

Maranhão, toponymics and history

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Abstract

The interest in knowing the place names meanings is a rather old curiosity. Usually the information they bring precedes the own history of the place. In this paper, our general aim is to present the processes which motivate the choice of some toponyms that compose the lexical index of the State of Maranhão. The thesis is that the system of names (Toponymics from Maranhão) is not totally arbitrary; thus, our hypothesis, that a set of names are influenced by a cultural transplantation process and by the disputes of power present in the history of the State. By doing so, we associate History to the Onomastics, as well as the Ethnolinguistic perspective, therefore relating language, culture, History and thinking (SAPIR, 1980, 1985). The basic principles used here derive from the Historical Linguistics (SILVA, 1999; CAMPBELL, 2004; CROWLEY, 2003) and from the Onomastics (DAUZAT, 1957; PIEL, 1968, 1969, 1975; DICK, 1993, 1995, 1997). The investigational paths are the Indiciary Paradigm (MORELLI apud GINZBURG, 2009) and the Words and Things Movement (CAMPBELL, 2004; CROWLEY, 2003). The proceedings used in the data collection were encyclopedic researches based on books of trip reports.

Introduction

The main purpose of this study is to identify the social-historical formation and change contexts of toponyms in the State of Maranhão, in the north of Brazil. The thesis is that this system of names is actually influenced by a cultural transplantation process and by the power disputes in the historical formation of the State.

In order to do so, we identified, described and interpreted some toponyms found in trip reports by using two methods. The Indiciary Paradigm, which suggests that “[...] it is necessary not to base, as it is normally done, on more prominent characteristics [...], it is necessary to exam the most neglected detail.” (MORELLI apud GINZBURG, 2009, p. 144), that is, the research must pursue an essentially investigative mark; and also the *Wörter und Sachen*, Words and Things Movement, which suggests that a story lies behind what is enclosed by a name. Therefore, the movement indicates paths to research not only the name, but also the thing itself that name represents, which makes these two methods complementary and also useful to the nature of our investigation.

Firstly, we will set up the historical formation context of the State of Maranhão. Then, we will proceed to the analysis of data which were either collected in trip reports books or in chorographic dictionaries. At last, the final considerations we could infer will be presented.

1. Context

The concern about determining the things and about knowing the meaning of names which were attributed to these things appears in the first biblical books, as in the book of the world creation, the Genesis, in citations such as “And God called the light Day and the darkness he called Night [...]. And God called the firmament Heaven [...]. And God called the dry land Earth; and the gathering together of the waters called he Seas” (Genesis 1: 1-10). In the following verses, one can read how rivers were denominated: “The name of the first is Pison, which compasseth the whole land of Havilah [...]. And the name of the second river is Gihon, the same is it that compasseth the whole land of Ethiopia. And the name of the third river is Hiddekel: that is it which goeth toward the east of Assyria. And the fourth river is Euphrates” (Genesis 2: 11-14). Still in this book, a name is attributed to the first woman, as

one reads in the following excerpt: “And Adam called his wife’s name Eve; because she was the mother of all living” (Genesis 3: 20); as we know, Eve means ‘life’, ‘human life source’ or ‘life’s mother’.

Some names embrace traces, vestiges and signs which provide information about facts that precede the written history of a place and which were attributed in the scope of a meaningful context that relates history and language, a diversity that identifies the discipline Onomastics as an important contribution to the History and to the linguistic knowledge of a people.

As far as the State of Maranhão is concerned, it is known that the first indigenous people were the main actors of the State history, its foremost landowners, who had a language, a religion and a cultural practice in each of their groups. As native inhabitants they were the first to nominate the places where they lived. Then, the Europeans came to Maranhão: mainly the French, the Portuguese and the Spanish, motivated by the dream and the ambition of conquering new lands. These colonizers imposed their culture to the colonized by suppressing their native languages and implementing a traditionally European dominative system.

In the 18th and in the 19th centuries Maranhão was one of the utmost importers of black slaves from Africa. But due to a bull edited in 1537 by the Pope Paul III in which it was stated that the American indigenous possessed soul and therefore could not be slaved the black handwork increased in order to substitute the indigenous labor. But then black African slaves were considered a mere production object and for this reason their language and culture were not respected, therefore constituting in elements submitted to oblivion. For this reason, most names in Maranhão rarely bring any African trace. Rather different from what happens to other local names which carry Lusitan or even indigenous traces in their forms as a vestige of historical identity.

Some authors regard the toponymy established in the Modern Age as of a lower importance because they do not play such a meaningful role as auxiliaries to the historical studies. Also, if they demonstrated anything at all, it would be just facts and causes commonly known, and few are the new place names (GUEVARA, 1969-1970; CROWLEY, 2003). Notwithstanding, the beginning of settlements on our State and on our country preceded the European invasions, with the presence of the ancient indigenous people in the Brazilian territory. Some toponyms from Maranhão implanted by the French and by the Lusitans let us interpret this period which foresaw the High Middle Age and the Modern Age. Therefore, it is possible to reach geographical and cultural aspects from rather remote periods in that past. The well known French and Portuguese domination process in Maranhão and in Brazilian lands is more related to the Golden Period invasions of Western India, invasions which are regarded as an imperialist eagerness towards new discoverings. For this reason, some names crossed maritime frontiers for they were carried by these people, therefore retaining historical facts of a very remote origin and dating back, as it seems, to 2104 B.C. There are names whose origin trace back to the Roman invasion on the land that turned out to be known as Lusitania, as the name Viana, for example; from the Germanic invasions of the Goths, we have the name Guimarães; from the Arabic invasions, the name Alcântara, as well as many other names which had been brought from different people who inhabited the Iberian Peninsula.

It is right to state that the place names in Maranhão have their meaningful roots based on the own history of the State. Maranhão has its formation process shaped by many episodes and whose history mingles with that of the colonizer which, in its turn, traces back to the Greek, the Roman, the Goths and the Arabian invasions.

2. Data analysis

2.1. Names changed by the French

We opened the investigation about the foremost historical motivations which led to the toponymic proper names choices in Maranhão as from reading d'Abbeville's trip reports. These reports were written between 1612 and 1614, period of the invasion in Maranhão. As from this period, it is possible to identify changes in the names of the oldest places in our State. The first name change occurred with the rise of the new colony and of the place that now is the Maranhão's capital, São Luís:

From the name *Nova França*: "As for the mission in the New France [...]" (D'ABBEVILLE, 1975 [1612-1614], p. 25)¹

França Equinocial: "France, which was fortunate to be the church's greatest daughter, is like a twin sister to this new França Equinocial." (D'ABBEVILLE, 1975 [1612-1614], p. 17)

São Luís: "Mr. De Rasily gave the fort the name Fort Saint Louis in the eternal memory of Luis XIII, the king of France and Navarra." (D'ABBEVILLE, 1975 [1612-1614], p. 73)

The first denominations instituted by the French use a mechanism of naming based on metonymy, in which the names *Nova França* and *França Equinocial* refer to the new colony as if they were an extension of the European country. In its turn, the name *São Luís* activates the king's image by the new conquered land, also using metonymy. Other smaller places in the State also had their names changed by the use of these new micro-toponymics, such as:

Ilha de Santa Ana: "He went onboard on a vessel with some companion and there he went to Ilha de Santa Ana, also called Guajavás, where the army was settled to invade Maranhão." (MORENO, 2001 [1614], p. 61)

Porto de Santa Maria: "And to the port, close to the fortress, called Porto de Santa Maria, in honor of the Heaven's Queen, the Blessed Virgin Mary, whose birth was celebrated on this day and also to honor her sister on Earth, Maria de Médicis, Queen of France and Navarra, mother and regent of our Christian king." (D'ABBEVILLE, 1975 [1612-1614], p. 73)

In another process, similar to what happened with the name *São Luís*, the names *Santa Ana* and *Santa Maria* are operated to refer to the new places in order to pay homage to saints celebrated on the same occupation date of the places.

Based on these excerpts, it is possible to apprehend how language is influenced by history and politics, that is, by socio-cultural events.

2.2. Names changed by the Portuguese

After the victory of the Portuguese against the French, in the Battle of Guaxenduba, those started to domain the places they owned, for different motivations.

¹ T. N.: One of this text's main purposes is to analyze how place names change, in Portuguese language, in the State of Maranhão. Since the text was originally written in Portuguese, we decided to preserve the place names which are written in Portuguese, such as *Nova França* (New France), *França Equinocial* (Equinocial France) and *São Luís*, as well as *Nossa Senhora da Vitória* (Our Lady of the Victory), *Revolta de Bequimão* (The Bequimão Battle), *Pedra Ferrada* (Ironed Stone), *Pastos Bons* (Good Pasture), *Serra da Desordem* (The Disorder Hill) and *Cinta* (Waist), *Sítio Velho* (Old Farm) and *Cais da Sagração* (Consecration Wharf).

2.2.1. NAMES CHARACTERIZED BY RELIGION

The first changes were, most of them, from indigenous names to religious character names, attributed by the first religious responsible for the mission administration and also for the settlements in the colony.

Guarapiranga > São José de Guimarães > Guimarães
Anajatuba > Santa Maria de Anajatuba > Anajatuba
Itapecuru Grande > Nossa Senhora do Rosário > Rosário
Guanaré > São José das Aldeias Altas > Caxias

2.2.2. NAMES TRANSPLANTATION FROM PORTUGUESE CITIES

At the same time that the indigenous names were changed by those of religious character, politicians also attributed names from Portuguese places to new places in Maranhão. Their aim was to pay homage to their native land, Portugal. More precisely, this practice occurred during Marquês de Pombal's government. Many of these Maranhão's cities names refer to the Lusitan territory's old invasions, such as:

Alcântara: this name refers to the Arabic invasions. The city in Maranhão which received this named was previously called *Tapouytapere*.

Guimarães: refers to the Goth Germanic invasions.

Monção: one of the names left by the Greek, as from 2014 B.C., in the Lusitania.

Paço do Lumiar: the city was previously denominated *Anindiba*; it is the name of a place that is currently a neighborhood in Lisbon, Portugal.

Viana: other names have their origin in the Roman invasions to the Lusitania, as it happens with the name *Viana*.

Viçosa: before it was *Atutoya*, after *Viçosa*, and now it is *Tutóia*; it is the name of a Portuguese city.

In all those denominations the activating name process persists by the use of a cognitive metonymy mechanism, in a continuum in which a city in Maranhão receives the name of a city in Portugal, cities that are historically and socially connected by the domination process.

2.2.3. NAMES THAT REFER TO HISTORICAL FACTS

Other names refer to historical facts of great repercussion or even marginal facts which occurred in the locality denominated, such as victory in wars, rebellions of natives, discoveries, conquests and eventual fights:

Nossa Senhora da Vitória: one of São Luís's first names, it indicates the victory of the Portuguese against the French, as we read: "In order to provide more particular news about the Capitania de São Luís do Maranhão, the city of São Luís is also named *Nossa Senhora da Vitória*, after the miraculous victory against the French." (BETTENDORFF, 2008 [1694], p. 46)

Revolta de Bequimão: "Our city received this name in honor to the sugar cane and mill owner and business man from the Mearin Valley. He was the Vera Cruz Mill owner. His name was Samuel Beckman, and he was known as Bequimão. He was a partner of the mill owners and also a partner of the business men in our city." (BORGES, 2011)

The discovery of a river: "[...] up to Manoel Alves Grande, the Paratinga of the Mamecrans." (CARVALHO, 2000 [1924], p. 75)

The pioneers conquests: “Close to this place, it is the Pedra Ferrada, stone slab of a hillock where there are inscriptions written by the Bandeirantes, the winners.” (CARVALHO, 2000 [1924], p. 83)

Fights: “Those who escaped transmitted the news of the disorder until Pastos Bons. Therefore, it is denominated Serra da Desordem.” (CARVALHO, 2000 [1924], p. 82-83)

Marginal facts: “Segismundo Rodrigues Chaves, Manoel Siqueira, Alexandre Marinho and Manoel Henriques had farms on both sides of the hill. Manoel Rodrigues lost a bag with money in it on that hill and for this reason the place was known as Cinta.” (CARVALHO, 2000 [1924], p. 75)

2.2.4. NAMES THAT REFER TO POLITICAL FACTS

Political facts have interfered a great deal in Maranhão's denomination processes. In the following excerpts, we bring some examples of these interferences characterized by locality transference and political events references.

Vitória do Mearin's locality change, in 1766: “The governor Joaquim de Melo e Póvoas, following his uncle policies to Maranhão, Marquês de Pombal, in a visit to the countryside, determines the locality change of the settlement around the Mearin Parochial Church [...] and chooses a new place to it, a higher and plainer one, four miles up the river and two miles up the land; the new place is now named Sítio Velho.” (CANTANHÊDE, 1999, p. 33)

The emperor's consecration: “We mention Cais da Sagração, with this name to the memory of D. Pedro II's crowning and consecration acts and also to the memory of the great Bahia.” (D'EVREUX, 2002 [1614], p. 386)

Homage to the empress of Brazil: “In 1852, Brother Manoel founded the settlement Santa Tereza da Imperatriz da Província do Pará, and all the expenses were paid with the public purse of Pará [...]. In 1854-1855, it was evidenced that the settlement founded by Brother Manoel actually belonged to Maranhão.” (CARVALHO, 2000 [1924], p. 163)

Locality and name transference: “In 1836, the president of Goiás, José Rodrigues Jardim, transferred the seat and the village's name from the decadent Carolina to the flourishing São Pedro de Alcântara and established the jurisdiction of the government of Goiás on the right margin of the Tocantins River.” (CARVALHO, 2000 [1924], p. 83)

2.2.5. RECENT NAME CHANGES

Toponyms may change frequently and mainly for political reasons. In latest years, this has been the case to various cities in Maranhão which were given not only politicians names but also the noble titles they have.

Presidents of the Republic

President Vargas < Santa Luzia do Dareu

President Dutra < Curador

President Juscelino < Cachoeira do Axixá

President Sarney < Pimenta

State governors

Governor Archer < Centro do Paciência

Governor Edison Lobão < Maloca

Governor Eugênio Barros < Criolí do Macário

Senators

Senator Benedito Leite < Foz do Balsas

Senator Alexandre Costa < Espírito Santo

Senator La Rocque < Macuíba

Presidents of Province

Barão de Grajaú < Colônia

In the last decades, some politicians received homage with the attribution of their names to cities in Maranhão, principally in 1994 and 1995, when new cities were created in the State. Sometimes this was achieved with the use of political power.

And as for the reference mode to the motivational objects of these toponyms, the places, we could assume that a causal chain explains their origin, through facts which are related to local history and politics. The history and politics encapsulated in place names in Maranhão seemed to be based on two main ideological trends: *a*) the theocentrism and the hagiotoponyms (names of male and female saints) which were common in the beginning of the domination process and until nowadays; and *b*) the humanism, as day after day the personal demonstration of power becomes more common, by the use of anthropotponyms (individual proper names).

2.3. Indigenous names as from 1612

Despite of the great amount of change that have occurred to name places in Maranhão, some of the names found by d'Abbeville in 1612 were preserved but with morphophonetic changes, especially on the shore of Maranhão.

Carnaupió (hog plum pulp) > *Cajapió* (city)

Euaíve (bad moss river) > *Iguaíba* (locality)

Eucatu (good water) > *Icatu* (locality)

Ita-Endave (stone space) > *Tandiua* (locality)

Iuniparã (bitter genipap) > *Juniparã* (locality)

Javiree (big) > *Javiré* (locality)

Maecã (skull) > *Bacanga* (river)

Maiove (bitter leaf plant) > *Maioba* (neighborhood)

Mbiary (prisoner river) > *Mearim* (river)

Tabucuru (waved stone) > *Itapecuru* (city or river)

Tapoouy-Tinguê (long hair) > *Tapetininga* (locality)

Toury (torch light) > *Turu* (neighborhood)

These indigenous names have descriptive character and a circular nature and as the previous ones they activate the contiguity concept mechanism by using the metonymy.

2.4. Thesis about the origin of the name Maranhão

1. *From Marañas*: “[...] the Maranhão River has this name because of Lopo de Aguirre’s treacherous marañas against Captain Pedro Orsúa in his 1560 expedition.” (BERREDO, 1988 [1749], p. 29)

2. *From mar + no*: “[...] the first discoverers were amazed by the Maranhão River because of its waters. They asked if it were sea and the answer was no, for its waters were sweet, thus it would be called Marañõn, which is Maranhão, in Portuguese.” (MANUEL RODRIGUES apud BERREDO, p. 29)²

3. *From Dom Fernando Gonzalo de Marañón’s nickname*: “[...] I believe it was the sixtieth D. Fernando Gonzalo de Marañón, elected in May, 1206, and who passed away in December, 1210. 300 years before Vicente Yáñez Pinzón’s expedition, this noble nickname already existed in the fields of Spain; fundamentally I am convinced this famous river was named after this first discoverer of Peruvian lands.” (BERREDO, 1988 [1749], p. 29)

4. *From the founding myth, with an unknown discoverer’s nickname*: “No one could be pointed as the famous discoverer of the Amazon without justified fundamentals. Except by part of the new Portuguese conquests, the Castilians Vicente Yáñez Pinzón and Aires Pinzón, in 1500, no doubt about it, and after them someone called Maranhão, gave this proper name to the huge river. And after navigating on it, Captain Francisco de Orellana also gave his nickname to the river in Gonzalo Pizarro’s expedition.” (BERREDO, 1988 [1749], p. 137)

5. An indigenous origin *mara + nhon*:

5.1. “*Mará nhon*. *Mara*, fight; *nhon*, genius of the ocean, genius of the sea, terrifying entity. This was the definition heard by Vincente Pizón and his expedition partners, who gave this name to the river because they realized the phenomenon in its river mouth in January, 1500.” (CARVALHO, 2000 [1924], p. 229)

5.2. “From the Nheengatu, *mara-nhã*, stream, derived from the Tupi *nhan* < *-mbara* > *nhana*, *pará-nhana*, river that flows.” (TIBIRIÇÁ, 1997, p. 84)

5.3. “Maranhão, linguistic corruption of *mbará-nhá*, the flowing sea, the great flux that simulates the flux of the sea. Alteration to *Maraña*, *Paraná*.” (SAMPAIO, 1955, p. 246)

Despite of the thesis presented here for the denomination of Maranhão, there is no definite position about the origin of its name.

Final considerations

We could realize that many places in Maranhão have their toponyms origin in the cultural transplantation system and in local disputes for power and for territory. Parallel to history and language, two terms subside the process of place naming in Maranhão, ‘domination’ and ‘denomination’. Firstly, the domination occurs. Right after it, as a means to consecrate the possession, the denomination happens, in which the name seems to establish and to definitely institutionalize the possession.

² T. N.: In English, sea + no.

Thus, the toponyms in Maranhão have their meaningful roots related to the history of the State, which has its formation process marked by various episodes and whose history ties itself to the colonizer's country history. These names are indications and vestiges which represent points of view, concepts, successes, encapsulated histories that may lead to the comprehension of the society in Maranhão. All these aspects help us understanding the denominators' motives when making their name choices. Initially, it was the need to expand the Christianity by the religious who followed the European invaders. After that, it was the homage to their native land, the homesickness feeling and the necessity to transplant their native land to the conquered place, a phenomenon which installs itself in the linguistic form and proceeds as a registry of historicization. In the last years, the proper names registry of those who detain or who are related to political power (and also the titles they have) marks the recent denominations or name changes, as a means of perpetuation of these men in power and in the linguistic memory of the State.

Differently from what happened to the European origin denominations or with the most recent ones, some remaining indigenous names represent the flora, the fauna, and the natural physical and geographical elements, which demonstrates a fraternal relation of these people with the land they inhabit.

Finally, we emphasize that this close connection between the forms represented by the indigenous and the Portuguese origin toponyms with the nature elements or with the socio-historical facts make the toponymic lexis study quite relevant to the study of History because of the strict existing links among language, History and thought, which may conduct to various other researches.

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