

Chapter 9

Hidden Histories

Frontier Situations and Indigenous Agency

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The unit of social analysis we call the nation, with all the cultural assets exalting and dignifying it, is ensured in violent processes of the submission of differences and the systematic and routine eradication of heterogeneities and autonomies. The facts and characters involved in these processes are objects of strong social control, which present themselves to succeeding generations in a ritualized manner, invariably institutionalized in certain forms of perception and narrativities.

In parallel, constructed memories are consistently accompanied by forms of forgetfulness that penetrate the minds of citizens through the most varied and diaphanous forms, even though they have never consciously learned and used such accounts. The construction of national identities thus operates by characterizing certain regions as internal borders versus frontiers, instituting certain social groups as the “others,” re-elaborating the past with the systematic exclusion and re-semanticization of historical facts, processes by which distinctions are made, and protagonists are transformed into uniquely distinct characters.

In this text, I focus on indigenous peoples and different boundary situations in reference to Brazil, in light of data produced through my own investigations (Pacheco de Oliveira, 2016) and the work of fellow historians, geographers, and anthropologists. I believe that national self-representations constitute strategic access routes for indigenous peoples and the Amazon as they confront historical process and social practices active therein. This frame allows us to identify the form of forgetting that in a sense distinguishes the country, as well as the conflicts and forms of resistance emerging with great constancy.

The elaboration of the first systematic historical account of Brazil, written by Francisco Adolpho de Varnhagen in 1854, laid the foundation for reflecting on the relationship between the nation and its indigenous populations. At this time, Brazil was considered essentially a project and creation of the

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Portuguese. Varnhagen's central concern was to highlight the elements of continuity with the institutions, doctrines, and meanings encountered in the life of the mother country.

The Portuguese heritage was what explained the political, geographical, and cultural unity of the country, together with the forms of governance that accompanied the process of independence and the construction of the principal national institutions. The violence of colonial action was omitted or minimized and persistently justified. Of special relevance, the *Indians*¹ were always described negatively—as cruel, primitive, bellicose, and unproductive—and their actions were narrated as devoid of rationality and morality.

Thus, in the historical reconstitution that Varnhagen undertook, relying on official documents and administrative sources, the Indians merely constituted an obstacle to the creation of the colony. In the accounts contained therein, invariably it was the Indians who attacked farms and cities, killing the settlers and destroying the goods and wealth that they had created. The destruction of villages, the extermination of entire collectivities, enslavement, and the compulsory displacement of others, were seen as integral to “just wars,” which were presented as pedagogical and humanitarian activities (catechesis) that were part of a so-called civilizing project.

What is more, this ideologically biased reading of history was reflected not only in the relationships between Europeans and indigenous peoples, but also other aspects of Varnhagen's comprehension of socioeconomic formation. For example, the poorly investigated complexity of the social fabric of the colony, which besides Portuguese and Indians, also included different categorizations of mixed races (*mamelucos*, *cafuzos*, *caborés*, and *curibocas*). Likewise, the enormous differences in the potential of the regions resulted in very different forms of indigenous incorporation, not a homogeneous treatment nor the establishment of a unilinear history. Conflicts with other European powers, like those that occurred with the French and Dutch invasions and in questions regarding the limits of Spanish America, meant the Indians were sought out as important allies. Likewise, the constant riots, rebellions, and attempts at secession, in which Indians and other segments of the population were implicated, were approached superficially and simplistically, as mere curiosities and exoticisms.

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND RECURRENT RACISM

In his massive documentary research and in the writing of his work, Varnhagen followed the directives outlined by the naturalist Carl Friedrich Philipp von Martius (1845), whose monograph won the contest promoted by the Historical and Geographical Institute of Brazil (IHGB), in 1840, entitled

“how one should write the history of Brazil.” Although the recommendation contained within the contest was that the nation should be described as the result of the mixture of three races—European, African, and indigenous—equality of treatment has never been afforded to each of them, whether regarding attention to the presentation and recording of data, or in the interpretation of the facts. In effect, though in very different forms, Indians and blacks were always treated along clear racist and prejudiced paths, the former as merely part of an expanding frontier whose inhabitants were deprived of rights as a matter of principle, that is, seen as clear enemies; the latter because they lived under the legal condition of slaves, were treated as simple commodities.

Thus, there is an outrageous negation, persistently repeated and naturalized in important interpretations on Brazil, regarding the participation of indigenous peoples.² From the first great synthesis elaborated by Varnhagen in the mid-nineteenth century to the twentieth century Marxist historians, the indigenous presence in the formation of nationality is treated as an exoticism, the outcome of interactions of chance, minor incidents, and picturesque report circumscribed by in large to its cultural dimension. From Catholic monarchism, slavery, and conservatism to investigations into the formation of the working class, what has remained secondary in such narratives and interpretive panels is the ethnic and racial diversity of the country.

Paradoxically, this logic continues to exist well into the twenty-first century. There is little point in adopting a liberal or socialist ideology, or in using sophisticated scientific categories, if the majority of the interpretations about Brazil continue to ignore the specificity of the process of national formation and persist in reading the history of the country within exclusively Eurocentric parameters.

To better clarify some of the many paradoxes that these national historical accounts continue to pose, we need to incorporate the autochthonous populations and their impacts on the configuration of young nations as the objects of investigation. This means we need to stop reproducing a naive and ethnocentric account of the expansion of Europe and its institutions and beliefs, which treat the colonial worlds as if they were merely a chapter of the “universal” history of the West. History thus written only reflects the perspective of those who affirmed themselves as the colonizers and their heirs, never the perspectives of the autochthones and those who were transformed into subalterns.

IMAGES OF THE COUNTRY AND ITS BORDERS

National self-representations express recurrent modes of thinking from the beginning of the young new country regarding the configuration of its regions and the social types that could be encountered therein, images that we should

treat analytically and critically. These self-representations have a huge impact on the framing of patterns of citizenship and morality, as well as on the performance of cultural and artistic activities, including the configuration of the future *métier* of historians, geographers, and anthropologists.

The famous painting by Victor Meirelles, the *Primeira Missa no Brasil* [First Mass in Brazil], based on a letter from the fleet's scribe, Pero Vaz de Caminha, depicts the arrival of Pedro Álvares Cabral's fleet (see figure 9.1). It was painted in Paris and in 1861, and was received at Rio de Janeiro with great pomp and circumstance. Much celebrated in the Second Reign (1840–1889), it soon became the official image of the country's emergence, and was reproduced repeatedly on text-books and even on printed money. It is Brazil's strongest self-representation, inculcated by schools and naturalized by the entire literate population.

In it, the Indians neither are the protagonists of History, at most they are unconscious witnesses, akin to the trees and animals, nor express any concern about their own destiny. As suggested by the painting, they seem to merge with nature, slowly losing their contours, in a sort of vegetable death, slow,

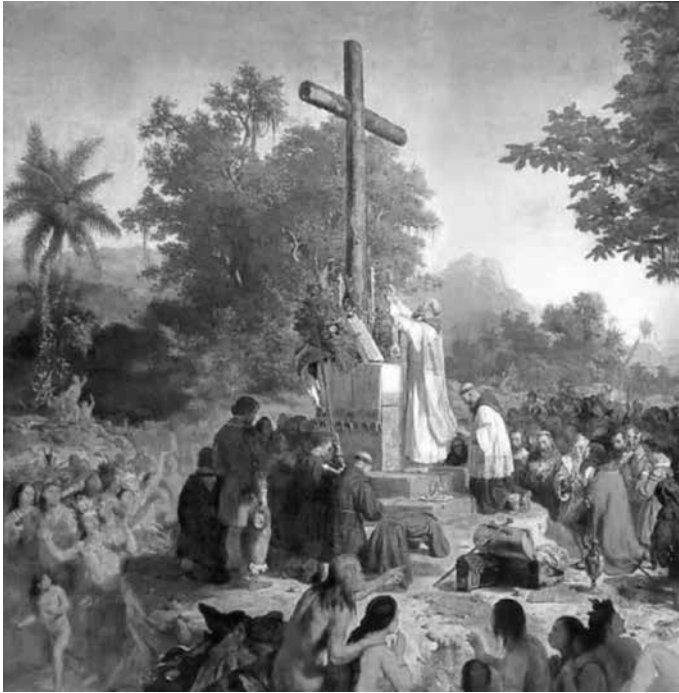


Figure 9.1 *Primeira Missa no Brasil* (First Mass in Brazil). Source: Victor Meirelles, 1861.



Figure 9.2 *A Conquista do Amazonas (The Conquest of the Amazon)*. Source: Antonio Parreira, 1906.

painless, and inexorable. For the public, the conclusion is obvious and molds deep certainties—the Brazilian nation is to be constructed essentially by Europeans, and by them alone, establishing farms, churches, roads, and cities. Years later, in the twentieth century and under the Republic, this canvas was hailed by Capistrano de Abreu, a prominent historian and influential intellectual, as the legitimate “birth certificate of Brazil.”

Nothing similar exists about the imagined views of the constitution of the Amazon. Yet, an attempt to create an equally celebratory image of the conquest of the Amazon through painting led the Governor of Pará, at the turn of the twentieth century, to involve in soliciting a work of art to be produced by the artist Antonio Parreira, which would also become an emblematic pictorial element (figure 9.2).

However, in contrast to what transpired in the work referring to colonial Brazil, Parreira’s painting does not express an idealized image of colonization. Light strikes the naked image of an Indian woman, to whom the gazes of whites turn devouringly. Far from celebrating a pact for the formation of a colony or a nation, what the painter insinuates to his public is an explanation of the fragility of colonization and the specific, predatory ends that drove its agents. The lofty ideals of religious conversion and the imperial political project seem to be submerged in an image of exploitation and prey.

The difference in the representation of how the two Portuguese colonies in America (that of costal Brazil and the Amazon) were integrated into the process of constructing a history and a national image was already rooted in the preceding colonial history itself. The Portuguese administration instituted them in different overseas colonies, with very different economic and socio-cultural configurations and temporalities.

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In the Brazilian colony, the sites occupied by Europeans began as fortifications and strongholds housing commercial enclaves expanding into the *sertões* [backlands] with the implantation of mills and plantations. Beyond these protected areas came the farms for extensive cattle breeding. Olinda, Recife, Salvador, and Rio de Janeiro, among others, were cities that followed this political and architectural strategy, and in some respects differed little from medieval cities.

In contrast, the exploration of the Amazon proceeded mainly by waterways and occasional expeditions that favored extractivist activities, which were temporary in nature, materialized into expeditions to collect *drogas do sertão* (extractive products, dried fish, turtles, etc.). Almost all of this production was focused on export so that it did not necessarily assume the establishment of forts and urban centers in the interior of the country. Occupation of the interior occurred only through the implantation of missionary settlements, productive units that were solely dependent on indigenous labor and, therefore, on their acceptance of religious conversion and the work of foreign religious agents.

The fundamental economic factor for the occupation of Amazonia, both for the extractive expeditions and the establishment of missionary settlements, was indigenous labor, called “red gold” by Father Antonio Vieira, upon which the entire wealth of the region was constructed (Hemming, 1978). It was the search for and control over this essential factor of production, for which no other successful alternative was created until the 1870s, that the settlers, the religious orders and official authorities, established fierce disputes to impose their respective and mutual interests.

Against the idealizing self-representations echoing the belief in the centrality and protagonism of the white man, the current researcher must rather reassemble the past in another fashion, one that seeks to understand the emergence of wealth-generating structures based on inequality and territorial expansion. Indigenous slavery, which preceded the importation of African slaves, is thus shown to be fundamental to the establishment of this Portuguese colony of exploitation in South America, and institution that intimately and inexorably associated the production of wealth with genocide, territorial expropriation, the destruction of environmental resources, and varying modalities of coerced labor (temporary slavery, patronage, and tutelage).

If we were to search the colonial archives for images closer to what this “birth” might have been, surely Jean-Baptiste Debret’s engraving, entitled *Família Guarani Aprisionada por Soldados Mamelucos* [Guarani family enslaved by mameluco soldiers], is much more suggestive (figure 9.3). The transformation of the autochthonous population, once free and autonomous into subalterns, an intrinsic violent and arbitrary foundational act, was the answer to dominant economic interests. This was so with the appropriation



Figure 9.3 *Familia Guarani Aprisionada por Soldados Mamelucos* (Guarani Family Enslaved by Mestizo Soldiers). Source: Jean-Baptiste Debret, 1830.

of land inhabited by the Indians and the compulsory acquisition of labor, articulated with the multi-ethnic formation of the Brazilian family, the consolidation of the ruling class, and the structures of government. This transformation never dispensed with a process of genocide—euphemistically called “pacification”—which corresponded to the fabrication of a permanent state of war that, in practice, justified the complete denial of any rights to the autochthonous population.

FRONTIER SITUATIONS

It is important to remember that, in Brazil, national formation was not achieved through the homogenizing structures of a republic, but rather the creation of an empire that articulated large regional heterogeneities, coexisting with a long period of legalized slavery and the strong and official presence of the clergy in politics and administration. Together this conferred a very conservative and authoritarian character to young nation, much like the ways in which Enlightenment itself was conceived in Portugal, something that in no way resembles republican Jacobinism.

Immense regions that are currently part of the political map of the country were far removed from the economic and sociocultural life of the nation even four centuries after the so-called “discovery.” Isolated from each other, they constituted potential boundaries, internal colonies, which at different times were the object of distinct forms of exploitation.

Although historians and sociologists of the past followed the representations of the ruling elite, who thought of such regions as “demographic voids,” the current research of anthropologists shows that extensive and distinct indigenous peoples inhabited these places, regularly and permanently, while maintaining control over these territories and continuing to develop their cultural practices in conditions of relative autonomy.

Such was the case in the southern provinces, with the Kaingang Indians; in northern Minas Gerais, with the Botocudos and Xacriabás; in southern Bahia, with the Pataxós and Tupinambás; in the central-west region, with peoples of the Ge tongue; on the borders of the Chaco region, with the Terenas, Kadiwéus, and Guaranis; in Mato Grosso, the Apiakás and Parecis stand out; and finally in the immense Amazon valley dozens of peoples formed a mosaic of languages and cultures. Certain areas where resistance was stronger were found in Amazonas, Mato Grosso, Maranhão, and Roraima, such as those inhabited by the Muras, Mundurukus, Crichanás, Xavantes, Teneteharas, and Makuxis, respectively.

The pace of occupation of the interior regions of Brazil was very slow even beyond the Amazon. In the Atlas of the Empire of Brazil (figure 9.4), produced in 1868 by Cândido Mendes de Almeida, the state of São Paulo consists of twenty-six counties, twenty-five of which are carefully identified as the municipal headquarters, towns, parishes, and the European colonies located within them. In the last, Itapeva, which extended over more than half of the state, there was no sign of Brazilian presence and a legend reads: “Lands occupied by ferocious Indians.” This is in São Paulo, the province next to the Court and only 150 years ago!

A map (included here as figure 9.5) by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) shows that 100 years after Independence, in 1920, moving away from the coastal strip, the population density of Brazil remained extremely low; in the vast majority of the interior it was of 0.5 inhabitants per square kilometer.

By virtue of this broad spatial dispersion (south, east, central-west, north-east, and Amazon), its inordinate ecological and cultural diversity, as well as the continental dimension of the young nation, the processes of conquest occurred at different moments in history, which were not always undertaken for the same economic reasons and were subject to distinct political formats. For this reason, we feel it is not possible or indeed meaningful to write a history of the Indians in Brazil, but rather explore the multiplicity of forms and temporalities that the relationships between indigenous peoples and Brazilian society have come to assume.

The war declared on the Botocudos of Minas Gerais and Espírito Santo, as well as the Kaingang people and others who occupied the fields of Guarapuava, in Paraná, occurred in the first twenty years of the nineteenth

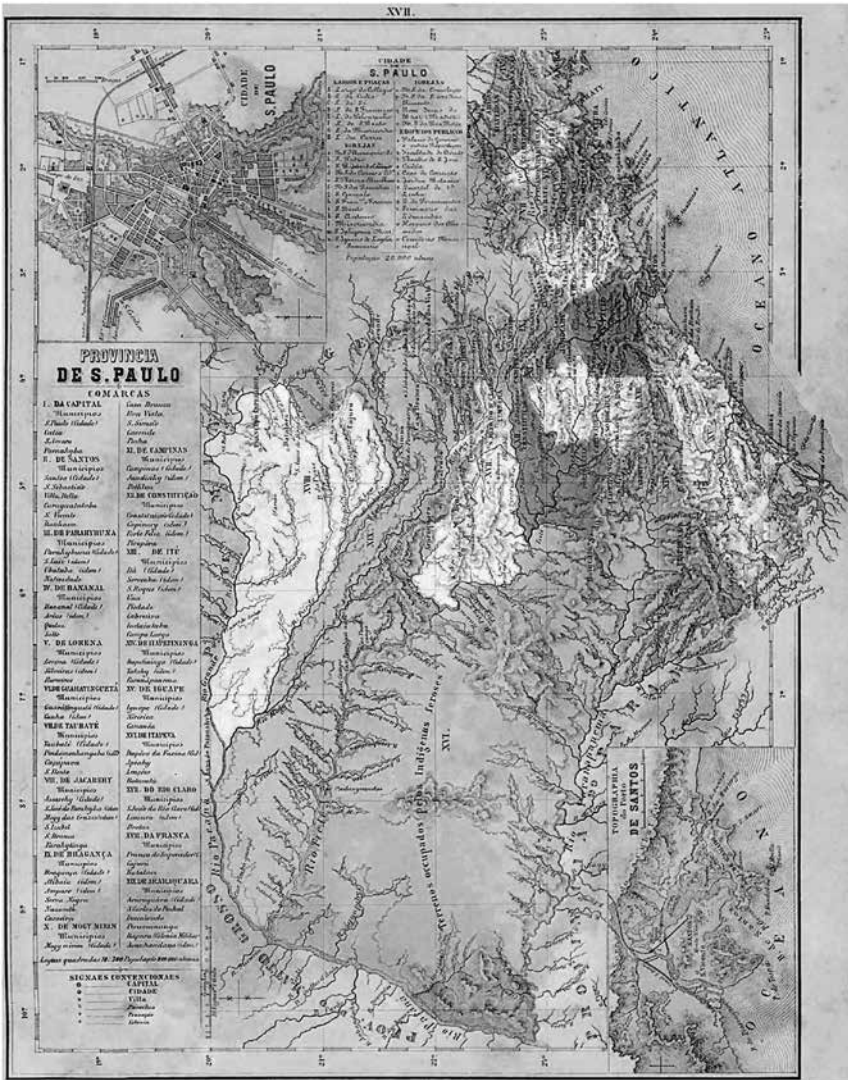


Figure 9.4 Atlas of the Empire of Brazil. Source: 1868.

century, beginning before independence in 1822. The religious missions deployed in the second half of the nineteenth century in various regions of the country (Amazonas, Maranhão, Bahia, Minas Gerais, Paraná States) were the spearheads of the colonists and *grileiros* [lit. land-grabbers], who stole indigenous territories. Extermination actions in the south against the Kaingang and Xokleng, carried out by *bugreiros* (Indian hunters) paid by

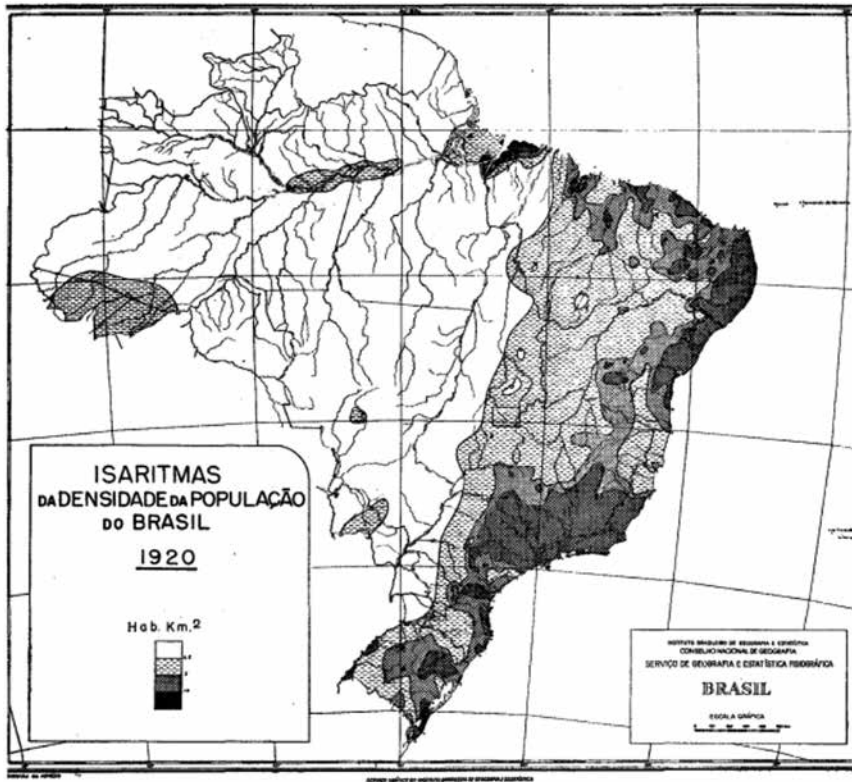


Figure 9.5 Population Density. Source: 1920.

farmers and settlers, extended until the first few decades of the twentieth century, as did similar actions in Mato Grosso against the Terenas and Guaranis (see table 9.1).

The conquest of the Amazon valley, reaching the most isolated areas, inhabited by “wild Indians,” implied the extermination of indigenous peoples and communities in unknown numbers. This was carried out by rubber tappers during the expansion of rubber production in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, especially between 1872 and 1911, and in the almost complete absence of the Brazilian state, a social process led by international markets and German, English, and North Americans banks.

The common fact, however, is that none of these conflicts were ever considered as important episodes in the life of the nation, but rather as strictly local events, supposedly devoid of major political or economic repercussions. Recurrent accounts of events involved the “surprise” of travelers and explorers who still encountered “wild Indians” in the nation’s interior. In most

Table 9.1 Frontier Situations in Brazil

<i>Frontier Areas / Brazilian States</i>	<i>Indigenous Groups Involved</i>	<i>Period</i>	
North of Minas Gerais and Espírito Santo (agricultural colonization projects)	Botocudos, Kakriabá, Krenak, Maxakali	1808–1815	
Campos de Guarapuava (Paraná) (agricultural colonization projects)	Kaingangs	1808–1815	
West of São Paulo (coffee plantation farms)	Kaingang, Terenas, Kadiwéus	1868–1920	
Amazon Valley (rubber production) (Amazonas, Pará, Rondônia, Acre, Roraima)	(dozens of indigenous peoples)	1877–1920	
Center-South of Maranhão (ranchos)	Guajajaras, Timbiras	1890–1940	
South of Bahia (cocoa production)	Pataxós, Tupinambás	1910–1951	
Southern Region (immigrant settlement areas) (Paraná, Santa Catarina, Rio Grande do Sul)	Kaingans, Xokleng	1910–1940	
Central Region (ranchos) (Goiás, Mato Grosso, Pará)	Xavantes, Kayapós e Xinguanos	1945–1970	
Legal Amazon Region (hydropower dams, roads, colonization projects) (Pará, Amazonas, Rondônia, Acre)	(numerous indigenous groups)	1970–1990	AQ: 1945/1970 has been changed to 1945–1970, please confirm.

cases, the provincial authorities acted “pragmatically” in regards to the Indians who, echoing colonial chroniclers, were seen as an integral part of the “plagues” that “infested the *sertões*.” Along these lines, considered as equivalent to snakes, mosquitoes, and numerous diseases that were endemic therein, the Indians were to be quickly and silently exterminated, thus removed from the path of “progress.”

In the twentieth century, state intervention was conducted by a specific federal agency—the Indian Protection Service (SPI), followed by the National Indian Foundation (FUNAI)—which was driven by a protectionist and humanitarian ideology. During the “pacifications” of the Indians that the SPI promoted, the motto of its founder, Rondon, was “to die if need be, but never to kill.” Although it represented official policy regarding indigenous peoples, the effective presence of the SPI was only a factor in very special cases, when conflicts with indigenous peoples were repeatedly reported by the press and gained a high profile in public opinion.

The pacifications conducted by the SPI, with great prominence in the press and the cultural and political environment of the Republic, occurred mainly in Mato Grosso and Rondônia in the first two decades of the twentieth century, affecting the territories occupied by Bororos, Parecis, and Nambiquaras (Souza Lima, 1994). In turn, the indigenous peoples and territories of the Upper Xingu region and parts of Central Brazil were only actually incorporated into the country’s economic life in the 1940s and 1950s, together

with several other regions of Mato Grosso, Pará, and Rondônia. Numerous indigenous peoples from Pará, Maranhão, Rondônia, Acre, and Amazonia only came to be contacted and settled by FUNAI in the 1970s and 1980s, in mitigating actions against large population displacements and environmental interventions resulting from the opening of roads (Belém-Brasília, Marabá-Santarém, Manaus-Porto Velho, Cuiabá- Rio Branco), the installation of hydroelectric and transmission lines, as well as legal and illegal mining activities and logging.

THE TUTELARY REGIME

Tutelage cannot be described on the basis of self-representations of indigenists and government officials alone, but must be approached ethnographically, as a sociological phenomenon, as we have proposed in several works (Pacheco de Oliveira, 1988a, 1998b, 2016). It is an exercise in coercive mediation that is supported by laws, but above all by uses and customs, and engenders and reproduces an “internal other,” often in a biased and racist manner. The most varied forms of compulsory labor and modes of population confinement (ghettoization) are associated with the tutelary regime and the modes of construction of social group seen as the “internal others,” that is, they have none of the rights generally attributed to citizens.

The position of tutor provides not only actions of protection and assistance, but also acts of restriction of rights and interests, repressive actions easily explainable by pedagogical intentions and ethical exemplarity. The tutelary condition establishes a social space legitimized for economic and political games in which the tutor’s action oscillates between the interests attributed to the tutor and the counterpointing interests of circumstantial external agents.

Due to the diversity of forms of production and economic agents interested in indigenous territories, and the multiplicity of uses that could be attributed to indigenous labor, the exercise of tutelage assumes very distinct forms in the numerous regions that compose the country (Pacheco de Oliveira, 2016). The expansion of economic frontiers in the interior of the country did not involve disorderly and contradictory activities, but rather different adaptive experiences indirectly associated with political and ideological intermediations.

The radical polarity between Brazilian indigenist policy and that of other South American countries results largely from the intentional construction of a “showcase,” which refers more to legal-formal, aesthetic, and philosophical self-representations and classifications than to concrete practices occurring in the different regions of the country. Exterminating or “pacifying” Indians, or placing them under the tutelage and protection of the state, while they may seem to be wholly contradictory actions and ideologies from the point of view

of national self-representations, in the interior, they were often associated with the process of incorporation of indigenous territories.

When the occupation of the indigenous territories sought the implantation of highly profitable colonial enterprises, the extermination policy prevailed. This was the case with the arrival of Spaniards in search of precious metals in Mexico, the Caribbean islands, Colombia, and the Andes. In the 1880s, the newly created republics of Argentina and Chile, respectively, through the “Conquest of the Desert” and the “Battle of Temuco” (Briones, 2000; Lazzari, 2012; Pinto Rodrigues, 2003), used their armies to seize territories that were controlled by indigenous peoples and coveted by pastoral and agricultural enterprises.

In Brazil, given the important role that Indianism played in constructing a national identity, disseminating very positive representations of the Indians, in contrast to the Portuguese settlers, the expansion of frontiers could not happen in a similar manner. There were no wars and military campaigns against the Indians, and no official initiatives that directly involved extermination. However, the complete omission of government authorities allowed more than fifty indigenous peoples to be exterminated in the first half of the twentieth century.

And although the Indians were considered protected, the occupation of some frontiers was registered without any state presence, and extermination practices were freely conducted by private citizens. This was the case, for example, in the Amazon valley, during the “rushes” that occurred on rubber plantations (an activity inserted in an international financial network of native rubber production for North American industry), and in the south of the country with colonizing companies and European immigrants.

In other regions, where the potential for exploitation proved to be much lower or where other uses (above all geopolitical, in areas of international borders) were afforded the Indians, the policy of pacifying and protecting indigenous peoples through a state agency prevailed.

THE ORIGIN OF A FRONTIER

The generation of wealth in the colony, in the Empire, and the Republican eras, was never based on a closed economic system with limited resources and complementary (though antagonistic) roles in the production process. Surplus value is by no means the main factor of wealth generation in this society, where the holders of political power have never abandoned the so-called “primitive forms of accumulation,”³ routinely transforming the appropriation of resources that comprise the basis of the way of life of indigenous populations. Decreed as “free” lands that are occupied by existing

collectivities, considered “rudimentary” existing social practices, qualified as “criminals” who oppose you, these were recurrent arguments that justified the construction of an “internal other,” to whom the rules that govern the coexistence between the other citizens do not apply.

A frontier is created whenever powerful groups of a nation associate to abolish the rights of another regarding the riches they possess and that they use for their reproduction and socio-cultural continuity. The present frontiers’ situations in Brazil are not only located in the Amazon region, but can be found in the coastal strip of the northeast, where indigenous peoples and *quilombola* communities are being expelled from their former territories by large tourist and port enterprises, and where marginalized populations are being removed from valued areas in the peripheries of large cities.

As I have already observed in an article on the Amazon written several decades ago (1979), there are no natural frontiers, frontiers are political creations resulting from economic potentials activated by games of scale and structures of power. Approaching a nation from the point of view of frontiers is not to identify successive modes of production over time, but to seek to understand the complex process of the denial of rights, the construction of alterities and the exercise of tutelage that contributed to their formation and individuality in the most diverse manifestations of social life.

FINAL REMARKS

A large part of the university public and even Brazilian social scientists still consider the Indian to be a segment of the population with no demographic expression or major economic and political implications. They do not realize the importance that the Indian had and has in the country’s recent history, as an inhabitant of the frontier situations in which the Brazilian economy came to exhibit its highest growth rates. This is the current situation of agribusiness and the production of riches for export (soybean, meat, and derivatives) that consider indigenous lands and areas pertaining to *quilombolas* and traditional populations as the main obstacle to national development.

Thus, the powerful ruralist faction established in 2015, in parallel with the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff, a parliamentary commission of inquiry (PCI) to investigate the actions of INCRA (National Institute of Colonization and Agrarian Reform) and FUNAI in demarcations deemed wrong and fraudulent. In addition to these public agencies, the Brazilian Association of Anthropology (ABA) was violently attacked and investigated. In the final report, the PCI proposes the opening of criminal cases against important indigenous leaders and recommends the indictment of

twenty-seven anthropologists who collaborated in conducting technical studies and producing expert reports.

What I want to propose here is another reading of the place of indigenous peoples and the frontier in the history of Brazil, seeking to write a kind of “history against the grain” (Benjamin) that helps to implode a vicious narrative structure unable to escape the self-representations of the elites and a merely legal-administrative history. There is an immense work to be done by the new generation of historians, geographers, and anthropologists. We must reread sources and historians of the past not as holograms, but as narratives engendered by social actors of their own time, since authors (as Pierre Bourdieu reminds us) have always written for their contemporaries. It is fundamental to investigate how only partial and fragmentary versions are consolidated in “historical truths,” whose circulation and appreciation are carefully scrutinized by hierarchical, though sometimes contradictory, networks of institutions and powers.

The map of a country needs to be treated as a cognitive construction articulated with multiple interests, particularly from economically and politically dominant sectors, implying in parallel the exclusion of other views and projects (see Tomas Paoliello’s recent doctoral thesis on the formation of the IBGE and geography itself as a university discipline). The traditional “colonial archives,” full of lacunae and paradoxes, are susceptible to radically new readings, and need to be exposed to the memory records of the subalternized populations themselves, as well as to current political scrutiny.

We can no longer be just ethnographers in the “classical” sense, that is by limiting our investigative tools to the profile of an anthropology produced in a colonial context and with the deliberate erasure of its conditions of existence. This type of cognitive project engendered a peculiar form of sociocultural existence found in museums and in ethnological literature that is relativizing but also frozen and arbitrary and which could be conveniently grasped out of history, as criticized by Fabian (1982).

By refusing ethnography and ethnological theory to take as the object of the concrete forms in which indigenous collectivities have survived genocide and try to resist the multiple mechanisms of domination and subalternization—which aim to transform them into mere objects of administration—hegemonic and nonindigenous intellectuals decreed a kind of self-amnesty regarding the violent aspects of colonization, imposing an ethnographic invisibility of tutelage and transforming relativism into a unique tool of its ideological horizon.

Tacitly accepting the conditions of research conducted in a colonial context, ethnographers avoided investigating the processes of domination suffered by the Indians. They took sociocultural manifestations as if Indians proceeded from a permanent and immutable essence, completely immune to

local relations and concrete political contexts, which in current idioms have been called “native ontologies” or even “cannibalistic metaphysics.” Such anthropology is equally incapable of understanding how the indigenous peoples came to accept themselves as holders of rights, who are actively pursuing forms of empowerment and other forms of citizenship in the construction of nation-states.

NOTES

1. The appealing “Indian” is often used to refer to members of autochthonous communities, thus attributing a false and artificial unity to the native populations that preceded the arrival of Europeans in America. All persons thus classified are subject to special legislation (Law 6,001/1973 and Federal Constitution 1988). Indigenous leaders and intellectuals generally question this call and prefer to talk about themselves as “indigenous” by specifying to which people or ethnic group they belong.

2. The same could be said on Afro-Brazilians’ studies until about sixty or seventy years ago. The work of sociologists, research into and studies on the African diaspora, and above all, the presence of intellectuals and black movements in the cultural and political life of the country has significantly changed this.

3. See Meillassoux (1973) and more recently Dorre (2010) and Mezzadra (2011) for thinking on primitive accumulation not as a circumscribed historical fact, but as a secondary form of exploitation, integrated with the economic and social reproduction of a social formation.

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