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## 500 Years of Native Brazilian History

John M. Monteiro <sup>1</sup>

During his visit to Brazil in 1980, Pope John Paul II was taken by surprise (among the so many things that surprised him in that country) by the bold words of a young Guarani Indian leader named Marçal Tupã-y: *“They say that Brazil was discovered, but Brazil most certainly was not discovered, Holy Father, Brazil was invaded and stolen from the Indians. That is the true story. The true history of our people has never been told, Holy Father”* (CEDI, 1981:53).

Twenty years later, in April, 2000, as Brazilians celebrate 500 years of Pedro Álvares Cabral’s arrival on the coast of South America, the history of indigenous populations still remains largely ignored. Actually, many people are commemorating, but a significant part of the country’s academic community, along with political, social and ethnic movements feel that there is nothing to celebrate. After all, the arrival of the Portuguese also introduced a profound disruption, which led to the relatively rapid depopulation of the coastal peoples. In a more general sense, the anticelebrationists argue that European expansion brutalized and destroyed native populations, while mercilessly forcing millions of Africans to serve as slaves. In other words, rather than the construction of a nation through the peaceful, harmonious mixture of the “three races” – a theme insisted upon by Globo television campaigns and which also appeared during the recent Carnival representations – one finds a sad record of organized violence and exclusion, which remains present to this day.

In effect, both sides of this discussion propose readings of Brazilian history that do little justice to the rich and varied historical experience of indigenous populations, which, paradoxically, are once again in the spotlight because of the quincentennial. The celebrationists remain true to one of the main foundational myths developed in nineteenth-century Brazilian historiography, which involves the idea that Brazil was discovered and then colonized. Very few historians ever even mention the word “conquest”, as if the native populations were simply a part of nature, yielding to the progressive waves of colonization that first occupied the coast, then cutting deep paths into the interior. The anticelebrationists

commit two crucial errors, in my view. First they are wrong to focus on the casual discovery as the breaking point between a peaceful, nature-loving existence and the brutal extermination of native peoples. As I will argue here, there was a considerable space of time between the fortuitous landing in April 1500, which was ascribed very little importance by the Portuguese until decades later, and the actual development of conquest strategies and a conquest mentality. The second oversight by the anticelibrationists is more serious: they tend to reduce all Indian peoples to the role of harmless victims, whose only role in history was a senseless and futile resistance to defend their tribal lands against invaders who were ultimately invincible. This article places this discussion in a different light, in an effort to show that indigenous history has as much to do with the strategies and actions of native peoples as it does with the kinds of representations and expectations developed by colonial interests.

## **Discovery and Invention of the Indians <sup>2</sup>**

Though the Portuguese first encountered indigenous peoples on the east coast of South America in 1500, the first more comprehensive accounts of native sociodiversity did not appear until the second half of the sixteenth century. Brazilian historians, however, tend to project back to 1500 – the emblematic, eve-of-conquest date – a portrait of indigenous diversity and interethnic relations actually produced at a much later date, reflecting the deep transformations that had already affected many of the coastal societies. Not unlike other historiographical traditions in the Americas, the early accounts were written by actual observers and interpreted by latter-day historians to convey a static and permanent image of pristine societies as if they had been untouched by contact with Europeans. At the same time, this approach tends to elide the role of indigenous polities and actors in their response to European expansion, which played an important part in shaping the kinds of ethnic configurations that have been passed down generation after generation as “original” and timeless, only to be upset, dilapidated, and, finally, destroyed by Western colonialism. <sup>3</sup>

While the gap between early contact and later descriptions must be taken into account, we must consider another temporal gap as well. With the exception of Pero de Magalhães Gândavo’s summary *História da Província de Santa Cruz*, published in Lisbon in 1576, and various Jesuit letters widely disseminated throughout Europe in several languages, the most important early Portuguese writings remained unpublished for centuries. This was certainly the case of Gabriel Soares de Sousa’s rich

descriptive treatise of 1587, considered by many to be the single most important sixteenth-century account, which circulated in multiple manuscript copies and probably did not have a great deal of influence before it was finally published the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, the *Tratado Descritivo*, as it came to be known, provides a clear guide to the accumulated perceptions and to the kinds of images that were developing with regard to the vast, varied, and largely incomprehensible indigenous universe during this crucial period in Portuguese-indigenous relations.<sup>4</sup>

Born in Portugal in the mid-sixteenth century, Gabriel Soares de Sousa set off for the Indies in 1569, possibly headed for the fabled Monomotapa mines in East Africa, in the powerful fleet commanded by former governor of India Francisco Barreto. For reasons unknown, Soares de Sousa remained in Salvador when the fleet called there, rather than going on to the Estado da Índia, where other talented writers of his generation went. He and his brother João Coelho de Sousa settled in Brazil, and he soon established a sugar mill along the Jiquiriçá River, near Jaguaripe, an expanding new plantation zone to the south of the Recôncavo. After inheriting charts of the hinterland and a few precious stones left by his deceased brother, fueled by the dream of discovering mines and probably informed by the constant slaving expeditions that headed for the Orobó hills during the 1570s and 80s, Soares de Sousa set out for Philip II's (Philip I of Portugal) court in 1586, hoping to secure royal favors and titles. Following a considerable waiting period, during which he rewrote his descriptive treatise, he finally received the lofty commission of Captain-Major and Governor of the Conquest and Discovery of the São Francisco River, involving a concession to seek and exploit silver mines in the interior. Upon his return to Brazil around 1591, Gabriel Soares de Sousa died shortly after setting out on an expedition, deep in the *sertão* near the headwaters of the Paraguaçu. His bones were taken back to Salvador, where they were buried in the Benedictine church under a tombstone that reads "Here lies a sinner", as he had stipulated in his will (Varnhagen in Sousa, 1971 [1587]:15-24; Rodrigues, 1979, 433-36).

Sugar, slavery, and overland exploration thus provided the setting for Gabriel Soares de Sousa's descriptive treatise on Bahia. Indeed, his writings reflected his deep experience in living with indigenous peoples, as plantation owner and as explorer, which constituted complementary activities in those times when the bulk of the slave population continued to be composed of Indians captured in the surrounding backlands (Schwartz, 1985:28-72). In addition to the slave population, Soares de Sousa also knew the mission Indians well, as they provided manpower for his

expeditions to the *sertão*, as well as occasional labor on the plantation. Therefore, most of the historical and descriptive information presented in his account derived from this specific colonial context, as his indigenous informants were in fact “colonial Indians”, so to speak. Soares de Sousa showed explicit concern for the quality of his information, as he declared that his description of the Tupinambá was based on “*information taken from the oldest Indians*” (Sousa, 1971 [1587], 299).

This revelation becomes all the more significant if we consider that an important part of his account on the Tupinambá is set in the tone of memory, as if this people’s integrity and independence were a thing of the past. Indeed, one of the author’s main narrative objectives was to justify Portuguese domination, placing it in an historical sequence of conquest cycles, beginning with the most ancient “heathen caste” – the Tapuia. At a certain point in the remote past, the Tapuia were expelled from the coast by the Tupinaé, a Tupi group, “*who came from the backlands in search of the reputed abundance of the land and sea of this province.*” After many generations, “when the Tupinambá learned of the greatness and fertility of this land,” this new group invaded the lands of the Tupinaé, “destroying their villages and fields, killing those who resisted, sparing no one, until they managed to expel the Tupinaé from the edge of the sea.” Concluding, Soares de Sousa wrote: “*Thus the Tupinambá have remained lords of this province of Bahia for many years, waging war against their enemies with great effort, until the arrival of the Portuguese; this information was taken from Tupinambás and Tupinaés, in whose memory these stories pass from generation to generation*” (Sousa, 1971 [1587], 299-300). Defeated, it seemed as though all the Tupinambá had left was the memory of their past greatness.

Written at a time of rapid and decisive transformations, which especially affected the native populations living in or near colonial settlements, Gabriel Soares de Sousa’s account of the Tupinambá sought to negotiate images of pre-colonial greatness and post-conquest decomposition. Based on information passed on by settled, enslaved, and Christianized Indians, these descriptions provide a sort of Tupinambá self-image filtered through the lens of a colonial situation that oppressed and destroyed these people. Nonetheless, establishing an example to be followed by ethnographers in the centuries to come, Soares de Sousa’s text sought to abstract the Tupinambá from this context, as if the Europeans had not encountered them. However, at the same time, his account contains many elements suggesting that this image of the Tupinambá, although reasserting pre-colonial traditions and structures, also had something to do with the very real conditions of colonial expansion. Thus the description of

Tupinambá lifeways and “customs” emerged from the colonial constructions made not only by the Portuguese but by the Tupinambá themselves. In a certain sense, then, his treatise stood apart from other sixteenth-century accounts that sought to project first-contact situations, which, according to Neil Whitehead, had more to do with the “self-representation of ‘discoverers’” or conquerors than the actual interaction between the author-observer and his native subjects.<sup>5</sup> Although he presented himself as a discoverer of uncharted lands and much desired mineral wealth, Soares de Sousa made it clear in his text that the Indians he was describing had been in contact with Europeans for quite some time.

Indeed, though apparently somewhat embarrassed, the author made this point more explicitly in dealing with the presence of *mameluco* mixed-bloods among the Tupinambá, recognizing that “*although that which this chapter contains may seem irrelevant, it seemed to be the decent thing to do in writing about this, in order to understand the Tupinambá’s nature and conditions better*” (Sousa, 1971 [1587]:331-32). A closer reading of this chapter, however, reveals one of the constant fears that colonial writers entertained with regard to miscegenation: Soares de Sousa seemed less concerned with the impact that the whites and their mixed descendants had on the Tupinambá than with the prospect that not only the *mamelucos* but also the whites themselves could become savages.

In seeking to “*understand the Tupinambá’s nature and conditions*” from this perspective, Soares de Sousa implicitly captured the need to recognize that indigenous peoples were caught up in an historical web, where the definition of separate identities proved both flexible and variable. The Potiguar, Tupinikin, Tememinó, and Tupinaé were all Tupinambá in a certain sense, but in the colonial context they clearly were not. Therefore, in order to understand this “indigenous Brazil”, one must first review the tendency followed by successive generations of chroniclers, historians, and ethnographers who sought to isolate, essentialize, and freeze indigenous populations into fixed, stable ethnic groups, as if the profile of ethnic differences we know today had already existed centuries before the discovery – or invention – of the Indians.

A long and intricate process, the invention of an indigenous Brazil involved the development of a broad repertoire of ethnic denominations and social categories capable of classifying and making comprehensible the rich array of languages and cultures previously unknown to the Europeans. More than that, the framework that emerged was to condition relations between Europeans and natives, not only because it informed Indian policy and legislation, but especially because it established a series of representations and expectations upon which these relations came to be

based. Hence, the new ethnic divisions described by colonial reports during the second half of the sixteenth century mirrored not only European desires and projections, but also the adjustments and aspirations of different native peoples who sought – each in his own way – to deal with the new challenges brought on by the advance of colonial domination.

### **Transformation of the Indians**

Current perspectives on the post-contact history of native peoples must take into account not only the historical processes affecting indigenous social, material, religious and symbolic organization but also how these same processes were conditioned by the actions and strategies adopted by indigenous actors. This may not seem to be a very remarkable discovery within the broader context of colonial studies – especially with regard to Spanish America – but the history of Indians in Brazil remains seriously undeveloped or, perhaps, paraphrasing Neil Whitehead’s comments on Amazonian historical studies, chronically underdeveloped (Whitehead, 1995:285). Part of the problem has to do with the fact that the bulk of ethnological studies have tended to isolate their subject as a discrete, separate universe, while historians have limited their narrative to a description of the destruction and disappearance of indigenous populations.

A different focus on ethnogenesis and historical identities allows us to rethink the history of Indians in Portuguese America, by establishing a dialogue with two quite different contexts. The first is current: it has to do with the emergence – or re-emergence – of ethnic groups thought to be extinct for a long time. This process, involving not only indigenous groups seeking to assert their “Indianness” but also Afro-Brazilian groups who claim the status of “quilombo descendants”, recently received an interesting treatment by anthropologist José Maurício Arruti (1998:28-50). According to this author, the emergence phenomenon involves “attributing new collective rights based on imagined historical continuities to groups of families who identified themselves before as rural workers”. These imagined historical continuities, however, stand in contrast to histories that are anything but continuous. Focussing on the Xocó Indians of Sergipe, Arruti shows how the inhabitants of a small rural community changed from Indians to *mestiços* to *remanescentes de índios* in three distinct moments, alternating between different criteria of social classification used by authorities as instruments of social control and intervention.

This “plasticity” of social classification and ethnic identification used by the official sphere is closely connected to the production of identities by the Xocó themselves – whether Indians or not – who began to

adopt an ethnic identity whose main references reside in their subaltern condition and are expressed basically in colonial terms. In this as well as among many other groups located mainly in the Northeast but also in every other part of the country – such as the recently “emergent” Kaxixó of Minas Gerais – the development of indigenous identities involves a complex play of images dealing with current and historical “otherness”. Here, the category “Indian” wavers between the effort to establish the authentic traces of a precolonial culture (as in the group’s name) and the manipulation of diacritical signs that express “Indianness” within a semantic field shared by Indians and non-Indians alike. Examples of these signs include the introduction of feathers and other ornaments “borrowed” from other sources, the expression of mystical or esoteric knowledge as an exclusively indigenous property, or the incorporation of rituals that have more to do with a regional repertoire than with a direct link to ethnic traditions.

Ethnogenesis, within this context, is not employed in its “primordial” sense, that is, it does not describe the historical emergence of a people who define themselves strictly in terms of their shared socio-cultural and linguistic heritage. Rather, it involves both a continuous process of mobilizing traces of identity as well as revisions of the past in order to establish a political “otherness”, one which is capable of supporting the actions and demands of these “new political subjects”.<sup>6</sup>

The second context of interest here refers to recent ethnohistorical explorations on the historically constructed identities of indigenous peoples in southeastern North America (Sider, 1994). In effect, this region provides an interesting case within a comparative scope, since there too we find an historical narrative focussing on depopulation and relocation, in contrast with a contemporary situation of ethnic regeneration. This suggestive discussion raises a series of challenges that can be helpful in reshaping our understanding of indigenous populations in colonial Portuguese America.

A first task that needs to be faced involves a reformulation of the radical discontinuity between pre-colonial and post-contact dynamics of social reproduction. We need to know more about devastating epidemics, spatial dislocations, changes in the form and meaning of warfare; all these factors contributed to fundamental transformations in indigenous societies. However, rather than focussing only on the dilapidation of native structures as a result of conquest – a term increasingly used to describe the early Brazilian “encounter” – it seems rather more interesting to analyze the emergence of different and divergent forms of indigenous society following contact. While obviously predicated on a certain structural continuity from



pre-contact times, at least three new social forms developed throughout the colonial period.

First, new ethnic and political configurations grew out of the different ways in which indigenous polities became engaged in the colonial project, whether as allies, enemies or even refugees. Involvement in colonial wars, inter-European rivalries or in the growing indigenous slave trade proved an important strategy for many groups seeking to maintain a good measure of political autonomy, paradoxically through their “collaboration” with advancing colonial powers. The phenomena of “ethnic soldiering”, for example, or of trade with indigenous brokers supplying slaves, involved far more than the manipulation of pre-colonial rivalries between ethnic groups, as early Brazilian historians would have us believe; rather, these processes often generated new sociopolitical units, defined by colonial observers in increasingly fixed, static terms.<sup>7</sup>

Second, the insertion of different indigenous groups within colonial society remains a key topic to be explored, especially considering the volume of untapped documentary evidence available in Brazilian and European archives, much of which focuses on questions relating to colonial missions, land and labor.<sup>8</sup> Although it seems unlikely that anyone will ever produce anything like “The Tupi under Portuguese Rule” – at least not on the same order of density as Charles Gibson on the Aztecs or Nancy Farriss on the Maya – new studies examining the role of indigenous political and spiritual leaders under the duress of colonial control begin to sketch a composite picture where Indians emerge as historical actors. This of course contrasts with the more conventional approach to indigenous actions, usually portrayed as predictable, collective reactions in unyielding defense of age-old traditions. Recent works have underscored the need to revise topics as diverse as the so-called spiritual conquest, Indian slavery, mission labor, and the Pombaline communities.<sup>9</sup>

Third, we must pay some attention to the new social categories that were constructed within the colonial space, especially the generic ethnic markers such as “*carijós*”, “*tapuios*” and even “*índios*”. While these new terms often reflected colonial strategies of social control and assimilation policies aimed at diluting ethnic diversity, they also became important references for the colonial indigenous population, who sought to forge new identities that not only stood in contrast to pre-colonial origins but also in contrast to emerging colonial ethnic groups and social conditions, especially with the rapid growth of the Atlantic slave trade, generating an increasingly visible African and creole black population. This probably led to an increasing stigmatization of Indians, defined as polar opposites to different sets of ethnic categories (whites, blacks, *mestiços*).

Finally, within all these new and divergent forms of social and political organization, the emergence of new indigenous leaders and the adoption of new strategies based on the creative interpretation of the historical circumstances surrounding them are points that need to be stressed. This perspective obviously stands in contrast to approaches that reduce indigenous resistance to a simple model of mechanistic reaction to European advances. One of the main challenges facing historians, then, is the need to identify and to attribute meaning to these kinds of strategies, often encrypted in documents and discourses difficult to access.

### **Agents of their Own History**

In a well known passage in Claude d'Abbeville's *History of the Capuchin Missions in Maranhão*, written in 1612, Tupinambá leader Japiaçu narrated the origins of the radical separation between Indians and whites:

*“We belonged to a single nation, ours and yours; but God, sometime after the deluge, dispatched his bearded prophets to teach us his laws. These prophets gave our father, from whom we descend, two swords, one made of wood and the other iron, allowing him to choose between them. He thought the iron sword was too heavy and chose the wooden one. Seeing this, the ancestor from whom you descend, who was more clever, took the iron sword. Ever since them, we have been miserable, because when the prophets saw that we did not want to believe in them, returned to the heavens, leaving their footprints inscribed with crosses in the rocks near Potiú” (Abbeville, 1975 [1612]:60-61).*

This interesting speech affords several possible interpretations. At first sight, it appears to transform the tragic history of contact into myth, offering a native explanation – within an indigenous narrative genre – for the subordinate condition experienced by the Tupinambá of Maranhão in the early seventeenth century. But perhaps the most revealing aspect lies in the displacement of the subject, since it was the actions of the Indian's ancestor that determined the march of history. Manuela Carneiro da Cunha, in her comment on this and other examples of myths focusing on the origins of whites, emphasizes the fact that *“in the myth, a choice is offered to the Indians, who rather than victims of some predestined force become agents determining their own fate. Perhaps they made the wrong choice. But at least they saved their dignity in having shaped their own history”* (Carneiro da Cunha, 1992:19).

However, it should be noted that post-contact choices always were conditioned by a series of factors set in motion with the arrival and expansion of Europeans in the Americas. The demographic catastrophe that deeply affected native societies, while closely associated with the Europeans' military, religious, and economic designs, left in its wake a desperate situation where fragmented societies became involved in an emerging colonial scenario. Facing increasingly unfavorable conditions, native leaders developed various responses, often adopting objects, strategies and discourses introduced by the colonizers. Hence native resistance, unlike the way in which it is usually portrayed, was not limited to the stubborn clinging to precolonial traditions, but rather gained force and meaning as indigenous leaders and societies opened themselves to innovation.

This characteristic of indigenous politics was not always recognized by European observers, who tended to portray the Indians who resisted as veritable savages, who by nature were openly hostile to the whites. Sebastião da Rocha Pita, author of a *History of Portuguese America*, published in 1730, expressed this view in a chapter on the Portuguese occupation of the *sertão* in Pernambuco, where he pointed that the landowners who had received grants measured in leagues, had to conquer that territory palm by palm, so great was the resistance put up by the barbarous heathen (Pita, 1976 [1730]). The flip side of this image involved Indians who collaborated with colonial projects. An interesting portrayal of this second stereotype can be found in a mid-eighteenth century document, probably penned by a Jesuit, listing 25 examples of "Famous Indians in Arms who contributed to the temporal and spiritual conquest of this State of Brazil". Headed by Dom Felipe Camarão, the list includes several leaders who, according to the author, dispel certain current notions about the Indian's supposed incapacity to act politically. "*From these and other similar cases*", wrote the anonymous priest, "*clearly we can infer that the Indians of our Lusitanian America are not as limited, crude, and undisciplined as ordinarily portrayed, where they are treated more like irrational wild beasts and brutes than as men capable of reason*".<sup>10</sup>

Among others, the author singled out "Pindobuçu, magnanimous, intrepid and brave who, wielding a wooden sword, threatened his own in order to maintain peace with the Portuguese and the favor of the Jesuit priests". He also mentioned "*Garcia de Sá, another famous preacher of the Faith, whose spirit resembled that of the Apostle of the Gentiles*". Or yet another Indian preacher: "*The celebrated Tacaranha, great friend of the missionaries who dressed in a long blue habit with a red cross embroidered on his breast*". In addition to their assistance in the

conversion field, the author also described the participation of Indians in other colonial activities, as in the dislocation of indigenous populations from the remote hinterland to the colonial settlements. For example, *“the famous Indian Arco Verde (Green Bow), who proved so zealous in his faith that he traveled 400 leagues into the wilderness in search of his kinsmen in order to bring them under the control of the Church and the priests, with little fear of his enemies, whom he defeated, placing them in retreat and killing many”*.

In effect, the author emphasized the collaborative role of these Indians. However, it seems clear that such activities involved much more than the mere manipulation of native leaders by colonial interests. Perhaps more to the point, these examples show how different indigenous subjects adopted some of the symbols and discourse of the Europeans, in order to forge their own space within the New World that was beginning to become delineated.

This same language can be found in the rebellious movements that opposed colonial rule. The Tupinambá of Maranhão, for example, in addition to the wooden swords, also used the written word in a conspiracy plotted by a leader named Amaro, who supposedly had been “raised” by the Jesuits in a Pernambuco mission. Brandishing a few Portuguese letters, Amaro pretended to read them to a large meeting of rebellious headmen, asserting that “the subject of these letters is that all the Tupinambá are to be enslaved”. According to colonial writer Bernardo Pereira de Berredo, *“this suggestion was so diabolical that it soon took hold of the brutality of so many barbarians, who agreed unanimously that they should kill all the whites”* (Berredo, 1989 [1749]).

Father Antônio Vieira, in his account of the Ibiapaba mission, also noted that rebellious Indians made use of writing in their efforts to negotiate peace with the Jesuits who were beginning to encroach on this “Geneva of the backlands”. One of the local leaders, Francisco, *“presented letters to the missionaries, which they brought from all the headmen, encased in calabashes sealed with wax, so that they would not be damaged when the bearers cross the rivers”*. Moreover, *“the priests were impressed when they saw that the letters were written on Venice paper, and closed with sealing wax from India”* (Vieira, 1992:139-40).

The written word, not unlike the wooden sword, became another alternative from which indigenous leaders could choose. While the myth presented at the beginning of this section appears to dislocate the critical action deciding the group’s fate to a remote past, the content of the narrative referred explicitly to the contemporary situation experienced by the Tupinambá. Japiaçu knew very well who his interlocutors were. After

all, the bearded prophets had returned, presenting new choices that were as challenging as the one presented to their ancestral father. It was at this crossroads, where tradition and innovation met face to face, that the history of the Indians was forged – and continues to be forged today – against the strong current of colonial expansion.

### **Concluding Remarks**

Nearly thirty years ago, Andean specialist Karen Spalding published an important article on the “Colonial Indian”, pointing out the rich possibilities facing a whole generation of Spanish American scholars. Far from the obstinately conservative figure, trapped in age-old traditions, and even father from the mere survivor of a grandiose culture that was disheveled and impoverished in the post-conquest transformation, this new “colonial Indian” was to play an active and creative role in response to the challenges posed by Iberian expansion (Spalding, 1974). While in a certain sense clinging to a deeply embedded cosmological horizon, native communities and their political and spiritual leaders developed an open dialogue with the new times, either appropriating or rejecting different things they had to offer. Spalding, of course, identified a process already under way in Latin American and Latin Americanist historiography at the time, which involved an abrupt shift that turned the floodlights away from the colonizers to shed light on the colonized. Indeed, an entire generation followed the pioneer footsteps of Miguel León-Portilla and Charles Gibson in attempting to characterize, document, and interpret the native experience under colonial rule.

In Brazil, historical studies focussing on indigenous peoples have lagged behind considerably. Unlike many other countries in the Americas, where an indigenous presence remains strong in the articulation of national identities, the place of Indians in Brazilian national discourse has always been couched in the past tense. An absolute minority, today’s indigenous population amounts to less than one-fifth of one percent of the total national population according to official statistics, which treat them basically as “remaining” populations. Nevertheless, behind this negligible statistic lies a richer picture of tremendous diversity – over 200 distinct ethnic groups speaking 170 different languages – and a historical legacy that the country has yet to come to terms with. Indeed, a narrative chronicling the decline and destruction of the Indians appears as the dominant trend among historians. While this perspective is in part true, given the tragic record of deliberate massacres, murders and epidemics, it obscures many other historical processes. Such processes are crucial to our

understanding of the specific trajectories experienced by scores of indigenous peoples, but in a more general sense also play a central role in the formation of Brazilian society and culture.

### Notes

1. Professor do Departamento de Antropologia, Universidade Estadual de Campinas (Unicamp). This paper draws together some of the ideas presented in a lecture held at Aarhus University in April, 2000. The author wishes to thank both Cecilia Martins for her generous invitation as well as the audience for its interesting comments and questions.
2. This section is developed in far greater detail in Monteiro (2000).
3. This image of dilapidation is best described by Richard White (1991:ix), where he writes: “*The history of Indian-white relations has not usually produced complex stories. Indians are the rock, European peoples are the sea, and history seems a constant storm. There have been two outcomes: the sea wears down and dissolves the rock; or the sea erodes the rock but cannot finally absorb its battered remnant, which endures. The first outcome produces stories of conquest and assimilation; the second produces stories of cultural persistence*”.
4. On the interesting editorial history of Soares de Sousa’s work, see Francisco Adolfo de Varnhagen’s comments in Sousa (1971 [1587]:11-14) and Rodrigues (1979:436-37).
5. On the issue of representation of “pristine contacts with unspoiled indigenes”, see Whitehead (1995:55).
6. For a broader discussion of ethnogenesis in the Americas, see Hill (1996).
7. On these questions, see, among other, Whitehead (1990); Farage (1991); and Monteiro (1994a).
8. For a guide to document collections in Brazil, see Monteiro (1994b).
9. Among others, see Farage (1991); Monteiro (1994a); Vainfas (1995); Domingues (2000); Schwartz and Salomon (1999).
10. Anônimo, “Índios Famosos em Armas que neste Estado do Brasil concorreram para sua conquista temporal e espiritual”, 10 março de 1758, manuscrito, Instituto de Estudos Brasileiros da Universidade de São Paulo, Cod. 5.6.,A8.

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