

Across Archival Limits: Colonial Records, Changing Ethnonyms, and Geographies of Knowledge

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Abstract. This article examines relationships between archival records produced in borderland spaces and the histories of autonomous (non-subjugated and non-missionized) Indigenous peoples. Focusing on the Banda Oriental region of Southeastern South America, it argues that the geographical content, dispersion, and curation of colonial records have served to silence Native pasts. As Portuguese, Spanish, and Jesuit administrators sought possession of this borderland, they overstated the reach of their own settlements and strategically ascribed ethnic labels to Indigenous neighbors to appropriate their lands or delegitimize their sovereignty. The geographical dispersion of colonial records over time has masked the inconsistencies of such claims, and colonial ethnogeographic imaginations thus persist. By reading colonial sources from multiple settlements against one another, this article identifies contradictions in the geographic and ethnographic information they provide, laying a foundation for new ethnogeographic imaginations that center the spaces and agency of autonomous Indigenous communities.

Keywords. borderlands, archives, ethnonyms, geographic information system (GIS)

Introduction

In February 1716, the Valencian Jesuit Policarpo Dufo penned an account of a recent raid undertaken against neighboring Indigenous communities in what is now northeastern Argentina. Dufo and 1,500 Guaraní militiamen had set out from the Yapeyú mission the previous November, only to abandon their efforts and return home in January (Dufo 1870: 245–61; see fig. 1). Despite the brevity of this endeavor, Dufo's account was unique for

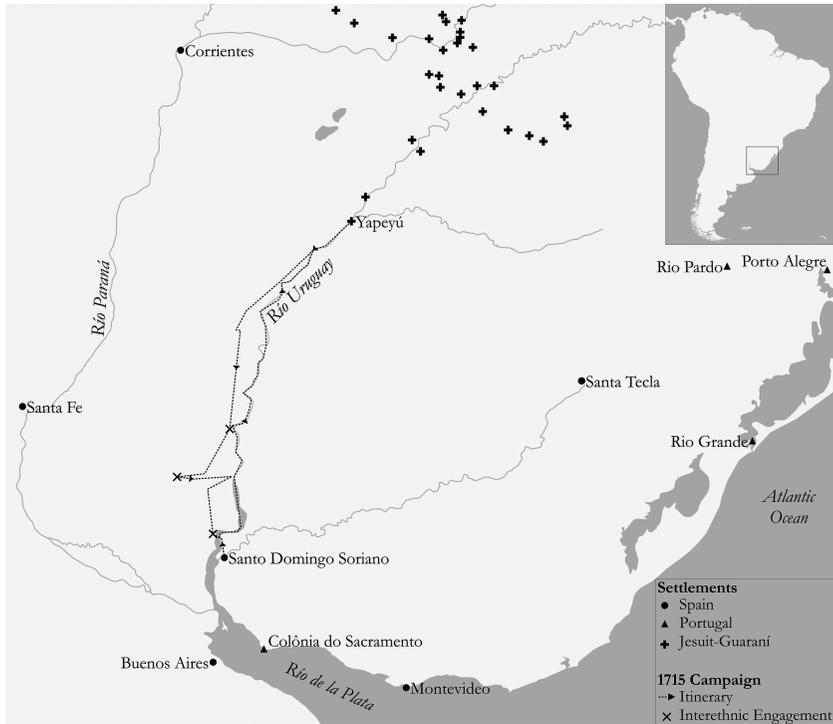


Figure 1. Portuguese, Spanish, and Jesuit-Guaraní settlements around the region's perimeter constituted the principal sites where written documents on the region were produced.

the details that it provided of lands and peoples beyond colonial settlements. Along the way, the militias encountered numerous Native communities, including Guenoas, who provided guidance and aid; Chanáes and Mohos, who spied on the troops; Yaros and Bohanes, who surrounded and waylaid the travelers; and Machados, who occupied a former mission settlement. Dufo's account also named individual Indigenous agents, including Juan Yaro and "the notorious" Carabí, both of whom the militias and Guenoas killed along the way. Yet for all of the tantalizing information Dufo's account provides, it raises more questions. Why did the Guenoas host the militias, guide them through the countryside, and serve as their vanguard? Why were there Chaná spies, when Chanáes lived on a nearby Franciscan mission? If the Machados were the "most numerous clan of Charrúas" and "peaceful people," who were the other Charrúas and why

did the Machados attack the militias? When had Carabí orchestrated “the first *invasión* of Yapeyú’s ranch?” Was Juan Yaro a Yaro Indian and why did he have a Christian name? This source does not permit us to know.

Dufo’s account gained singular prominence in the recounting of this expedition. The priest likely sent it to Jesuit authorities in Buenos Aires, where it remains in Argentina’s national archive. A transcription of the text appeared in 1870 in the archive’s annual journal, alongside a disparate array of documents regarding Argentina’s colonial past, and during the next sixty years, historians in Argentina and neighboring Uruguay referenced it as they assembled stories of the Spanish consolidation of regional lands (Bauzá 1895: 436–41; Martínez 1901: 56–70; Cervera 1907: 421–24; Sallaberry 1926: 179–204; Pérez Colman 1936: 113–17). Yet Dufo’s was not the only account. The Spanish *maestre del campo* who led the expedition, a resident of Santa Fe named Francisco García de Piedrabuena, penned his version of the events. One copy of this account was taken to Rio de Janeiro in the 1850s and is currently held in Brazil’s national library. Another seven-page copy remains tucked away in Argentina’s national archive in a collection of over 6,500 loose documents produced by the Jesuit order between 1595 and 1770. It was transcribed and published in 2012.¹ Meanwhile, the recent digitization of tertiary sources, the identification of new manuscripts in far-flung archives, and the growth of research on nearby settlements provide a broader contextual panorama within which to interpret the case (Areces, López, and Regis 1992; Levinton 2009; Latini and Lucaioli 2014).

These new sources deepen Dufo’s original story. Piedrabuena explained that the Spanish governor in Buenos Aires had commissioned the expedition to “punish Charrúas and other infidels, who with their insults, killings, and theft disturb the land and impede travel along the Paraná and Uruguay rivers,” and he named Carabí “captain of the infidels” (Latini 2012: 9). He also affirmed elements of Dufo’s report, including the militias’ unfamiliarity with the lands they traveled and the Guenoas’ integral support. Town council records from Santa Fe’s provincial archive indicate that the city’s authorities attempted to thwart the expedition after a plea from a Charrúa cacique named Juan Yasú, a long-standing ally of the city. Similarly, testimonies taken in Corrientes regarding a 1720s revolt in Paraguay offhandedly mention that city’s close ties with Charrúas, who had been raided by the missions years earlier. These testimonies are housed in the Archivo General de Indias, in Seville, Spain. Lastly, a 1735 interrogation of Guaraníes on the Candelaría mission suggests that Carabí had led a raid on Yapeyú in 1707, that he was Charrúa, and that the case remained present in the minds of mission dwellers long after. This

interrogation was published in Brazil in 1954 as part of a compendium of sources regarding the Portuguese settlement of Colônia do Sacramento (hereafter Colônia).²

These records nonetheless muddled the Jesuit's ethnographic panorama. Whereas Dufo only marked Machados as part of a broader Charrúa nation, Piedrabuena contended that Bohanes and Yaros were as well, and their accounts diverged on whether the Machados were even present for the fighting. Other sources make the case even murkier. Records from Yapeyú recounting trade relations and kinship ties with Charrúas and Yaros belie the supposed enmity that engendered the raids. Records from Yapeyú and other missions demonstrate that prior to this expedition, the missions had engaged in protracted warfare with neighboring Guenoas, who were in turn allied with Bohanes. Moreover, while Piedrabuena's account marked Carabí as the "captain of the infidels," Santa Fe's town council suggested that Juan Yasú was the "principal cacique of the Charrúa nation" (Latini 2012: 9).³ Letters from Buenos Aires suggest that motivations for the raids derived from deepening ties between the Portuguese in Colônia and "an infinity of infidel Indians" whom the Spanish governor lumped together as a single group.⁴

This dizzying array of documents is typical of colonial records in borderland regions, particularly records pertaining to autonomous Indigenous peoples. As Native communities were often mobile, they generally popped in and out of place-based record books when they approached a colonial settlement and then left the vicinity; thus records of their histories span many archival institutions, often in different countries or continents. Within a given archival repository, accounts of Native pasts are also fragmented and buried within larger collections relating to a given locale or the serendipitous histories of the repository itself. Transcriptions and publications follow similar patterns. Detailed accounts like Dufo's and Piedrabuena's, which address lands and people beyond colonial administration, are scarce and generally provide little identifying information beyond the ascription of an ethnonym or the occasional naming of a cacique. Yet, in cases such as this one, where no Native-authored sources remain, where Indigenous oral traditions have focused on the past two centuries, and where archaeological records are sparse, colonial texts are the principal source of information.

In recent decades, scholars have reformulated their understanding of colonial archives (corpuses of documents and the institutions that house them) by demonstrating how archives frame and limit knowledge of the past. Every step of the archiving process, from the recording of information to the organization of diverse records to the institutionalization of

organized records to their retrieval for researchers, generates an “archival grain” that in turn orients the production of historical knowledge (Stoler 2009: 44–51; Burton 2005). Archives do not simply record and preserve historical evidence; they also condition how that evidence is accessed and interpreted. In filtering what information is worthy of remembrance, recording it in ways intelligible for specific audiences, and assembling information into meaningful structures, archives contribute to the silencing of divergent pasts (Trouillot 1995: 52; see also Derrida 1996: 16–18; Harris 2002: 79). This process is at once ideological and inevitable, as the sheer immensity of archives can itself be a silencing mechanism. Archiving is an effort to make vast seas of information navigable for researchers, yet doing so requires the prioritization of particular avenues of inquiry, types of information, or conceptual frameworks (Dirks 2002: 63). To pursue alternative lines of analysis or divergent narratives thus requires extra labor on the part of researchers and writers.

This recognition of archival knowledge production has led scholars to adopt a number of methodological responses, particularly when addressing the actions of Indigenous Americans. In Latin America, the first has been to identify sources produced by Native authors. This strategy is a cornerstone of philological and ethnohistorical studies in Mesoamerica and the Andes, and has included analysis of visual or material documents (maps, khipus, paintings), oral traditions, performances, Indigenous-language writings, or sources written by Indigenous authors in imperial tongues (Lockhart 1992; Marcus 1992; Boone and Mignolo 1994; Salomon 2004; Dueñas 2010; Salomon and Niño-Murcia 2011; Rappaport and Cummins 2012; Ramos and Yannakakis 2014; Townsend 2017). The overall paucity of Native-authored sources has led other scholars to instead examine the discursive universe of colonial authors, the so-called “lettered city,” articulating administrators’ attempts to produce social order. Some have read against the archival grain of extant records by assessing the content of imperial sources (trial records, wills, commercial transactions, treaties, maps, log-books, etc.) in order to retrieve latent meanings or identify activities that authors sought to silence. Others have read along the archival grain, historicizing archives as composite, discursive productions or analyzing the experience of archival research in order to highlight where archival sources and institutions orient or impede historical inquiry. This acute attention to the formulae of imperial records and the active role of record-keepers in translating actions into discernable events and actors into discernable categories has enabled scholars to deconstruct archival classifications and trace “holograms” of Indigenous agents (Rama 1984; González Echevarría 1990; Scott 2008; Burns 2010; Sellers-García 2014; van Deusen 2017).

Critical discussions of colonial archives in Latin America have typically focused on administrative centers, but borderland areas presented different conditions for knowledge production. In borderlands, colonial officials struggled to know and to project authority over peoples and places beyond the purview of their missions, forts, towns, and provincial cities (Benton 2010: 10–23; Herzog 2015: 25–133; Karasch 2016: 303–4). Here, the geographical limits of the lettered city came into relief, as scattered field reports, travel logs, correspondence, and periodic pacts replaced the ordered records scribed by notaries.⁵ Accounts regarding autonomous Native peoples were more episodic than systematic and non-subjugated actors usually remained nameless. While imperial writers occasionally noted the names of caciques, they more frequently relied on geographically defined ethnonyms to distinguish their Native counterparts. More analysis is therefore necessary to understand how archival records and institutions construct the ethnic and geographic categories that underpin ethnohistorical research. The interplay between disaggregated, dispersed records and scholarly efforts to assemble ethnohistorical accounts is perhaps most evident in the borderlands of southeastern South America, an area commonly referred to as the Banda Oriental.⁶ There, the reading of colonial ethnonyms and geographical imaginations from local archival collections has resulted in the subordination or complete silencing of Native pasts.

Anatomy of a Borderland Archive

The Banda Oriental's colonial archives (source materials) display many of the same attributes as others in borderland regions.⁷ Sources regarding events and people beyond the purview of individual settlements are episodic and geographically obscure. Rather than coming from the rural interior of the region itself, most records come from the settlements that dotted its perimeter, localities linked to polycentric and competing Portuguese and Spanish imperial projects and the Jesuit-Guaraní mission complex (fig. 1). As a result, source materials continually reflected the simultaneous geographic myopia and ambition of these competing projects when addressing the region's large interior and the Native peoples that occupied and controlled it. They exhibited the frustrations and anxieties of imperial writers when faced with the presence or specter of the autonomous Native peoples that surrounded them, while at the same time projecting contiguous control over the territories that separated individual settlements, thereby imagining a terrain devoid of non-subjugated Indigenous actors. Even military forays tended to remain close to colonial settlements or along extant corridors.

The Banda Oriental's archives (present-day institutions) are at once fragmented and geographically defined. Manuscript records regarding autonomous Native communities in the region are scattered across approximately two dozen repositories in at least five countries, a legacy of both the ever-changing jurisdictional boundaries of colonial administrations and the unique histories of different sets of records. No single repository contains an overwhelming amount of documentary evidence regarding autonomous communities. In fact, no specific collections and only a handful of detailed case files exist. Given that most Native peoples lived beyond the purview of imperial administrative apparatuses, they only entered into the stage of historical events when they engaged local settlements or when military expeditions set out against them (Bracco 2004b: 118). As a result, information on specific communities, caciques, or events most often appears in letters tucked away in larger collections of correspondence or spread across multiple repositories (cf. Ballantyne 2005: 90).

The geographical dispersion of relevant source materials comes into stark relief when plotted on a map (fig. 2). To demonstrate this, we created a database of manuscript records that mention autonomous Native peoples within the Banda Oriental, nearly seven hundred in all. This tally derives from the authors' individual archival research in twenty-seven archives (imperial, national, state, ecclesiastical, private, etc.) across seven countries, as well as from manuscripts cited in the over one hundred secondary sources on Native peoples in the region that we surveyed.⁸ No single city holds more than 31 percent of relevant sources and no country more than 39 percent (fig. 3). We also mined published primary sources for the region's principal ethnonyms and common terms used to refer to non-missionized Native communities: *bárbaros*, *indios infieles*, *tolderías*, *gentio*, etc. Taking into account the multiple spellings of ethnonyms, the multilingual nature of relevant sources, the frequent use of abbreviations, and the limits of optical character recognition (OCR) software, we employed numerous spelling variations and double-checked every search hit for digitized sources to verify its accuracy. We discovered that about 17 percent of relevant manuscripts have been transcribed and published. These proportions will change as new documents are identified—relevant source materials likely exist in Lima, Peru (the former viceregal capital); Corrientes, Argentina (an administrative center adjacent to Charrúa and Yaro lands); Rome, Italy (where records of the Jesuit Order are held); and elsewhere—but adding new institutions will only increase the level of geographical dispersion of known materials. Similarly, while the development of digital indexes and images of manuscripts has begun to expand their geographical accessibility, these efforts remain severely limited.⁹

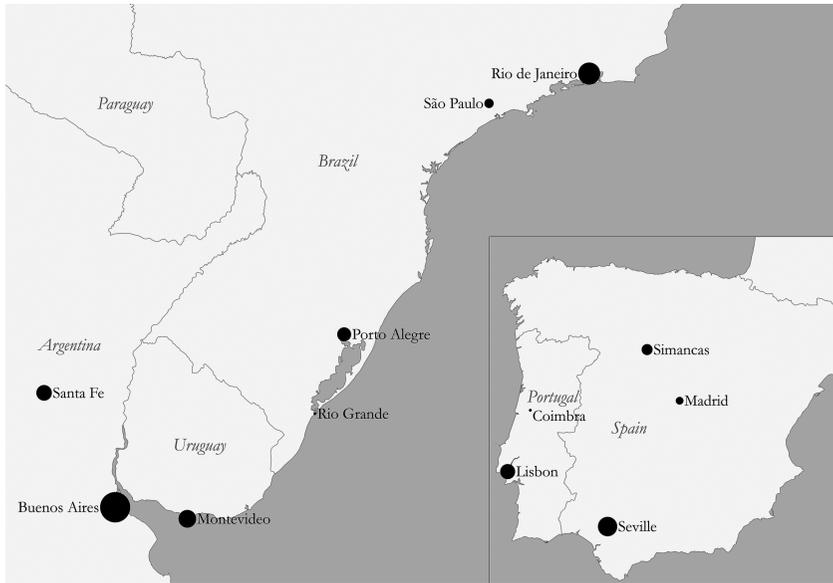


Figure 2. Nearly 700 identified manuscripts are held in archives across twelve cities. Each city is plotted and weighted proportionately according to number of manuscripts it holds, from 1 to 175.

The trajectories of source materials corresponded with the territorial objectives of postcolonial states in the region. As republican governments sought to claim inheritance of imperial lands and narrate the histories of their contemporary territorial units, they prioritized the transcription of geographically based primary sources that fortified their assertions. Since most imperial ethnographies of the region had been drafted as part of late-eighteenth-century boundary demarcations, these sources tended to appear in published volumes. The diaries of sixteenth-century explorers and seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Jesuit missionaries and administrators, which had formed the historical basis for claims of land possession, filled the remaining pages of such publications (e.g., Angelis 1836; Calvo 1862; González 1883; Groussac 1902). Manuscripts not directly related to land claims were generally absent from these publications, but instead ended up in one of the numerous archival repositories founded by newly formed national or subnational governments or in Spain's or Portugal's imperial archives. Each institution implemented different organizational structures—Argentina's and Brazil's national archives mostly maintained

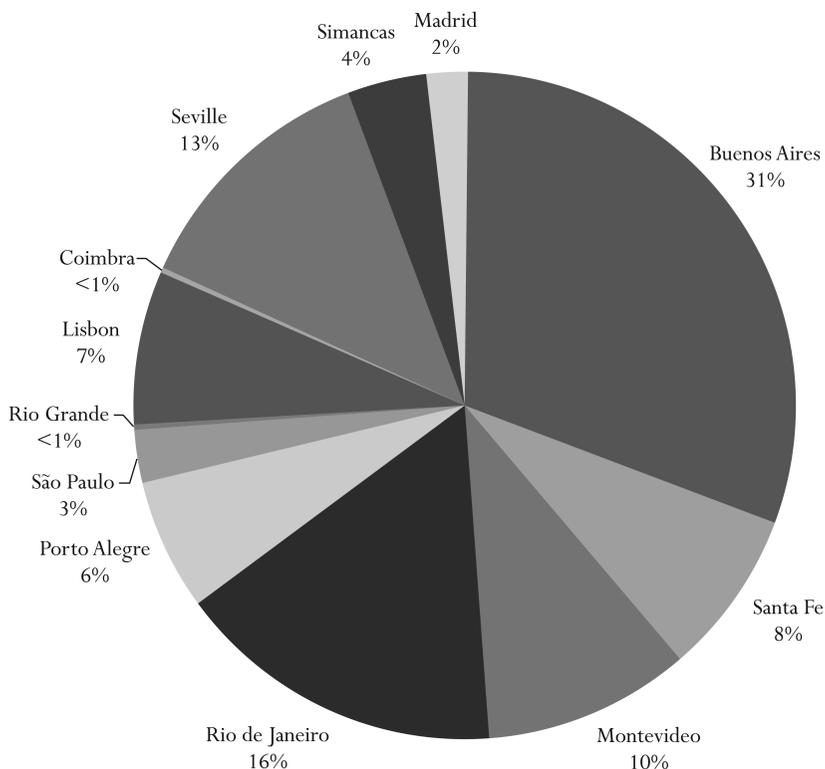


Figure 3. Of the manuscripts plotted in figure 2, 39 percent are found in Argentina, 25 percent in Brazil, 26 percent in Iberia, and 10 percent in Uruguay. Seventeen percent have been transcribed and published.

bundles of records according to imperial administrative units, while Uruguay's national archive disaggregated many records and reorganized them chronologically—but they all tended toward geographical categories to organize records regarding the Banda Oriental's countryside.¹⁰

This fragmentation and dispersion of relevant manuscripts coincides with the myopic geographical gaze of each archival institution. By plotting the manuscripts according to the location of events they recounted and color-coding them according to the city where they are held we can see this trend emerge (fig. 4).¹¹ Nearly all of the manuscripts held in Brazilian or Portuguese archives address events occurring near Colônia, along the Río de la Plata's northern coast, or on the Portuguese side of the late-eighteenth-

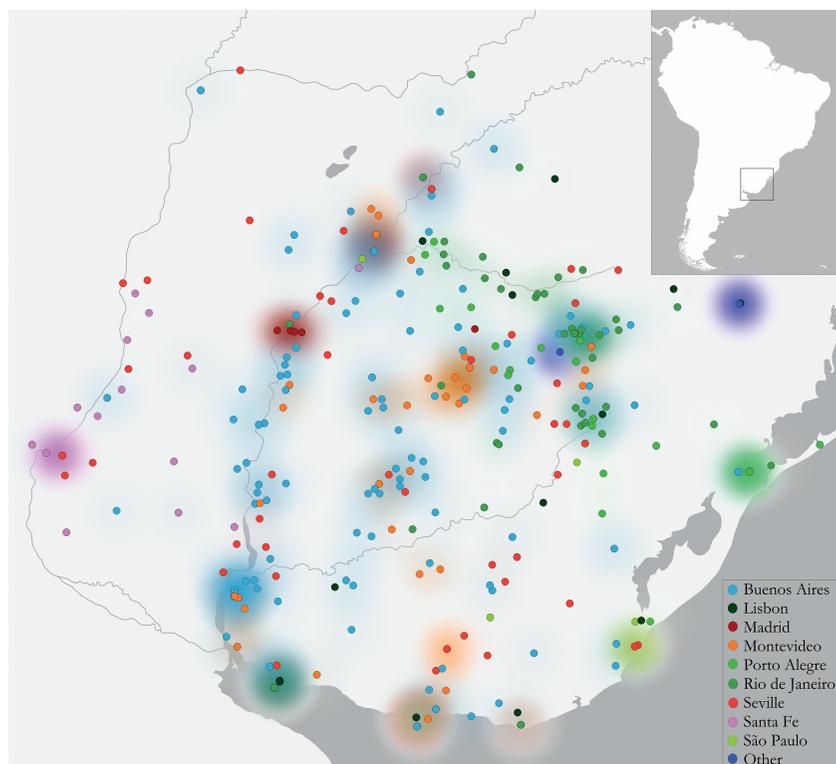


Figure 4. More than five hundred manuscripts report locations of autonomous Indigenous agents, yet each present-day archival city exhibits a limited territorial vantage point concentrated on colonial settlements.

century interimperial borderlines. Conversely, manuscripts held in Buenos Aires and Seville focus primarily on coastal settlements, Jesuit-Guaraní missions, and forts on the Spanish side of the border. With the exception of the records of a brief military foray in the early 1800s, nearly all of Montevideo's records pertain to events occurring near the city or its immediate hinterlands. Santa Fe, Argentina, presents a similar trend. Overlaying individual references on a heat map that measures the concentration and amount of citations reveals that even when a given city's institutions hold records pertaining to distant lands, those references are sparse, as is the case for viceregal records held in Argentina's Archivo General de la Nación and imperial records held in Spain's Archivo General de Indias. Controlling for years would reveal even thinner accounts: relevant Portuguese records from

Colônia disappear during years of Spanish control; Santa Fe's relevant records dissipate after the 1750s; Montevideo's collections begin in the 1720s; and Portuguese records from Rio Pardo begin in the 1750s. The silences generated by the dispersion and content of pertinent records indicate the limits of imperial reach rather than the absence of Indigenous agents. Native peoples moved onto and off the stage of a given archive's records when they spent time in proximity to these locales and then went on; less frequently, they would also appear in documents when imperial agents entered Native lands. While colonial records tended to conflate the countryside adjacent to a settlement, where one might find farms, ranches, or villages, with lands farther away (*tierra adentro/campanha/sertão*), these were distinct spaces of authority and the latter was undoubtedly Native ground (DuVal 2006).

Although the publication of primary source materials would conceivably ameliorate the geographical fragmentation of manuscripts, this has not always been the case. The publication of a collection of records in Buenos Aires, Rio de Janeiro, Madrid, or Porto Alegre did not always give rise to international circulation, as most archival publications were intended for local or national audiences. Nor has the scanning and digitization of published primary sources always resulted in broader accessibility, as even sources too old to be protected by copyright are often held behind firewalls and only accessible to users with institutional affiliations or licenses. Furthermore, published primary sources are often buried in larger tomes or published in fragmented formats, appearing as appendixes in books on tangential topics and decontextualized and deployed in line with an author's specific argument. Plotting these sources reveals similar geographical vantage points to those exhibited in manuscript records (fig. 5). While published sources collectively provide broad geographic coverage, they tend to reflect the vantage point of archives from their city of publication and concentrate on sites of imperial settlement. When taken together, the content, dispersion, and curation of historical records in the Banda Oriental have hindered ethnohistorical research on autonomous Native communities. Although publicly available, records are often effectively inaccessible due to the logistical, temporal, and financial hurdles presented by intercontinental research on unindexed sources. This archival history has begotten historiographical traditions in which certain Indigenous Americans remain marginalized.

Ethnic Identities and Geographies of Knowledge

Given the scant, episodic, and geographically dispersed documentation on autonomous Native peoples in the Banda Oriental, scholars have used

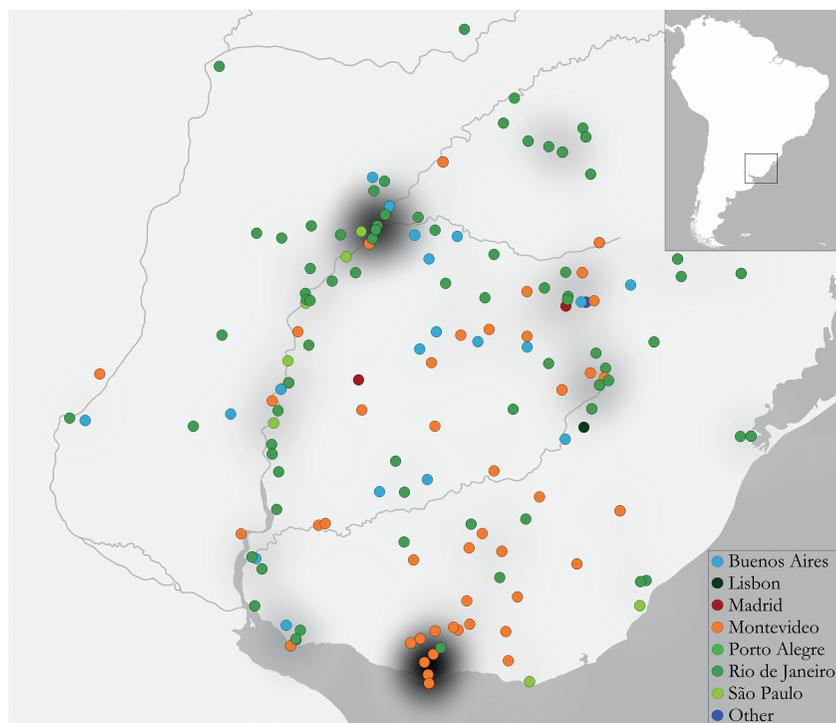


Figure 5. Plotting the reported locations of autonomous Indigenous agents in published primary sources reveals similar patterns as figure 4.

ethnonyms as unifying conceptual frames. In mutually constitutive processes that structured regional scholarship, anthropologists deployed ethnonyms to define communities of historical agents, while historians identified colonial documents referencing such terms to assemble ethnohistorical narratives (e.g., Araújo 1911; Cordero 1960; Acosta y Lara 1989: 1; Pi Hugarte 1993; Basile Becker 2002; López Mazz and Bracco 2010). The construction of ethnic labels in colonial records from the region thus warrants special consideration, particularly since there is little evidence to suggest that these imposed identities were meaningful to the peoples to whom they referred. Indigenous communities instead organized themselves into seasonally mobile encampments (*tolderías*) made up of several dozen to a hundred members and tethered to one another through extended networks of kinship, trade, and political authority.¹² These decentralized, nodal networks changed over time, amid

the proliferation of feral livestock, the incorporation of colonial deserters, deepening ties to Atlantic economies and trans-imperial smuggling, raiding and slave trades, and shifting interethnic alliances.¹³ Yet, the ever-changing employment of ethnonyms within colonial texts only opaquely captured Indigenous processes of sociocultural transformation (ethnogenesis), and more readily revealed alterations in colonial classification (ethnification and ethnicization) that ascribed alterity and timelessness to dynamic communities and ultimately engendered Indigenous invisibilization.¹⁴

The assignation of ethnic identifiers was inextricable from the changing geographical imaginations of imperial and ecclesiastical writers. Sixteenth-century European explorers who moved along the Atlantic coast, the Río de la Plata, and the Paraná River identified Native peoples according to sites of encounter. These travelers employed a myriad of ethnonyms—Beguas, Caracaraes, Corondas, Chanás, Charrúas, Guaraníes, Mepenes, Querandíes, Quiloazás, Mocoretás, Timbús, and others—as they sought to distinguish potential trade partners from enemies, yet the travelers' similar itineraries did not result in consistent nomenclature or geographical locations.¹⁵ The term *Charrúas* first appeared in a 1527 account by the Spanish mariner Diego García, who positioned them as “the first people [encountered] on the river’s northern shore,” likely referring to the coastlines of present-day Montevideo or lands farther east (García [1527] 1879: 122; see fig. 1). Four decades later, the Spanish conquistador Francisco Ortiz de Vergara testified that “there is a nation of Indians called Charruaes that goes to San Gabriel,” an island near Colônia, while the German mercenary Ulrich Schmidl claimed to have encountered Charrúas in Buenos Aires (Ortiz de Vergara [1569] 1941: 118; Schmidl [1567] 2009: 93–99). As these accounts circled back to Iberia and informed subsequent expeditions, new ethnic geographies emerged. Whereas Vergara had noted that Charrúas frequented San Gabriel, the Spanish chronicler Martín del Barco Centenera declared in 1602 that “the people who inhabit [the island] are called Charruaha,” thus presenting them as more permanent residents (Centenera [1602] 1836: 104–5). *Charrúa* eventually became a general term to refer to all Native peoples who lived north and east of the Río de la Plata, and by 1608 at least one Spanish official labeled the Banda Oriental the “Charrúa Coast” (*Banda de los Charrúas*), rendering ethnic and geographic designations synonymous.¹⁶

During the seventeenth century, as Spanish settlements emerged along the Paraná River between Buenos Aires and Asunción, each developed local patterns of assigning ethnonyms. A single ethnonym thus took on numerous meanings, referring alternatively to people in a certain area or to those associated with a given cacique, even after the leader's death. Thus in 1655 the governor of Buenos Aires urged Cloyan and other caciques of the

“Yaros, Mojanés, [and] Guenoas” to form missions; then a quarter century later, a missionary recorded an encounter with a person “of the Cloyá nation,” which lived in the “land of the Guanoás” and in *tolderías* shared with other nations.¹⁷ Similarly, in 1650 sources from Santa Fe mentioned a “principal leader of the Charrúas” named “Machado,” who threatened the city’s ranches east of the Paraná River, but in 1715 Piedrabuena negotiated with “the caciques of the Machados” and Dufo claimed that Machados were a Charrúa clan.¹⁸ Amid this inconsistent use of ethnonyms, new associations between geography and ethnicity emerged. Administrators in Buenos Aires continued to ascribe the term *Charrúa* to *tolderías* on the northern coast of the Río de la Plata, but Santa Fe’s city council used it to refer to non-subjugated Native peoples (*indios infieles*) between the Paraná and Uruguay Rivers (Lucaoli and Latini 2014). *Charrúa* thus became a catchall term to define disparate peoples. One Spanish military officer explained: “Indians who are called Yaros [are] infidels and are commonly considered the same nation as Charrúas, but they are from various and distinct communities that have continuously been at war against one another.”¹⁹

Portugal’s founding of Colônia in 1680 transformed the Banda Oriental into a contested ground where Spanish, Portuguese, and Jesuit-Guaraní settlements competed for access to the region’s interior, which *tolderías* controlled. This dynamic infused a new political calculus into ethnic labeling, as declaring ethnic communities to be vassals enabled imperial diplomats to claim legal possession of Native lands yet made them responsible for *tolderías*’ actions. For example, when Colônia’s chaplain was killed in the countryside in 1703, Portuguese authorities argued that the assailants were Bohanes, while the Spanish governor contended that they were Minuanes. These determinations were less about ethnographic precision than Portuguese demands that Spain pay reparations, since Spain had claimed Bohanes as vassals and both empires viewed Minuanes as independent.²⁰ Undergirding these assertions was the assumption that pacts with individual *tolderías* applied to all people classified under their same ethnonym, of which only five remained: Bohán, Charrúa, Guenoa, Minuán, and Yaro. This conflation of diverse *tolderías* led to tropes of Indigenous infidelity, and thus when Colônia’s governor sought peace with neighboring Minuanes, Portugal’s *Conselho Ultramarino* warned of Minuanes’ general “inconstancy,” and when Jesuit writers marked Guenoas as uniformly resistant to missions, they overlooked the nearly one-third of San Borja’s population identified as Guenoa.²¹ Under this same logic, military officers assumed that isolated victories over individual *tolderías* signified the vanquishing of entire ethnic communities.²²

Around the eighteenth century's midpoint, written records regarding *tolderías* began to shift again, and the number of ethnonyms dwindled to two: Charrúa and Minuán. Portugal and Spain conceptually divorced territorial possession from Indigenous vassalage, instead partitioning the region (and all of South America) via two interimperial treaties and bilateral border-drawing expeditions.²³ This legal transformation produced material changes—each empire subsequently militarized the border and distributed titles to willing settlers—and generated tensions between imperial claims of possession and *tolderías*' sovereignty. Colonial writers began to narrate Indigenous resistance to new ranches or to cattle runs in their lands as “invasions” of imperial property that derived from what they perceived to be *tolderías*' bad temperment (Erbig 2016; Sarreal 2014: 93–114).²⁴ Similar assumptions permeated ethnographic accounts of the region, which first appeared during these years and which presented Charrúas and Minuanes as timeless, landless, and incorrigible. By linking present and past *tolderías* according to ethnonym, imperial ethnographers espoused narratives of Native territorial decline and unchanging cultural practices, and by classifying ethnic communities according to taxonomic scales of civility, they disparagingly distinguished *tolderías* from missionized Guaraníes (Azara 1847: 145–48, 159–62; Alvear 1902: 342–45; Saldanha 1929: 96). Divergent ethnographic assessments reflected distinct administrative experiences, as Spanish officials defined Charrúas and Minuanes as violent and uncivil, while Portuguese officials claimed that Minuanes were “not as cruel as the Tape Indians [Guaraníes from the missions]” (Saldanha 1929: 101; Wilde 2003: 109–17; Sirtori 2008). Since most *tolderías* were situated on the Spanish side of the interimperial borderline, Charrúas and Minuanes prevented Spain from consolidating its claims while serving as important allies for Portuguese agents.

The terms *Minuán* and *Charrúa* disappeared from historical records in the early nineteenth century, in the 1810s and 1830s respectively, but this discursive erasure did not coincide with the end of the people to whom they referred. Rather, it indicated a separation of once autonomous peoples from the countryside and the disintegration of the *toldería* as a socio-territorial unit. Throughout the colonial period, most ethnonyms in the region denoted Native peoples beyond Iberian administrative control. Thus, individuals separated from *tolderías*—voluntarily or through captivity—lost their ethnic identifier in written accounts, and historical processes of ethnification and ethnicization coincided with attempted ethnocide. Record-keepers replaced ethnonyms with terms that indicated general Indigenous ancestry, such as Indian (*indio*) or Indian woman (*china*); that emphasized age, such

as preadolescent child (*párvulo*) or infant (*criatura*); or that highlighted occupation, such as domestic laborer (*criada*), peon (*peón*), or household dependent (*agregado*). These identifiers occasionally appeared alongside ethnonyms, particularly in the case of new arrivals, yet often disappeared over a person's lifetime. Moreover, ethnonyms that were ascribed to first-generation migrants from *tolderías* to colonial settlements almost never passed on to their descendants, as demonstrated by the approximately two thousand Indigenous captives taken during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Erbig 2015: 265). The principal exception was Nuestra Señora de la Concepción de Cayastá, a fortified frontier mission founded by the Spanish in 1750 and populated by Charrúa captives. There, the reverse happened: *Charrúa* functioned as a catchall term for its inhabitants, similar to *Guaraní* in the missions of Paraguay. Whereas administrators in Spanish cities and towns aimed to incorporate captives into a creolized social order, the mission instead functioned to transform non-subjugated Indians to mission Indians through exile and separation from Spanish settlements (Wilde 2012). Ethnic identification was thus paramount until the mission was abandoned in 1793.

Conclusion

While strategies to read against or along the archival grain have revealed much about the limits of imperial knowledge and the activities of imperial subjects, the episodic and fragmented records of colonial engagement with the autonomous Indigenous communities produced unique archival conditions in borderland spaces. These diverse and scattered sources are characterized less by formulaic patterns of writing or record-keeping than by ever-changing ethnonyms and territorial imaginations projected from isolated locales. This process was both colonial and postcolonial, as the inauguration of archival institutions in the nineteenth century encased dispersed imperial records within national or subnational territorial frames. In the case of the Banda Oriental, the independent lives of imperial sources begat independent and parallel historiographical traditions in which scholars accepted the geographic and ethnographic categories of archival sources and institutions. These ethnogeographical assumptions have in turn contributed to the invisibilization of Native peoples past and present.

The dynamic nature of ethnonyms in colonial records engendered contradictory and fragmented pasts for the communities to which they were meant to refer. As scholars used ethnonyms as proxies for cataloguing diverse *tolderías*, the ethnonym employed in a given source determined

which ethnohistory—Charrúa? Minuán?—its information would fit into. Retellings of the 1715 militia expedition from Yapeyú illustrate such struggles. In defining the *tolderías* encountered by the militias, some historians suggested that they were Bohanes, Charrúas, and Yaros; some countered that they were Bohanes and Yaros, but not Charrúas; one suggested that they were all “Uruguayan Indians”; and by the late twentieth century, most suggested that they were all Charrúas (see Lozano 1874: 470; Funes 1856: 358; Trelles 1870: 243–44; Bauzá 1895: 436–41; Cervera 1907: 421–24; Sallaberry 1926: 182). Meanwhile, anthropologists sought to agglutinate individual ethnonyms under broader categories, affirming that all participants were Charrúas, purporting that *Bohanes* may have been a misspelling of *Minuanes*, or suggesting that Yaros may have been Kaingang people (see Serrano 1961: 190–94; Basile Becker 2002: 55; Vidart 1996: 21).

This tendency toward agglutinating diverse peoples, driven by a paucity of available records, has produced a historiographical weight against which more recent scholarship and Indigenous social movements have had to contend. Present-day Indigenous Americans in Uruguay, Brazil, and Argentina have reclaimed Charrúa identity in forming such groups as the Association of Descendants of the Charrúa Nation (ADENCH) and the Council of the Charrúa Nation (CONACHA). Charrúa and other ethnonyms have thus been integral to the reemergence of Indigenous peoples in a region that has long denied their existence (Basini Rodríguez 2003; Verdesio 2014). Yet taking such terms at face value and assuming that they were meaningful to colonial-era Indigenous actors leads to narratives of vanishing, as ethnonyms in historical texts primarily designated people who maintained political autonomy while Native peoples’ integration into the colonial sphere coincided with their discursive disappearance. Accounts of ethnic identification thereafter might draw on the increasingly asserted oral traditions of reemergent Indigenous communities today.

Reading across archives entails the recognition that ethnonyms were often imposed labels that developed over time to categorize peoples beyond the reach of colonial settlements. Recent research has demonstrated this trend throughout the Americas, from the borderlands of northern New Spain to the eastern foothills of the Andes, and from Brazilian forests to the grasslands of Patagonia. Numerous scholars have shown the inconsistent use of ethnonyms, which agglutinated diverse Native neighbors, distinguished Indigenous allies from enemies, and assigned culpability to external Native foes. Yet researchers have diverged on whether ethnonyms ever became meaningful to the communities to which they referred. They have

also disagreed on whether to continue using such terms, to deconstruct them, or to discard them in favor of other classifications (Langfur 2006: 26–30; Julien 2006; Ortelli 2007; Oliveto 2010; Nacuzzi and Lucaioli 2017). It is nonetheless possible to simultaneously historicize ethnonyms and adopt other concepts that more closely approximate Indigenous patterns of social organization, such as *tolderías*, *parcialidades*, *cacicazgos*, or kinship networks. In this way, one can identify the interplay between colonial discourse and Indigenous action, whether or not Native communities ultimately adopted these terms themselves.

This type of reading also requires the acknowledgment of contradictions between the short-range territorial vantage points of source materials and their authors' efforts to project an understanding of a countryside about which they had little knowledge. The process of identifying and reading beyond these modes of classification and territorial framing is only possible through the examination of multiple archives, as discrepancies are only apparent through comparison. Reading interethnic engagements from multiple vantage points both highlights the contradictions of individual accounts and allows for deeper analysis of the interests and motives of *tolderías* and *caciques* as they moved throughout the region and engaged various locales. This, in turn, enables the construction of new territorial frames that highlight the plurality and locality of Indigenous sociocultural organization. Moreover, it derives meaning from Indigenous actions where Indigenous voices are elusive, and it highlights material factors, rather than purported ethnic tendencies, as the driving forces behind such actions. Lastly, it allows for the deconstruction of supposed Iberian hegemony over Native lands and acknowledges the authority exercised by autonomous Native communities.

To read across archival limits is to build bodies of evidence from the edges of extant repositories, to collect fragments, and to push back on the ethnogeographical imaginations of historical sources, archival repositories, and historiographies. Such an effort is nonetheless fraught with logistical, financial, and institutional hurdles. It is not enough to read sources with a new mindset, and multiarchival research is often prohibitively expensive, particularly when archives are spread across continents and sources of funding privilege nationally framed projects. Digitalization initiatives have made documents more accessible, but unstable connections, slow servers, changing web addresses, and finding aids that do not highlight or index Native peoples have limited their utility. Perhaps the most promising pathway is further collaboration among scholars from different locales and with present-day Indigenous people.

Notes

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- 1 Recent indexing by the Archivo General de la Nación has enabled the tallying and cataloguing of documents within this collection for the first time in Zabala 2011: 287–97, 401. Piedrabuena's account was transcribed in Latini 2012: 8–12.
- 2 "Acta de Cabildo de Santa Fe," 7 Dec. 1715, Archivo General de la Provincia de Santa Fe (hereafter AGPSF); Archivo General de Indias (hereafter AGI) Buenos Aires, 235, fs. 12, 89v, 108, 130–130v, 150v, 172, 214v, 239v, 259v, 276v, 296, 320–320v, 345v, 371v–372, 385v, 405v–406, 429v; Cortesão 1954: 321–2.
- 3 "Acta de Cabildo de Santa Fe," 7 Dec. 1715, AGPSF.
- 4 Letter from the city of Buenos Aires, Buenos Aires, 16 Dec. 1715, AGI, Charcas, 263.
- 5 Notaries were present in many borderland settlements; however, their records mostly referred to individuals who operated within a settlement's administrative apparatus.
- 6 The Banda Oriental as defined here comprises present-day Uruguay, north-eastern Argentina, and southern Brazil. The term, which literally means "eastern side," refers here to lands east of the Río de la Plata and the Paraná River.
- 7 This includes all archival repositories that contain manuscripts regarding the region's borderlands, including repositories in Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay, Spain, Portugal, and the United States.
- 8 At the time this article was written, we have not found relevant manuscripts in Paraguay or the United States, and thus omitted them from figure 2. We did, however, identify published primary sources and manuscript maps in North American institutions such as the Newberry Library, the John Carter Brown Library, and the Library of Congress.
- 9 The Actas de Cabildo of the Archivo General de la Provincia de Santa Fe; the Coleção De Angelis of Brazil's and Argentina's national libraries; the Projeto Resgate of Lisbon's Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino, Brazil's Universidade de Brasília, and its national library; the Archivo Artigas of Uruguay's national archive; and Spain's Portal de Archivos Españoles (PARES) are some examples of this trend.
- 10 This tendency also permeated subsequent transcriptions and publications that these archives produced. Some series included: *Documentos interesantes para a história e costumes de São Paulo* and the *Revista do Instituto Histórico e Geográfico do Rio Grande do Sul* (Brazil), the *Revista del Archivo General Administrativo* (Uruguay), and the *Revista del Archivo General de Buenos Aires* (Argentina). Most records in Portugal's and Spain's imperial archives

- reflected the territorially based administrative structures of their overseas governments.
- 11 Of the nearly seven hundred manuscripts identified, just over five hundred provide a spatial referent according to which they can be plotted. This dataset was originally cited in Erbig 2016 and has since been updated to include newly identified records.
 - 12 The term *toldería* derived from the transportable tent-like structures (*toldos*) that made up such an encampment. For seasonal mobility, see Nacuzzi 1991; Barr 2011.
 - 13 Detailed discussions of sociocultural changes among *tolderías* in the Banda Oriental include Bracco 2004a; Frühauf García 2009; Latini 2010; Erbig 2016.
 - 14 For more on ethnonyms, the colonial gaze, and indigenous agency in southern and eastern South America, see Nacuzzi 1998; Monteiro 2001: 53–78; Verdesio 2001: 37–38; El Jaber 2011: 291–93; Giudicelli 2007; Boccara 2007; Roulet 2016.
 - 15 Many of these ethnonyms were recorded with different spellings and may have referred to distinct peoples. In the case of Charrúas, this included “charruaes” and “charruases” (Diego García, 1527), “jacroas” (Fernández de Oviedo, 1535), “zechuruas” (Schmidl, 1536), “charruaes” (Ortiz de Vergara, 1569), and “charruaha” (del Barco Centenera, 1602). Different ethnonyms may have also derived from different translators and intermediaries that accompanied the expeditions, including Spanish castaways and captives and native Guaraní speakers (Latini 2010: 76–79; Metcalf 2005: 76).
 - 16 Sixteenth-century travelers often considered the Río de la Plata and the Paraná River one and the same (Acosta y Lara 1989: 15; Frega 2008: 96).
 - 17 Order issued by Governor Baigorri, Buenos Aires, 21 Oct. 1655, Archivo General de la Nación, Argentina (hereafter AGNA), IX. 6-9-3; Jarque 1687: 374–82.
 - 18 “Acta de Cabildo de Santa Fe,” 5 Dec. 1650, AGPSF; Latini 2012: 10; Dufo 1870: 253.
 - 19 Petition by Fernando Alarcón, Corrientes, n.d., AGNA, IX. 6–9–5.
 - 20 AGNA, IX. 41-3-8, exp. 4, f. 49–49v, 54–59, 86–87. Recent works have repudiated perceived Indigenous loyalty to a given crown in the region. See Frühauf García 2009: 227–72; García and Milder 2012: 40.
 - 21 Instituto Histórico e Geográfico Brasileiro (hereafter IHGB), Conselho Ultramarino, Arq. 1.1.25, f. 59–62; AGNA, VII. Biblioteca Nacional 289, 4390/1, 4390/2; Petition by Juan José Rico, s.d, AGI, Charcas, 384.
 - 22 Archivo General de la Nación, Uruguay, Falcao Espalter, vol. 1, f. 89, 112; Museo Mitre, Archivo Colonial, Arm B, C28, P1, No. 3.
 - 23 The treaties of Madrid (1750) and San Ildefonso (1777) each commissioned mapping teams to establish a transcontinental border between Brazil and Spanish South America. Portugal (1759) and Spain (1767) also expelled the Jesuit order from their territories.
 - 24 Letter from Francisco Bruno de Zavala, Las Vívoras, 9 Nov. 1750, AGNA, IX. 4-3-1; Letter from Martín Joseph de Echauri, Campo del Bloqueo, 19 Mar. 1758, and Letter from Joseph Martínez Fontes, Campo del Bloqueo, 3 Oct. 1758, AGNA, IX. 4-3-2; Letter to Francisco Albín, Montevideo, 20 Mar. 1798, AGNA, IX. 3–9–2; Letter from Francisco de Albín, Vívoras, 28 Sept. 1798, AGNA, IX. 4-3-4; IHGB, Conselho Ultramarino, Arq. 1.2.19, f. 261v.

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