

Possible Appropriations of an *Other* Protagonism

Apropriações possíveis de um protagonismo outro

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RESUMO

O propósito deste artigo é demonstrar, por meio das atitudes de dois indígenas, distantes no tempo e contraditórios nas suas manifestações, a evidência de algumas normas culturais que não se apagaram pela convivência dos nativos em diferentes contextos coloniais. Uma vez identificadas essas normativas culturais, aponta-se para a existência de diferentes protagonismos possíveis no mundo colonial, por meio de sujeitos que evidenciam *também* a intermediação e a negociação com o mundo colonial. Palavras-chave: Guarani; séculos XVII e XVIII; protagonismo.

ABSTRACT

In this article we set out to demonstrate, based on the attitudes of two indigenous persons, distant from each other in time and opposite in their manifestations, the evidence of various cultural norms that persisted despite the fact that these natives lived in different colonial contexts. Having identified these cultural norms, we point out the existence of different possible protagonisms in the colonial world, through subjects who also make evident their intermediation and negotiation with the colonial world. Keywords: Guarani; seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; protagonism.

My documents are living beings; they change and fluctuate together with us; there is no end of things to be gotten out of them. Something new and necessary for us precisely now. This very moment.

(Svetlana Alexievich, *The Unwomanly Face of War*)

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The search for indigenous figures as protagonists of situations in the colonial past has been a constant element in the historiography on the theme over recent decades. It should be pointed out from the outset that the objective of this persistent quest had been to provide arguments capable of deconstructing and overcoming the old dichotomies that informed the historiographic production on the presence of indigenous peoples in History. The space occupied by these peoples in historiography fluctuated: either their evocation was based on a postcolonialist agenda, which identified them as passive victims of contact (whether through the idealization of the indigenous person resistant to the colonial system – the practitioner of a solipsistic self-sufficiency – or through the theory of acculturation), or indigenous peoples were simply ignored in both the academic sphere and the public mind by being “made socially invisible and discursively silent” (Portela, 2009).

The primary goal, then, became to locate indigenous figures who had acted as historical *subjects*, aware of the social reality in which they were inserted and who had sought to achieve a prominent place in a historical context that, initially at least, was unfavourable to them.¹ In attempting to meet this objective, more importance was frequently given to evidence of an indigenous name and surname, a particular figure who becomes foregrounded in the description of a contact situation, than to the analysis of the cultural or symbolic elements present in document-based descriptions (Duarte, 2011, pp. 87-103). In most instances, such elements appear surreptitiously amid the evaluations of the authors concerning the case at hand.

As a rule, historians have tended to ignore or dismiss information from the record that appears unhistorical to them, including cultural or symbolic elements – in other words, material that seems to belong exclusively to the field of Anthropology. Not infrequently, therefore, the analysis ends up reaffirming the discursive and argumentative logic of the documentation being utilized, emphasizing, through various conceptual resources, the construction of a discourse that attempts to sound contemporary by the use of expressions like strategies, negotiation, mediation, agency and protagonism.² As Guillermo Wilde has already cautioned, “paradoxically, the endeavour to encounter an indigenous protagonism in history, an ‘agency,’ has tended to overlook the singularity of the native regimes of historicity, projecting onto them modern fictions like the idea of the free and rational individual” (2009, p. 36). In other words, the effort to encounter indigenous protagonists ultimately created another category of indigenous persons: fully westernized modern individuals

who place greater value on freedom and reason, despite occupying a peripheral position in society.

Wilde's caution is based on the now classic affirmation 'different cultures, distinct historicities' (Sahlins, 1994, p. 11): comprehending a regime of historicity means comprehending the notion of time and, above all, the characteristics of the history being told, lived and relived constantly by native groups, very different to the western vision of linear, accumulative and non-repetitive history. For the latter, the contact between westerners and natives is a datable moment,³ after which *all relations* become modified in response to this year zero. The production of documents in the colonial period adheres to the logic of this regime of historicity, where each record *is a fact* and its cultural dimension only emerges *from contact onward*: "The eyes of the Jesuits and travellers who saw the real are rather eyes that have gazed on reams of paper and ink; the missionary wanderings are rather ancient rhetorical maps, reappropriated as occasion demanded and applied according to each case" (Pécora, 2006, p. 13).

In this context, it is worth reminding ourselves that narratives of contact and cultural change are structured by the classic dichotomy of absorbing or resisting the other, positing identity as an impermeable frontier that must be defended or preserved. If we consider this *identity* as a nexus of relations and transactions between individuals and worlds, then contact and the narratives surrounding it become more complex and less linear (Clifford, 1988, p. 344, cited by Viveiros de Castro, 2002, pp. 195-196). Approached in this way, other histories flourish as a product of the clashes, interchanges and relations between indigenous populations, between white populations, and between indigenous and white populations, as Isabelle Combés has emphasized (2010, pp. 17-18).

Setting out from the analysis of two document records, describing the actions of Pedro Mbaïugua, in 1661, and Nazário Paraguá, in 1798, we seek to demonstrate the identificatory dynamics present in these two Guaraní figures recorded by representatives of the colonial society of their time. The records marking the presence of these two individuals in the colonial documentation were made in very different historical contexts in response to very distinct demands. The interpretative exercise presented here forms part of the movement of 'returning to the field' (archive), seeking to invert the earlier orientations in order "to recall the theoretical conditions under which the work was proposed ... while yielding to the flow of events and ideas which present themselves" (Strathern, 2014, pp. 346-347).⁴

Evoking these two figures in order to analyse them as protagonists of their time entails, then, the need to evaluate the reach of this concept and point to what we take to be some viable possibilities already identified in the historiographic production.

First there exists a *given protagonism*, which emerges from the documentation as a result of the characteristics foregrounded by the authors of the records of particular figures, whose analysis and demonstration are enough to make known the content of the colonial documents. In this model, the emphasis given to the indigenous figures is generally designed to provide the discourse elements that corroborate the narrative intended by the person who produced it, assuring the importance of the role and actions of the authors of the records rather than those of the people recorded. Second there also exists *protagonism through writing*, in which indigenous people become authors of the records. In this case, the assurance of indigenous authorship of a document, written in a native language or a tremulous signature at the end of the document, is sufficient to vouch for the legitimacy of raising the indigenous person to the status of protagonist. This model of protagonism is apparently the most undisputed insofar as it is also the most immediate for historians, since their theoretical convictions find themselves endorsed by the empirical proof of the document's indigenous authorship. There is also the *protagonism constructed by historiography*, when historians select the figures to be prioritized in their analyses in response to political or ideological demands, the objectives of which exceed the construction of an indigenous history. Much in vogue in the historiography produced between the 1930s and 1960s, this type of recourse elevated the indigenous person to the category of protagonist in order to prioritize questions such as the formation of the national territory or the activities of religious orders in the past, but contributing very little in terms of thinking about the place of the indigenous population in history. In accordance with changes in the agenda of historians, the new political-social demands continue to evoke this protagonism at the whim of contemporary needs, while still pushing indigenous people into the background of the historiographic analysis. Finally, it is also possible to perceive an *other protagonism*, one that seeks to interpret documental data through the analysis of categories that express a particular logic that does not imply, at least in determinant terms, just native reactions to the disturbances caused by colonial events, nor obey only those attitudes that adhere to the same logic projected by the colonizers. Through the diversity of the colonial documentation, therefore, it is possible

for us to perceive elements overlooked by earlier studies, capable of giving rise to other analytic bases and other lines of questioning concerning the data presented. These are the categories identified by our readings and analyses. We do not ignore the fact that other classifications are possible: nevertheless, we think it is essential for researchers to make explicit the conceptual bases on which their analyses were constructed.

Returning to our indigenous figures, when seen within a linear narrative of colonial documentation, with its traditional dichotomies, they lead to the conclusion that they were subjects/agents, each one in his own context: individuals who mastered the rules established *following* contact and who sought strategies by which they could adapt to the colonial world or, who knows, manage to gain some advantages in this new reality. The objective here is to take into account all the elements that appear in the documentation in order to show that, despite the chronological distances, the different demands that they made, the distinct behaviour of each of the figures and the form in which they expressed themselves, there exists, in both cases, an attempt to control and master an *other situation*. Not just control another new situation to be learnt.⁵ The appropriation of an *other situation* entails much more than a response to an outside context: it brings with it earlier learning or lessons to be replicated in different contexts, based on the conception of what is real and on the relation with the other entities populating the sphere of the perceptible which the individual in question carries with him or her. Inevitably, there exist the personal interests of the figures linked to different power groups, but, in this case, it is worth observing the caveat made by Roy Wagner that we should

consider such interests as a subset, or *surface phenomenon*, of more elemental questions. It would be, therefore, rather naive to expect a study of the cultural constitution of phenomena to argue for 'determination' of the process, or of significant parts of it, by some particular, privileged phenomenal context – especially it argues that such contexts take their significances largely from one another. (Wagner 2012[1975], p. 18, our italics)

With this, we wish to make it clear that the choice of the figures of Pedro Mbaigua and Nazário Paraguá was based on their respective manifestations, which – recorded in documents – express their own personal interests. However such interests and manifestations are treated as *surface phenomena* in terms of comprehending the meanings of the contexts, understood as

culturally interdependent, despite their distance from a chronological viewpoint. It is also worth emphasizing that, beyond the different historical contexts concerned, our focus is on the importance that the analysed figures attribute to their relations with other indigenous people or with representatives of the colonial administration, whether Jesuit missionaries or Bourbon administrators.

Thus the distance between the figures examined here is not just temporal in kind: Pedro Mbaigua lived in the context of the Jesuit missions on the Río de la Plata (River Plate) and their consequent traditional reductional projects; Nazário Paraguá, on the other hand, living in Buenos Aires, was a witness to the colonial context following the expulsion of the Society of Jesus from the territories of Spanish America – of course, as will be presented below, the analysed figures possessed particular and personal interests, but their attitudes ended up manifesting more than this.

THE CONTEXTS AND THEIR FIGURES

When historians define the object of their analyses, there exists a historical fact and its context. By contextualizing this fact, they unite a series of conclusions *external to the fact*, which are considered relevant to the explanation eventually given. Here it is worth returning once more to Roy Wagner and his argument that the context is a part of experience but is also something constructed by experience: “it is an environment within which symbolic elements relate to one another; one that is formed by the act of relating them” (2012[1975], p. 111).⁶ For Wagner, therefore, in every human attempt at communication – read: every culture – “the range of conventional contexts is centered around a generalized image of man and human interpersonal relationships, and it articulates that image,” leading these contexts to define and create a meaning by providing a *collective* relational base, “one that can be actualized explicitly or implicitly through an infinite variety of possible expressions” (1975, p. 117).

In *contextualizing* our figures, therefore, we seek to take into account not only the historical *facts* external to their manifestations, which sets them apart in time, but also the *collective relational base* that brings them together, within a Wagnerian dialectical perspective, that is, a dialectic that never aims to arrive at a synthesis.

Our first figure, Pedro Mbaïugua, appears in the documentation by virtue of a missionary who found himself compelled to record him. He is cited in the Carta Ânua (Annual Letter) referring to the Jesuit reductions on the Paraná and Uruguay Rivers amid a description of the impacts caused by epidemic crises, a paramount topic at the time. The original manuscript (Carta Ânua, 1970[1661]) is held, minus the final pages, at the Rio de Janeiro National Library. This record appears more like the legacy of a descriptive memoir of the missionaries who worked in the region until the 1640s, where internal and external threats to the settlements abounded. This is evident mainly through the form in which the author⁷ represents Mbaïugua, including him in the list of past rebels. The period between 1641, when the Guarani armies defeated the São Paulo *bandeirantes*, until 1685, when the Jesuit missions began to expand eastward of the Uruguay River, is conceived as the moment when the missionary project in the region became reorganized (Wilde, 2009, p. 92). During this period, the onslaughts by the Portuguese had declined significantly; neither was their space for claims, fights or skirmishes that posed any threat to the missionaries.

The pen of the missionary tells the story of Pedro Mbaïugua. A Guarani Indian, son of the main leader or *cacique* Belizário of the São Carlos Reduction, located in the Uruguay River region, Pedro went to Buenos Aires as chief of the group in 1660, where he was greeted by the governor Pedro Baigorri Ruiz, who treated him like a Spanish captain (Becker, 1992, p. 141). On his return, he arrived back at the settlement of São Carlos calling himself by the title of Captain. His entrance into the Jesuit reduction was heralded by a magnificent accompaniment of drums and flanked by two rows of arquebusiers. He arrived on a day of festival in the reduction with the Church packed. There, in the space controlled and dominated by the religious members of the Society of Jesus, he addressed everyone present and commanding them to return to their homes, causing a commotion among the indigenous population, priests and *cabildantes*⁸ because of the unprecedented nature of the orders – indeed, according to the report, they prompted one elder to yell out inside the church: “that’s put an end to all the good customs the priests have taught us” (Carta Ânua, 1970[1661], p. 178). The discursive design of the record hints at the start of another of rebellion, like so many others registered in the first years of contact or in the extreme situations experienced by the Jesuit reduction project, with rhetorical clashes on both sides.

Taking care, however, not to transform Pedro Mbaigua into a two-dimensional figure whose only purpose in life was to rebel against the missionaries, we should also note that he was raised among the priests, who taught him to read and write, and that he was also deemed “skilled in music” (Carta Ânua, 1970[1661], p. 177). Although he was also described by the missionary as a very “daring and crafty” individual (ibid), Pedro Mbaigua’s attitudes marked more than just the confrontation with the priests, denoting his complexity. They emphasized the search for political control of the reduction, leaving the priests with responsibility for the religious life of the settlements. The latter aspect distanced him considerably from the classic rebellions that challenged the norms imposed by Christianity, such as monogamy or the ancestor worship promoted by some spiritual leaders. According to the description, Pedro Mbaigua held “in his house assemblies of the people from the settlement, hosted travellers in the role of captain, and wrote notes” to the absent calling on them to join together under his authority (Carta Ânua, 1970[1661], p. 178). Addressing the priests, he told them emphatically that

they only have to take care of the spiritual. We, the Captains of the secular government of the settlement who, for this purpose, the King made us Captains and put us on charge. And what the priest might need, we, if it’s good, and for the good [of] our settlement, we’ll order it done and if not, we won’t. (Carta Ânua, 1970[1661], p. 178)

In a short while, the appeals of Pedro Mbaigua had reached five settlements, two on the Paraná River and three on the Uruguay. As part of his strategy of challenging the political power and winning over supporters, he sought to intervene in the decisions of the *Cabildo*, convinced that the latter was not acting properly: he ordered the arrest and punishment by flogging of those indigenous people whose acts were considered errors of judgment within the jurisdiction of the secular government. One such example was the order to punish an indigenous man with fifty lashes for failing to warn the priest in time about sick people who had needed urgent treatment. Mbaigua ordered the arrest, punishment or release of prisoners who had been detained by the *cabildantes* or the missionaries. He arrested and punished those who remained loyal to the priests or those who refused to accept his authority over the community: “who released those prisoners or ordered them released? [Mbaigua]

replied that he had. But why? asked the Priest. Because I wanted to, *he replied shamelessly*” (Carta Ânua, 1970[1661], p. 179, original italics).

Perceiving the gradual loss of neophytes and even entire families as they joined Mbaigua’s cause, the priests decided to order his imprisonment and transfer to the settlement of São Ignácio do Paraguai.⁹ Pedro Mbaigua’s incarceration and transfer resulted in his isolation, deeply affecting his aim of establishing his authority in the settlements and projecting himself as a political leader, sharing the administration of the reduction with the missionaries, each assigned with the specific tasks he believed were appropriate to them: the Jesuits would be responsible for matters linked to the religious and the spiritual; Captain Mbaigua would be responsible for the legal decisions that would consolidate his position as a civil authority, seeking to lead the population that he managed to unite through his influence.

Seen *on the surface*, as Roy Wagner puts it, Pedro Mbaigua’s expressions would merely seem to indicate the indigenous leaders’ quest for control and the power to command, reinforced by the missionary system. In this case, ignored – or better, controlled – by this same system. Seen from the historical perspective, Mbaigua’s manifestation shows an open dispute for control of political power within the missions (Kern, 2015[1982]). But it also reveals the tensions inherent to the delicate missionary balance, exacerbated by external factors, as Guillermo Wilde (2009, p. 129) emphasizes, such as the awarding of the title of captain to Mbaigua by the Spanish authorities and the mobilization (or relational) capacity that he possessed vis-à-vis other indigenous people. Situated in the “context of the invention of culture,” these expressions point to a perpetuation of the *relation* anterior to behavioural patterns:

The contexts of culture are perpetuated and carried forth by acts of objectification, by being invented *out of each other* and *through each other*. This means that we cannot appeal to the force of something called ‘tradition,’ or ‘education,’ or spiritual guidance to account for cultural continuity, or for that matter cultural change. (Wagner, 2012[1975], p. 119, original italics).¹⁰

Here we have a figure attributed with the role of protagonist already in the colonial documentation itself, that is, with a *given protagonism*, since it is the author of the document who emphasizes the desire of the indigenous himself to remain inside the missionary settlement under the condition of exercising his political and coercive authority within a spectrum beyond what had

been previously imaginable – presenting Mbaiguá as a rhetorical resource to accentuate the rebellious temperament of the indigenous population and, as a consequence, reinforce the need for the missionary presence. It is worth emphasizing that, according to the empirical data provided, Pedro Mbaiguá formed part of an elite of the missionary settlements and, as Eduardo Neumann (2015, Chapter 3; 2016) has already pointed out, this group made use of all the resources available, including writing, to coopt the largest number of followers possible. Although these written notes were not kept either by the indigenous people or by the colonial authorities, it is very likely that they contained an argumentative logic capable of mobilizing the other leaders of other settlements.

Meanwhile the life of our second figure unfolded in a completely different historical era. In 1776, the Río de la Plata region was promoted to the status of viceroyalty, a late administrative manoeuvre of the Bourbons' controlling ambitions, since the Río de la Plata inherited the fact of being a zone on the margin of the Crown's control, a situation derived both from the dominance of the Jesuits in the area and from its development as an ideal space for smuggling under the colonial system.

For the metropolis, the contraband problem was minimally controlled by the creation of the viceroyalty, followed by the installation of the Intendence system (1782), with administration take over by royal officials loyal to the Crown, replacing the local authorities. The arrival of the Intendants in America represented the end of the influence and autonomy of the *Cabildos*, conceived during the administration of the Habsburg dynasty, which granted considerable freedom to the local administrative bodies, Provincial Governments and *Cabildos*, especially in the peripheral regions deemed less important by the metropolis due to the absence of any potential for mining precious metals. The concession of autonomy and freedom to local administrations was a comfortable way for the Habsburgs to relieve themselves of the Crown's commitments in regions judged of little importance. However, following the ascension of the Bourbons to the Spanish throne in 1713, the logic of the peripheral and strategic regions was inverted: the Río de la Plata region, for example, once seen as peripheral, now became strategic, changing all the other relations between the metropolis and colonial space.

As for the control of the areas previously occupied by the Jesuits, the territories of which contained not just reductions, ranches and small towns, but also the notable presence of missionized indigenous populations, the

Enlightenment rationality of the Bourbons was not always entirely successful. Various attempts were made to implement projects for territorial and administrative divisions and subdivisions, seeking to cope with the space and population left behind following the expulsion of the Jesuit missionaries.¹¹ Neither the nomination of civil administrators, nor the designation of religious members from other orders succeeded in controlling the space and the indigenous peoples who had belonged to the sphere of activity of the Jesuits. The civil administrators repeatedly strove without success to revive the glorious past of the settlements described and exalted by the Society of Jesus missionaries. For their part, the religious members of the Orders of Saint Francis, Saint Augustine, Saint Dominic and the Mercedarians were disappointed by the rusticity of the indigenous population. During the Bourbon administration, in the Río de la Plata region, while civilians and religious members wandered blindly, the indigenous peoples did not.

Nazário Paraguá, an indigenous man born in the village of Santiago, a magistrate, a saddler by profession and a resident of Buenos Aires, lived in this context. In 1798, he wrote to the viceroy, Antonio Olaguer Feliú, requesting exemption from complying with the order received by the then administrator of the settlements. The General Administrator of Missions, Manuel Cayetano Pacheco, ordered Paraguá to unite all the indigenous people resident in the capital of the viceroyalty to return to their respective villages of origin. He argued that the absence of these indigenous residents of Buenos Aires and nearby towns – where they provided sporadic services to the inhabitants and to the army – generated serious problems for the maintenance and subsistence of the villages. In his letter to the viceroy, Paraguá describes the harm that compliance with the order would cause to Buenos Aires's indigenous residents:

Firstly, the imminent abandonment of the married woman by her husband, set to be absent in a distant town. The absence of the mother from her child, due to the same circumstances, the lamentable loss and abandonment of her already scarce goods, which they had acquired at the cost of so much toil, as can be seen in the person of María Bacília Cayuari, along with José Casere, working in Montevideo; who, as a consequence, sold off all his goods for a tenth of what they had cost, with the rest facing the same prospect of having to squander their incomes and goods so as not to lose everything. (Processo, 1798-1799, f.1r-1v)

Nazário Paraguá also argues that the viceroyalty had been through a period of poverty, and the execution of the order received by the Administrator would imply the need to organise a transmigration, which would in turn necessitate expenditure on transportation and lead to a depletion in the men, services and arms for the army of *Nuestro Católico Monarca*. Nazário expands on the latter point by explaining that the *Capitán de Naturales*, D. Ventura Ysaurral, would be unable to assemble the militia companies for the disposal of the Viceroy, as previously planned. He also argued that no indigenous people were lying idle, but rather working for the benefit of the community: the men in mechanical or artisanal trades, the women in their tasks of washing, ironing and cooking (Processo, 1798-1799, f.2r). Paraguá also cites, as witnesses to his declaration, the mayors of the districts of the capital where the indigenous population was living. He concludes his missive by asking those responsible for the settlements of Conchas and Arroio da China to prohibit the disembarkation of any family coming from the settlements, save at the viceroy's express order (Processo, 1798-1799, f.2r).

As usual, the viceroy requested expert opinion from the Administrator General concerning the request. Manuel Cayetano Pacheco initially presented the motives that had led him to order the return of all the fugitive indigenous residents of Buenos Aires, emphasizing that, by so doing, his aim was to prevent the depopulation of those territories known as Missions. Next, Cayetano Pacheco levelled various accusations at Nazário Paraguá, describing his representation as deceitful. In Pacheco's view, Nazário was prone to "foment the lazy and prejudicial life of all his caste," principally by turning his house into "a receptacle for all of them, sheltering their disorderliness" (Processo, 1798-1799, f.3r), in addition to, without the consent or order of any colonial authority, having given himself the title of 'General Commissioner of Trades' (Processo, 1798-1799, f.3r-3v).

In December 1798 a new figure emerges in the case files: the indigenous woman Ana Maria Martínez, a native of the settlement of Loreto, also living in the capital of the viceroyalty. The declaration made by Ana Maria backs the arguments of Cayetano Pacheco against Nazário: "a saddler by trade, called Nazario Paraguá, of a disposition so restless and ambulatory that he has seen fit to do nothing else than bring evils to the whole land, badly influencing the conduct of everyone" (Processo, 1798-1799, f.4v).

At the end of her testimony, Ana Maria requests to stay in Buenos Aires, but not at the orders of Nazário Paraguá (Processo, 1798-1799, f.5v), since her

husband is currently in Montevideo, serving the interests of the King. Ana Maria asks and indeed implores the viceroy to oblige Nazário Paraguá return to his village and act as *corregedor de su pueblo* (magistrate of his people/village) (Processo, 1798-1799, f.6r). Ana Maria's declaration resulted in a new report by Cayetano Pacheco, vouching for her good repute and exonerating her from compliance with the order to return to her village of origin. Nazário's continuation in the capital is deemed inappropriate "due to his turbulent spirit" (Processo, 1798-99, f.7r). Eventually, on December 12th 1798, the order is expedited for Nazário Paraguá to return to Santiago village – not extended to all the indigenous inhabitants of Buenos Aires. Ana Maria and her husband, Miguel Cavañas, as well as other indigenous residents not cited in the proceedings, could remain in Buenos Aires (Processo, 1798-1799, f.7v-8r).

Here we have a process instigated following the refusal of an indigenous man to comply with colonial administrative orders. By taking a stand against the initial request, he sought to convince the legal authorities that it would be better for the indigenous population already living in Buenos Aires and neighbouring towns to remain in their current dwelling places, since they had already complied with the norms of marriage and were economically active. However, the accusatory reports of the Administrator General, combined with the testimony of an indigenous woman, who had not been cited previously and whose declaration was used as a denunciation against Nazário, proved decisive for the initial request for Paraguá to return to his village to be maintained – perhaps as punishment, revoking the order for the return of the other indigenous residents, making Nazário Paraguá the only one penalized. Apparently, the personal wish of an indigenous man to carrying on living in Buenos Aires, thus demonstrating his disinterest in returning to his homelands, took the form of a disregard of legal orders. In the discursive logic of colonial documentation, principally in those records concerned with the contact and coexistence with indigenous peoples, explanations based on personal interests acquire a prominent role as mechanisms used by the author to convince the reader and justify the evolution and outcome of the event – turning this explanation into a *surface* analysis in which the logic of cause and effect can end up both seductive and comforting. When historians adhere exclusively to the discursive form of the record, they become ensnared in a trap that they themselves set.

Taking the empirical data of these two descriptions to be based on a western logic, we can encounter an alleged continuity *exterior* to the culture of indigenous people like Mbaiguá and Paraguá. In this logic, the first figure

could be classified as a exponent of the adaptation of indigenous leaders to the norms imposed by life in the Jesuit reductions, insofar as he negotiated the exercise of his political and coercive power with the reinforcement and acceptance of spiritual power by the Jesuits.

Following the same logic, the manifestations of the second figure could be seen as the expression of the acculturated indigenous population, insofar as Paraguá's representation to the viceroy is based on the defence of monogamous marriage and on the request to stay in the capital, pointing to the benefit that the indigenous inhabitants provided through services to the viceroyalty. If we take into account the other elements found in the descriptions, however, we can expand the questions concerning the actions of Mbaiugua and Paraguá beyond an analysis limited to the solipsistic individual that the source places in the spotlight. Prior to the attitudes of these figures, there is an accumulated pool of experiences, knowledge, sensory conceptions and concepts shared by a collective, which is also communicated through these records, and that operate as a relational base, "one that can be actualized explicitly or implicitly through an infinite variety of possible expressions" (Wagner, 2012[1975], p. 117).

FROM APPROPRIATION TO PROTAGONISM

The process of appropriation is situated on another conceptual level that, in the 1970 and 1980s, Anthropology defined as processes of integration and assimilation of contacted groups. Our proposal here is to move beyond this vision conceptually, given that, as initially argued, we set out from a conception of *identity* as a nexus of relations and transactions between persons and worlds (Viveiros de Castro, 2002, pp. 195-196).

The aim here is to offer an outline, from the theoretical and methodological viewpoint, of the proposal that it is possible to perceive an *other* protagonism, emphasizing the *relation* of an identity made through relational nexuses rather than just games of strategy, mediation and negotiation. If we consider that, during the process of contact, the bases are established from which the groups choose elements they wish to appropriate, what is at stake is, in the final analysis, "the incorporation of something eminently incorporeal" (Viveiros de Castro, 2002, p. 290).

Consequently, limiting our comprehension of the manifestations of Mbaiugua and Paraguá to the personal interests of these figures means

simplifying all the complexity of the relations potentially established, adhering to the limits set by the biased discourse impressed in the documentation, which, above all, ends up projecting only the dominant logic. Just as the historical document should not be confused with history (Wittmann, 2014, p. 50), which makes the mistake of taking the analyses and judgments of the authors of written sources as the truth per se, so the records need to be comprehended within a geometrical spectrum of the innumerable relational possibilities established *over the course of contact*.

Pedro Mbaigua thus awarded himself the title of Captain in order to remain in the Jesuit reduction of São Carlos and control political life both locally and in the other settlements to which his influence could extend, whether through his eloquence or through the provision of shelter to travellers. Mbaigua employed all the resources available to him, even making use of writing to mobilize allies from other village settlements. There was no direct confrontation with missionary authorities – on the contrary, his interest was for the priests to remain responsible for spiritual matters as a commitment that his followers would remain faithful to Catholicism.

Nazário Paraguá, on the other hand, had no intention of returning to his village of origin, preferring to remain in the capital of the viceroyalty providing services, just as the other indigenous people with fixed abodes in the region's towns were already doing – including the witness who accused him, Ana Maria, and her husband. Nazário also made use of writing as a form of dialogue with the colonial authorities, making use of administrative, judicial and legal argumentation. At first glance, the arguments that he employed would seem to declare his acculturation in relation to the customs imposed by Christian morality and the good civilizing habits practiced through monogamous marriage, paid work and a western diet and clothing.

Both the figures are described by their opponents with adjectives like insolent, shameless, restless in spirit and nonconformist – as well as having been accused of almost promoting riots in pursuit of their personal interests. However, the similarities end there – precisely in the context of the reading that the colonial authorities made of these indigenous figures. The peculiarities of each case become clearer if we imagine a graphic projection of the manifestations of these two figures with each describing opposite vectors: Mbaigua does not wish to leave the village but is eventually expelled; Paraguá does not want to return to his village of origin but is eventually forced to go.

The logic of linear reasoning leads to the inevitable *a priori* conclusion: in these two figures, it is impossible to see either the classic demands for the perpetuation of a traditional past, or the attempts to flee to the forest, or even stances taken in opposition to white customs, all of which would be associated with the ideal type of attitudes found in a *historiographically constructed protagonism*. On the contrary, in both cases there is a visible use of assemblies, the forming of a nucleus of supporters based in their houses, as well as the use of resources like writing and the circulation of written notes. Given this fact, can these two examples be used as an analytic base for thinking about indigenous protagonism? The question depends precisely on what kind of protagonism one wishes to focus on. Beyond the actions of a subject (strategist) who assumes the role of mediator or negotiator between the colonial world and the indigenous groups, we seek to determine a protagonism in which the discussed values or expressed manifestations are situated at another level of the *relation* between native groups and colonial society.

To comprehend the potentiality of the information contained in the records of Pedro Mbaïugua and Nazário Paraguá, we need to address aspects involved in the construction of the accounts on the two indigenous men, such as narration and agency. The first aspect that merits consideration is the narration of the consulted documents. An evaluation of the convergences and divergences between form and content can provide us with more questions than answers, and comprises a first step, showing the innumerable interpretative conflicts.

Pedro Mbaïugua's case presents us with the classic situation of a record produced by a missionary in which the attitudes and words of the indigenous person are channelled through the perceptions of the writer. However, this is not necessarily an impediment to accessing the perspective of the person described in the record. We should not overlook the fact that this method evokes some classic problems: attempting to find and interpret the *other* described in the documents can bring the researcher face-to-face with the technical difficulties presented by the source. Such is the case of Mbaïugua, where both the notes written by himself and his speeches to the assemblies were lost, making it impossible for the historian, more concerned in discovering the content of these notes and speeches, to move beyond a traditional and unilateral analysis of how the indigenous figures involved acted. Knowing what Mbaïugua said or wrote matters less than determining what disruptions his attitudes and/or words generated in terms of mobilizing the rest of the

indigenous population, thereby identifying how these figures interacted beyond the scrutiny of the Jesuits.

In Nazário Paraguá's petition to the viceroy, by contrast, the problem of who recorded the account seems to be minor, given that Paraguá makes himself present in the transcripts of the proceedings – at least by signing his declaration. An incautious analysis of this case might conclude that Paraguá and the other indigenous residents of Buenos Aires were condemned to culture loss by being seduced by the modernity of the city customs and by Christian moral indoctrination. It is clear that there was a change in the lives of these indigenous residents, indicating how much they had learned to live and negotiate with colonial society – but there is more to it than this.

As in the previous case, the most important fact is not the requests made by Paraguá but just how much his capacity to establish relations and mobilize the Buenos Aires citizens troubled the local authorities. In the proceedings, Paraguá was highlighted as a protagonist, though only to reinforce the need for the colonial government to control this population. In this reading, then, Nazário appears in a *given protagonism* – more important than the reach of his actions, in other words, are the threats that the colonial administration believes him to pose. Nevertheless, his influence on the rest of the indigenous population reveals him as an agent of an *other protagonism* – a figure who, beyond the control of the authorities, sets in motion orderings “of the symbolic and relational regime itself” (Mano, 2012, p. 134) which enabled interactions among his peers.

In the first aspect, the narration, the following problem is posed: how should we read these records and what questions are we going to ask? Were we to consider that the indigenous people wrote, painted, played instruments and warred because they had learned to do so from the Jesuits and/or the colonists, we would be led to admit that they only had the capacity to learn or live like the westerners. This would result not in an indigenous history but in a colonial history in which the natives are mere supporting actors.

The second aspect is the potential for agency of the figures of Pedro Mbaiugua and Nazário Paraguá. If the figures appear as rebels in the narratives, and an asymmetry exists in the records, this is because the mistakes of polarization dominate the writing of indigenous history. For Combés (2010, p. 19), “indigenous histories are not reduced to a simple asymmetric and violent encounter between the protagonists.” This is another point to be highlighted. Pedro Mbaiugua and Nazário Paraguá compose possible records of the writing

of indigenous history, but their inclusion as figures and the place that they will occupy in historiographic production depends, fundamentally, on how the researcher views them. If the analysis emphasizes agency, with a subject's capacity to mediate and negotiate taken as behavioural parameters to identify protagonism, then indigenous history will be homogenized according to behavioural patterns of the west, and the (re)actions of the indigenous population will be understood as typical of the colonial world.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Mbaiugua and Paraguá configure examples of an *other protagonism* by maintaining a fluid proximity with the colonial system, but without submitting to all the peculiarities that the different historical contexts imposed on them, or the political-ideological or religious baggage that the colonial authorities attempted to instil. Pedro and Nazário did not make their respective demands merely to maintain a relation of interests. Very different from appropriating the elements offered by another system of relations (whether in the Jesuit reductions or in the cities), both figures sought to appropriate external elements (such as political power or life in the city) through an *other* system of relations whose concepts of reciprocity, leadership, collectivity, alliance and belonging operated through specific logics of the sensory and concrete experiences of their indigenous origins: "the interpretation of the event" always occurs "in accordance with preexisting cultural categories" (Mano, 2012, p. 134).

The fact that Nazário Paraguá reinvented a space for controlling power in the city of Buenos Aires does not make his manifestations illegitimate. Neither does Pedro Mbaiugua's attempt to control secular power in the São Carlos reduction make his activity solely a manifestation of personal interests.

The biggest problem resides in the distorted evaluation of these records. If, on one hand, we consider the documental narratives to be *accounts of the truth*, we neglect the informational potential that they contain. On the other hand, though, if we consider them to be merely accounts of *one about the other*, we overlook the perturbations that the indigenous actors provoked in the authors of the sources. And here resides the most important lesson acquired from the exposition of these two cases: problematizing what is not explicit and, even more to the point, questioning what is very explicit in the documentation.

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NOTES

¹ Here we refer to the works developed in the context of the ‘New Indigenous History,’ in accordance with the definition formulated by John Monteiro (MONTEIRO, 1994), enhanced in his text for the volume edited by Adauto Novaes (MONTEIRO, 1999) and presented in more complete form in MONTEIRO (2001). The author’s contributions were fundamental in introducing the necessary relation between History and Anthropology into historiographic production. For an overview, see ALMEIDA (2013).

² It is worth emphasizing that the origin of the different explanations concerning the *pro-
tagonism* of certain indigenous attitudes can be synthesized problematically as a question of “whether the actions of a figure are linked to the structure and function arising from a determined society, whose philosophy, as a form of thought and understanding of the world, forms the background to these actions; or whether this figure acted in accordance with his or her subjectivity, in an act almost isolated and disconnected from the group structure that told the person how to act in determined circumstances” (SANTOS; FELIPPE, 2016, p. 18).

³ More than a dated moment, contact is seen by western society as a *given* in contrast to the ‘constructed,’ according to the conception presented by WAGNER (2012[1975]). In this work, Roy Wagner questions, among other things, the idea of what is given and what is constructed, proposing that “much of [what we consider] the ‘innate,’ too, is created in the same transient, repetitive, and stylistically conditioned way that arrowheads, meals, and festivals are created” (WAGNER, 2012[1975], p. 318). It is important to know, therefore, in any specific society, which realm “is considered the normal and appropriate medium of human action (the realm of human artifice) and which is understood as the workings of the innate and ‘given’” (ibid, p. 136).

⁴ For now, it should simply be mentioned that the case of Nazário Paraguá has already been analysed as an example of the incorporation of new values and lessons by indigenous people on “living in colonial society” (SANTOS, 1993). Meanwhile the case of Pedro Mbaiguá was analysed by KERN (2015[1982]) as an example of the dispute for political power in the Jesuit reductions, leaving the missionaries control over spiritual power.

⁵ As though the only option possible were the elaboration of adaptive mechanisms based on the dominant logic, completely ignoring the underlying concepts, sensory experiences, lessons, experiments, practical and philosophical knowledge that together form the “set of

theories concerning the world, which comprehend and explain its physical functioning, the place occupied by the beings and entities inhabiting it, the formal and symbolic relations between them and, principally, how perceptions of reality are disposed” (FELIPPE, 2014, p. 30).

⁶ For the author, the “elements in a conventionally recognized context seem to belong together, as elephants, tents, clowns, and acrobats ‘belong’ to a circus. Some elements are less conventionally a part of such a context than others, though this varies from time to time and from place to place ... The more conventional [contexts] may be so familiar that they are perceived as wholes, things, or experiences in their own right, like ‘wintertime,’ ‘school,’ or the Declaration of Independence. Others are more obviously ‘put together,’ like the bunch of words that make up an unfamiliar poem, or a schedule that one has not yet learned to live with” (WAGNER, 2012[1975], p. 112).

⁷ The person responsible for the Carta Ânua was probably the priest Simón de Ojeda, the provincial superior of the Jesuit Province of Paraguay between 1658 and 1663 (MÖRNER, 1968, p. 236).

⁸ The *Cabildantes* were members of the Spanish administrative institution at municipal level, the *Cabildo*. All the settlements in the Spanish colonial territories possess a *Cabildo*, formed by a *Corregedor* (magistrate), a *Tenente de Corregedor* (deputy magistrate), two *Alcaides* (mayors), an *Alcaide de Irmandade*, four *Regedores* (judges), a *Alguacil Mayor* (head of police), a *Mayordomo* (general manager, intendant) and a secretary. They were responsible for maintaining order and security within the settlement. Most of the posts had an annual mandate with the exception of the *Corregedor* and the *Tenente*, whose period of office was indeterminate. Elections were held on New Year’s Day and the candidates were nominated by those completing their mandate. These elections were accompanied by nominations for military posts (DOBLAS, 1836[1785], p. 42; see too NEUMANN, 2015, p. 78 and WILDE, 2009, pp. 74-75).

⁹ A practice used frequently by religious members of the Company of Jesus was to dispatch individuals branded as ‘rebellious’ to the older settlements, with the aim of ensuring their behavioural recuperation by obliging them to follow everyday routines based on good Christian practices and customs. This strategy was used, for example, in 1635-1637 with Yaguacaporó and Tauyubay (RUIZ DE MONTOYA, 1985[1639], pp. 228-235) and in 1636 with Erovocá (SANTOS, 2016).

¹⁰ Here it should be pointed out that this cultural change, as the author argues, does not refer to the behavioural adaptations or assimilations imposed by a dominant culture on a dominated one. In fact, Wagner observes, in its “broadest and simplest connotation, ‘culture’ provides a relativistic basis for the understanding of other peoples. We study culture through culture, and so whatever operations characterize our investigation must also be general properties of culture. If invention is indeed the most crucial aspect of our understanding of other cultures, then this must be of central significance in the way in which all cultures operate” Invention, therefore, “is culture, and it might be helpful to think of all human beings, wherever they may be, as ‘fieldworkers’ of a sort, controlling the culture

shock of daily experience through all kinds of imagined and constructed 'rules,' traditions, and facts" (WAGNER, 2012[1975], pp. 107-108, original italics). Or in the words of Marshall Sahlins: "People are criticizing each other. Besides, their different interpretations of the same events also criticize each other, and so allow us a proper sense of the cultural relativity of the event and the responses to it" (SAHLINS, 2008[1981], pp. 126-127).

¹¹ Among the main projects we can highlight: the Bucareli Directive, 1768; the Amendment to the Bucareli Directive, 1770; the Vértiz Division, 1778; the Provisional Regulations for Administration of the Settlements by Melo de Portugal, an addendum to the Stewardship Plan of 1782; the recommendations made in 1796 by the Governor Manuel Antônio Pacheco; the Regulations for the Settlements, created by the Governor-Intendant, Lázaro de Ribera, in 1798 and the Plan for the Reorganisation and External Security Plan of the Interesting Eastern Colonies of the Paraguay River or the Río de la Plata, by Miguel de Lastarria in 1805 (BAPTISTA; SANTOS, 2010).

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