

## Article

---

""Civilizing"" the Amazon: Amerindians and the Portuguese Crown's Struggle for Sovereignty, 1650-1777"

Helena Nunes Duarte

*Journal of the Canadian Historical Association / Revue de la Société historique du Canada*, vol. 18, n° 2, 2007, p. 226-253.

Pour citer cet article, utiliser l'information suivante :

URI: <http://id.erudit.org/iderudit/018230ar>

DOI: 10.7202/018230ar

Note : les règles d'écriture des références bibliographiques peuvent varier selon les différents domaines du savoir.

---

Ce document est protégé par la loi sur le droit d'auteur. L'utilisation des services d'Érudit (y compris la reproduction) est assujettie à sa politique d'utilisation que vous pouvez consulter à l'URI <https://apropos.erudit.org/fr/usagers/politique-dutilisation/>

---

Érudit est un consortium interuniversitaire sans but lucratif composé de l'Université de Montréal, l'Université Laval et l'Université du Québec à Montréal. Il a pour mission la promotion et la valorisation de la recherche. Érudit offre des services d'édition numérique de documents scientifiques depuis 1998.

Pour communiquer avec les responsables d'Érudit : [info@erudit.org](mailto:info@erudit.org)

# **“Civilizing” the Amazon: Amerindians and the Portuguese Crown’s Struggle for Sovereignty, 1650-1777**

**HELENA NUNES DUARTE**

## ***Abstract***

*This article examines Portuguese colonization techniques in northern Brazil and subsequent changes during the regime of the Marquis of Pombal (1750-1777), which centred on restructuring defence, settlement, and the role of natives in the colonies. Focusing on the 1758 Indian Directorate, a collection of laws on native policy, the article examines how, despite the Enlightenment humanitarian trappings of the reform, it had a far more complex purpose than merely converting Indians into loyal subjects of the Portuguese crown. The legislation was just one part of a multi-faceted attempt to establish the crown’s sovereignty in the Amazon, which included taking power from the Jesuits, subjugating the natives, defining imperial territory, and asserting economic independence.*

## ***Résumé***

*Cet article examine les techniques de colonisation portugaises dans le nord du Brésil et les changements qui ont suivi le régime du Marquis de Pombal (1750-1777), centrées sur la restructuration de la défense, la colonisation et le rôle des autochtones dans les colonies. En mettant l’accent sur l’administration indienne de 1758, une série de lois sur la politique autochtone, l’article examine comment, en dépit de tous les signes humanitaires extérieurs d’illumination de la réforme, elle avait un objectif beaucoup plus complexe que la simple conversion des Indiens en de loyaux sujets de la couronne portugaise. La législation n’était qu’une partie de la tentative à volets multiples d’établir la souveraineté de la couronne en Amazonie, c’est-à-dire soutirer le pouvoir aux jésuites, subjuguer les autochtones, définir le territoire impérial et faire valoir l’indépendance économique.*

“CIVILIZING” THE AMAZON: AMERINDIANS AND THE PORTUGUESE  
CROWN’S STRUGGLE FOR SOVEREIGNTY, 1650-1777

In the mid-eighteenth century, Portuguese America was struggling after the end of the “Golden Age” of Brazil, which spanned the first half of the century and saw the influx of wealth into Portuguese coffers. João V, “the Magnanimous,” died in 1750 after a reign of spending the new-found riches of Brazilian gold and diamonds on public works and the Church.<sup>1</sup> However, the wealth did not stimulate improvements in agriculture, industry, civilian administration or the military.<sup>2</sup> In fact, the Portuguese empire suffered from a trade deficit, for which only the export of Brazilian specie could compensate, and the crown had little real power in Brazil, the jewel that sustained Portuguese trade by providing bullion. The Portuguese had pushed west in South America, but there were no real lines of demarcation, no defined imperial territory. Moreover, even if the Portuguese sovereign governed regions like the Amazon in theory, the missionaries and the natives controlled the region in practice.

Amazonian town councils, residents, plantation owners and governors all resented the structure of power in the region, as they repeatedly asked the crown to free the native labourers controlled by the Jesuits, or to authorize and subsidize the import of African slaves. A power struggle developed between the administration and the Jesuits, as the religious order clearly controlled the frontiers of the empire. However, during the Pombaline administration, issues of government control became prominent, especially when it came to emphasizing the sovereignty of José I.

During the reign of José I, or more precisely the dynamic government of his secretary of state, the Marquis of Pombal, which governed from 1750 to 1777, the Amazon region underwent systematic reforms involving significant political, military, economic, administrative and religious aspects. The crown questioned the role of each subject within the empire, attempting to consolidate and demonstrate its power, especially in relation to natives. During its first decade in power, the administration issued three laws regarding the governance of natives in Grão Pará and Maranhão: the law of 6 June 1755 restoring Indian liberty, the law of 7 June 1757 removing the natives from the Jesuits’ temporal control, and the 1758 laws that created the Indian Directorate.<sup>3</sup> This reform project and its execution generated bitter conflict among the missionaries, the natives, the colonists and the administration. The Jesuit order, which lost its

---

1 I wish to thank Hendrik Kraay for his comments, Joan Sangster for her patience, and the anonymous reviewers of the Canadian Historical Association.

2 Charles Boxer, *The Golden Age of Brazil, 1695-1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962), 321.

3 For some academics, the term “Indian” is considered inappropriate because of its origins in European colonialism. I use the terms “native” and “indigenous” particularly when generalizing about different native groups in the Amazon region. However, I often use the term “Indian” when I am talking about colonial structures and the colonial regimes’ relationship to subjected indigenous peoples in that the crown classified them officially as *índios* or “Indians.”

power in the empire, culminating in its expulsion from the Amazon and Portugal in 1759 and the remaining Portuguese possessions in 1760, was particularly affected by the changes imposed by the crown.

This article examines the new colonization techniques implemented by the Portuguese in northern Brazil during the Pombaline era, focusing on changes in defence and settlement, and how they focused on the indigenous population. In the Amazonian state of Grão Pará and Maranhão, the crown, represented by Francisco Xavier de Mendonça Furtado (Pombal's brother), clearly changed its attitudes toward Amerindians on the frontier in the hope that they would become active participants in defending royal sovereignty in the region. Colonization techniques used on the Brazilian frontier demonstrated a new Catholic ideology that centred its attention on "humanizing" or "civilizing" the native population through a process of assimilation. In 1758, this took on the form of the Directorate, a collection of laws on native policy, which despite its Enlightenment humanitarian trappings, had a far more complex purpose than merely converting Indians into loyal subjects of the Portuguese crown. The primary focus of this article is not the examination of how the Indian Directorate affected the native population, but rather how the legislation was just one part of a multi-faceted approach for establishing the crown's sovereignty in the Amazon, which included taking power from the Jesuits, subjecting natives, defining imperial territory and asserting economic independence.<sup>4</sup>

### **Francisco Xavier de Mendonça Furtado**

In early 1751, José I appointed Francisco Xavier de Mendonça Furtado to the post of governor and captain general of Maranhão "for three years or more until a successor [was] sent."<sup>5</sup> On 24 September 1751, Mendonça Furtado succeeded Governor Francisco Pedro Gorjão de Mendonça and took office in Belém do Pará. The new governor had already been in Brazil as part of Commander Luís de Brederode's fleet, serving in Sacramento. In fact, Mendonça Furtado's appointment cited his previous merits and services to the crown explaining that, therefore, the king was confident that he would carry out his duties competently.<sup>6</sup>

---

4 For a detailed discussion on the colonization of natives see John Hemming, *Red Gold: The Conquest of the Brazilian Indians* (London: Macmillan, 1978); *Amazon Frontier: The Defeat of the Brazilian Indians* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987); Mathias C. Kieman, *Indian Policy of Portugal in the Amazon Region, 1614-1693* (New York: Octagon Books, 1973) .

5 Francisco Pedro Gorjão de Mendonça to Mendonça Furtado, Belém, 7 June 1751, Arquivo Nacional/Torre do Tombo (hereafter cited as ANTT), Chancelaria de D. José I, Livro 82, fl. 377.

6 *Ibid.*

“CIVILIZING” THE AMAZON: AMERINDIANS AND THE PORTUGUESE  
CROWN’S STRUGGLE FOR SOVEREIGNTY, 1650-1777

Mendonça Furtado’s long civil and military career exemplified the governing ideology of the administration of his brother, the Marquis of Pombal, and José I. His knowledge of cartography enabled him to undertake the arduous task of demarcating the borders of northern Brazil, the principal reason that he was named the minister plenipotentiary in the region. More importantly, the appointment of Mendonça Furtado as governor and captain-general of the state of Grão Pará and Maranhão signified the inception of the Pombaline strategies and reforms for the occupation and development of the vast northern region of Brazil.

King José I had inherited a global empire that was losing its economic power, especially in the area of Asian commerce. In fact, the rapid deterioration of the empire became increasingly alarming for the administration, leading the crown to look at Brazil’s economic potential. With proper development, the Americas could provide the natural resources and products required by a demanding pre-industrial Europe. In addition, Portugal suffered from a severe trade imbalance, with imperial capital going more or less directly to imports coming from other countries, such as England, and something had to be done to boost the Portuguese economy. Therefore, producing and exporting products from Brazil became more important, particularly with the discovery of gold and diamonds in Brazil and the loss of Asian markets.

For various reasons, the vast Amazon rainforest was a major obstacle for Portuguese colonization in northern Brazil during the eighteenth century. The population consisted of a few Amerindian villages, with hardly any whites and African slaves. Although it is difficult to find population estimates, the region was sparsely populated, lacking any real population density and suffering from high mortality rates.<sup>7</sup> Epidemic outbreaks were common and killed thousands. A smallpox epidemic claimed approximately 40,000 victims between 1743 and 1747. Popular resistance to vaccination meant that it took a long time to overcome smallpox, despite the fact that a Carmelite missionary attempted the first Latin American inoculations in the Amazon region in 1729.<sup>8</sup> For the Portuguese crown, the Amazon represented an economic reserve that had never produced large quantities of commercial goods due to a lack of labour to clear the land and exploit the potential fountain of riches. The lack of systematic production and exportation translated into a subsistence economy, in which the residents did not contribute to the royal treasury.

Ironically, the very jungle that the Portuguese wished to tame, rich in plants and oily seeds, constituted the primary source of income for the colonists

---

<sup>7</sup> Hemming, 445.

<sup>8</sup> D. Sweet, “A Rich Realm of Nature Destroyed” (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin, 1971), 88; David Cleary, “Towards an Environmental History of the Amazon: From Prehistory to the Nineteenth Century,” *Latin American Research Review* 36 (2001): 64-94.

and natives. The indigenous slaves collected the products, which included cacao, cinnamon, annatto, vanilla, sugar cane, fine and coarse cloves, cotton, and wood of various species.<sup>9</sup> These products would then be transported to Europe, where they had a guaranteed market and served as an alternative to spices from the Orient. Certainly, the crown was not indifferent to the natural resources available in the region and knew that if production was stimulated the Portuguese empire could reassert itself on the international spice and drug market. In addition, missionaries, especially those from the Society of Jesus, had colonized the Amazonian region. The majority of the Portuguese inhabitants belonged to the regular clergy: Franciscan, Carmelite, Mercedarian or Jesuit. The Jesuits owned the larger operations of agriculture, silviculture, fishing and ranching. In addition, the Society of Jesus administrated the majority of the native reduction villages in Pará and Maranhão.<sup>10</sup>

The Pombaline political objectives for northern Brazil were too ambitious to be undertaken by the colonists who resided in the region. Neither the colonial elite nor the missionary republic were congruent with the new direction of the enlightened, absolute monarchy of the mid-eighteenth century. Also, some Carmelite missions on the Rio Negro, Rio Madeira and Rio Javari, and the São Pedro and São Paulo Jesuit missions on the Amazon functioned as advanced posts of penetration under the sovereignty of the Spanish crown. It is important to note that after many years of drawn-out negotiations concerning the frontier between Portuguese and Spanish America, the Treaty of Madrid was signed in 1750 and approved the topographical survey and border demarcation between the two respective administrations. In light of the new treaty, securing Portuguese sovereignty in the Amazon was imperative and urgent, requiring immediate organization to demarcate, fortify, inhabit and develop the region. Therefore, to defend Portuguese possessions from neighbouring powers the new governor had to strengthen the region's defences, which the Overseas Council (the government organization responsible for all colonial matters) recognized as incipient and undisciplined. Also, the governor had to fortify and build new fortresses at strategic locations, both on the coast and in the interior.

Mendonça Furtado wasted no time in investigating Grão Pará and Maranhão and reporting his findings to the crown. He received much information from the Bishop of Pará, the city council of Belém, and the civilians of the

---

9 For more detailed description of Amazonian products see Cleary, "Towards an Environmental History," 83; António Carreira, *A Companhia Geral do Grão Pará e Maranhão* (São Paulo: Editora Nacional, 1988); *Diccionario histórico, geographico ethnographico de Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro: Imprensa Nacional, 1922).

10 Isabel Vieira Rodrigues, "A governação do Francisco Xavier de Mendonça Furtado," *Revista Oceanos* 40 (1999): 97; *Conquista recuperada e liberdade restituída. 1759*. Biblioteca Nacional de Lisboa (hereafter cited as BNL), R, CP (Reservados, Pombaline Collection), Cod. 639.

“CIVILIZING” THE AMAZON: AMERINDIANS AND THE PORTUGUESE  
CROWN’S STRUGGLE FOR SOVEREIGNTY, 1650-1777

region who cooperated with the government. However, judging by the correspondence of the governor, his reforming task would be difficult to undertake. In his first letter to his brother – a personal one – he apologetically revealed his perception of the Amazon and the problems that he faced: “The issue that I have the intention of describing in this report is such, and so lamentable, that even to treat you like a brother whom I cordially love, seems violent and repugnant.”<sup>11</sup> Despite his relatively positive opinion of the natives of the region (“docile, easy to persuade and extremely able”) the governor was appalled by the Portuguese settlers and missionaries.<sup>12</sup> Not only were the missionaries unfruitful at “saving the infinite souls that every day [were] lost,” but they also did not take advantage of Amazonian resources. Worse yet, “many Christians have not only taken some of the gentile’s customs, but have also followed their rituals,” and those who went native even included “many ecclesiastics.”<sup>13</sup> Mendonça Furtado directed much of his frustration at the regular clergy. The crown had originally entrusted the missionaries with the spiritual and temporal responsibilities of Christianizing and civilizing the native population, but ecclesiastical control over mission villages had degenerated into a violent “tyranny” that left the natives “wailing under the weight placed on them by the ambition and pride of the Regulars.”<sup>14</sup> The governor went so far as to declare that the “abominable vice of avarice” demonstrated by the missionaries caused “civil war between the people, even the missionaries.”<sup>15</sup>

For the governor, the inability of the Portuguese missionaries to “civilize” the native population was indicative of a problem with asserting royal authority in the region. Worse yet, “neither justice nor king” were recognized in the Amazon.<sup>16</sup> Language became an especially contentious issue in the Amazon. Despite government orders issued in 1688, 1728, and 1751 to instruct natives in Portuguese, the missionaries used native languages for religious instruction. Not only did the missionaries thus defy a direct royal order, but their failure to teach Portuguese ensured a continuation of traditional beliefs and polytheistic practices, for the limitations of native vocabulary made effective Christianization impossible.<sup>17</sup> The Jesuit missionaries argued that Pope Alexander VII had ordered evangelization in the language of the perspective converts back in

---

11 Mendonça Furtado to Marquis of Pombal, Belém, 21 November 1751, in *A Amazônia na era pombalina: Correspondência inédita de governador e capitão-general do estado do Grão Pará e Maranhão Francisco Xavier de Mendonça Furtado, 1751-1759* (hereafter cited as AEP), ed. Marcos Carneiro de Mendonça (Rio de Janeiro: Instituto Histórico e Geográfica Brasileiro, 1963), 63.

12 *Ibid.*

13 *Ibid.*, 64.

14 *Ibid.*, 66.

15 *Ibid.*

16 *Ibid.*

17 *Ibid.*

the mid-seventeenth century, but Mendonça Furtado rejected the Jesuit argument that the Pope's edicts trumped those of the king. In addition, the governor claimed that royal orders having to do with the liberty of natives were forever "compromised," and the religious orders inflicted "the most rigorous of slaveries that could be imagined."<sup>18</sup>

In the governor's estimation, the temporal and political power conceded to the missionaries in 1686 and 1688 to govern the Amazon had resulted in insubordination on the part of the religious orders. He complained that, through these concessions of power, the missionaries, especially the Jesuits, were convinced that all of the Indian villages belonged to them, with the king and the governor having nothing to do with governing. More importantly, this power translated into a control over the labour force in the region. The missionaries felt that they could freely take advantage of their monopoly over native labour, "ruining with it a considerable commerce, of not only the royal treasury, but the market in general, and the plantations and farms in particular."<sup>19</sup> A similar concern existed with the collection of Amazon rainforest products. The Company of Jesus had the most native canoes at their disposal for obtaining these products, as well as controlling the fishing activities, production of meat, and the production of turtle butter. In addition, by virtue of their religious tasks, the Jesuit's products were exempt from taxes, which further hurt the treasury. Since labour, not land, was the most important factor of production, to use modern economic jargon, the Jesuits were far wealthier than the settlers and the religious orders controlled the pace of the economic activity in the Amazon.<sup>20</sup> Mendonça Furtado worried that not only was the treasury reduced to scarcity, but also colonists were reduced to "poverty and misery."<sup>21</sup>

The crown demanded reform in a region where it enjoyed little to no real power in the face of missionary government. However, Mendonça Furtado's appointment came with full powers to remedy the worrisome situation that for decades had troubled the crown. Despite the fact that changes by former governors had produced no visible results, Mendonça Furtado arrived with a clear mandate from a new imperial administration, which had clear expectations for reform in the Amazon.

### **The Public and Secret Instructions for Establishing Royal Control of the Amazon**

As it normally did when appointing colonial governors, the crown gave Mendonça Furtado public and secret directions for conducting his government.

---

18 *Ibid.*, 68.

19 *Ibid.*, 70.

20 *Ibid.*

21 *Ibid.*



“CIVILIZING” THE AMAZON: AMERINDIANS AND THE PORTUGUESE  
CROWN’S STRUGGLE FOR SOVEREIGNTY, 1650-1777

The instructions clearly demonstrate that the crown had a vested interest in Amazonian colonization. Moreover, the project was highly classified, with the instructions concluding: “You will keep this instruction secret and you will only communicate the paragraphs and that you see fit for your government to the governor of Maranhão in observance of my royal orders.”<sup>22</sup>

Given the vast size and governmental difficulties in the Amazon, the instructions outlined important administrative changes. It was imperative that the presence of royal authority be seen throughout the state of Grão Pará and Maranhão, no matter where the Mendonça Furtado resided. Therefore, article thirty-seven of the instructions appointed Luís de Vasconcelos Lobo as governor of Maranhão, subordinate to the governor and captain-general. Mendonça Furtado’s mandate demanded that he stay in Belém to secure defence and promote Portuguese commercial interests. Therefore, two distinct administrative sub-regions were established, the captaincy of Pará and the captaincy of Maranhão, with the captaincy of Rio Negro (roughly the modern state of Amazonas) soon following in 1753.<sup>23</sup>

Judging by the stern language of the instruction document, it is clear that the monarch knew about the systematic failure on the part of the missionaries and colonists to observe laws regarding the civilizing of natives and the development of the Amazon region. More important, the first articles demonstrate great trepidation about the state of colonization in the Amazon region. The crown explained to the governor that the “public interest and the state profits that [he] would administer [were] indispensably linked to business pertaining to the conquest and freedom of natives.”<sup>24</sup> Judging by the orders, it was apparent that these attempts at control and liberty, best classified as assimilation, would have to be executed in a radically different way from colonization endeavours of the past. Many of Mendonça Furtado’s instructions emphasized the problems associated with the liberation and captivity of natives.

Mendonça Furtado’s instructions to uphold the liberty and secure the civilization of the Amerindian population were based on the laws of 1 April 1680 and the royal decree of 28 April 1688, which respectively banned native captivity and then allowed it in some cases. The crown insisted that problems of the continuing existence of native slavery derived from the Mission Council’s interpretation of the laws for its own benefit: “It found in them a pretext to extend their power more than what was permitted.”<sup>25</sup> Therefore, the Overseas Council ordered on 13 July 1747 that all licences permitting the capture of natives issued to the missions would be revoked and forces dedicated to their

---

22 José I to Mendonça Furtado, Lisbon, 31 May 1751, AEP, 38; BNL, R, CP, Cod. 625, 626.

23 *Ibid.*, 37.

24 *Ibid.*, 26.

25 *Ibid.*, 27.

capture were to be withdrawn. On 28 May 1751, the crown issued a decree declaring that no natives could be captured and enslaved, revoking all previous laws concerning Indian slavery. In addition, all Indians used as labourers now had to be paid a daily wage. Therefore, given the importance placed on reforming native law, the crown specifically ordered Mendonça Furtado to be vigilant in the area of native affairs, as it was one of the vital components in the crown's overall strategy in reforming the Amazon.

The abolition of native slavery – de jure and de facto – an institution on which Amazonian society had rested since Portuguese colonization in the seventeenth century, meant that an alternative source of labour was necessary. A year before Mendonça Furtado's appointment, the crown had ordered the commencement of African slave imports into Grão Pará and Maranhão. Hence, one of the governor's principal mandates was to investigate the labour needs of the region to better inform the crown of what was needed to implement a transatlantic slave trade. José I requested to know how many slaves would be required, how many would have to be imported annually and what strategies would better satisfy the needs of the colonists requiring labour.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, the "more intelligent and interested colonists," who were interested in purchasing or importing slaves, had to be consulted to start an active slave trade.<sup>27</sup> Also, identifying methods of payment or trade goods to facilitate the slave trade was imperative. Without finding goods to trade, the importation of African slaves would not be a viable option.

Along with the introduction of slavery and the assimilation of the native population, colonization required a concerted effort on the part of the crown to introduce more Portuguese settlers to the Amazon. The crown planned a program of immigration to Brazil from places such as the Azores and Madeira to establish a Portuguese presence in the Amazon, which was a task to be organized by the new governor. However, settlement also had much to do with strengthening production. The king warned the new governor that when the new settlers arrived they were to be observed and be made accustomed to working on the land, "just as they practiced on the islands."<sup>28</sup> The many *vereadores* (aldermen), plantation owners and farmers who arrived in Brazil traditionally felt too self-important in the colonies to engage in farm work. Moreover, the disdain for toil could often be taken as noble aspirations, something the sovereign clearly did not support.

Mendonça Furtado's instructions reveal the crown's objectives and methodology, and consist mostly of warnings, advice, and insisting that Lisbon be informed of all matters of governance. In the case of the privileges conceded

---

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

“CIVILIZING” THE AMAZON: AMERINDIANS AND THE PORTUGUESE  
CROWN’S STRUGGLE FOR SOVEREIGNTY, 1650-1777

to the missionaries established in Grão Pará and Maranhão, especially the Society of Jesus, the language of the crown’s instructions is both stern and cautious, specifically outlining reforms that had to be made in articles thirteen and twenty-six. The king ordered the governor to consult with all of the regular clergy and other ecclesiastics on the new laws for the use of native labour.<sup>29</sup> In the event that the missionaries did not comply with the laws, José I was adamant that he would confiscate their land grants for the insubordination of the missionaries served “as an embarrassment to the principal objective of why the ecclesiastic peoples were sent to that state.”<sup>30</sup> The instructions revealed a Portuguese administration set on following through with its reform strategies. By order of the king, the governor was to inspect all villages and report back to the crown, with the cooperation of the secular church: “You will take the necessary information and consult with the Bishop of Pará, whom I trust for having a good prudent opinion and experience from the land and will instruct you with the truth, to inform him that it will be better for the ecclesiastics to be left with spiritual dominion.”<sup>31</sup> Interestingly, even though the laws pertained to all orders, the secular clergy, namely the Bishop of Pará, cooperated with the government, which suggested that the Jesuits, rather than all ecclesiastics, were being targeted with these new laws. The Bishop, Miguel de Bulhões e Sousa, a Dominican who had been in the diocese of Pará since 15 February 1749, became the governor’s confidante and right-hand man in Grão Pará and Maranhão.

Article twenty-seven clearly explained the objectives of the program for occupation and settlement of the Amazon for reasons of sovereignty and defence. It recommended that the governor should “intently find methods to secure the state, as well as make commerce flourish.”<sup>32</sup> To do so, native reduction villages with a few Portuguese settlers, especially along the frontier of the captaincy, were required to extend the borders of the region in a short period of time. Similarly, subsequent articles of instruction defined the crown’s strategies for the defence of the territory. Of particular importance was the recommendation that the governor examine the operation of fortresses in the Amazon, investigating the number of troops available, discipline, equipment, and available munitions, especially at the fortress of Macapá. In addition, the crown commissioned a study to identify the need for new fortresses.

---

29 The regular clergy lived according to the rule of an established order and were withdrawn from daily contact with lay people, as opposed to the secular clergy (namely the parish priests) who ministered daily to non-ecclesiastics.

30 *Ibid.*, 29.

31 *Ibid.*, 30.

32 *Ibid.*, 35.

## The Era of the Society of Jesus

Portuguese expansion throughout the globe had long involved a close alliance between the Church and the conquest. The missionaries accompanied the sailors of Portuguese ships, not only to provide spiritual comfort when death came upon the crews, but also to engage in contact with the Other, in order to convert the subaltern into a Christian, into a “civilized” human being. Based on the educative characteristics of these enthusiastic religious men, the government understood missionaries as best suited and prepared to undertake the arduous task of “civilizing.” In Brazil, the Society of Jesus (Jesuits) claimed the right to disseminate this Christian ideology, especially after gaining prominence during the Counter-Reformation of the mid-sixteenth century. The Jesuits perceived themselves as the only genuine crusaders for Christ, defending and spreading faith, obeying only the Pope.

The missionaries, who in 1549 had accompanied the first governor general of Brazil, Tomé de Sousa, especially Fathers Manuel da Nóbrega and José de Anchieta, were instrumental in building Brazil as part of the Portuguese empire.<sup>33</sup> The first contingents of Jesuits helped in the 1560 victory over the French in Fort Coligny, founding Rio de Janeiro, and moved south to São Paulo de Piratininga, creating the mission that would give birth to the city of São Paulo.<sup>34</sup> Land grants, sacrificial spirit, belief in the obligation to convert the gentile, and the “humanization” of Amerindians were pillars of the colonial order. The Jesuits identified the Amerindian populations, namely the Tupinamba, as docile, humble and capable of being molded, and quickly changed not only their religious practices, but also all activities of social life such as economics, education and culture. For three centuries, the Portuguese crown had granted the Jesuits, and subsequently other religious orders, financing, honours, and authorization to establish and administer schools, villages, and seminaries. The Jesuits carried out government policies outlining economic development and the 1680 laws prohibiting native slavery, which went beyond the spiritual realm, and concerned the secular life of aboriginal communities.

The first twenty years of the Jesuit presence in Brazil saw a major transformation in the methods of evangelization. They replaced traditional nomadic missions with settlements that consisted of a primary residence, a college and an *aldéia* (Indian village). The residence housed missionaries, while the colleges served as centres to educate recruits and local elites. However, as Isabel dos Guimarães Sá argues, the evangelization of the native population took

---

33 Isabel dos Guimarães Sá, “Conversion in Portuguese America,” in *The Spiritual Conversion of the Americas*, ed. James Muldoon (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2004), 197.

34 Jean-Claude Laborie, ed., *La mission jésuite du Brésil: Lettres et autres documents (1549-1570)* (Paris: Chandeigne, 1998), 7-62.

“CIVILIZING” THE AMAZON: AMERINDIANS AND THE PORTUGUESE  
CROWN’S STRUGGLE FOR SOVEREIGNTY, 1650-1777

place primarily in the villages.<sup>35</sup> The Jesuit missionaries convinced the Indians to settle in new villages, where they would be available for religious instruction. In the captaincy of Maranhão, formed after the expulsion of the French from the mouth of the Amazon in 1615, development of these villages occurred primarily in the eighteenth century, coinciding with the growth of the Jesuit population.<sup>36</sup>

By the mid-eighteenth century, the remote Amazon missions were rich in comparison to the other colonists and residents. Although other religious orders also administered villages, Jesuit organization, much more temporal than spiritual, provided self-sufficiency and autonomy and gave the Society of Jesus more social and economic power than other settlers, including the civil servants. By the mid-eighteenth century, the Jesuits controlled nineteen villages, the Carmelites controlled sixteen, the Franciscans of Saint Anthony controlled nine, the Franciscans of Mercy controlled nine, the Franciscans of Conceição da Beira controlled seven and Mercederian friars controlled two, for a total of sixty-two villages surrounding the Amazon River and its tributaries.<sup>37</sup> However, apart from these missions, the Jesuits acquired estates through purchase or inheritance on which they used native and slave labour. Inventories made in 1759, when the Society of Jesus was expelled from the Portuguese empire, note that the Jesuits owned twenty-five cattle ranches, three sugar-mills and one pottery-mill.<sup>38</sup> On the island of Marajó alone, the Jesuits managed ranches holding over 100,000 head of cattle.<sup>39</sup> They also marketed native products from the Amazon, such as drugs, cloves, cacao and cinnamon, and transported them by fleets of canoes to warehouses in Belém. Yet, control over labour rather than property ownership determined the wealth of the order, as large tracts of land could easily be abandoned and commodities could not be collected or produced without a workforce, whether Indian or African slave.

The missionaries carried out the distribution of Indian labour for the service of colonists, resulting in many grievances and petitions to the Overseas Council concerning a shortage of workers. The colonists accused the missionaries of hoarding and unequally dividing labourers, insisting that they kept the stronger and younger individuals, making the order’s business ventures more competitive. Governor Francisco Xavier de Mendonça Furtado expressed his frustration with the labour shortage, explaining that the Jesuits were “accus-

---

35 Sá, “Conversion,” 198.

36 Dauril Alden, *The Making of Enterprise: The Society of Jesus in Portugal, Its Empire and Beyond, 1540-1750* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 674-76.

37 Renata Araújo, *As cidades da Amazônia no século XVIII: Belém, Macapá e Mazagão* (Porto: FAUP Publicações, 1992), 98.

38 *Ibid.*, 99.

39 Kenneth Maxwell, *Pombal: The Paradox of the Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 58.

tomed to being the absolute lords of all of these people, because rarely comes the year when the settlers are given their rightful share.”<sup>40</sup> More importantly, missionaries maintained a close relationship with the natives that often meant that natives were more willing or felt more obligated to work on land held by the religious orders. Mendonça Furtado interpreted this situation as being indicative of a master/slave relationship:

These facts are made even more scandalous when you realize that not only do those 1,550 Indians belong to those priests, but apart from them, they have infinite private settlements at their service ... in which they keep a infinite number of these miserable Indians as enlisted serfs, where they live in a hard and rigorous form of slavery, without a way of getting out from now until the end of the world.<sup>41</sup>

Although the plight of the natives concerned the governor, much of his rhetoric had more to do with the economic development of the Amazon region and the perception that the Jesuits hindered growth due to their monopoly on labour and their tax exemptions, a problem that had bothered the Pombaline administration.

### **Mendonça Furtado: Frustrated Governor**

As early as three months after his arrival in Belém in 1751, Mendonça Furtado was well aware of the conflict between the Jesuits and the administration over implementing the government’s plan for developing the Amazon. His preoccupation with the Jesuits compelled him to write his brother on several occasions, not only to explain the problem, but also to seek advice on the measures that should be taken against the Jesuits. He complained that “they [did] not care about the king, court, governor, or any sort of government or justice; they consider[ed] themselves sovereigns and independent.”<sup>42</sup> More suspicion of the Jesuits was fuelled by the apparent insubordination of the Society of Jesus. In one instance, the governor asked the Jesuit representative to transfer a Jesuit friar, João de Sousa, after two native elders from the village of Piraviri complained that he had used violence to punish the community for getting drunk during a marriage celebration. Mendonça Furtado was appalled when the Jesuit official replied coldly that he neither wanted to move, nor should the government move Sousa.<sup>43</sup> In addition, he complained that the Jesuits exuded

---

40 Mendonça Furtado to Pombal, Belém, 10 September 1754, AEP, 582-83.

41 *Ibid.*, 583. When Mendonça Furtado spoke of the “private settlements,” he meant those where Portuguese settlers were not entitled to a share of native labour, namely because these settlements were too far from where labour was required.

42 Mendonça Furtado to Pombal, Belém, 29 December 1751, AEP, 143-148.

43 *Ibid.*

“CIVILIZING” THE AMAZON: AMERINDIANS AND THE PORTUGUESE  
CROWN’S STRUGGLE FOR SOVEREIGNTY, 1650-1777

“unparalleled arrogance and inexplicable pride” after receiving orders to establish villages in Javari and Japorá from the Confessor, José Moreira.<sup>44</sup>

However, Mendonça Furtado’s initial instructions from the crown in 1751 demonstrated that the metropolis had long suspected the Jesuits’ economic practices, and that concern over the Jesuit control of natives had much more to do with money than with humanitarianism. King José I suggested that Mendonça Furtado should investigate the wealth and capital of the Jesuits with “great caution, circumspection, and prudence.”<sup>45</sup> The crown ordered the governor to observe the Jesuit treatment of natives and to convince the settlers that “it was more useful to have [Indians] who willingly and voluntarily served,” than having to use a system of forced labour.<sup>46</sup> The colonists also fuelled tensions between the governor and the Jesuits with constant claims that the religious order’s protection of Indians (or monopoly over their labour) had deprived the colonists of workers, especially since African slaves were too costly. Furthermore, Mendonça Furtado expressed interest in the turtles, cloves and drugs that the natives acquired for the Jesuits, and questioned the order’s requests for government funds as they obviously profited from trade. Instead, the governor wished to encourage secular colonist trade that would be subject to taxation. Taxation likewise concerned colonists, who demanded reforms that would remove the religious orders’ customs exemptions to create fair market conditions.<sup>47</sup> Similarly, Mendonça Furtado viewed all religious orders, especially the Society of Jesus, as potential threats to the economic development of the Amazon, because too much capital was tied up in their estates and did not circulate in a market economy:

It is necessary to settle on two true, clear and evident principles. The first is that this state was founded, flourished, infinite sugar mills and plantations were established, while the religious did not have this high and absolute power. Second, after they had it (power) everything was ruined, confused and finally reduced to nothing, because the religious communities took all of the commerce that should revolve around the market ... taking profit from the public and the royal treasury.<sup>48</sup>

Regardless of the approach taken by Mendonça Furtado to encourage trade in the region, reforms were difficult to implement if they did not receive the support of the Jesuits.

---

44 Ibid.

45 José I to Mendonça Furtado, Lisbon, 31 May 1751, AEP, 26-31.

46 Ibid.

47 Manuel Lopes to José I, Belém, 5 May 1752, Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino (hereafter cited as AHU), Pará, caixa 33, doc. 3096.

48 José I to Mendonça Furtado, Lisbon, 31 May 1751, AEP, 26-31.

After 1621, the crown granted the state of Maranhão its own administrative apparatus after it separated the region from the control of the state of Brazil.<sup>49</sup> The Overseas Council in Lisbon handled all matters of government, aside from religious responsibilities. A civil service, made up of a governor, a high judge and the purveyor of the exchequer, had authority over the captaincies of Maranhão and Pará, while each respective captaincy had a captain general, a judge and a purveyor who were accountable to their state superiors. Other secretaries of state, such as supreme court judges, could also issue orders to the state concerning matters specific to their offices.

Despite the government framework, control of the Amazon region in the eighteenth century was firmly in the hands of the Society of Jesus and not royal administration. Not only were royal orders ignored, but the governor and the other civil servants wielded little power. Understanding the difficulties in administering the region, Mendonça Furtado endeavoured to suppress Jesuit privileges, reclaim control of Amerindian labour, and restructure the state apparatus. Immediately, he convened the Missions Council, consisting of the executive state officials, the Bishop of Maranhão, and prelates of the religious orders, in order to establish a minimum salary for native workers, thus creating a workforce willing to labour for the colonists and addressing the Jesuit fears that settlers would enslave natives:

Sir, I convened the Missions Council to arbitrate the salary that should be paid to the Indians from now on, understanding the quality of their work, and the poverty in which we find this state; it was unanimously agreed that each Indian [farm and domestic labourer] should be paid 400 reis per month, 600 reis for pilots and oarsman, and officials 1 tostão per day, and food for all.<sup>50</sup>

Surprisingly, establishing a minimum wage for the native population did not incite controversy. Yet, these negotiations were the first steps taken towards a new policy for social organization in the Amazon.

### **The First Imperial Efforts to Consolidate Power**

Through the introduction of administrative reforms, Mendonça Furtado changed the colonial power structure and began to remove the autonomy of the missions and, within a decade, transferred authority to the state. The administration controlled all of the essential initiatives required to change the Amerindian population, and anticipated that through these proposals a “civi-

---

49 Stuart B. Schwartz, *Sovereignty and Society in Colonial Brazil: The High Court of Bahia and its Judges, 1609-1751* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 162.

50 Mendonça Furtado to Diogo de Mendonça Côte Real, Belém, 22 December 1751, AEP, 131; One tostão was equal to 1000 reis



“CIVILIZING” THE AMAZON: AMERINDIANS AND THE PORTUGUESE  
CROWN’S STRUGGLE FOR SOVEREIGNTY, 1650-1777

lized” and assimilated population would emerge, or at least a productive and lucrative population, subject to the king. Directly inspired by the changing political and social ideals of the eighteenth century, this reconfiguration of the social order was imperative for the Portuguese government that wanted to position itself as an enlightened administration. Despite the fact that the colony began to be territorially defined, demarcated and recognized by foreign governments with the Treaty of Madrid, the ideology of enlightened absolutism practiced by the metropolis depended on a new relationship being formed between the natives and the colonial power, focusing on the king and his state apparatus. This imperial affiliation, built on subordination, produced a new conversion philosophy, one that put aside Christian criteria in order to promote the virtues of civilization and the right to property so that under the same law every individual, regardless of race, could feel honoured and dignified being the subject of the king. From this humanistic and enlightened ideological perspective, Mendonça Furtado revised the laws of native liberty.

The Pombaline administration entrusted Mendonça Furtado with a mandate to liberate the Amerindian population, whose status had been a point of contention for many years. In Amazonian society, everyone – colonists and missionaries alike – depended on native labour. Several laws were enacted throughout the seventeenth century to curb the capture and enslavement of the Amerindian populations. On 17 October 1653, the government passed a law that banned the capture of natives, except if they were imprisoned during a “just war,” for theft, for avoiding fiscal obligations (such as tributary labour), or if they practiced cannibalism.<sup>51</sup> Later, on 1 April 1680, the law was amended because of abuse and difficulty in determining “just cause” for enslavement, especially in the state of Maranhão. However, with the expansion of the Amazonian frontier, more offensive and defensive wars were fought, and laws against taking native slaves meant that Indian prisoners would most likely be executed by colonists rather than be held captive. Therefore in 1688, the government rescinded the 1680 law and returned to a modified 1653 law. Later, all captured natives were administrated by the holy orders, and subsequently the ecclesiastics were to report all incidences of native slavery at the hands of colonists.<sup>52</sup> Even though laws prohibiting slavery were enacted, natives were “administered,” which often was a form of disguised slavery, depending on the character of their employers, including the missionaries.

Obviously, Mendonça Furtado realized that an alternative labour force was needed before natives could be freed from labour obligations. It was quite com-

---

51 Francisco Ribeiro da Silva, “A legislação seiscentista portuguesa e os índios do Brasil,” in *Brasil: Colonização e escravidão*, ed. Maria Beatriz Nizza da Silva (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Nova Fronteira, 1999), 20.

52 *Ibid.*, 21.

mon for the colonists to petition the king for affordable access to African slaves to create a large alternative workforce, especially in light of epidemics that devastated the native communities.<sup>53</sup> In 1754, Mendonça Furtado wrote a series of letters to his brother outlining the pleas of some colonists to establish a monopoly company to facilitate the importation of African slave labour to the Amazon region. He reasoned that, if African slaves could provide the bulk of a workforce, the colonists would not feel the need to enslave and abuse the native population. In turn, a new workforce would enable more production and potential for trade, which meant that natives could theoretically be freed from labour obligations. Considering that the “absolute power” of the Society of Jesus rested on their ability to control native labour, Mendonça Furtado felt that establishing a monopoly company to obtain slave labour would also be the best way to eradicate the Jesuit sphere of influence.<sup>54</sup>

In 1755, the Marquis of Pombal acted quickly on his brother’s advice and enacted legislation that founded the Company of Grão Pará and Maranhão and wrote a decree to enact the complete liberty and integration of the native population, removing them from the supervision of the religious orders.<sup>55</sup> On 6 June 1755, the Portuguese court issued a law concerning Indians being given “equal” rights and obligations, essentially receiving legal equality with the white population. The natives would be free to work for whomever they desired, for a predetermined salary. The next day, 7 June 1755, another law establishing a civil government for the Indians was released. All priests and missionaries were to be excluded from government roles as “secular government was far from the obligations of priesthood.”<sup>56</sup> Temporal government of the natives would be given to the ordinary judges, councilmen, and justice officials, and to the Indian chiefs of each village, who were to govern according to Portuguese law.

### **The Indian Directorate**

Commonly referred to as the Indian Directorate, Mendonça Furtado authored the *Directorate that Should be Observed in the Settlements of the Indians of Pará and Maranhão until His Majesty Should Order the Contrary*, which was

---

53 Conselho Ultramarino to João V, Lisbon, 16 May 1750, AHU, CU, Pará, caixa 31, doc. 2976; Moradores to José I, Belém, 15 February 1754, AHU, CU, Pará, caixa 36, doc. 3342.

54 Mendonça Furtado to Pombal, Belém, 20 February 1754, AHU, CU, Pará, caixa 36, doc. 3347; Mendonça Furtado to Diogo de Mendonça Corte Real, Belém, 18 January 1754, AEP, 456-59; Mendonça Furtado to Pombal, Belém, 26 January 1754, AEP, 465-70.

55 *Instituição da Companhia Geral do Grão Pará e Maranhão* (Lisbon: Oficina de Miguel Rodrigues, 1755).

56 Mathias C. Kiemen, “The Status of the Indian in Brazil after 1820,” *The Americas* 21:3 (1965): 263.

“CIVILIZING” THE AMAZON: AMERINDIANS AND THE PORTUGUESE  
CROWN’S STRUGGLE FOR SOVEREIGNTY, 1650-1777

released on 3 May 1758.<sup>57</sup> The Directorate, approved by royal decree on 17 August 1758, expressed the pedagogical goals of Mendonça Furtado. He desired that the natives become “civilized” men and women. Interestingly, the emancipation law of 6 June 1755 was kept secret until the opportune time, on Pombal’s instructions.<sup>58</sup> However, Mendonça Furtado was aware that problems might occur:

As one who had dealt with them [the indigenous population] on a day-to-day basis and who has lived in their settlements for two years, [that] the most pious intentions of his majesty will be frustrated if these miserable and rustic ignorants are totally placed in control of their own affairs ... and since it is not possible to pass from one extreme to the other without seeking some means by which it is possible to obtain the objective [of the legislation] I see no more appropriate measure than to place in each settlement a man with the title of director.<sup>59</sup>

Despite the cautionary tone of the governor’s advice, a civil service that planned to aid natives with the process of integration quickly replaced the Jesuits. The crown zealously implemented the Directorate to establish an enlightened government which could effectively control the Amazon.

On the other hand, if the Pombaline government were to claim authority for the state in the vast region, the Amazon had to be inhabited with individuals loyal to José I, such as assimilated natives. In order for foreign surveyors to be contracted to demarcate the border between the Portuguese and the Spanish empires, the immense area required a population occupying the territory, which was claimed under the international law of *uti possidetis*.<sup>60</sup> Pombal expressed the importance of inhabitants:

---

57 *Directório que se deve observar nas Povoações dos índios do Pará e Maranhão em quanto Sua Magestade não mandar o contrário* (Lisbon: Oficina de Miguel Rodrigues, 1758); ANTT, MSS. Livraria, Livro 962, 118-41v; Joaquim Ignacio de Freitas and Feliciano de Cunha França, *Collecção chronológica de leis extravagantes: posteriores à nova compilação das ordenações do reino, publicadas em 1603*, tomo 4 (Coimbra: Real Imprensa da Universidade, 1819), 465.

58 Initially, it appears that the law of 6 June 1755 was to be secret; however, the wait for enactment could also have much to do with the Lisbon earthquake that took place 1 November 1755, because this legislative package was only sent to Mendonça Furtado the following year. The Directorate was ordered in 1757 and ratified in 1758.

59 Official letter from Mendonça Furtado to the crown, Belém, 21 May 1757, cited in Maxwell, *Pombal*, 59.

60 *Uti possidetis* is the law of possession. It was used in South America to demarcate lands that belonged to the Portuguese and Spanish as they scrambled to the centre of the continent, pushing for more territory. Essentially, the Portuguese crown claimed that since its settlements were west of the original international boundaries set by the Treaty of Tordesillas in 1494, they were sovereigns of that territory. However, based on this argument, the Portuguese had to ensure that enough settlers loyal to the crown were present so as to extend the border as far west as possible and to keep the Spaniards from renegeing on their territorial concessions.

As the power and wealth of all countries consists principally in the number and multiplication of the people that inhabit it ... this number and multiplication of people is most indispensable now on the frontiers of Brazil for their defence.”<sup>61</sup>

Continental Portugal, the Azores and Madeira were not able to supply enough people to colonize the Brazilian colonies and defend the territory. Therefore, the solution had to rest in the population that already inhabited Brazil and assimilation. By removing all differences between the Indians and the Portuguese, he felt that natives would no longer feel subjugated, resulting in miscegenation and loyalty to the crown.

Pombal's instructions and subsequent laws concerning the status of Indians incensed the Jesuits as their protectionist Indian policy had been devised precisely to isolate the Indians from exploitation by the settlers and to discourage integration with the Portuguese.<sup>62</sup> Based on past experiences, the Jesuits believed that removing their protection would decimate the Amerindian population. In addition, even though the Treaty of Madrid (1750) did not negatively affect the Jesuit missionaries by displacing missions in the Amazon as they did in upper Uruguay, the Jesuits in Grão Pará and Maranhão obstructed the crown patrols that kept Spanish colonists from pushing east, which the missionaries viewed as an act of solidarity in support of their uprooted southern brothers.<sup>63</sup> Every time that the Jesuits were asked to prepare boats, oarsmen and provisions, boats would be dismantled, and oarsmen and provisions could not be found in the region.<sup>64</sup> Mendonça Furtado lamented that “there is nobody to paddle the canoes, and in every hinterland settlement there are no provisions,” adding that the task of demarcation had become arduous as “all the religious were against him.”<sup>65</sup> Mendonça Furtado complained that even when the Jesuits were consulted to aid in border demarcation, they remained indifferent and, despite their ability to aid the situation by providing labour and provisions, they did not help the governor.<sup>66</sup> Pombal deemed their indifference to defence a

---

61 Pombal to Gomes Freire Andrada, 21 September 1751, in Carneiro de Mendonça, *O Marquês de Pombal e o Brasil* (São Paulo: Companhia Editora Nacional, 1960), 188.

62 Maxwell, *Pombal*, 53.

63 The Treaty of Madrid was a document signed by Spain and Portugal concerning their empires in what is now Brazil. It allowed for further expansion of the Portuguese empire, west of the former limit of the 46<sup>th</sup> meridian, at the expense of the Spanish empire. In their attempt to demarcate the new frontier, the Spanish and Portuguese armies met the resistance of the seven (Spanish Jesuit) missions of the upper Uruguay that did not want their missions going to the Portuguese, sparking the Guarani War.

64 Visconde de Carnaxide, *O Brasil na administração pombalina* (Rio de Janeiro: Companhia Editora Nacional, 1940), 149.

65 Mendonça Furtado to Pombal, Belém, 10 September 1754, BNL, R, CP Cod. 11393, 21-23.

66 Mendonça Furtado to Pombal, Belém, 16 September 1754, BNL, R, CP, Cod. 11393, 17; Mendonça Furtado to Pombal, 1 October 1754, BNL, R, CP, Cod. 11393, 7-9.

“CIVILIZING” THE AMAZON: AMERINDIANS AND THE PORTUGUESE  
CROWN’S STRUGGLE FOR SOVEREIGNTY, 1650-1777

form of treason and their obstructionism suggested that the presence of the Jesuits in Portuguese territory hindered Portuguese imperial expansion.

In the law of 6 June 1755, José I prohibited the capture of natives and returned to them their liberty, granting them dominion over their land and goods. The law stated that the true reason why the discovery of Grão Pará and Maranhão had not resulted in civilizing and integrating more natives was that the crown failed to “efficiently sustain the liberty of Indians.”<sup>67</sup> It asserted that the natives had been banished to barbarianism and paganism, not able to seek the comfort of temporal happiness in civilized communities, and that reform was the only means to remedy the situation.

Considering that granting the Amerindian population liberty without ceding them a means of subsistence would not be viable, the government instructed that the section four in the royal decree of 1 April 1680 was to be immediately re-enacted. The section ordered:

And for these Gentiles in this way liberated and others here present, it is better to stay in the villages; it is good that they be lords of their own property, as they are in the wilderness, without it being taken, or on [their property] be threatened. And the governor, with the advice of the said religious, will assign those who leave the wilds, convenient places for them to clear and cultivate; and they may not be moved from those places against their will, nor will they be obliged to pay rent, or any tribute for those lands; even if they are designated to be allotted to private persons.<sup>68</sup>

This decree – which emanated from the sovereign, the opinion expressed by the Overseas Council, and educated men – provided the Indian population of Grão Pará and Maranhão with all of the autonomy, dignity and honour of being a subject of the king.

On 7 July 1755, José I released a law prohibiting the clergy from governing the temporal affairs of natives. The decree invoked canon law and appealed to Catholic philosophy. Essentially, the government argued that since canon law prohibited “ecclesiastics, as ministers of God and His Church to be involved in secular government,” political participation was completely contradictory to their religious obligations.<sup>69</sup> The prohibition “most urgently” targeted the mission priests; the men of the Society of Jesus were incapable of venturing into forums outside of religious matters because of “the strength of their vows,” and the Franciscans’ “humility was incompatible with the civil and criminal jurisdiction of the empire.”<sup>70</sup> Apart from using ecclesiastical reasoning, José I

---

67 *Colecção de leis extravagantes*, 421-434.

68 *Ibid.*

69 *Ibid.*, 465.

70 *Ibid.*

explained that he, as protector of his kingdom and dominion, enacted these new laws to guard the sacred canons and apostolic constitutions. Therefore, using the ecclesiastical discourse of the missionaries, he argued that if they were the defenders of the Amerindian population then he, as the sovereign bound to protect his subjects, was the guardian of the sacred ministries; it was his duty to protect the natives so that the clergy could fulfill their vows.<sup>71</sup> The pronouncement cancelled all other laws, decrees and instructions given to the missionaries by the crown in relation to natives. The choice of words for the law reveals that the Jesuits were the principal target: "It is good to declare, that in this way, the aforementioned Society and its members, as others from any religion, have no temporal jurisdiction over Indian government, that they may aid and reside in the state to be upright and all workers in the Lord's vineyard."<sup>72</sup> Meanwhile, the right to perform all religious functions, such as tutoring the Indians, went to the secular clergy that at the time numbered less than the regulars, undermining the Jesuits further.

By removing the regular clergy from their role of guardians of the natives, an administrative vacuum would be created. The monarchy identified the problem as a need to "govern the villages," and gave the responsibility for the civil service offices to the judges, town councillors, and justice officials in that all major issues could be directed to the respective offices of the state. In other words, all authority over the native people in the territory was transferred to the state with its various levels of government, so that they could assimilate into colonial society on equal terms as the colonists.

The Indian Directorate, written by Mendonça Furtado on 3 May 1757, came in the midst of the government's desire to abolish the secular power of the regular clergy and to emancipate the natives, as expressed in the decree of the 6 and 7 June 1755. The Directorate contained ninety-five articles and can be considered a "Declaration of the Rights of Natives" in respect to emancipation law. The document was understood as a legal code or a culmination of all of the proposed Indian laws of the kingdom that aspired to separate the legal from the illegal, defined new laws, and conferred power and legitimacy on the lay institutions. For all intents and purposes, the Directorate, under the authority of the state, legally placed the natives under Portuguese sovereignty, as subjects of the king in practice and in theory so that they could be integrated into the rest of society.

In August 1758, José I approved the entire Directorate and ordered the document's distribution to all branches of government so that it could be followed and enforced. Demonstrating the zeal with which the "civilizing" project was approached, the decree affirmed "royal and absolute power," insisting that it

---

71 Ibid.

72 Ibid.

“CIVILIZING” THE AMAZON: AMERINDIANS AND THE PORTUGUESE  
CROWN’S STRUGGLE FOR SOVEREIGNTY, 1650-1777

would enable natives to integrate more and more into society, until they would “live civilly.”<sup>73</sup> Subsequently, the crown authorized the royal printer, Miguel Rodrigues, to proceed with the publication of the Directorate. Over 300 copies were sent to the Brazilian colonies so that they could be distributed among the governors and other authorities for an efficient implementation of the reform. Extensively applied throughout the Brazilian colonies, the law remained in effect until Governor-General Francisco Maurício de Sousa Coutinho pushed the crown to abolish it in 1798.

When the Directorate became law, it conferred upon the civil authorities of the state of Grão Pará and Maranhão the power and legitimacy that formed a legislative structure that supported the “civilizing” program of the Portuguese empire. The object of the agenda was to transform marginal regions of the Amazon basin – unknown and inhospitable – into a network of villages sustained by an expanding economy, a model that could be integrated into the rest of the global empire. In many respects, the Directorate structured and guided all Amazonian projects in that judges, town councillors, and justice officials made decisions revolving around business and the settlement of villages and towns (both new and old). Specifically, the director of the Indians, a civil servant responsible for orienting and administering the Amerindians, formed a link between the natives and the colonial government.<sup>74</sup> Meanwhile, spiritual guidance and Christianization came in the form of secular priests, who fit into the structure of government, and were led by the prelate of the diocese working in conjunction with the director of the Indians.<sup>75</sup>

According to the Directorate’s terms, the responsibilities attributed to the director were fundamental in restructuring power relations in the Amazon, touching on all aspects of human activity and comportment: civic, social and moral. Article five clearly stated that, “the civilization of the Indians is the entire responsibility of the directors.” Of primary importance was instruction in Portuguese, seen as a vital means of conquest.<sup>76</sup> Mendonça Furtado emphasized that the Portuguese language was necessary to drive out barbarity from the rustic populations, maintaining that a common language would strengthen the region and the empire. In fact, he openly criticized the Jesuits for learning native languages for the purpose of evangelization instead of stressing Portuguese, stressing that native tongues were “gibberish invented for confusion and the total separation” and was “a notorious loss to human society.”<sup>77</sup>

---

73 Decree approving the Directorate, 18 August 1758, *Ibid.*, 187.

74 *Directório que se deve observar nas Povoações dos índios do Pará e Maranhão em quanto Sua Magestade não mandar o contrário* (Lisbon: Oficina de Miguel Rodrigues, 1758), Articles 5, 9, 10 and 92.

75 *Ibid.*, Article 4.

76 *Ibid.*, Article 6.

77 Mendonça Furtado to Pombal, Belém, 21 November 1751, AEP, 63-78.

Therefore, the Directorate instructed that in every settlement there were to be two schools, divided along gender lines. The boys would learn to read, write and count, while the girls would learn to read, write, spin, crochet and sew, with each sex under the instruction of a teacher of the same gender.<sup>78</sup> More importantly, Jesuits were not to teach these schools. Unfortunately, the secularization of schools in Brazil did not prove very successful, due to the vacuum created when the Jesuits (famous for their colleges and education) were expelled in 1759.<sup>79</sup> Lack of human resources and funding derailed a rather ambitious plan in the larger project of assimilation.<sup>80</sup>

Despite the equal status of Indians before the law, it was obvious that prejudice would continue to stratify the population in a system of racial hierarchy. In order to address the problem, the Directorate prohibited the use of the term *negro*, meaning black or slave, to describe the Amerindian population, demonstrating that natives were seen as racially superior to the Africans, while distancing the Indians from the stigma of slavery.<sup>81</sup> Instead, the decree implied that class was a better form of classification: "Treat them with the distinction they are due, according to their rank, employment and wealth."<sup>82</sup> However, the very fact that natives were ordered to select Portuguese surnames suggests that racial lines remained in that European names remained superior. Mendonça Furtado believed that the new names would encourage the natives to live more virtuously.<sup>83</sup>

The law empowered the director to attempt to assimilate the population through more personal and social means. The director, charged with ensuring that natives lived in decorum and comfort, had to establish rules of "human dignity." Nudity for example was prohibited for reasons of honour and honesty, especially for women. The vice of drunkenness was seen as leading people astray from a civilized life: "It impedes the reaching of honours and human and civic dignity, which are now available." Even family dwellings were regulated under the directory system. Homes changed to better suit nuclear families, rather than extended families, in order to promote chastity. Likewise, assimilation came with the uniformity and structured ordering of new settlements. The director, in collaboration with the settlers, was to build a church, town hall and

---

78 *Directório*, Articles 8 and 9.

79 Hemming, 479.

80 Maxwell, 96.

81 C.R. Boxer, *Race Relations in the Portuguese Colonial Empire, 1415-1825* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963); E. Franklin Frazier, "Some Aspects of Race in Brazil," *Phylon* 3:3 (1942): 288.

82 *Directório*, Articles 9, 10, 11.

83 Barbara Ann Sommer, "Negotiated Settlements: Native Amazonians and Portuguese Policy in Pará, Brazil, 1758-1798" (PhD. diss., The University of New Mexico, 2000), 75.



“CIVILIZING” THE AMAZON: AMERINDIANS AND THE PORTUGUESE  
CROWN’S STRUGGLE FOR SOVEREIGNTY, 1650-1777

jail in every community. Similarly, judges, town councillors and justice officials administered these communities and kept track of the population.<sup>84</sup>

Miscegenation was a means to introduce assimilation at a more personal, but probably more profound, manner. Every village was to accept European immigrants in their communities not only to boost economic development, but also to promote communication between the two different cultures. The former exclusion of Portuguese settlers from mission villages was seen as problematic, but the Directorate opened the villages to Europeans so that natives could emulate their lifestyle.<sup>85</sup> Moreover, marriage between Europeans and natives was not only accepted, but was also encouraged to promote assimilation. Miscegenation became an official policy when the crown permitted marriage between the Portuguese and the natives on 4 April 1755.<sup>86</sup>

The Directorate also provided a real labour code, which had been lacking until 1758. Natives had to be productive to encourage economic prosperity. The director had to encourage the natives to cultivate their land and persuade them to succeed in agriculture by not just growing crops for subsistence, but also surplus crops for the market. The cultivation of cotton became quite popular in Maranhão as the indigenous women knew the technique for spinning and weaving cotton. Yet, everything about agricultural production had to be scrutinized by the director so that he could evaluate the products. The crown obliged the farmers to pay a tax of ten percent on the production of their goods, and each village was supposed to have warehouse where that share was kept. Likewise, the director’s salary consisted of one-sixth of all of crops destined to market and for that reason he was very careful to coordinate harvest days with transportation for city markets were more lucrative.<sup>87</sup>

Regulations also applied to the transport and commercialization of drugs, which for many colonists were a chief source of income. Articles fifty and fifty-seven of the Directorate defined the rules that had to be observed for the trade. Village officials had to prepare the canoes destined to the jungle to collect drugs. Of the amount collected, one tenth went to the Royal Treasury; then costs for the expedition were paid; then the ship’s corporal had to be paid; subsequently, the director would take one-sixth as payment; lastly, the leftover amount was divided between the Indians. The buyers paid taxes for products such as coffee, cacao, and cloves.<sup>88</sup>

---

84 *Directório*, Articles 75, 77, 78, 79.

85 *Directório*, Article 85; Colin MacLachlan, “The Indian Directorate: Forced Acculturation in Portuguese America, 1757-1799” *The Americas* 28:4 (1972), 362.

86 Miguel de Bulhões e Sousa to José I, Belém, 4 August 1755, AHU, CU, Pará, caixa 38, doc. 3568; Manuel Bernardo Melo e Castro to Tomé Joaquim Corte Real, Belém, 31 July 1759, AHU, CU, Pará, caixa 45, doc. 4100.

87 *Directório*, Articles 39 and 43.

88 *Directório*, Article 7.

The Directorate labour code outlined in articles fifty-nine and sixty-four was a meticulous record of all available labour. All people between the ages of thirteen and sixty had to register in two ledgers: one destined for the governor and the other to a judge. These ledgers were to be systematically updated and showed entries, exits and absences. Labour was divided in thirds in the following order: (1) for the missionaries, (2) for the service of colonists, and (3) for the service of the towns. All colonists had to pay the natives a minimum salary through the director. In turn, he was in charge of all village business, obliged to know everything about his community and relayed that information to the governor via lists, maps and guides. Essentially, he formed one part of an administrative hierarchy.

Despite the fact that the Directorate was touted as a humanizing document, the voices of the natives were silenced by the mechanism of colonial government. Article ninety-one summarizes a true “Declaration of the Rights of Indians:” “We hold their people in esteem; we do not despise their alliances; we hope their relationship is cordial, and we sincerely [want] to preserve that reciprocal union that strengthens and establishes a solid happiness of Republics.”<sup>89</sup> However, were the Amerindians prepared and willing to collaborate in this imposed social reordering?

### **The Directorate in Practice**

It is obvious that the Directorate was a complete contradiction between its alleged respect for tradition and customs, and the obligatory program of acculturation expressed by forced social and civil change. By looking at the process used to arrive at the Directorate, one questions the humanitarian aspects of the document. One finds, instead, the interests of the Indian taking a back-seat to the Pombaline obsession with bringing down the missionary empires, especially those belonging to the Jesuits. In the end, the Directorate was not much different than the former regime of Jesuits, with the exception being that a secular power was now in place.

The Portuguese crown might have been too ambitious in trying to implement the Directorate for the enlightenment document did not consider the realities of the Amazon. It was difficult to find men capable of undertaking the reform strategy. Colin MacLachlan described the problem as having to do with the Directorate’s ideal director, a “secular saint willing to sacrifice himself when in reality, the majority of the settlers in Pará were desperate men locked in a struggle for survival and economic gain.”<sup>90</sup> Most directors were not very educated and most were settlers wanting to earn fortunes. In 1762, Governor Francisco de Sousa Coutinho described the new European settlers as worse

---

89 *Directório*, Article 91.

90 MacLachlan, “The Indian Directorate,” 369.

"CIVILIZING" THE AMAZON: AMERINDIANS AND THE PORTUGUESE  
CROWN'S STRUGGLE FOR SOVEREIGNTY, 1650-1777

"than a blood-thirsty leech," and "more like a jaguar or a ferocious tiger."<sup>91</sup> Some directors were nothing more than petty despots who carried out their administrative tasks without any regard to the native municipal officials. In addition, problems with corruption meant that often the crown did not receive its revenues, which led to excessive taxation. Directors took a greater percentage of revenue than they were due. More often, they used natives to work on their own property or obtain goods on their behalf instead of sharing the native labourers with other settlers. Regardless of the way the Directorate reform was not followed, the abuse of the native population was apparent and did not contribute to any real change in native policy.<sup>92</sup> Subsequently, the crown issued disciplinary orders against abusive directors, but they were never implemented effectively and directors continued to undermine the Directorate's goals.<sup>93</sup>

While the Directorate aimed to establish new villages throughout Pará based on European models, the administration did not seem to have been totally successful. Rather, urbanization developed according to local demands. In fact, people tended to live in houses built close to their gardens instead of the villages.<sup>94</sup> Although carpenters, blacksmiths, potters, stonemasons, shoemakers, barbers and sacristans stayed in villages, men working in the forests and canoes would only come to the villages on days of celebration, the occasional Sunday, or for business purposes. Desertion from native villages was common and worrisome, especially in settlements close to the Castilian border.<sup>95</sup> There were also challenges when it came to exemptions from the Directorate. The military, people who married into Indian villages and their families, and immediate relatives of town officials were not subject to the Directorate or most labour duties.<sup>96</sup> Eventually, the general population increased relative to the population of the Directorate villages and it was hard to establish new towns. Interestingly, natives began to form their own villages, sometimes derived from patterns of protest.<sup>97</sup>

Directorate natives often fled to escape labour drafts. Reports filed to governors concerning the availability of workers demonstrated that absenteeism was a major reason for labour shortages.<sup>98</sup> The constant shortage of Indian

---

91 *Ibid.*, 370.

92 Luís Goes de Faria e Sousa to Mendonça Furtado, Belém, 16 December 1762, AHU, CU, Pará, caixa 53, doc. 4877; Judge Feliciano Ramos Nobre Mourão to Mendonça Furtado, Belém, 17 June 1764, AHU, CU, Pará, caixa 57, doc. 5135.

93 João Pereira Caldas to Martinho de Melo e Castro, Belém, 2 March 1774, AHU, CU, Pará, caixa 72, doc. 6114.

94 Sommer, "Negotiated Settlements," 113.

95 João Pereira Caldas to Martinho de Melo e Castro, Belém, 4 November 1776, AHU, CU, Pará, caixa 76, doc. 6352.

96 Sommer, "Negotiated Settlements," 165.

97 *Ibid.*

98 *Ibid.*, 167; Cerzedello Jozé Vicente to governor, Serzedelo, 5 February 1776, Arquivo Público do Estado de Pará (hereafter cited as APP), cod. 298; Population rolls, APP, cod. 408.

workers for canoes and extracting rainforest drugs at times limited production in the Amazon.<sup>99</sup> The same could be said for state projects. While at building projects, such as the fort at Macapá, men were overworked, poorly fed, and exposed to disease. As the population declined, largely due to epidemics, abuses became more frequent, including the keeping of natives beyond the times stipulated in their contracts.<sup>100</sup> Oarsmen would often not appear with their canoes. Natives who temporarily fled usually went to their gardens, Belém, a neighbouring town or a maroon community before returning home.

Some natives took a more radical approach and permanently escaped Portuguese settlements. Many Directorate villages consisted of natives descended from the original inhabitants joined by new arrivals from different ethnic groups. Often, the size of settlements depended on whether or not the distinct groups could coexist. Yet, new arrivals frequently fled to the forest and their former way of life. Some runaways found it impossible to return to forest groups because of ethnic differences or geographic distances and chose to establish independent maroon communities called *mocambos*. Even though they were independent, many maintained close ties to the Directorate villages, going as far as competing for residents. In general, the crown did not try to break up the maroon settlements for they were isolated and it would have required a concerted military effort and resources.

Many natives took an active part in working within the Directorate system to suit their own preferences. Apart from desertion, more natives sought exemptions from the labour rolls. In many respects, the natives were aware of their Directorate rights, choosing to operate within the system to achieve their own goals. For example, when director João Pedro de Andrade became physically abusive and beat thirteen women in Alenquer, the mistreatment was reported to Commander Pedro Miguel Ayres Pereira.<sup>101</sup> Native leaders and villagers testified against the director, accusing him of misappropriating labour and refusing to reveal the governor's orders. They were aware that the orders prohibited corporal punishment and the use of native labour for personal economic gain and chose to direct their concerns to the director's superior.

The Directorate policies enjoyed minimal success in implementing large-scale settlement and "civilization" of the Amazon. Although the Directorate, as outlined in its charter, appeared to be the ideal strategy for developing the region, the regulations were impractical and did not take into account the harsh environment, the lack of competent personnel, and the strength of native cul-

---

99 João Pereira Caldas to Martinho de Melo e Castro, Belém, 7 March 1773, AHU, CU, Pará, caixa 70, doc. 5964; Manuel Pereira de Faria to Martinho de Melo e Castro, Lisbon, 6 July 1773, AHU, CU, Pará, caixa 71, doc. 6024.

100 Sommer, "Negotiated Settlements," 168.

101 Hilario Francisco, Alenquer, 9 February 1792, APP, cod. 470; Sommer, "Negotiated Settlements," 166.

“CIVILIZING” THE AMAZON: AMERINDIANS AND THE PORTUGUESE  
CROWN’S STRUGGLE FOR SOVEREIGNTY, 1650-1777

ture.<sup>102</sup> Other problems such as disease and population decline could not be predicted and proved to be tremendous obstacles. These difficulties often meant that “civilizing” the natives became a secondary thought. Secular education, a lofty goal on the part of the administration, proved a bitter failure due to a lack of teachers, funding, and the need to employ children in forest collecting.

Yet, the Directorate did settle the Amazon basin and aided the crown in asserting its sovereignty in the Amazon region. Even though great goals for the social “civilization” of natives might not have been accomplished, the Directorate set the spatial, psychological, and methodological patterns of settlement for the future.<sup>103</sup> The Directorate managed to build on existing settlements involved in retrieving forest goods and agricultural production. More importantly, the Directorate tied the villages economically to Belém, the main port of exportation, joining the Amazon with global markets. These villages, loyal to the Portuguese crown, demonstrated the sovereignty of José I and for the first time, started to define the territorial limits his domain. Also, Pombal managed to uproot the Jesuits from their position of economic, social and administrative control, replacing them with secular directors and crown administration. Even though the Directorate was just one reform aimed at controlling the native population, the ramifications went beyond colonizing the native peoples, and fit into a larger multi-faceted Pombaline plan for crown’s assertion of sovereignty.

\*\*\*

**HELENA NUNES DUARTE** is a doctoral candidate and lecturer at the University of Calgary, where she is completing her dissertation, “Illuminating the Amazon: The Marquês de Pombal and the Company of Grão Pará and Maranhão,” focusing on the monopoly company and Portuguese imperial reform of the eighteenth century. Her work is an extension of her research interests in Iberian and Latin American history, imperial trade, settlement and urbanization, which includes a Master’s study on Portuguese and Spanish Imperial trade between Macao and Manila.

**HELENA NUNES DUARTE** est candidate au doctorat et chargée de cours à l’Université de Calgary, où elle termine sa thèse, « Illuminating the Amazon: The Marquês de Pombal and the Company of Grão Pará and Maranhão », qui se concentre sur l’entreprise de monopole et la réforme impériale du Portugal du dix-huitième siècle. Son travail est une extension de ses intérêts de recherche sur l’histoire ibérique et latino-américaine, le commerce impérial, la colonisation et l’urbanisation, y compris des études de maîtrise sur le commerce impérial portugais et espagnol entre Macao et Manille.

102 Robin L. Anderson, *Colonization as Exploitation in the Amazon Rain Forest, 1758-1911* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1999), 39.

103 Ibid.