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Imaginary wars in the wilds of Portuguese America

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The southeastern, central and southern areas of Brazil have shared a common regional history ever since the period when they formed part of the Portuguese Empire. From the end of the seventeenth to the twenty-first century, it is possible to identify many contexts and situations of tension, conflict, negotiation and agreement between the various parts of this territory, such as the movement of independence, in 1822, the installation of a republican governor in 1889 or the various crises of the first republic, in 1910, 1922 or 1930, as well as at other crucial times in Brazilian history (see the best two syntheses and overviews of the period of the republic: Penna, 1999; Ferreira & Delgado, 2003)

Over the last decade or so, there have been great theoretical and methodological advances made in the historical research being conducted into modern oceanic empires (see Boxer, 1965 and 2002; Furtado, 2001; Monteiro, 2005; Elliot, J. H., 2006), or into more contemporary periods (see Hobsbawn, 1992, 1999, 1977, 1995), so that is no longer possible to make locally based reflections about the subject or to undertake monographic research of a purely local character. One way of coping with the difficulties involved in research with such a broad territorial scope is to decrease the time span of the research, and with this strategy we can create favorable conditions for the empirical investigation of documents and literature from different regions.

Research carried out into a region such as the southeast-center-south region of Brazil during certain periods of the Portuguese Empire cannot be broken down into separate fractions. For instance, it is not possible to interpret the society of Rio de Janeiro or that of southern Brazil without also including that of São Paulo, at least when the research relates to the late seventeenth or eighteenth century. Classical synthesis and current historiography have also followed this form of interpretation (Prado Jr; 1942; Gouvêa, 2001; Fragoso, 1998), in the case of research conducted into both political and economic history.

From the moment when mining areas were effectively established within the territory of Brazil, or from the moment when the Portuguese Crown became aware that the innermost reaches of this territory should be protected against Spanish invasion, this part of the country clearly began to think together as a whole under a form of *realpolitik*.

Furthermore, one of the greatest challenges faced by historiography in recent years is to understand how modern empires tended to spread into the interior of the continents that they occupied or where they simply had business interests.

The extensive hinterland of American territory was late in its colonization. Many human and physical barriers impeded access to its remotest regions, such as the Allegheny Mountains in the (then still British) colony of North America. Only in 1747 was the region beyond those mountains settled with the support of the Ohio Company of Virginia.

In order to secure its control of this region of North America, the British Empire had to establish alliances and different schemes for cooperation with the local rivals of the groups of Indians. The price paid for this initiative was a longstanding dispute for control over the fur trade

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in the region of the Great Lakes, which pitted “the Iroquois against Algonquian-speaking peoples and French against the English, with corresponding combinations and permutations of political alliances” (see: Elliot, J. H., 2006, p. 265).

From the very beginning of their occupation of the territory of Brazil, the Portuguese were excited by news of the silver that was being mined in Peru (Varnhagen, 1854) and it consequently became their intention to colonize the interior of the continent. But it was not until the late eighteenth century, with the news of minerals being discovered on the southern coast of the captaincy of São Paulo (Iguape, Paranaguá, Cananéia) that this intention was actually fulfilled.

Just as the British Crown had to pay the price of the competition that developed around the fur trade in order to guarantee their continued presence in one particular area of North America, so the Portuguese Crown similarly bore the burden and reaped the benefits of having to strike a balance between its own plans and different political traditions, in order to secure control over areas that were rich in mineral resources, especially gold. Furthermore, this took place after at least a whole generation of settlers had already become established in the territory.

A diversified group of the King’s officers became established in these mining areas, all with their own different plans for the colonization and exploitation of the interior of the American continent, and this was yet one more ingredient in the “tumultuous process” of the occupation of the interior of mainland Brazil.

The book *Paulistas e emboabas no coração das Minas: idéias, práticas e imaginário político no século XVIII*, by Adriana Romeiro, is a good synthesis of all these issues, and presents an original (and almost always highly convincing) analysis of one particularly important episode in the history of the central and southeastern regions of Portuguese America. Rather than writing a history of Minas Gerais or São Paulo, the author primarily examines the history of the southeastern region of Portuguese America, and consequently writes a history of the Portuguese Empire (see Romeiro, pp. 27-28). In addition to this, she also breaks with the tradition of ideological or descriptive analyses that have tended to form part of the historiography written about the *emboabas* war.

As the author writes in her introductory pages, the historiography of the conflict known as the “emboaba war,” which took place in 1709 in the mining area and which resulted in skirmishes between *paulistas* and “outsiders,” has been heavily restricted by certain eighteenth and nineteenth-century interpretations, which regarded both this moment and this movement as the natives’ reaction to the situation, giving rise to the first feelings of this being their own native country or nation (*pátria*). In the first half of the twentieth century, the Geographic and Historical Institutes of the two regions, São Paulo and Minas Gerais, used this episode for their own political and ideological objectives in order to create regional identities (see also Ferreira, 2002).

The interpretation offered by Adriana Romeiro is supported by the same documents that were often used in the historiography written about the *emboabas* war, such as bureaucratic correspondence, travel reports and memoirs. But the theoretical references are very up-to-date and correctly applied, and she does not lose sight of the historical horizon of Portuguese America.

References found in the works of traditional British social historians, such as E. P. Thompson, gave her some guidelines for examining the experience of *paulistas* and “outsiders” and for interpreting their attitudes as amounting to a conflict of political imaginaries. In addition to these theoretical references, there is an unbiased and in-depth dialogue with seminal and modern works, such as those of Souza (1982), Silveira (2000), Campos (2002) and Anastasia (2005). One problem, however, that the book does not resolve is the conceptualization of the various groups who were given the title of “outsiders.”

The central idea of the book, which consists of 431 pages divided into six chapters, is that a conflict took place in the region of Minas that was more of a struggle between *paulistas* and “outsiders” (people of Portuguese or other origins) than a battle between different historical experiences.

The first such conflict that the book refers to is encountered in the first chapter, for which a more appropriate title would be “Os negócios das minas,” rather than “O negócio das minas.” The plural here would confirm the magnitude of the subject that is treated here very well by Adriana Romeiro, since it would point to the confrontation between two different projects for the colonization of Minas Gerais.

The Portuguese Crown supported the “closed-door” policy adopted in relation to Minas Gerais, which was based on the argument put forward by the governor-general D. João de Lencastro and designed both to ensure the occupation of the area and to establish the first administrative and fiscal structures in the mining areas.

The intention of this governor was to connect this region to Bahia and not to Rio de Janeiro. At the same time, all of the coastline of southeastern and southern Brazil was to be militarized by the building of fortifications and the introduction of troops to prevent the establishment of a foreign presence. The author suggests that the real motive behind this activity was to provide support to the powerful businessmen from Bahia. More than simply amounting to a region that was richly endowed with precious metals, these areas also became a profitable consumer market with the mining of gold.

The main opposition to the governor D. João de Lencastro came from the governor of the *República Sul*, Artur de Sá e Menezes. This governor represented the effective and official introduction of *paulistas* into the administrative structures of the Portuguese Empire, because he gave them graces and favors for the services that they rendered in the exploration of the hinterland and the discovery of the mines. In order for these people to be able to perform such services, it was necessary to apply an “open-door” policy, and this governor encouraged the migration of people to the mining areas.

Up to a certain point in time, it was important for the Portuguese Crown to retain the confidence of the *paulistas* and to create institutional conditions that were favorable for them, such as the By-Law of 1700, which bestowed upon them certain benefits. When the Crown tried to impose limits on the activities of the *paulistas* with the By-Law of 1702, it met with the powerful opposition of a group who maintained argument that they themselves were the early settlers. Consequently, the Portuguese Crown had difficulty in appointing a political governor for the mining areas without agreeing to the participation of *paulistas* in the incipient bureaucracy.

As a result of this, the mining areas became a hotbed of rebellion right from the beginning of their activities, and no picture of peace could ever be painted of this region and its society. Thus, the title of the second chapter, “Tumba da paz, berço da rebelião” (“Tomb of peace, cradle of rebellion”) is once again inappropriate in terms of explaining the complexity that the author was able to document through her powerful insights and interpretations.

Although the idea of a “lawless earth” was the predominant feature of the discourse of that time, as well as of the colonial agents themselves, the author defends and reinforces the argument already put forward by important research in this field (see Silveira, 2000), namely that, in the mining areas, there were other values to be found in social and institutional relations, such as honor, fame, revenge, bravery, favor and dependence. These values formed the “collective political imagination” of the region and they became the lifeblood of people from a region that was as violent as it was characterized by solidarity.

Based on empirical research, the author examined the settlement of younger populations in Portuguese America in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century. It is interesting to note that this question had already been considered by Sérgio Buarque de Holanda in his essay on Brazil in the 1930s (Holanda, 1991).

The structure of society was a hierarchical one, both within institutions and outside them. In certain violent situations, such as the case of the poor man who killed his sister, or the fight that broke out between two powerful men, the problem was the same: to uphold one’s honor. Honor and public image lay at the root of power, authority and prestige, and they were necessary if one wanted to make any advance at a social or institutional level.

With this postulate, the author leads the reader to believe that the continuous threat of expulsion hanging over the *paulistas* had forced them to fight tooth and nail in defense of their honor. The honor and public fame that they had acquired, and which was endorsed by the Crown and the metropolitan authorities, arose from the fact that they, the *paulistas*, were the discoverers of metal ores in Portuguese America, as well as being reinforced by their remarkable capacity for administering these new areas of the Empire.

The *paulistas* fought hard to preserve this historic mission that they had invented for themselves, and which involved their disputing each and every attempt made by the Crown to change the administrative life of the mining areas, whether in fiscal or in legal terms. There was

an increasing tendency for the Portuguese Crown to seek to take away the power from the *paulistas* and hand it to the “outsiders.”

This task was carried out by D. Fernando, who appointed new officials in the mining areas of Minas Gerais to collect taxes and to supervise the areas of mineral exploitation. But, corroborating the argument put forward by Marco Antonio Silveira (2001), Adriana Romeiro empirically demonstrates that changes in the administrative structure of mining areas had the effect of offering officials better opportunities for developing commercial and bureaucratic ties with “outsiders,” who gave them power and fulfilled their aims.

Furthermore, Adriana Romeiro advances an original and bold hypothesis that the riots held in protest against the “public meat contract,” which took place in São Paulo in 1707, aggravated the hostile climate between *paulistas* and “outsiders” and was one of the ingredients that would later lead to the *emboaba* riot.

In the third chapter of the book, entitled “O levante paulista” (the *paulista* uprising), three key ideas are important for the development of her argument: the supply of the mining area as an important factor in the relationship between local potentates and the Governor’s Palace in Rio de Janeiro; the *paulista* riot of 1707 as a preliminary stage leading to the *emboaba* riot; and the emergence of the *emboaba* leader as a result of the actions taken by the governor against the *paulistas*.

The monopoly over the cutting of the meat that was sold in the mining areas was a lucrative business controlled by Amaral Gurgel, a man who was born in Rio de Janeiro and was one of the most important potentates in the hinterland, also enjoying the solid support of the governor, D. Fernando Martins Mascarenhas de Lencastre.

The *paulistas* who had occupied the hinterland of São Francisco with cattle farms challenged the meat monopoly enjoyed by Amaral Gurgel and thus also his position as the new militia commander in the region. This increasingly bitter rivalry between *paulistas* and outsiders in 1707 might have been a preliminary phase in the development of the *emboaba* riot.

As far as the conflicts of 1707 are concerned, the author shows this rivalry as a struggle between different political imaginaries. On one side was the “moral economy of the plateau” and on the other the image of the *paulistas* as barbarians. Inspired by the English historiographic tradition and substantiating her argument with empirical research carried out at the documentary archives of the São Paulo city council, Adriana Romeiro defended the idea that this institution had to guarantee people that they would continue to receive their meat supplies and to control the import and export of goods.

In 1707, the *paulistas* began to fight the “outsiders” in mining areas, guided by their political tradition of opposition to contractors and merchants, behavior that was widespread and recurrently found in all societies of the Ancien Régime, depending on their historical background.

The same context also gave rise to the leadership of the *emboaba* Manuel Nunes Viana, a merchant and cattle rancher, who drove his livestock from São Francisco to the new inland settlements in the area of Minas Gerais. He had links with the contractor Amaral Gurgel. As a defender of the poor, a healer and a man of authority, he manipulated the negative images of *paulistas* created by the Palace in order to gain legitimacy among the miners.

The fourth chapter, entitled “As artes da Guerra” (the Arts of War), is a de-construction of the traditional picture of the larger war being waged in Minas Gerais, which used to be painted by traditional *mineira* historiography as a matter of dignity and heroism.

Furthermore, this chapter has inspired more recent research into military matters seen from a cultural perspective, such as that which has been carried out, for instance, by Geoffrey Parker, Franco Cardini and John Rigby, exploring the differences between *paulistas* and “outsiders” in their particular fight.

The *paulistas* had gained a long experience of fighting in the hinterland since the seventeenth century, and their existence there was historically connected to their very mobility, which seems to have caused them to pay less attention to the hierarchical organization of their armies. Thus, while for example the names of the leaders of the “outsiders” have been recorded in history, the names of the *paulista* leaders are unknown.

This is a plausible argument, and, in addition to this, there are others, such as the re-use made by the *paulistas* in Minas Gerais of defense tactics similar to those that were used in the Palmares guerrilla wars in Bahia in the seventeenth century. The *paulistas* came out of the villages

and hid in the wilderness. This tactic has been confused with an attempt at flight, but it was a life-saving tactic that significantly reduced the attacking capabilities of the enemy.

In her analysis of the battleground, the author identifies two kinds of war: the “indigenous Brazilian war” and the “outsiders’ war.” The first had its origins in the Indians’ art of war, being based on the scattered nature of positions, and involving a decentralization of decisions and ambushes. The second form of war was based on the organization of the regular troops into groups. Each of these strategies of war represented a different political conception: while the first, the “indigenous Brazilian war,” revealed a disobedient vassal, the other, the “outsider’s war,” strengthened the image of a faithful vassal.

But the major battleground was that of political ideas, as discussed in the fifth chapter, entitled “*Idéias e práticas políticas*” (Political ideas and practices). The problem was the “black legend,” originally formulated by the Jesuits. During the course of this legend, the *paulistas* earned themselves a reputation as rebel vassals who adopted an autonomous stance of disobedience towards the rules of the Ancien Régime. In Minas Gerais, the “outsiders” were responsible for lending credibility and durability to this legend, and they themselves used it to justify their military actions against the *paulistas*.

But by using the concept of an “ethnic group” (borrowed from John Russell-Wood), the author seeks to show that this image that was constructed and used against the *paulistas* resulted from a specific attitude and from a particular kind of negotiation with the Crown. It was an image that was based on frankness and showed little reverence in dealing with the King, whilst also often asking for more than was considered fair. Furthermore, the *paulistas* constructed a rhetoric that attributed all defects and shortcomings to the “outsiders.”

The book ends with the sixth chapter, “*O retrato do rei*” (The Portrait of the King), a text incorporating and developing the idea of the influences of the theories of the Portuguese Restoration from Spain in 1640 on the challenging environment of the mining areas of the eighteenth century. But what seems to be most important here is the discussion of the political prudence of the Crown, which avoided any confrontation with the *paulistas*. The Crown’s preferred strategy was one of reconciliation, i.e. allocating equal numbers of *paulistas* and *emboabas* to the Infantry Regiments, or raising the village of São Paulo to the status of a “city.”

In other words, the solution was to accommodate São Paulo in the Empire after all, as the Crown felt that the *paulistas* might be needed at some time in the future, due to their experience in clearing hinterlands and in armed conflicts.

Research work such as this study by Adriana Romeiro highlights the strength and creativity of Anglo-Saxon historiography, as represented by names like Charles Boxer and John Russell-Wood, whose works continue to renew and inspire the historical research into Portuguese America that has been undertaken in Brazil since the late 1990s.

The kind of analysis that Adriana Romeiro presents here of a classic theme from the eighteenth century, such as the war of the *emboabas*, can prove to be very useful for the study of the various problems encountered in the History of Portuguese America, mainly relating to the nature of a political culture that only had its origins in the Europe of the Ancien Régime, but whose development took place over time and space.

One of the themes that is frequently investigated by both Brazilian and foreign historiographies is the question of institutions and their administrators. An interpretive proposal, such as the one made here by Romeiro, could be very helpful, for example, in developing our understanding of the role of the town and city councils.

This theme has been a subject of research for various historians of Brazil, inspired by both the Anglo-Saxon and the Portuguese historiographies (see Boxer, 1965; Monteiro, 2007; Bicalho, 1998; Gouvêa, 2002). There is widespread consensus among these historians that the merchants participating in the city councils of the Portuguese Empire enjoyed a form of ennoblement that was in keeping with the Ancien Régime.

But, inspired by Romeiro’s analyses, the reader can also reconsider the ennoblement of settlers, according to a tradition that they themselves established in a particular territorial context: in São Paulo, nobility titles (with administrative rights) were traditionally conferred upon the conquerors of the hinterland. The São Paulo city council afforded few ennoblement possibilities to businessmen as a reward for acquiring economic power.

But for a professional such as a merchant, it was important to be part of an institution that represented an imagined community of conquerors and *sertanistas* (the men from the wilderness of the hinterland), who had rendered many services in the enlargement and empowerment of the realm.

In others areas, such as that of the frontiers, the tradition was to confer nobility titles upon the men from the frontiers themselves: the officers of Vila Real, in Mato Grosso, considered themselves to be men who were confined within the territory of a foreign Crown and sometimes referred to themselves by the expression *fronteiros* (men of the frontiers) (see Nauk, pp. 31-32).

It would be interesting to undertake some further research into the documentary archives of the Overseas Council, now converted into digital form as part of the “Barão do Rio Branco” Rescue Project, which contains letters, requests and petitions addressed to town and city councils from various parts of Brazil, in order to examine how each area created its own traditions of nobility in the Empire.

The image of the *paulista* like that of the *sertanista* is an ancient one, and it was used very frequently with political and ideological connotations. Only in the *sertão* (hinterland area) of the mines was it possible to reinvent a glorious past with hints of the promise of great wealth, typical of the chronicles written by travelers in the late Middle Ages.

This powerful image of the *sertanista*, which is also suggestive of the internal exploration of the territory of Portuguese America, has tended to influence the choice of both the themes and periods of research, even in the case of the historical and historiographic production that has sought to offer fresh insights and to break free from ideological interpretation

Capistrano de Abreu, an important historian from the early 20th century, sought to dissuade the younger historian Affonso de Taunay from studying the period of the governor-general of the captaincy of São Paulo, with the argument that it was an uninteresting time, because, for him, the best period in the history of São Paulo had been the time of the *bandeiras* (Araújo, 2005, p. 131).

In fact, even modern historiography has tended to concentrate its attentions on the themes and problems of the period of the *bandeiras*, the exploitation of the mining areas and the movement of settlers into the hinterland (Monteiro, 1994; Blaj, 2002; Borrego; 2006), just as Adriana Romeiro has done. In a more recent and important research work, Maria Aparecida Borrego ended her analysis in 1765, the year when the governorship of D. Luis de Sousa Botelho Mourão began.

The expansion and movement of the *paulistas* in the second half of the eighteenth century, heading towards the south and west of the continent in order to expel the Spaniards, was a common theme in the bureaucratic correspondence published in *Documentos Interessantes para a História e Costumes de São Paulo*, a collection of 95 volumes of printed documents. However, this phenomenon is almost never dealt with, perhaps because the movement southwards during this period does not have the same brilliant interest of the period of the beginning and expansion of mining.

In recent years, some research and studies in Brazilian historiography have chosen to reflect upon the period of the governor-general, a time for which it is possible to “des-sertanizar” the history of *paulistas* and São Paulo (to take it away from the hinterland). But such research seeks, above all, to focus on the economy of São Paulo, in a model of interpretation that gives special priority to the Atlantic perspective as a category of analysis (Max, 2006; Mont Serrath, 2007; Ferlini, 2009). In other words, such research is designed to link São Paulo and its economy to Atlantic mercantile circuits.

However, besides the *sertão* (hinterland) and the Atlantic regions, it is possible to find other contexts, such as the coastal context. Even so, the *paulista* historiography of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and several interpreters of the meaning of the theoretical models of Brazilian colonization and the old colonial system (Prado Jr., Caio, 1942; Novais, Fernando, 1979) do not seem to have had eyes for the coastal context of São Paulo.

This context is more recent than the *bandeirante* context. The life and activities taking place along the coast of São Paulo began to intensify in around 1780 and this development continued throughout the first few decades of the nineteenth century. An important historian has since concentrated his on this coastal perspective of São Paulo (see Holanda, 1995). More

recently, other research has also followed this path (Valentin, 2003; Moura, 2009), an avenue that was originally opened up by Caio Prado Jr. (Prado Jr., 1933).

The coastal context does not have a past that is full of stories of bravery and glory. The Crown itself had a major interest in maintaining the coast of the captaincy protected and preventing this southern coast from becoming a mere gateway to the mining areas. The first mining operations for the production of metals in Portuguese America took place in the coastal regions of São Paulo, until such time as the Crown started to make incursions further inland. Studying the coastal context, on the other hand, also means connecting the history of São Paulo and the *paulistas* to Rio de Janeiro (*idem*).

The political status of the discoverers and *sertanistas* that according to this book by Adriana Romeiro, was defended by the officials of São Paulo city council leads the reader to think that there might have existed a sense of rivalry between the city council of São Paulo and that of Santos, one of main maritime villages on the coast of the captaincy, providing the only direct access route to this city by land.

The rivalry between the two councils, that of Santos and that of São Paulo, seems to have deepened in the second half of the eighteenth century, when, after the captaincy had regained its autonomy in 1765, the first governor-general D. Luis de Sousa Botelho Mourão, the heir to the house of Mateus, began to apply a policy that involved economic stimuli for the development of activities in the port of Santos.

The officials of the Santos council, perhaps taking advantage of this historic circumstance, wrote to the Overseas Council and asked to be promoted to the status of a senate (*Carta dos oficiais da Câmara da vila de Santos ao rei [D. José], reclamando pelo fato de já não terem os privilégios que tinham antigamente*, AHU-São Paulo, cx 5, doc. 23), but they received no reply.

The silence of the King meant that the Crown was not in a position to fight against the *sertanista* status that guaranteed the cooperation of the *paulistas* in other situations of conflict in the Empire, as was the case in the second half of the eighteenth century.

These are some of the ideas that this book by Adriana Romeiro, an associate professor of History at the University of Minas Gerais, encourages the reader to think about. Some of her other ideas are controversial, such as the concept of an “ethnic group” that she borrowed from John Russell-Wood and applied to the *paulistas*.

This concept of an *ethnic group* is dangerous and sits uncomfortably amid the intellectual traditions of Brazil and particularly in the historiography of the *paulistas*, because, at a first rather rapid glance, it might evoke memories of the image of a “race of giants” that was projected by some intellectual *paulistas*, such as Alfredo Ellis Junior, around the figure of the *bandeirante* (Ellis, Jr., Alfredo, 1926). Ellis Jr. based his analysis on biological and evolutionary assumptions, and he was one of the authors of the modernist manifesto entitled *Verde Amarelo*, published in 1929, which defended the formation of a fifth race or a cosmic race in Brazil.

The concept of *ethnic group*, as used by Adriana Romeiro, is far removed from this image created by Alfredo Ellis Jr., and it is well grounded in the theoretical assumptions of the anthropologist Fredrik Barth (Barth, Fredrik, 2000). But it is best to avoid it, because regional sentiments are always the first to appear, especially in conflict situations, and also because of the strength of the ideology of the *paulista* regionalist historiography. Why not just use the phrase “the *paulista* identity?”

Doesn’t using two pages (232-233) to justify the idea that the *paulistas* were an ethnic group (even if based on modern anthropology) mean persisting with a common problem of the regional historiography written about them? This problem does not fit in with the proposal made in this book by Adriana Romeiro, which is precisely that of escaping from the common established issues of historiography.

Anyway, one of the greatest contributions made by Adriana Romeiro’s book is to warn the historian that the political imaginary is often more violent and leaves scars that run much deeper than those inflicted during the fighting on the battlefield.

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