers’ senate, where the Indians occupied the positions of judges and councilors” (Moreira 2019: 187).

The territories of the *aldeias* were therefore constituted in historical situations of the violent imposition of the Portuguese colonial project in America, and were of differing significance for the related historical subjects. From the cases presented, it is possible to affirm that, in the face of constant threats of enslavement and death, the indigenous peoples saw the *aldeia* as a space in which they would have some protection and access to land, as demonstrated by Almeida (2013). In these spaces they created their own trajectories, arrived at their own interpretations of the circumstances into which they had been inserted, and reconfigured their collective identities and cultures. The centrality of mission village territories can thus be seen as a testament to the vigorous strategies that different indigenous peoples used, until the mid-nineteenth century, to defend their right to govern or manage themselves in the ways that best suited them.

Administering the colonial villages’ land necessarily entailed considering the relationships established with the indigenous people who inhabited them, with the success of the Portuguese project depending on effective dynamics and interdependency with the indigenous populations. From the start, therefore, we should regard indigenous villages, in addition to other units of spatial occupation, as a founding element when seeking to understand the processes of land formation in Brazil, of delimiting internal and external borders, and of consolidating the Portuguese domain overseas.

### **Indigenous Work: Slave Labor, Villagers, and Militarized Labor**

Moving on from the debates focusing on aspects of governing or of saving souls and controlling indigenous lands, let us now consider the administration of work. Once again we should recall that the Portuguese establishment in Brazil, following the implementation of the general government in 1548, was accompanied by the drafting of the first legislation aimed at managing the work of people under the control of religious authorities or settlers, as well as the drafting of legal justifications for obtaining indigenous peoples as forced laborers.

Once the model on which the trading period of the early decades was based began to wear out, the settlers began to demand more and more work from the indigenous peoples. This need was linked to their settlement in the territory and the establishment of sugarcane cultivation across large portions of land along the coastal strips of the captaincies of Pernambuco and areas of Bahia and São Vicente. In this latter area, and specifically in the interior, indigenous labor was directed mainly to other agricultural activities on the São Paulo plateau, and to transporting goods in the region's rugged terrain (Monteiro 1994b: 109),<sup>10</sup> while in the region currently known as the Brazilian Northeast indigenous laborers worked in the sugarcane fields and were involved in cutting brazilwood in the Atlantic forests until more and more Africans joined the labor force. However, the indigenous peoples did not disappear from the sugar mills, and their presence was still observable throughout the sugar zone several decades after the expansion of sugarcane plantations on the coast. In areas outside the State of Brazil—specifically in Grão-Pará and Maranhão—expeditions for collecting drugs from the hinterlands and using large numbers of indigenous peoples were known to be carried out on an ongoing basis. In Grão-Pará and Maranhão, and in the Planalto Paulista, African slavery was relatively infrequent and the colonial economy depended almost exclusively on the labor of the “Blacks from the land,” who were forced to work in various capacities (Alencastro 2000: 138-144).<sup>11</sup>

As mentioned earlier, the inefficiency of the barter model, caused by the indigenous peoples' refusal to “collaborate as the Portuguese expected,” as Monteiro pointed out, led to a change in relations between settlers and indigenous peoples, as well as accentuating the internal struggles between indigenous peoples hit hard by the mounting wars. These conflicts had a profound impact because contacts with Europeans, and exchanges between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples, triggered demands by the latter for work by the former, and

---

<sup>10</sup> According to Monteiro (1994a: 110-123), the indigenous workforce of São Paulo was linked to an “intercapitania commercial circuit” that began to expand in the late sixteenth century. The author identified an intensification in wheat production in São Paulo in the mid-seventeenth century, with the main consumer market being Rio de Janeiro “with its growing white population of planters, merchants, and bureaucrats.” The increasing production on the plateau both expanded and deepened indigenous slavery, giving rise to “several rural properties that boasted squadrons with more than a hundred Indians.” Indigenous people were also fundamental in transporting the product and “for this reason, continuous access to indigenous labor proved to be fundamental for the survival of commercial agriculture.”

<sup>11</sup> The use of indigenous labor, as referred to above, was not uniform. Even with the establishment of large plantations and the wide use of African slave labor, many indigenous people were displaced to less profitable activities in the international market that were essential to the colony's dynamics, such as subsistence production and a wide range of services provided to settlers (Oliveira 2017: 222). In Minas Gerais, which at one time was a supplier of staples for the Rio de Janeiro commercial area, indigenous peoples were also involved in the mines, on swiddens, in transport, and in hunting and fishing to feed the settlers, in addition to public works (Resende 2003: 191).

later demands for captives, and the combination of these factors caused a de-structuring of the groups. This led to the realization that the exchanges would not be sufficient to transform the economic base, and this in turn prompted the colonists to act more aggressively, entering wars with indigenous peoples either by instigating or stimulating such conflicts, and appropriating indigenous work through captivity and slavery (Monteiro 1994a: 30-33).

The increase in the number of prisoners taken during conflicts could have been expected to lead to the formation of a slave market. In the case of Alencastro, however, this did not happen; over the decades, therefore, increased use began to be made of enslaved laborers from West Africa.<sup>12</sup> However, the enslavement of Indians continued and was supported by colonial legislation, which recognized the right to rescue or save captives, and the enslavement of Indians resistant to conversion or hostile to the Portuguese (Hemming 2007: 86; Monteiro 1994a: 33; Perrone 1992: 123-128).

In general terms, the laws enacted by the Portuguese Crown allowed for three modes of appropriation of the indigenous workforce: rescue or salvation, captivity or enslavement, and descent or relocation. As Schwartz pointed out, these three ways of transforming the natives' work represented "steps" in the relations between the Portuguese and indigenous peoples that were not taken in a "unilateral, continuous, and ubiquitous" way; instead, they

---

<sup>12</sup> In the early decades of colonization, the numbers of indigenous enslaved people were much higher than the numbers of slaves brought to Brazil from West Africa (Ricupero 2009: 360). In contrast to Alencastro, who claims there to have been no market for native slaves, Schwartz states indigenous slavery in the captaincy of Pernambuco to have been so widespread in the 1570s—after military campaigns against the Caeté—that "Blacks from the land" were exported from there to other captaincies. Schwartz sees the apex of indigenous slavery in Brazil as being between 1540 and 1570. This market was clearly linked to sugar production (Schwartz 1988: 46), but —corroborating Alencastro's idea— it was running out of steam. Alencastro points to barriers preventing indigenous enslavement from becoming widespread, such as the fragmentation of groups due to the existence of a dominant group; their ease in living in the interior territories, where they could escape European pressures; the inability of indigenous leaders to order their groups to participate in captivation activities; the difficulties of navigating between captaincies, and the impact of diseases among the natives (Alencastro 2000: 117-154). Dias (2019: 241-242) conducted studies that demonstrated the existence of a large market outside the State of Brazil, specifically in the Amazon. Dealing in prisoners transformed "into a profitable business" and involved groups of peoples from the hinterlands and "agents of various European empires", including the Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch, French, and English. Schwartz is not alone in pointing to the widespread use of indigenous slaves in areas of the State of Brazil. Almeida (2014) and Monteiro (1994a) also demonstrated the ample demand for Indian slaves in two former colonization areas, Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, even after the African slave trade became common in the colony. Marcílio (1999: 316) refers to 200,000 Indians being sold by São Paulo slave traders to sugar producers in Rio de Janeiro, Espírito Santo, Pernambuco and Bahia in 1639. However, it would be strange for Pernambuco to have received such a number, given that the region was occupied by Dutch settlers and no records of such transactions have as yet been found in West India Company documents. The author, distrusting the figures, points to fewer Indians (people captured from Jesuit missions in Paraguay) being sold in Rio de Janeiro between 1628 and 1630.



depended on the region and the moment, and ran in parallel (Dias 2019: 240; Schwartz 1988: 45).<sup>13</sup>

It should be noted that, under the pretense of saving souls, slavery of all indigenous peoples, not only those considered hostile, was legal. It was also possible for Indians held captive by other Indians to be acquired or “rescued.” These were the “rope Indians,” caught up in conflicts, and destined for ritual slaughter in the case of coastal peoples who practiced ceremonial anthropophagy. By purchasing them, the Portuguese would save these people from physical and spiritual death, while also converting and civilizing them. All this was under the protection of the 1587 law, the contents of which were repeated in 1611, in the 1653 Royal Provision, and in the 1688 Permit. In theory, this serfdom was seen as temporary. Once rescued captives had repaid their ransom value through work, they were to be freed. The 1611 law even stated that captivity was limited to ten years, while also indicating that its tenure could be linked to the value of the “debt.” Whatever the case, however, abuses that resulted in slavery being prolonged were common (Dias 2019: 239; Perrone, 1992: 127-128).<sup>14</sup>

Another form of captivity could occur as a result of indigenous peoples being imprisoned following a Just War authorized by the royal authorities and waged by the settlers against the indigenous peoples. In practice, the religious authorities were invasive and regularly ended up inciting hostilities. Even the Jesuits, after their initial fascination with the indigenous peoples, began to defend violence as the only possible way to convert them (Bettencourt 1994: 41-44; Cunha 1990: 101-106).

Although, as observed earlier, the saving of souls and bodies from ritual slaughter appears to support the concept of the Just War, it is also apparent from the sources that this was not the only factor used as justification for such action. Indeed, under the 1611 law, indigenous hostility—real or alleged—towards the settlers constituted the argument carrying the greatest legal weight for conducting a Just War. Given the possibility, granted by law, of

---

<sup>13</sup> Dias also points to another, very common form of appropriation: the “apprehension” or “mooring”, according to Portuguese sources, or “raids”, according to Spanish sources. This consisted of direct attacks on indigenous villages, with the aim of capturing women and children, whereas men were killed (2019, 240).

<sup>14</sup> Some cases, not necessarily of Indians enslaved via ransom, serve to demonstrate that by learning to act in accordance with the culture of the Old Regime, Indians sought to access colonial justice to denounce the illegality of their condition. In the late sixteenth century, Mônica, a “Brasilla Indian,” taking advantage of a hearing surrounding the Holy Office’s visit to Pernambuco, testified about the practices of Judaism and sodomy of a relative of her mistress, denounced her condition as a slave, made “according to her report, unfairly, since she had been a Christian since the age of four, baptized in the village of Olinda” (Silva 2004, 81). In the early eighteenth century, Rosa Dias Moreira, an Indian descendant of the Carijós, filed a lawsuit in São Paulo against her master, alleging that she had been unjustly taken captive. Other Indians went on to do the same, arguing that they had suffered abuse and unjust captivity, especially when they tried to demonstrate that, contrary to what their owners claimed, they were slaves and not just servants (Monteiro 1994b: 117).

enslavement or imprisonment, the settlers were clearly the main stakeholders in this respect. The Crown subsequently started demanding proof of the Indians' hostility and even, on account of abuses committed, to declare settlers' assaults to be unfair (Bettencourt 2000: 39-46; Hespanha 2010; Perrone 1992: 124-126).

Where, however, it was accepted that Indians had behaved with hostility—and were therefore considered barbarians—wars of extermination and enslavement remained possible. Indeed, from the sixteenth to the early eighteenth century, evidence abounds of campaigns and recommendations for the “total destruction” of indigenous peoples (Perrone 1992: 126). These campaigns include the various Just Wars that shook the coast of Brazil at the end of the sixteenth century: against the Tamoios in Rio de Janeiro (1557), against the Caeté in Sergipe (1557), and against the Tabajara and the Potiguar in Paraíba (1580). Later, in 1611, the general government in Salvador declared a Just War against groups from the hinterlands that attacked areas of the Recôncavo. However, the battle against the Dutch in northeastern Brazil (1624-1654) interrupted more concrete and broader actions in the region, with the result that these actions were not resumed until the 1650s, when military expeditions moved against the Aimoré in 1653 and against the Paiaíá in 1654. In areas further north, the targets were the Tapuia, against whom war was waged throughout the second half of the seventeenth century and into the eighteenth century in what was referred to as the “War of the Barbarians” (1650-1720) (Monteiro 1994b: 107-108; Puntoni 2002: 91, 128-135).

The cases of Just War did not take place without resistance and triggered reactions from the indigenous peoples against the advances of the Portuguese. However, such attacks also involved participation by indigenous groups allied to the settlers and interested in destroying rival peoples or finding ways to survive colonization. But while, therefore, it was not a process solely perpetrated by Whites, it was certainly encouraged by them and had dramatic consequences for the indigenous peoples, regardless of whether they opposed or were allied with the Europeans. It also led to the displacement to the hinterlands of various peoples fleeing the Portuguese colonists' thirst for captives. These displacements had internal repercussions among indigenous nations and led to territorial disputes in places far from the coast (Hemming 2007: 145-149; Galindo 2017: 75-77, 182).

Wars aimed at imprisonment or captivity persisted throughout the colonial period, with far too many examples to enumerate. In the twilight of the colony, in 1808, D. João VI issued a permit for a Just War against the Botocudo Indians in the interior of Minas Gerais,<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> For a debate on the resistance of the Botocudos to the Portuguese attacks and the negotiations between them, see Langfur (2017).

claiming that they were hindering colonization of the hinterlands. However, the Botocudos were not the only targets of campaigns in the early nineteenth century as such campaigns persisted for decades and constituted the main instrument for obtaining indigenous slave labor across Brazil. Indeed, it was not until 1831 that royal charters revoking the decision of 1808 were issued (Amantino 2006; Sposito 2011).<sup>16</sup>

Lastly, there was the forced or induced displacement of Indians to areas occupied by Europeans, where, as explained earlier, they were gathered in colonial mission villages, or *aldeias*. These relocations, or descents, entailed displacing entire populations from the interior to areas close to the Portuguese settlers, and were both encouraged by and anchored in legislation—from the Regiment of Tomé de Souza (1548) to the Pombalino Directorate (1757). From the law of 1587 onwards, the relocations, which had previously mainly involved coercion by troops, started to rely on the presence of missionaries, with these religious authorities being made responsible for persuading Indians to cooperate in negotiations regarding relocation, and their knowledge of the local languages, and the prestige of some religious figures in the groups, being factors explaining the need for their presence in these enterprises (Almeida 2010: 76; Perrone 1992: 118).

Over time, missionaries came to lead the process, as noted in the law of 1587, the General Government Regiment of 1588, the Charter of 1596, the Carta Régia of 1653, and the Regiment of Missions of 1686. In 1611, secular administrators were also able to demission, although they had to consult religious authorities in their undertakings. The negotiations to convince people to relocate to the villages involved gifts, especially to the leaders, as well as promises of land in the *aldeias*, paid work, good treatment and—importantly, in a context of war and violence—protection of the indigenous populations. Although forcing indigenous people to relocate against their will had been forbidden by law, at least since 1611, the fact that this point was reinforced in the 1686 Missions Regiment, as well as in laws of the eighteenth century, demonstrates that the practice was persistent and that the prohibition was not complied with. In a context of violence, however, as Almeida points out, “descending” to the neighboring areas of white settlements could mean a group’s survival in a world shaken by constant conflicts and the threat of slavery (Almeida 2010: 76-79; Almeida 2013; Perrone 1992: 118).

One of the functions of the *aldeias* for the agents of the Crown and the colonists or residents was to be a repository of labor, with a workforce to be used in a wide range of

---

<sup>16</sup> Although the impact and amplitude can be inferred, indigenous enslavement is a long-lasting phenomenon that needs a broad and quantitative investigation. The first studies for the Amazon have been undertaken by researchers such as Chambouleyron and Bombardi (2011), Dias (2019) and Sommer (2005).

activities designed to consolidate the colonial project. Indigenous labor was even more important in cases where colonists' private undertakings were also of particular interest to the Crown, as in the case of the excursions into the hinterlands to discover mines or to undertake relocation activities. Indigenous peoples were also in great demand for defending and constructing fortifications in population centers, providing labor for public works, cutting wood, providing agricultural services for the Crown, and for working as porters or domestic servants (Almeida 2013: 235-236).

In these villages, whether managed by religious authorities or civilians, Indians were supposed to be paid for their work. Laws stipulated the amounts and methods of remuneration, and their working hours. Labor was voluntary and remunerated, at least on paper. As mentioned earlier, indigenous people spent some days working outside the *aldeias* in an equitable division between work of interest to residents and work of interest to the Portuguese Crown. Nor were indigenous laborers supposed to work to the point of hindering the development and support of the *aldeia* itself. However, abuses were regular, and compliance with the standards set on time spent traveling to a site, payment, and good treatment of the indigenous workers was deplorable. This led to disturbances in the mission villages and to escapes, which indicates that the indigenous peoples resisted the process and sought to negotiate better conditions with administrators, thus leveraging their very presence and participation in the settlements (Almeida 2013: 164-167; Perrone 1992: 120-1).

Religious authorities exercised their temporal control over indigenous villagers until the Directorate of Indians (1757), being afterwards replaced by the village director, who assumed responsibility for managing labor, while the religious authorities were responsible for the governing of souls. This certainly did not mean the end of the management problems as the laws and the secular and regular administration all needed to be adapted to different realities. The continuing presence of the Crown, through its intermediaries, in a permanent relationship of guardianship or tutelage with the indigenous peoples certainly extended beyond the colonial and imperial period (Perrone 1992: 119-120). But even with losses of land and lives, and the continuing advance of non-indigenous people, some of the Portuguese Crown's objectives were not fully satisfied, partly as a result of resistance, and partly due to the incompetence of village administrators (Lopes 2011: 263; Medeiros 2011: 138).

Another dimension of indigenous work to be considered is military employment. The colonial economy could not be kept supplied with indigenous labor without warfare, without the territorial expansion needed to deal with indigenous peoples, without disputes with

European competitors and without entering into alliances with indigenous peoples, many of whom were incorporated into the ranks of Portuguese troops. Examples of indigenous action and employment in war can thus be found throughout the colonial period and beyond, and were closely linked to negotiations with groups that initially saw war as an opportunity to defeat their opponents and later as a way to gain advantages in a disadvantageous context of enslavement and genocide (Almeida 2013: 91-102; Carvalho 1996: 51-69; Raminelli 2011: 47-67; Vieira 2011: 69-90).

Settlers were highly dependent on the indigenous people, especially in the first century of colonization, when there was no balance of power between natives and settlers in terms of population and military strength, and this explains the need to recruit these people as a shield against opposing nations, both indigenous and European alike.<sup>17</sup> After the violent campaigns that ensured territorial control of much of the colony's coastal region, and after the turn of the seventeenth century, a greater balance of power arose between settlers and indigenous peoples on the coast, although the use of the latter as military manpower was extensive. Even in that century, the Indians were essential for attacks against rival native groups and other European challengers, notably the French and Dutch. This can be seen in the reconquest of Maranhão from the French by a troop of settlers and Indians (with the latter comprising the bulk of the contingent) from Pernambuco, or in the battles against the Dutch in Salvador between 1624 and 1625, and in the northern captaincies (Pernambuco, Paraíba, and Rio Grande) between 1630 and 1654, and lastly in the *Guerra dos Bárbaros* between 1650 and 1720 (Almeida 2014: 15; Golin 2014: 58-59; Moreno 2011: 29-45; Paraíso & Magalhães 2007: 9-38; Possamai 2001; Puntoni 2002: 202-209; Raminelli 2011: 47-67; Vieira 2011: 69-90).

While the balance of power shifted in the eighteenth century to the Portuguese side, the colonists were still reliant on Indian troops for entering the hinterlands and installing central elements there for maintaining the interior and the borders disputed with Spain in the State of Grão-Pará and Maranhão, and along the southern border of the State of Brazil, in disputes such as the Guaraníticas Wars (1753-1756) and in earlier conflicts in the Banda Sul that involved the Portuguese, Spaniards, and the indigenous peoples who were subjects of villages and alliances for war purposes (Fontella 2020: 15; García 2007: 55-59, 84-87; García 2008: 613-632; García 2011; Golin 2014; Possamai 2001).

---

<sup>17</sup> On the balance of power, or even the monopoly of violence, in relations between indigenous peoples and Europeans, see Zandt (2008). See also Bushnell (2009) and White (2011). This debate accompanies the discussions about indigenous alliances. For the case of Brazil, see Almeida (2010, 2013), García (2007), and Monteiro (1994a).

However, despite this extensive military dependence on natives in colonial wars, the extant historiography has devoted little attention to indigenous interests in these disputes. In fairness, some historians cited here have sought to assess indigenous participation; nevertheless, there is a clear lack of a broad and quantitative analysis able to measure the impact of indigenous action on colonial forces and to connect this participation to native agency.

### **Final Considerations**

As we have shown, historiography has only recently started seeing the effective participation of indigenous peoples as actors in historical processes. Evidence of this action, even in documents produced by non-indigenous people, is scattered across the historical sources. Detailed scrutiny is consequently needed to verify indigenous peoples' participation as agents rather than simply allowing the historiographical reading to persist in which indigenous peoples are invisible as historical subjects. This latter reading can be seen in texts on the administration of the Crown, even those pertaining to the three specific spheres selected for this text: the dimensions of religious authorities' management of indigenous peoples, their lands and, finally, their labor.

In all these aspects, it is possible to glimpse evidence of indigenous people acting to negotiate with and resist the Crown, and to force it to make adaptations in colonial rule. Whether mediated (by religious or indigenous leaders) or otherwise, the actions of indigenous groups coming into contact with conquerors, settlers, and missionaries guaranteed their survival in an increasingly unbalanced context of disadvantage and violence.

The historiographical survey that we have carried out here demonstrates the extent to which the Portuguese Crown's management of the diversity of American domains necessarily impacted on the relations of mutual dependence between conquerors, missionaries, settlers, and indigenous peoples from different groups. It also shows that the role of the indigenous peoples in the formation of Portuguese colonial America was not restricted to the initial decades of contact and exploitation, but instead continued in the processes of constituting internal and external borders, constructing the agrarian structure, producing the food and supplies needed for the colonial society's survival and, therefore, creating the foundations of the export economy.

The attempts at and process of dismantling the indigenous nations did not take place in a uniform and gradual way across the vast territory that now comprises Brazil. Similarly,

the process cannot be regarded as being over, as we can infer from the continuing existence of a discourse that treats indigenous people as in need of civilizing, or a discourse pointing to delays and, therefore, to the need for intervention to enable these peoples to progress.<sup>18</sup> Such attitudes, which were observable throughout the colonial phase, persisted throughout the existence of the Portuguese Empire and, indeed, are still alive in the current republic.

Today, more than five centuries after the arrival of the Europeans, indigenous peoples continue to maintain their ways of life and social structures, despite the losses they have suffered and the need to make concessions. So, too, have they continued to negotiate guarantees of rights and to act as historical subjects even after centuries of a disciplined campaign of conversion to reform minds and of advances on land in processes imposed on them by agents of the Crown and dating back to the sixteenth century.

It is hoped that the debate in this article will serve as a stimulus and as a starting point for those interested in understanding the importance of indigenous peoples in constructing the history of Brazil, specifically from the broad and general vantage point of the historiographical debate that has been underway in the country since the 1990s. It is also important to point out the great lack of comparisons for the relations between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples in Brazil and the relations in other colonial experiences in Hispanic and Anglo America. Such comparisons will further substantiate interpretations, as well as give rise to new research questions.

---

<sup>18</sup> As also seen in the obstacles placed in the way of land demarcation, in the advances on already delimited reserves, in the continuing attacks on indigenous non-governmental organizations, in the murder of indigenous leaders, and in the systematic destruction of the environment.

## References

- Alencastro, L. F. de (2000). *O trato dos viventes. Formação do Brasil no Atlântico Sul*. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras.
- Almeida, M. R. C. de (2010). *Os índios na história do Brasil*. Rio de Janeiro: Editora da FGV.
- Almeida, M. R. C. de (2013). *Metamorfoses indígenas: identidade e cultura nas aldeias coloniais do Rio de Janeiro*. Rio de Janeiro: Editora FGV.
- Almeida, M. R. C. de (2014). “Escravidão indígena e trabalho compulsório no Rio de Janeiro Colonial.” *Revista Mundos do Trabalho*. 12 (6): 11-25.
- Almeida, M. R. C. de and T. Seijas (2020). “Amerindians in the Iberian World.” In F. Bouza, P. Cardim and A. Feros (eds.), *The Iberian World 1450-1820*. London: Routledge: 357-374.
- Almeida, R. H. de (1997). *O Diretório dos índios: um projeto de civilização no Brasil do século XVIII*. Brasília: Editora Universidade de Brasília.
- Almeida, S. C. de, G. Cabral de Souza, G. Melo Silva and K. V. Silva (orgs.) (2012). *Políticas e Estratégias Administrativas no Mundo Atlântico*. Recife: Editora da Universidade Federal de Pernambuco.
- Bettencourt, L. (2000). “Cartas brasileiras: Visão e Revisão dos índios.” In L. D. B. Grupioni (ed.), *Índios no Brasil*. São Paulo: Global: 39-46.
- Bushnell, A. T. (2009). “Indigenous America and the limits of the Atlantic World, 1493-1825.” In J. P. Greene and P. D. Morgan (eds.), *Atlantic History. A critical appraisal*. Oxford: Oxford University Press: 191-221.
- Carrara, A. A. (2014). “A população do Brasil, 1570-1700: uma revisão historiográfica.” *Revista Tempo*, 20: 1-21.
- Carvalho, M. J. M. de (1996). “Os índios de Pernambuco no ciclo das insurreições liberais, 1817/1848: ideologias e resistência.” *Revista da SBPH*, 11: 51-69.
- Castelnau-L'Estoile, C. (2006). *Operários de uma vinha estéril: os jesuítas e a conversão dos índios no Brasil, 1580-1620*. Bauru: Edusc.
- Chambouleyron, R. and Bombardi, F. A. (2011). “Descimentos privados de índios na Amazônia colonial (século XVII e XVIII).” *Varia História* 27 (46): 621-623.
- Coelho, M. C. (2005). *Do sertão para o mar. Um estudo sobre a experiência portuguesa na América, a partir da colônia: o caso do diretório dos índios (1751-1798)*. São Paulo: PhD thesis, Universidade de São Paulo.
- Cohen, P. (2008). “Was there an Amerindian Atlantic? Reflections on the limits of a historiographical concept.” *History of European Ideas* 34: 388-410.
- Costa, A. F. P. da (1954). *Anais Pernambucanos. Tomo IV*. Recife: Arquivo Público Estadual de Pernambuco.
- Cunha, M. C. da (1990). “Imagens de Índios do Brasil: O século XVI.” *Estudos Avançados*, 4 (10): 91-110.
- Cunha, M. C. da (2012). *Índios no Brasil. Histórias, direitos e cidadania*. São Paulo: Claro Enigma.
- Dantas, M. A. (2018). *Dimensões da participação política indígena. Estado nacional e revoltas em Pernambuco e Alagoas, 1817-1848*. Rio de Janeiro: Arquivo Nacional.
- Dias, C. L. (2019). “Os índios, a Amazônia e os conceitos de escravidão e liberdade.” *Estudos Avançados* 33(97): 235-252.
- Domingues, A. (2000). *Quando os índios eram vassalos: colonização e relações de poder no Norte do Brasil na segunda metade do século XVIII*. Lisboa: Comissão Nacional para as Comemorações dos Descobrimentos Portugueses.
- Domingues, A., M. L. Chaves de Resende and P. Cardim (orgs.) (2019). *Os indígenas e as justiças no mundo ibero-americano (sécs. XVI-XIX)*. Lisboa: Centro de História da Universidade de Lisboa.



- Farage, N. (1991). *As muralhas dos sertões: os povos indígenas no Rio Branco e a colonização*. São Paulo: Editora Paz e Terra.
- Ferlini, V. (2003). *Terra, trabalho e poder: o mundo dos engenhos no Nordeste colonial*. Bauru: EDUSC.
- Ferlini, V. And M. F. Bicalho (orgs.) (2005). *Modos de governar. Idéias e práticas políticas no Império português. Séculos XVI-XIX*. São Paulo: Alameda.
- Ferraz, S. (2008). “Sesmarias do açúcar. Sítios históricos.” *Clio: Revista de Pesquisa Histórica*, 26 (2): 59-78.
- Ferreira, L. de M. (2006). *São Miguel de Barreiros. Uma aldeia indígena no Império*. Recife: Dissertação de Mestrado da Universidade Federal de Pernambuco.
- Fontella, L. G. (2020). “A Guerra Guaranítica num contexto de Cultura de Contato: uma interpretação sobre o caráter das interações entre guaranis missionários e sociedades ibéricas.” *Anos 90, Porto Alegre*, 27: 1-20.
- Fragoso, J. and M. de F. Gouvêa (orgs.) (2010). *Na trama das redes. Política e negócios no império português, Séculos XVI-XVIII*. Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira.
- Fragoso, J. and M. de F. Gouvêa (orgs.) (2014). *O Brasil colonial, 1443-1580*. Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira.
- Fragoso, J., M. F. Bicalho and M. de F. Gouvêa (orgs.) (2001). *O Antigo Regime nos Trópicos. A dinâmica imperial portuguesa (séculos XVI-XVIII)*. Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira.
- Galindo, M. (2017). *O governo das almas: A expansão colonial no país dos tapuias (1651-1798)*. São Paulo: Hucitec.
- García, E. F. (2007). *As diversas formas de ser índio: políticas indígenas e políticas indigenistas no extremo sul da América portuguesa*. Niterói: PhD thesis, Universidade Federal Fluminense.
- García, E. F. (2008). “Quando os índios escolhem seus aliados: as relações de “amizade” entre os minuanos e os lusitanos no sul da América portuguesa (c.1750-1800).” *Varia Historia*, vol. 24 (40): 613-632.
- García, E. F. (2009). *As diversas formas de ser índio: políticas indígenas e políticas indigenistas no extremo sul da América portuguesa*. Rio de Janeiro: Arquivo Nacional.
- García, E. F. (2011). “Ser índio” na fronteira: limites e possibilidades Rio da Prata, c. 1750-1800.” *Nuevo Mundo Mundos Nuevos*, <https://doi.org/10.4000/nuevomundo.60732>
- Golin, T. (2014). *A guerra guaranítica. O levante indígena que desafiou Portugal e Espanha*. São Paulo: Terceiro Nome.
- Hemming, J. (2007). *Ouro Vermelho. A conquista dos índios brasileiros*. São Paulo: Edusp.
- Hespanha, A. M. (2010). *Imbecillitas. As bem-aventuranças da inferioridade nas sociedades de Antigo Regime*. São Paulo: Annablume.
- Holanda, S. B. (dir.) (1997). *História Geral da Civilização Brasileira. I. A época colonial. 1 Do descobrimento à expansão territorial*. Rio de Janeiro: Bertrand Brasil.
- Hulsman, L. (2009). *Nederlands Amazonia. Handel met indianen tussen 1580 en 1680*. Amsterdam: Universiteit van Amsterdam Academisch Proefschrift.
- Ibáñez-Bonillo, P. (2019). “Processos de guerra justa en la Amazonía portuguesa (siglo XVII).” In A. Domingues, M. L. Chaves de Resende and P. Cardim (orgs.), *Os indígenas e as justiças no mundo ibero-americano (sécs. XVI-XIX)*. Lisboa: Centro de História da Universidade de Lisboa: 241-271.
- Johnson, H. and M. B. Nizza da Silva (1992). *O império luso-brasileiro, 1500-1620*. In J. Serrão and A. H. de Oliveira Marques (dirs.), *Nova história da expansão portuguesa*. Lisboa: Editorial Estampa.
- Langfur, H. (2017). “Canibalismo e a legitimidade da guerra justa na época da Independência.” *Revista Brasileira de História*, 37 (75): 119-143.
- Lopes, F. M. (2005). *Em nome da liberdade: as vilas de índios do Rio Grande do Norte sob o Diretório Pombalino no século XVIII*. Recife: PhD thesis in History, Universidade Federal de Pernambuco.

- Lopes, F. M. (2011). "As mazelas do Diretório dos índios: exploração e violência no início do XIX." In J. P. de Oliveira (org.), *A presença indígena no Nordeste*. Rio de Janeiro: Contra Capa: 241-265.
- Maia, L. J. de O. (2010). *Serras de Ibiapaba. De Aldeia à Vila de Índios: Vassalagem e Identidade no Ceará colonial - Século XVIII*. Niterói: PhD thesis in History, Universidade Federal Fluminense.
- Maia, L. J. de O. (2011). "A implantação do Diretório em Vila Viçosa Real (CE): incerteza, colaboração e negociação indígenas (c. 1759-1762)." In J. P. de Oliveira (org.), *A presença indígena no Nordeste*. Rio de Janeiro: Contra Capa: 21-45.
- Marcílio, M. L. (1999). "A população do Brasil colonial." In L. Bethell (org.), *História da América Latina. América Latina Colonial. Vol. II*. São Paulo: Edusp:311-338.
- Mauro, F. coord. (1991). *O império luso-brasileiro, 1620-1750*. In J. Serrão and A. H. de Oliveira Marques (dir.), *Nova história da expansão portuguesa*. Lisboa: Editorial Estampa.
- Medeiros, R. P. (2011). "Política indigenista do período pombalino e seus reflexos nas capitanias do norte da América portuguesa." In J. P. de Oliveira (org.), *A presença indígena no Nordeste*. Rio de Janeiro: Contra Capa: 115-144.
- Medeiros, R. P. de (2007). "Política indigenista do Período Pombalino e seus reflexos nas capitanias do Norte da América portuguesa." In C. M. de O. Silva and R. P. Medeiros (orgs.), *Novos olhares sobre as capitanias do Norte do Estado do Brasil*. João Pessoa: Editora Universitária/UFPB: 125-159.
- Mello e Souza, L., J. Furtado and M. F. Bicalho (eds.) (2009). *O governo dos povos*. São Paulo: Alameda.
- Mello, E. C. de (2012). *O Bagaço da Cana*. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras.
- Meuwese, M. (2012). *Brothers in Arms, Partners in Trade. Dutch-Indigenous Alliances in the Atlantic World, 1595-1674*. Leiden/Boston: Brill.
- Monteiro, J. (1994a). *Negros da terra: índios e bandeirantes nas origens de São Paulo*. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras.
- Monteiro, J. (1994b). "O escravo índio, esse desconhecido." In L. D. B. Grupioni (ed.), *Índios no Brasil*. São Paulo: Global: 105-120.
- Monteiro, J. (1995). "O desafio da história indígena no Brasil." In A.L. da Silva and L. D. B. Grupioni (eds.), *A Temática Indígena escola: novos subsídios para professores de 1º e 2º Graus*. Brasília: MEC/MARI/UNESCO: 221-236.
- Monteiro, J. (2001). *Tupis, tapuias e historiadores. Estudos de História Indígena e do Indigenismo*. Campinas: Habilitation da Universidade de Campinas.
- Monteiro, J. coord. (1994). *Guia de fontes para a história indígena e do indigenismo em arquivos brasileiros: acervos das capitais*. São Paulo: USP/FAPESP.
- Moreira, V. M. L. (2019). *Reinventando a autonomia: liberdade, propriedade, autogoverno e novas identidades indígenas na Capitania do Espírito Santo, 1535-1822*. São Paulo: Humanitas.
- Moreno, D. C. (2011). *Jornada do Maranhão. Por ordem de sua Majestade feita o ano de 1614*. Brasília: Edições do Senado Federal.
- Oliveira, J. P. de (1988). "O nosso governo": os Ticuna e o regime tutelar. São Paulo/Brasília: Marco Zero, MCT/CNPq.
- Oliveira, J. P. de (2004). "Uma etnologia dos 'índios misturados'? Situação colonial, territorialização e fluxos culturais." In J. P. de Oliveira (org.), *A Viagem da Volta: Etnicidade, Política e Reelaboração Cultural no Nordeste Indígena*. Rio de Janeiro: Contra Capa: 13-42.
- Oliveira, J. P. de (2016). *O nascimento do Brasil e outros ensaios: "pacificação", regime tutelar e formação de alteridades*. Rio de Janeiro: Contra Capa.
- Oliveira, J. P. de (2017). "Os indígenas na fundação da colônia: uma abordagem crítica." In J. Fragozo and M. de F. Gouvêa (eds.), *O Brasil colonial. Vol. 1*. Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira: 167-228.

- Paraíso, M. H. B. and Magalhães, P. A. I. (2007). “Muros do recôncavo: A capital da América portuguesa transferida para aldeamentos jesuítcos (1624-1625).” *Clio*, 25(2): 9-38.
- Perrone-Moisés, B. (1992). “Índios livres e índios escravos. Os princípios da legislação indigenista do período colonial (séculos XVI a XVIII).” In M. C. da Cunha (org.), *História dos índios no Brasil*. São Paulo: Cia. das Letras:115-132.
- Pompa, C. (2003) *Religião como Tradução: Missionários, Tupi e Tapuia no Brasil Colonial*. São Paulo: Edusc.
- Possamai, P. C. (2011). *O cotidiano da guerra: A vida na colônia do sacramento (1715-1735)*. São Paulo: PhD thesis, Universidade de São Paulo.
- Puntoni, P. (2002). *A Guerra dos Bárbaros: Povos indígenas e colonização do sertão. Nordeste do Brasil, 1650-1720*. São Paulo: Hucitec/Edusp.
- Raminelli, R. (2011). “Nobreza indígena – os chefes potiguaros, 1633-1695.” In J. P. De Oliveira (org.), *A presença indígena no Nordeste*. Rio de Janeiro: Contra Capa: 47-67.
- Resende, M. L. C. de (2003). *Gentios brasílicos. Índios coloniais em Minas Gerais setecentista*. São Paulo: PhD thesis, Universidade de Campinas.
- Ricupero, R. (2009). “Poder e patrimônio: o controle da administração colonial sobre as terras e mão-de-obra indígena.” In L. Mello e Souza, J. Furtado and M. F. Bicalho (eds.), *O governo dos povos*. São Paulo: Alameda: 355-370.
- Sampaio, P. (2009). “Política indigenista no Brasil imperial.” In K. Grinberg and R. Salles (orgs.), *O Brasil Imperial, volume I: 1808-1831*. Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira:175-206.
- Schwartz, S. (1988). *Segredos Internos: engenhos e escravos na sociedade colonial 1550-1835*. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras.
- Silva, G. (2004). *Índios e Identidades: formas de inserção e sobrevivência na sociedade colonial (1535-1716)*. Recife: Dissertação de Mestrado da Universidade Federal de Pernambuco.
- Sommer, B. A. (2005). “Colony of the Sertão: Amazonian Expeditions and the Indian Slave Trade.” *The Americas* 61(3): 401-428.
- Vieira, G. (2011). “Entre perdas, feitos e barganhas: a elite indígena na capitania de Pernambuco.” In J. P. De Oliveira (org.), *A presença indígena no Nordeste*. Rio de Janeiro: Contra Capa:69-90.
- Weaver, J. (2014). *The Red Atlantic: American indigenes and the making of the modern world, 1000-1927*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press.
- White, R. (2011). *The middle ground. Indians, empires, and republics in the Great Lakes region, 1650-1815*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Willeke, V. (1974). *Missões franciscanas no Brasil (1500-1975)*. Petrópolis: Vozes.
- Zandt, C. J. van (2008). *Brothers among Nations. The pursuit of intercultural alliances in Early America 1580-1660*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Zeron, C. A. de M. R. (2011). *Linha de fé: a Companhia de Jesus e a escravidão no processo de formação da sociedade colonial (Brasil, séculos XVI e XVII)*. São Paulo: Editora da Universidade de São Paulo.

*Received for publication: 11 May 2021*

*Accepted in revised form: 26 October 2021*

*Recebido para publicação: 11 de Maio de 2021*

*Aceite após revisão: 26 de Outubro de 2021*