



Algumas reflexões teóricas sobre a traje indígena no Brasil colônia

*Some theoretical reflections on indigenous
dress in Colonial Brazil*

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[abstract] This article is a preliminary attempt to apply current social theories of adornment as “dress” and “dress” as signifier of class to the issue of indigenous dress in colonial Brazil. Drawing upon the analysis of Joanne Entwistle, I examine encounters between indigenes and the Portuguese colonial administrators which took place over more than three centuries of control. I also interpret orders issued for clothing the native population under the rule of the Directorate. My conclusions reinforce the theories that indigenous adornment can be interpreted as “dress” and, that moreover, the Portuguese understood this concept. Nonetheless, there were contradictions in the Portuguese approach to creating a proletariat from uniformly dressed indigenous workers; the Crown routinely elevated leaders (who were allotted finer clothing) in order to reinforce their dependence upon colonial rulers. While this “dress code” for the indigenous population helped to maintain social order, it was not inevitably followed.

[keywords] **Adornment. Directorate. “Dress”. Maintenance of social order.**

[resumo] O presente artigo é uma tentativa preliminar de aplicar as teorias sociais atuais sobre “vestuário” como uma forma de adorno, e “vestuário” como significante de classe em relação a questão dos modos de vestir dos povos indígenas no Brasil colonial. Partindo da análise de Joanne Entwistle, examino o encontro entre os indígenas e os administradores coloniais portugueses que ocorreu por mais de três séculos de controle. Também interpreto as ordens emitidas sobre as roupas dos nativos durante o controle do Diretório dos Índios. Minhas conclusões reforçam as teorias de que os adornos indígenas podem ser interpretados como “vestimentas” e, além disso, os portugueses entendiam esse conceito. Apesar disso, existiam contradições na abordagem portuguesa de criação de um proletariado de indígenas vestidos de maneira uniforme; a Coroa rotineiramente elevava os líderes (aos quais eram destinadas roupas elegantes) de maneira a reforçar a dependência em relação aos líderes coloniais. Ainda que esse “código de vestimenta” para a população indígena ajudasse a manter a ordem social, ele não foi inevitavelmente seguido.

[palavras-chave] **Adornamento. Diretório dos Índios. “Vestuário”. Manutenção da ordem social.**

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Background

During my professional career as an historian of colonial Brazil I have had several occasions to research the history of Brazilian textiles. With my colleague John Dickenson, I have examined the process of industrialization of cloth production in Brazil (Dickenson and Delson, 1991). I have also discussed the hybridization of indigenous woven cloth (Delson, 2000) and the sometimes idiosyncratic adoption of European modes of clothing during the colonial period (Delson, 2004), as well as the history of the textile industry in Brazil, from its origins to the present (Delson, 2010).

Most of my writing on these subjects, however, was published before theories regarding dress, fashion and the body had been well established. In the intervening years since I conducted my research, many new and relevant ideas regarding the universality of dress and the role of dress in defining social class have been published. Anthropologists and sociologists initially looked at the “body” as an object of study upon which culture was superimposed in both Western as well as non-Western contexts (Barnes and Eicher, eds., 1993). “Fashion studies” have extended that idea to consider how different concepts of dress reflect cultural norms and the push to accept “modernity” (Wilson, 2013).

In this paper I have attempted to apply some of these new insights to my previous research in order to better explain the parameters and meaning of what constituted indigenous dress in colonial Brazil. By referring to some of the most recent historical writing on Brazil, which continues its questioning of traditional historiography, I ask the following questions about indigenous dress of the Brazilian colonial period in this paper: should we continue to consider the bodies of Brazilian indigenes “undressed” if, in fact, they were otherwise “adorned” with decorations, but not clothing in the traditional sense? And, if dress is a signifier of class, which contemporary sociological theory suggests it is, then what did orders imposed on Brazil’s native population to adopt a daily habit of clothing themselves say about their status within Brazilian society? What did colonial projects to clothe indigenous peoples actually mean in the context of the construction of power networks? Was there any input from local people in implementing these policies? Finally, did such metropolitan-imposed policies which insisted upon a “dressed” indigenous population actually work? While these questions were not the focus of my original work, they are considered here not only because they are intellectually interesting, but because their answers offer the possibility of new perspectives on our total understanding of Brazil in colonial times. I approach these issues chronologically in this paper by first examining indigenous dress from the time of the Portuguese arrival in Brazil and then indicating how clothing policies changed over more than three hundred years of colonial rule. I remain especially concerned about deciphering what such dress policies indicate about the maintenance of the colonial order in Brazil and the processes of acculturation of the Brazilian native population.

In discussing the theoretical perspectives on dress, I draw upon the excellent synopsis of recent theories on “dress and body” discussed in the third edition of Joanne Entwistle’s important work, **The Fashioned Body** (Entwistle, 2023). In this newly revised edition of her seminal treatise on fashion and sociological methodology, Entwistle updates the theoretical debates stemming from the centrality of dress to social order and power, with the acknowledged propensity of all peoples to adorn themselves, to the effects of dress regulations and sumptuary laws on the body politic. Her incisive overviews of sociological, historical and anthropological

theories, therefore, inform this paper, even though her emphasis is admittedly largely on European manifestations of such premises rather than the application of these theories to non-western situations.

The Issue of Adornment

I begin this discussion with a consideration of the issue of adornment. Entwistle (2023, p. 7) reminds us that, “Dress is a basic fact of social life and this, according to anthropologists, is true of all known human cultures: all people ‘dress’ the body in some way, be it through clothing, tattooing, cosmetics or other forms of body painting”. She further notes that anthropological studies insist that doing something to the body is a universal inclination and explains that “...no culture leaves the body unadorned, but adds to, embellishes, enhances or decorates the body. ... what constitutes ‘dress’ varies from culture to culture and also within a culture, since what is considered appropriate dress will depend on the situation or occasion [my underlining]”.

How is her observation relevant to colonial Brazil? To answer that, I apply the argument that adornment is “dress” to a review of the first documented encounter between the Portuguese and the native inhabitants of Brazil. The fact that the Portuguese Admiral Pedro Álvares de Cabral, who famously sailed his convoy off course to Brazil in 1500 on his way east, had a scribe with him (Pero Vaz da Caminha) allows us to read on the spot commentary reporting the initial contact between the Europeans and the native Brazilians. Most of the traditional historiographical treatments of this first encounter of the Portuguese with the Tupinambá peoples who lived on the northeastern coastline where Cabral landed, almost inevitably focus on the European reaction to the “nakedness” of the indigenous bodies. Consequently, most students of Brazilian history are familiar with an historical trope of the initial encounter which not only contrasts the “dressed” Europeans with their unclothed native counterparts, but also attributes “innocence” and “lack of guile” to these indigenes, for exactly the reason that they are unclothed. As this version goes, the native Brazilians were as naked as the day they were born; according to the typical framing of the initial encounter, this impression led the Portuguese to believe that the indigenous peoples should be considered “innocents,” and therefore spiritually neutral and receptive to Christianity.

But a closer reading of Pero Vaz da Caminha’s account of this first encounter suggests that something quite different was happening. According to historian John Hemming (1999, p. 20), the scribe reports that Cabral sent his representative, Nicolau Coelho, to examine the coastline. As Coelho approached the shore, indigenous men began to gather, carefully watching as the new arrival walked toward them. It should be noted that prior to 1500, the Portuguese had already encountered many “foreign peoples” in their previous explorations of the coasts of Africa and India and had, in response, developed a “vocabulary” of confronting the unknown. Coelho, who obviously could see that the local people were not wearing clothing in the conventional sense, understood instinctively the concept that these people were adorned, but not undressed. He therefore threw them a red hat and a linen cap that he had been wearing. He followed this gesture by throwing a black hat to the assemblage.

How did the indigenes react to his display? They apparently understood precisely the message that Coelho was conveying and responded in kind, by presenting Coelho with a feathered headdress as well as a string of small white beads that looked to the Europeans

like seed pearls (Hemming, 1999, p. 20). In other words, the native Brazilians comprehended at once that the hats Coelho offered them had been worn as adornments and were now being offered to them as such. This prompted them to respond in kind with what they considered their local equivalents. This exchange presents a very nuanced, and considerably less salacious, picture of the initial encounter, one that shies away from the trope of “shock” experienced by Portuguese who were left gaping at the nudity in front of them, in favor of a clearer meeting of the minds.

Of course, we have no account of what the indigenes thought of the textiles the Portuguese were wearing. On this point, Heather Roller, an historian whose perceptive recent work on native autonomy in Brazil is quite extensive, writes that these initial contacts, or “rituals of approximation,” (Roller, 2021, p. 58) in which native populations encountered the Portuguese for the first time, and vice versa, would be repeated over and over again throughout the colonial period, a process which extended even into the late eighteenth century. From the later accounts which she has analyzed we get a greater sense of what the native population thought of the concept of European “dress.” A perfect example of her view of these initial encounters is provided by the recounting she provides of the meeting which took place between the Portuguese and the Karajá peoples who, along with the Javaé, were enticed in 1775 to make peace with the colonial authorities, despite decades of previous resistance. A description of the jovial event which took place when the parties met to finalize their agreement suggests that the first step in this encounter was having interpreters offer reassurances to both sides of continuing peaceful intentions. Obviously, by this time, European style body coverings were not unknown to native Brazilians, but the Portuguese used the uniqueness of their outfits to cement relations with the Karajá. Following mutual reassurances of friendliness, the Portuguese took off their jackets and shirts and stood “bare-chested to watch as Indians gleefully donned their clothes” (Roller, 2021, p. 58). The symbolism of this gesture cannot be overstated: from the Portuguese point of view the fact that the Karajá willingly tried on European clothes was interpreted as a welcome signal of breakdown of barriers which their otherwise foreign clothing might represent. For the native Brazilians, putting on the Portuguese jackets made them at once the equals of the Portuguese, thus erasing the “mystique” of Portuguese dress which had heretofore served to distinguish the groups from the other. In other words, allowing the indigenes to don their clothing narrowed the psychic and cultural distance and differences between the groups. After these reassurances, Roller tells us, gifts were exchanged (including bolts of cloth so that the indigenes could fashion their own clothing), amidst a very festive atmosphere. And, Roller suggests, this kind of ritual of approximation, in which indigenous peoples were allowed to try on European dress and, in effect become the “Other,” was “performed” multiple times over the course of three plus centuries of Portuguese colonization.

Should we then continue to view the native Brazilians as “undressed” in the conventional sense? If we understand dress to be adornment and that, as anthropologists have observed, adornment is a universal phenomenon, the answer must be no. Additionally, we have evidence that headdresses and beads were not the only adornments wore by indigenous Brazilian peoples; historically, they wore feathers, *tangas* (small skirts), necklaces, ear plugs and plates in their lips and sometimes covered parts of their bodies with an occasional animal skin. They also liberally applied a paste made from *urucum*, or annatto, from which they extracted a bright red color, to paint their bodies. Some, like the Omagua (Cambaba in

Portuguese), wore woven tunics (Figure 1). While it is true there was not a uniform indigenous dress in Brazil similar to the smocked and embroidered *huipil* tunics worn for centuries by Mayan women in Central America, the native tribes of Brazil distinguished among themselves on the basis of the adornments which they wore.

FIGURE 1 - CAMBEBA IN TUNIC.



SOURCE: FERREIRA, 1971, vol. 1, plate 118.

Although it is not possible today to extract the exact meaning attached to all of the adornments worn by native Brazilians, an anonymous account written 87 years after Cabral's visit to the Brazilian coast offers insight into what the adornments of the Tupinambá at least meant to them; it further suggests that rather than acting as mere decorations, these adornments instantly telegraphed a message which was blatantly obvious to the people who wore, or saw them. This anonymous account also provides a detailed description of the Tupinambá cotton industries of the late sixteenth century and comments upon the fineness of the textiles with which they made their hammocks (Anonymous, 1999, p. 28). Interestingly, the author also precociously opines that given looms, the skills these women showed in weaving hammocks could easily be transferred to the making of cloth; it would take several centuries for that to happen.

The account also deciphers the meaning of at least some of the ornaments worn by the Tupinambá. For example, the braided bands which young women wound on their wrists and waists were universally understood to mean that the girl who was wearing them was chaste (Anonymous, 1999, p. 27). They also suggested, in a parallel understanding, that she was now mature enough to be married. Once a woman had been penetrated, however, married or not, she was obliged to break the bands which she wore to signify her new status to the rest of her community. Thus, without the identity imbued by conventional clothing or even, for that matter, minus the use of any covering in the European sense, the Tupinambá had nonetheless developed a vocabulary of adornment which depicted a woman's status and place within her society at a simple glance.

Dress As a Signifier of Class

Adornment as a form of "dress" is not just universal but, as Entwistle's analysis reveals, where actual body covering (i.e., dress) is present, it may further serve as a signifier of class, in turn playing a central role in the maintenance of social order (Entwistle, 2023, p. 9). She suggests that "dress is an embodied activity and one that is embodied within social relations" (Entwistle, 2023, p. 11). Each society has expected norms, and "dressing requires one to attend unconsciously or consciously to these norms and expectations when preparing the body for presentation in any particular social setting" (Entwistle, 2023, p. 11).

Can these precepts be applied to colonial Brazilian history? I believe the answer is yes, given some peculiarities of the Brazilian situation. We can begin this part of the discussion by observing that almost from the beginning of Portuguese direct settlement of Brazil in 1532, textiles destined to be made into clothing were produced in the colony. Thread (largely from cotton) was spun and woven into cloth by Portuguese colonists in Brazil in their homes, in much the same manner as it was spun and woven throughout rural areas of Portugal. Most of what was produced from this domestic industry was simple, coarse cloth

which was subsequently sewn into garments to clothe the African or creole slave population (Dickenson and Delson, 1991, p. 40). This incipient textile industry was associated with the sugar plantations of the northeast, which dominated the economy of the initial period of colonization, but it is fair to say that coarse cloth was woven throughout the colony. Some of it was also used to produce sacking materials for transporting goods from extractive industries overseas (sugar for example), and, undoubtedly, some of it went to clothe Portuguese settlers as well.

Importantly, by the second and third century of colonization, cloth was being produced in every part of the Brazilian colony and with increasing variation. For wealthy consumers in urban areas, and also buyers from the gold and diamond mining regions of Minas Gerais who had the means, there were silks (using thread from imported silk worms) and finely woven cloths produced in the colony (often in small factories; Madureira, 2001, p. 78); these were augmented by cloth imported from abroad. Indeed, the more refined (and imported) fabrics purchased by the well-to-do were deemed so valuable that fine clothing items were frequently mentioned in inventories, or left in wills to either relatives or the occasional lucky slave or illegitimate child (França Paiva, 1995, p. 96 and chapter 2). For the free urban poor (of Portuguese or mixed background), lesser cloth was available. Some types of the cloth produced in this industry were dictated by geographic area; thus, woolen goods including felts were produced for markets in the colder south, while lighter cloth continued to be produced for the hotter north. Cloth had become such an integral part of the economy that by the eighteenth century it often served as a proxy for currency, with wages for workers doled out in bolts of fabrics (Delson, 2010). By the mid-eighteenth century, when the economy had expanded with the discovery and mining of gold in Minas Gerais, two separate textile configurations had emerged: “home/estate manufacture and factory production.” (Delson, 2010, p. 78). Later in the century, extensive Brazilian textile production began to compete with that of Portugal. The Crown responded by attempting to shut down colonial production in 1785, ruling that Brazilian cotton, silk, wool, linen and embroidery manufacture was to cease. This legislation was not wholly successful, and textile production continued in the colony into the nineteenth century (Dickenson and Delson, 1991).

In all instances, by their ability to purchase fine cloth produced from Brazilian manufacture and/or imported from abroad, the wealthy class used “dress” as a means of easily distinguishing themselves from the masses. To prevent any confusion, in the colony, as well as in the mother country, sumptuary laws operated, assuring that only the upper classes were permitted to wear certain fabrics and laces in public. The origin of these laws appears to have been the Muslim-ruled regimes of Iberia (Seed, 2001, p. 74). These laws also applied elsewhere across the vast Portuguese realm; for a discussion of their impact in the Atlantic Islands, see Soares Fernandes, Freitas Alves and do Vale Fernandes (1994).

In this manner, “dress” managed to convey not only the class status of the individual, but it reinforced and strengthened the social distances between classes by imposing prohibitions on those who would wish to emulate the upper class style of dress. It should be noted that this distinction was predominantly in the type of dress and fabric used, rather than the “style” of the dress, which begs the question of fashion, a totally different issue. It is likely that considerations of fashion, long associated with court life in the sixteenth and seventeenth century and with the European aristocracy in general, were probably not as important in the distant colonies as they were in the metropolitan countries. Occasionally these sumptuary prohibitions took an ironic twist: for example, elite partisans of the late eighteenth century nativist revolt in Minas Gerais known as the *Inconfidência* sported locally produced inexpensive cotton clothing as a proud symbol of their resistance to the Crown (Dickenson and Delson, 1991, p. 40).

By the eighteenth century the basic textile industry in Brazil had expanded beyond simple home or plantation production into what Dickenson and Delson (1991) have previously called proto-industrialized settings. In this last full century of colonization, the Portuguese established cloth-producing factories which were assigned specific tasks by the government. One factory in Belém do Pará, for example, manufactured cloth in various colors for military uniforms, presumably using local dyes like indigo (see Prado, Jr., 1967, p. 179). These factories were largely staffed by wage laborers (Delson, 2010, p. 13), some of whom were recruited from the indigenous population and whose wage compensation was often provided in the form of bolts of cloth.

Dress was undoubtedly a signifier of class for the colonial elite of Brazil, and social distance was maintained by the type of garments worn. But none of this history is directly relevant to the issue of indigenous dress. Did “dress” also differentiate social classes in this instance? The answer is not as clear. Initially, there were no overarching colonial rules for the way native Brazilians were to appear in public, unless those indigenes had come under the specific tutelage of religious orders and had been relocated to isolated communities. It was the religious fathers who dictated what their charges used to cover themselves, since the modesty provided by a simple cloth garment was their main concern. The dress worn by the native Brazilians in the charge of religious orders is not immediately known. We have one image, however, believed to be that of indigenes who came to a village in Brazil from the Spanish Santa Clara mission in Paraguay, which suggests that the mission’s residents (at least the women) wore simple shifts or long chemises (Figure 2). This was, of course, an eminently suitable garment for hot weather, not unlike similar garments worn even today in hot, desert cultures.

FIGURE 2 - CLOTHED FEMALE INDIGENES OF AN UNKNOWN TRIBE, C. 1787



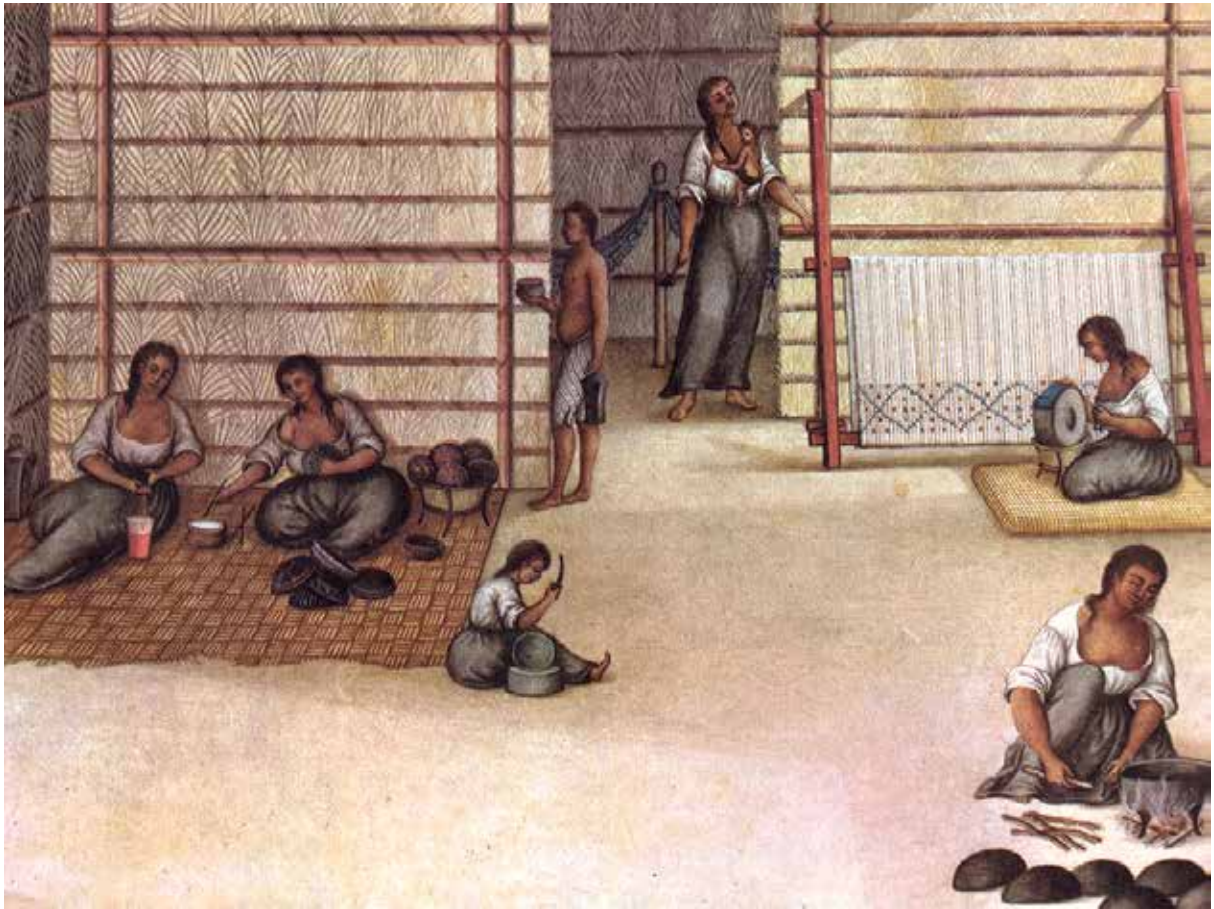
SOURCE - FERREIRA, 1971, vol. 1, plate 107.

All of this would change radically in the mid-eighteenth century when the Portuguese government took direct control of the Indian *aldeias* (villages) from the religious orders, an action which stemmed from the expulsion of the Jesuits in 1759. In assuming responsibility over a network of indigenous *aldeias*, and with the goal of expanding them, the Portuguese now substituted a secular regime dedicated to bringing indigenes more fully into the realm as vassals of the Crown. The rules by which this new direction of the Portuguese Crown were to be implemented were outlined in legislation which established an administrative regime for the indigenes known as the Directorate. The brainchild of the Marques de Pombal, effectively the Prime Minister of Portugal, this new set of regulations aimed to transform Brazilians of indigenous background into useful workers who would now be organized into secular but nonetheless tightly controlled government villages. The goal was to create a new, servile class which took its cues from Portuguese administrators.

The key to achieving this goal was to dictate the parameters of every aspect of the lives led by the native Brazilians who were enticed to live in these new communities. Elsewhere (Delson, 1998), I have argued that by mandating uniformity in the facades of the houses built for Indian occupants, the Portuguese hoped to eliminate any disagreements among the residents. The same may be said about orders for clothing the *aldeia* residents. Where the priests had formerly just required their native charges to cover themselves, the Portuguese, under Pombal's direction, now aimed to create a kind of peasantry and ordered that the Indians be dressed as such. Thus, all of the indigenous workers, including those engaged in textile production, who came under the jurisdiction of the Directorate, were required to be dressed in quasi-European fashion. Each of the towns founded under the regulations of the Directorate, especially in the Far West and the Amazon, was further required to have an area set aside for growing cotton; many villages had buildings dedicated to the spinning and weaving of cloth for local needs and for trade purposes.

The great eighteenth century Brazilian naturalist, Alexandre Rodrigues Ferreira, observed that cloth was not only given as wage payment to native workers but also doled out, free of charge, to occupants of such indigenous communities so that they might fashion garments of their own. In the illustrations which accompany his work we can observe that the women weavers in the village of Monte Alegre wore simple skirts and blouses (Figure 3). Elsewhere, he remarks that for the resettlement of the Muras into the village of Airão, in 1787, each individual received a customary allotment of 4 varas (an old measurement of 1.10 meters) of cotton cloth from which to fashion their clothing. Additionally, each woman received a necklace (consistent with the concept of adornment), a mirror and a cape (Ferreira, 1974, p. 160). The men received similar items including an allotment of cloth.

FIGURE 3 - INDIGENOUS WOMEN WEAVERS IN THE VILLAGE OF MONTE ALEGRE.



SOURCE - FERREIRA, 1971, vol. 1, plate 28.

Presumably, the goal here was to create a uniform peasantry, i.e., a kind of proletariat of indigenous workers, who were instantly recognizable by the simple, proto-European clothing they wore. But if so, how then can we reconcile this plan with the Portuguese propensity to differentiate among the inhabitants of these villages by singling out certain individuals, namely the chiefs or natural leaders, for greater and more elaborate clothing allotments? For example, the leader of the Muras and other individuals deemed worthy of such privilege were given shoes with a pair of buckles, linen stockings, gold leaf buttons and hats, along with enough cloth to fashion seven shirts. At a glance, these chosen individuals were dressed differently from everyone else; the European style clothing provided to these men meant they were instantly elevated and recognizable as an elite. This decision would seem to have defeated the Portuguese aim of creating a homogeneous working class.

On the other hand, the Portuguese chose to elevate local elites because they understood the second part of this theoretical equation, namely that “dress” plays a central role in the maintenance of social order. The colonial authorities rightly reckoned that “gifting” these extra goods to the natural leader of an indigenous community would encourage the,

perhaps otherwise reluctant, chief to wear European-style dress; in turn his actions would presumably inspire others to follow his example. In essence, the practice of differentiating between clothing styles served to reinforce the authority of the local elite. It was thus in their interest to comply with the demands of the colonial powers. Ironically, even while such a practice served to reinforce the chief's authority, the act of wearing more elevated "dress" exponentially increased his overall obligation to his Portuguese patrons for securing and underwriting his position. The question of creating role models from the leadership of native communities is similarly discussed in the very interesting thesis of Araújo Corrêa (2012). Araújo Corrêa explores the relationship of the Directorate policies to the agency of indigenous leaders in the Captaincy of Rio de Janeiro. He emphasizes the role of such leaders as intermediaries between the village inhabitants and the Crown. He concludes that elevated native leaders had a vested interest in keeping the Portuguese in control, as doing so simultaneously shored up their own authority.

Critics of the Directorate system (e.g., Barickman, 1995) have suggested that the real motivation behind the clothing mandate was to increase profits by creating a captive indigenous consumer market. While it is undoubtedly true that an expanded numbers of consumers was a consequence of the legislation increasing cloth production (and went far in confirming the existence of a proto-industrialized economic modality), this critique misses the irony inherent in transforming native workers who provided the labor in the textile factories into a rural proletariat. Not only did indigenous textile factory workers dress in clothing sewn from the fabrics which they, themselves, had produced at work, but they were even paid salaries (as dictated by the Directorate) calculated in bolts of locally-produced cloth. Additionally, it was likely that they, or others in their villages, grew the cotton from which they spun and wove cloth. The indigenous spinners and weavers who worked in these small textile factories, therefore, were being assimilated, even while, ironically, they were the very instrument via which the assimilative process took place. Seen in its broadest perspective, the clothing directive exhibited multiple functions: it stimulated the increased output of industrialized cloth production which, in turn, hastened assimilation and economic integration, as well as expanded markets.

Thus while it might seem to be internally contradictory for the Portuguese to attempt to create a uniform peasantry and, at the same time, to elevate the status (and clothing) of certain individuals deemed to be leaders, having "role models" perfectly served the Portuguese purpose. This was the prevailing pattern as it emerged under the Directorate. It also was the rationale for the provision of Portuguese military uniforms and commissions to certain trusted individuals, privileges which they received in elaborate ceremonies. In 1791, for example, two Guaikurú chiefs went to the town of Vila Bela, in Mato Grosso, where they were given military uniforms with accompanying commissions (Roller, 2021, p. 94).

By standardizing the clothing of indigenous members of society, the Portuguese created a separate and distinguishable servile class whose use of quasi-European style clothing suggested that they were, in fact, willing participants in Portuguese rule. But the truth was that such orders were not necessarily successful; adoption of Euro-styled clothing by the in-

digenes was still problematic at the end of the eighteenth century. In this regard, Hal Langfur points out that as late as the 1790's the eminent Brazilian Bishop Azeredo Coutinho argued that "material appetites were the key to civilizing intransigent Indians...the shirt, the hat, the dress, trousers [and] shoes, which they have disdained as superfluous things, and even as a heavy burden to carry through the forests and wilderness, will become useful to them, and necessary... (Langfur, 2006, p. 236-237).

Perhaps just as important, the clothing of indigenous workers provided a false binary distinction to non-indigenous Brazilians. As Langfur (2023, p. 80) writes, colonists "contrasted *gentios* (heathens) ... with índios mansos, those Indians considered domesticated, settled or civilized," and who dressed in proto-European style. But, as he further suggests, this duality "glossed over the porous boundaries between the village and the forest, between the sedentary and the itinerant, between indigenous rural agriculturalists and backcountry fishers, hunters and foragers" which allowed indigenes to retreat into the wilderness, even if only temporarily. This dichotomy between the "tame" and the "wild" has nonetheless been perpetuated by generations of historians, even though recent researchers provide indications that where individuals appeared receptive to European ways, such "conversions" to a quasi-peasant-like existence were not necessarily permanent. Roller (2021, p. 115), for example, provides examples of several Guaná men who arrived at Fort Coimbra "dressed and groomed in colonial style, only to eagerly transform back to [their] original appearance that same day."

Conclusions

What has this discussion of indigenous dress of the Brazilian colonial period revealed? First, I would argue that we must be wary of facile descriptions of how the Portuguese understood the native inhabitants of Brazil. In fact, the Portuguese realized that even without clothing the Indians were adorned. Secondly, while "dress" was an inevitable facet of the "civilizing" mission of the Portuguese, it was not necessarily successful. Even where a servile, clothed class was created in secular villages, when and if the inhabitants chose to leave, nothing precluded them from returning to their original cultural norms. Did "dress" create social distinctions and classes in colonial Brazil? Undoubtedly the answer is yes, but not in the ways history has traditionally chosen to portray them.

In this brief account I have assessed anthropological and sociological theories of adornment and "dress" as having a central role in the maintenance of social order for colonial Brazilian indigenes. Such theories appear to be useful in explicating colonial Brazilian history. There is much more that can and should be done in exploring and applying these exciting perspectives to the Brazilian past. The result should yield new insights into the true meaning of dress for the indigenous peoples who were subjected to more than three centuries of Portuguese rule.

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