

Artificial Indigenous Place Names in Brazil.pdf/3



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It was engineer Theodoro Sampaio, author of *O Tupi na Geografia Nacional*, published in 1901, who first drew attention to the fact that there was an important toponymy of Tupi origin in regions that were never inhabited by ancient Tupi-speaking Indians. They are, in fact, names originated from the General Colonial Languages spoken in the missionary villages during expeditions by land and water (called “bandeiras” and “monções”, respectively), and among troopers, in short, by most members of the Brazilian colonial system. Indeed, names originating from such general languages are found in almost all parts of Brazil interior.

Concerning the other hundreds of indigenous languages spoken in the colonial period and in the two centuries after Brazil independence, their individual participation in the naming of Brazilian space was minor. Collectively, however, they played a considerable role in the toponymic

system. Place names of these origins, however, are territorially circumscribed. Moreover, many of these names are untranslatable because they originate from languages that have disappeared and that had no written grammars, unlike ancient Tupi, General Amazonian Language, and Nheengatu.

Ancient Tupi was spoken until the end of the 17th century. By contrast, the loss of Nheengatu primacy to Portuguese in most of Amazonia occurred by the end of the 19th century, and it is spoken currently only on the Upper Negro River. The General Language of São Paulo disappeared together with the great European migratory flow to southern and southeastern Brazil from 1850 onwards. Thus, the hundreds of toponyms of indigenous origin appearing by the end of the 19th century and in the first half of the 20th century throughout Brazil are the results of artificial nomination. Artificial creation of place names in Tupi or in Tupi origin General Languages was greatly stimulated, in fact, by the publication of the above-mentioned work by Theodoro Sampaio, which helped to provide many names for pioneer fronts in Brazil during the 20th century, with the emergence of many settlements and transformation of old districts into municipalities. In its third edition, *O Tupi na Geografia Nacional* reads:

Brazilians' predilection for indigenous names in the denomination of places is today so accentuated that the primitive toponymy gradually restores itself and new

localities are preferably given names taken from the language of the Tupi Amerindians (SAMPAIO, 1987, preface, our translate).^[1]



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1. [↑]“A predileção dos brasileiros pelos nomes indígenas na denominação dos lugares é hoje tão acentuada que a toponímia primitiva vai aos poucos se restaurando e às localidades novas dão-se, de preferência, nomes tirados da língua dos ameríndios tupis.”

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