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Excerpt

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## Blacks of the Land

### Indian Slavery, Settler Society, and the Portuguese Colonial Enterprise in South America

John M. Monteiro

## Preface and Acknowledgements

In 1651, following a prolonged march through the wilds of South America, a few surviving members of the once grand expedition led by the master backwoodsman Antonio Raposo Tavares reached Belém do Pará so stricken by illness, hunger, and wounds suffered in Indian attacks that, according to the Jesuit missionary and renowned orator Father Antonio Vieira, “those who remained looked more dead than alive.” Nonetheless, the same priest added, their journey “truly was one of the most notable that has been carried out in the world to this day”: for three years and two months the members of the company had completed a “great walkabout” through the interior of the continent, though after a certain point they scarcely knew where they were or where they were going. Lost in the immensity of America, they only learned that they had traveled down the great Amazon River when their precarious, improvised crafts reached the military outpost of Gurupá, on the falls of the Xingu River, and the fort’s astonished soldiers told them where they were.

However, what most shocked Vieira was the evident contrast between such extraordinary efforts and the prosaic objectives that had led these Portuguese colonists to travel so many leagues and suffer such privation. For the single motive that had impelled their undertaking was to uproot “either by force or by will [Indians] from their lands and take them to São Paulo and then have them there as their servants as they are accustomed to doing.”

To a certain extent, the expedition led by Raposo Tavares was emblematic of seventeenth-century expansionism in Portuguese America. Although many historians, following Jaime Cortesão, have emphasized the geopolitical dimension of the undertaking, Raposo Tavares’s expedition and so many other slaving parties that set out from São Paulo were not motivated by territorial expansion, nor did their efforts result in more expansive settlement. Quite the contrary: rather than contributing directly to the occupation of the interior by the colonizing power, these incursions – like the heavily armed canoe flotillas that plied the Amazon basin, and the forcible resettlements carried out by missionaries in both

regions – contributed to the devastation of innumerable native peoples. To paraphrase Capistrano de Abreu, the activities of these “colonizers” were profoundly tragic in their effects, depopulating rather than settling vast stretches of the continent.

In their day, the Paulistas – settlers of the colonial nucleus of São Paulo and founders of its satellite towns – came to be known in the Americas and Europe as great backwoodsmen, peerless in their knowledge of the vast wilderness, in their perseverance, and in their courage. Much later, historians would christen them *bandeirantes* while building them up to epic proportions, emphasizing their role in the geographic expansion of Portuguese America. But while their expeditions came to occupy a prominent place in Brazilian historiography, the society that these ventures created remains little understood.

Indeed, tales of the legendary feats of brave explorers have obscured the gripping history of the thousands of Indians – the *negros da terra*, or “blacks of the land” – captured by the backwoodsmen of São Paulo. Thus, a sizeable body of scholarship has recounted the dramatic adventures of the *bandeirantes*, but in this literature a “cycle of Indian hunting” appears as a preliminary, relatively unimportant phase of their activities, in which the Paulistas furnished Indian slaves for the plantations of the sugar-producing northeast. At the same time, the immense bibliography on the colonial economy and society of Portuguese America has paid scant attention to indigenous labor. Although a few recent contributions have shed some light on this neglected subject, the major trends in the study of colonial Brazil remain bounded by a theoretical framework in which the organization of labor is subordinate to the logic of the expansion of mercantile capitalism. In this perspective, the Indian – when mentioned at all – is described as having played the ephemeral, secondary role of precursor to the millions of African slaves whose fundamental place in the history of colonial Brazil and the broader Atlantic world is unassailable.

*Blacks of the Land* returns to the seventeenth-century history of São Paulo, while seeking to re-evaluate the historical context of the *bandeirante* phenomenon. Its starting point is the simple claim that the frequent incursions into the interior, rather than provisioning a supposed market for Indian slaves on the coast, sustained the growth of an indigenous labor force on the plateau, thus enabling the production and transport of an agricultural surplus; in this way, the São Paulo region was linked to other parts of the Portuguese colony and even to the commercial circuits of the South Atlantic. But the dimensions and significance of Indian slavery in the region went far beyond this commercial nexus. In fact, virtually every aspect of the formation of São Paulo during its first two centuries was tied in some fundamental way to the expropriation, exploitation, and destruction of indigenous populations.

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In this new critical interpretation of the social history of São Paulo between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, native peoples play a central role. By focusing on the origins, development, and decline of Indian slavery, the chapters that follow seek to demonstrate that the principal structures of colonial society in the region emerged from a specific historical process in which several distinct indigenous societies came to be subordinated to an elaborate structure designed to control and exploit Indian labor.

Though it focuses most specifically on the structure and dynamic of Indian slavery, this book seeks to engage with three central problems in the history of Brazil: the role of the Indian in colonial economic and social history; the potent myth of the *bandeirante*; and the importance of non-export economies in the making of the country. Far from settling these issues, the material presented here seeks instead to contribute new elements to a broader and more critical discussion of the internal dynamic that developed in the interstices of an economy and a society oriented above all to the Atlantic world.

This book was born of a doctoral dissertation defended at the University of Chicago in 1985. Although much of the original material of the dissertation remains, it was expanded and enriched over the last six years by additional research and by revisions undertaken in response to criticism. I am greatly indebted to John Coatsworth, Bentley Duncan, Friedrich Katz, and Stuart Schwartz, the members of the doctoral committee, for their precise comments and suggestions, many of which were incorporated into this book.

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Parts of this book previously appeared in several scholarly publications: *Slavery & Abolition*, *Estudos Econômicos*, *História* (Universidade Estadual Paulista), *Revista de Antropologia*, *Ler História*, *Ciências Sociais Hoje*, and *Revista de História*. I am grateful to the anonymous referees of these journals for their important critiques.

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## I

## The Transformation of Indigenous São Paulo in the Sixteenth Century

On Christmas Day, 1562, Martim Afonso Tibiriçá lost his final battle, succumbing to one of the infectious diseases that ran rampant among the indigenous inhabitants of Brazil at the time. In a way, the life and death of this important Tupinikin warrior and chief mirrored the very march of European expansion in the captaincy of São Vicente in the sixteenth century. Many years earlier, he had brought the first white man into his community – as a son-in-law – and witnessed the newcomer's speedy rise as an influential leader of Indians and Portuguese. In the 1530s, Tibiriçá agreed to enter into an alliance with the outsiders, undoubtedly thinking of the advantage over his traditional enemies that this alliance would provide. With the arrival of the first Jesuits at mid-century, he authorized the raising of a rustic chapel in his village and allowed the priests to convert his people, he himself becoming the first to be baptized. The Jesuits, for their part, expressed their reverence for an Indian they considered to be an exemplary Christian leader and a valued ally, interring his body in the modest church of São Paulo de Piratininga.

Although his collaborative role in the establishment of European dominion over the region tends to be emphasized in the sparse biographical data on Tibiriçá, this material can also be read in such a way as to provide another perspective. Indeed, while Tibiriçá's actions were greatly influenced by European demands, they responded first and foremost to the logic and internal dynamics of indigenous social organization. Moreover, even as he figured as a protagonist in the making of Luso-indigenous relations in the region, Tibiriçá, alongside the other members of his society, endured the profound crises and transformations unleashed by European expansion. What appeared at first to be an inoffensive and even beneficial alliance soon proved to be very harmful to the Indians. Changes in patterns of warfare and grave crises of authority, punctuated by waves of epidemic disease, conspired to debilitate, disorganize, and, ultimately, destroy the Tupinikin.

Although the internal dynamics of indigenous Brazil have been largely ignored in the existing historiography, they were sufficiently profound and historically dense to influence the formation of the colony in a significant

way. The importance of these dynamics lay not only in the social and economic configurations of native societies, but also in the various ways that they constituted the historical memory of aboriginal peoples. In this sense, it was often the consciousness of an indigenous past that provided the bases for action in the face of the historically novel situation of the conquest. Strong expressions of this disposition emerged in native social movements throughout the sixteenth century, whether in messianism or armed resistance, some cases of which involved the participation of multiple villages, as in the case of the Confederation of the Tamoios (1555–1567), which brought together Tupinambá communities in a long-lasting armed movement that aimed to destroy Portuguese colonialism.

Taking into consideration the internal dynamics of Tupi-speaking groups – including the Tupinambá and the Tupinikin – and these groups' clashes with the process of Portuguese expansion, this chapter aims to evaluate the history of Luso–indigenous relations in southern Brazil in the sixteenth century. During this period, indigenous actions and reactions ran contrary to Portuguese expectations and, as such, proved significant in shaping the structures of domination that emerged in the colony. In their relations with the Indians, the Portuguese attempted to impose diverse modes of labor organization and, in turn, were faced with shifting stances that oscillated between collaboration and resistance. While none of the various forms of exploitation that were attempted proved satisfactory, all had the negative impact of hastening the demographic decline and social disintegration of indigenous populations. As a result, the colonizers increasingly turned to forced labor in their attempt to establish an economic basis for colonial society. In this sense, one may locate the origins of slavery in Brazil – African as well as Indian – in this initial phase of Portuguese–indigenous relations.

### The Tupi in the Age of Conquest

What formed the “internal dynamics” of Tupi societies? At the risk of oversimplifying the enormous complexity of the social structures of sixteenth-century Brazil, we may identify some of the constitutive elements of the dynamics that animated them: the process of fragmentation and reconstitution of local groups, the leadership roles played by chiefs and shamans, and finally the fundamental importance of the warrior complex in the affirmation of these groups' historical identity. Taken together, these elements were of particular relevance to turning points in the subsequent development of relations with the Europeans. In this sense, they help to explain not only the historical bases on which patterns of indigenous resistance and adaptation rested, but also the means by which Portuguese domination became possible.

Upon arriving in Brazil, the European invaders soon discovered that much of the coast as well as the more accessible parts of the interior were occupied by societies that shared certain basic characteristics, common to what came to be called Tupi-Guarani culture. Despite this apparent homogeneity, however, any attempt at providing a synthesis of the ethnographic situation of sixteenth-century Brazil immediately runs into two problems. In the first place, Tupi society remained radically segmented, and relations between segments and even between local units most often were associated in one way or another with internecine warfare. Referring to the relationship between the Tupinambá and Tupinikin groups of southern Brazil, Gabriel Soares de Sousa observed, in his rich descriptive treatise on early colonial Brazil, considered by many to be the most important sixteenth-century account: “And even though the Tupinikin and Tupinambá are enemies, between them there is no greater difference in language and customs than between the residents of Lisbon and those of Beira.”<sup>1</sup> Second, large parts of Brazil were also inhabited by non-Tupi peoples, representing dozens of unrelated language groups.<sup>2</sup>

To deal with these problems, sixteenth-century Europeans sought to reduce the vast ethnographic panorama to two generic categories: Tupi and Tapuia. The Tupi side of this dichotomy encompassed the coastal societies, including the Guarani, that were in direct contact with the Portuguese, French, and Spanish. While these groups exhibited similar traditions and cultural patterns, the same cannot be said of the so-called Tapuia. Indeed, the term “Tapuia” was often applied to groups that not only differed socially from the Tupi pattern, but were little known to Europeans. In the *Tratado descritivo*, Gabriel Soares de Sousa acknowledged the precarious state of European knowledge: “As the Tapuia are so many and are so divided by group, custom, and language, in order to say much of them, it would be necessary to take careful and deliberate notice of their divisions, life, and customs; but, up to the present this has been impossible. . . .”<sup>3</sup> At around the same time, the Jesuit Fernão Cardim classified seventy-six non-Tupi groups as “Tapuia.”<sup>4</sup> It would seem that for these early observers the denomination represented little more than the antithesis of Tupi society, and that the groups so described were thus defined in purely negative terms.

In any case, the emergence of the Tupi–Tapuia dichotomy had some basis, to the degree that it identified different historical trajectories and distinct forms of social organization, something emphasized in virtually all sixteenth-century sources.<sup>5</sup> Laying out his first impressions of the Indians of Brazil, the Jesuit missionary Father Manuel da Nóbrega portrayed the Tapuia in vague terms: “There is in these lands a sort of people who do not live in houses, but in the hills, and they are at war with all and by all are feared.”<sup>6</sup> Gabriel Soares de Sousa, referring to the Gê-speaking Guaianá of

São Paulo, emphasized in a more detailed fashion the apparent backwardness of these Indians relative to the Tupi:

They are people of little work, much leisure, they do not work the land, they live from the game they kill and the fish they take from the rivers, and from the wild fruits that the forest provides; they are great archers and enemies of human flesh. . . These heathens do not live in villages with fixed homes, like their neighbors the Tamoio [Tupinambá], but in caves in the countryside, beneath the ground, where they keep fires night and day and make their beds of branches and the skins of the animals they kill.<sup>7</sup>

These superficial and incomplete images of Tapuia groups contrast with more elaborate descriptions of Tupi societies. As we shall see in greater detail, these differences – real or imagined – played an important role in Euro-indigenous relations as they unfolded with the arrival of the whites. Whether manifested peacefully or contentiously, the coexistence of radically divergent forms of social organization was apparent in every part of Brazil in the sixteenth century. The region encompassed by the captaincy of São Vicente was no exception, though the identity of the original inhabitants of the place where the town of São Paulo was founded has aroused some controversy. There, alongside one another, lived Tupinikin and Guaianá, the former Tupi-speaking and the latter Gê-speaking, thus neatly fitting the dichotomous Tupi–Tapuia scheme. We have already invoked Gabriel Soares de Sousa’s observations of the Guaianá; to these we can add the comments of one of the most direct observers of the situation, Hans Staden, a German adventurer who was held captive by a Tupi-speaking group. He clearly distinguished the Guaianá from the Tupinikin, describing them as inhabitants of the coastal escarpment, who “do not have permanent homes, like the other savages,” and identifying hunting and gathering as their basic source of sustenance.<sup>8</sup>

In fact, most sixteenth-century reports make it clear that the Tupinikin constituted the principal inhabitants of the captaincy of São Vicente, at least until the last decade of the century.<sup>9</sup> While present on the coast, the Tupinikin – “whose region extends eighty miles into the interior and forty along the coast,” according to Staden<sup>10</sup> – maintained an important network of villages above the coastal escarpment that the Portuguese would call the Serra do Mar, around the site of what would become the town of São Paulo.

Early sources use ethnic terms to identify what may be considered tribal agglomerations, but the basic unit of social and political organization among Tupi groups was the multi-family village. Different communities could have very close relations, bound by alliances or kinship ties, without these relations involving the development of larger political or territorial units.<sup>11</sup> In effect, connections between local units were subject to constant

changes stemming from historical circumstances, as frequent shifts in the makeup of alliances affected the nature and extent of multi-village bonds. This mutability escaped the attention of colonial-era chroniclers, who described groups of villages as if they formed larger, more stable political groupings.

Unfortunately, contemporary accounts tell us little about the number and size of sixteenth-century Tupinikin villages.<sup>12</sup> It would seem, however, that the principal Tupinikin settlement at the time of the arrival of the Europeans was the one headed by the chief Tibiriçá, certainly the most influential indigenous leader of the region. In the 1550s, this village – known as Inhapuambuçu and, perhaps, as Piratininga as well<sup>13</sup> – would be host to the chapel and precarious College of São Paulo de Piratininga, installed by the Jesuits on January 25, 1554. Another important village of the period was Jerubatuba, under the chieftainship of Caiubi, supposedly Tibiriçá's brother. It was located about 12 kilometers south of Inhapuambuçu, near the future settlement of Santo Amaro. In 1553, the German adventurer Ulrich Schmidl, having spent a few days in the village, described it as “a very large place.”<sup>14</sup> Finally, a third village that stood out in sixteenth-century reports, Ururá, also had as its chief a brother of Tibiriçá, named Piquerobi. Located 6 kilometers to the east of Inhapuambuçu, this settlement became the site of the Jesuit mission village of São Miguel.

We have little information about the size of these precolonial units, but from what can be ascertained from post-contact accounts, Tupinikin villages may have been smaller than their Tupinambá counterparts in Rio de Janeiro, Bahia, and Maranhão, according to the detailed descriptions of French and Portuguese chroniclers and missionaries. Referring to the interior of the captaincy of São Vicente, Father Diogo Jacomé mentioned the existence of some villages with four hundred souls each.<sup>15</sup> His fellow Jesuit, Brother José de Anchieta, affirmed that each village “consists just of six or seven homes,” which for Hans Staden would be a “small village.”<sup>16</sup> These observations contrast with the population size frequently attributed to Tupinambá villages, estimated at around 800 to 1,000 inhabitants, though some awestruck chroniclers arrived at figures in the thousands.<sup>17</sup>

In any case, what is known for certain is that these villages did not constitute permanent, fixed settlements, for after a few years groups tended to move to a new locale. In the plateau region, the first Jesuits alleged that migrations occurred every three or four years, while other accounts suggest longer spans of time between moves, of twelve or even twenty years. Already in the initial period of Jesuit influence, in 1557, Inhapuambuçu and Jerubatuba were experiencing a process of fragmentation. “What is worse,” commented Father Luís da Grã, “is that they do not go together.”<sup>18</sup>