



COMMENT

Indigenous Alliances in the Dutch–Portuguese Wars in Brazil: Native Petitions and the 1645 Potiguara Assembly

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Abstract

In March 1645, a large number of Potiguara people from various regions of north-eastern Brazil gathered in the *aldeamento* (Indigenous settlements under colonial control or supervision) of Tapesserica on Itamaracá. The primary objectives of the assembly included the establishment of Indigenous *câmaras* (municipal councils) and deliberations on the law of native freedom. Notably, in this period, some Indigenous people in Brazil were still held as slaves in territories under Dutch jurisdiction. The Tapesserica Assembly produced a remonstrance ('remonstrantie'), which was delivered to the Dutch government in Recife by the Potiguara. This article scrutinises the Potiguara Assembly, the earliest recorded Indigenous assembly in Brazil, and reconstructs its connections to Indigenous political culture predating the European arrival in Brazil. It explores the Indigenous perspective on the Dutch–Portuguese wars and demonstrates the role of the Potiguara as historical agents, navigating the complexities of conflict and decision-making processes that ultimately shaped their destiny.

Keywords: political assemblies; Potiguara people; indigenous alliances; Dutch–Portuguese wars; colonial Brazil

In late March 1645, after travelling several miles, 134 Potiguara from different areas of north-eastern Brazil gathered in the *aldeamento* of Tapesserica, Itamaracá. The objective of these Potiguara leaders and officers from sixteen *aldeias* (Indigenous settlements) and *aldeamentos* (Indigenous settlements under colonial control or supervision)¹ of Rio Grande, Paraíba, Itamaracá and Pernambuco was to elect representatives who would negotiate with the Dutch West India Company the establishment of a semi-autonomous government for the Potiguara, who were now allied with the Dutch. The

¹The word *aldeia* is used by the Portuguese to describe Indigenous settlements. From the mid-sixteenth century, the Portuguese Crown and the Church cooperated in implementing the policy of *aldeamentos*, which consisted of 'reducing the allied Indians to large *aldeias* near the major Portuguese urban centers, where they could be more easily Christianized and resocialized'. *Aldeamento*, then, is an *aldeia* reassigned

Potiguara expressed dissatisfaction with how the alliance was functioning. Following discussions at the assembly, their leaders drafted a document detailing their complaints and decisions. The Potiguara personally delivered their signed *remonstrantie* (remonstrance) to the Company government in Recife and the latter examined their demands. The original text of the remonstrance has not been found, but a Dutch transcription survives in the minutes of the West India Company government in Brazil, dated 11 April 1645.²

Notwithstanding the assembly's significance for the Potiguara people and their European allies in Brazil, it has attracted only limited scholarly attention.³ By contrast, a good deal of recent scholarship on political assemblies and representation in the colonial territories controlled by Portugal has discussed the interactions between local authorities in Brazil and their royal counterparts in Portugal through representative assemblies and courts. Comparative studies have extended their scope to encompass other territories on the continent.⁴ What though of the Dutch experience in Brazil? The Brazilian Diet (also called General Assembly) of 1640 is among the topics frequently considered in Brazilian and Dutch historiography in relation to political assemblies or forms of local government representation.⁵ Governor

and controlled or supervised by the colonists. In Brazil, the Dutch used a similar system. They borrowed all the Portuguese experience in organising *aldeamentos* and established their own *aldeamentos* under the control or supervision of West India Company agents. J. A. Gonsalves de Mello, *Tempo dos flamengos: influência da ocupação holandesa na vida e na cultura do norte do Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro, 2001), 215–36; M. R. C. de Almeida and T. Seijas, 'Amerindians in the Iberian World', in *The Iberian World 1450–1820*, ed. F. Bouza, P. Cardim and A. Feros (Abingdon and New York, 2020), 364–5.

²Daily Minute of the Political Council in Brazil, 11 Apr. 1645. National Archives, The Netherlands. Archive of the Old West India Company. NL-HANA_1.05.01.01_70_1208–1223. For a more extensive introduction and Portuguese translation of this manuscript text, see B. Miranda, 'A representação dos Potiguara na Assembleia de Tapesserica (1645): estudo e tradução de um escrito indígena das Guerras do Açúcar', *Boletim do Museu Paraense Emílio Goeldi*, 20 (2025), 1–33.

³F. L. Schalkwijk, *Igreja e Estado no Brasil holandês (1630–1654)* (São Paulo, 2004), 248–9; Gonsalves de Mello, *Tempo dos flamengos*, 220; J. van den Tol, 'Non-Dutch Petitions in the Seventeenth Century Dutch Atlantic', *Early Modern Low Countries*, 4 (2020), 170; M. Meuwese, *Brothers in Arms, Partners in Trade: Dutch-Indigenous Alliances in the Atlantic World, 1595–1674* (Leiden, 2012), 170–1; M. Meuwese, "'For the Peace and Well-being of the Country': Intercultural Mediators and Dutch-Indian Relations in New Netherland and Dutch Brazil, 1600–1664' (Ph.D. thesis, Notre Dame University, 2003), 180–2; L. S. Navarro, 'O direito no império holandês: perspectivas atlânticas sobre o funcionamento da justiça nas colônias holandesas nas Américas (1621–1664)' (Ph.D. thesis, Universidade Federal do Paraná, 2019), 183–7; P. Souto Maior, 'Uma assembleia de índios em Pernambuco', *Revista do Instituto Archeológico e Geographico Pernambucano*, 15 (1910), 61–77.

⁴P. Cardim, 'As Cortes e a representação política no Antigo Regime', in *O parlamento português, I: Antigo Regime e monarquia constitucional*, ed. P. T. Almeida (Lisbon, 2023), 3–48; P. Cardim, *Cortes e cultura política no Portugal do Antigo Regime* (Lisbon, 1998); P. Cardim, M. F. Bicalho and J. D. Rodrigues, 'Representação política na monarquia pluricontinental portuguesa: cortes, juntas e procuradores', *Locus*, 20 (2014), 83–109; R. J. Raminelli, 'Monarquia e câmaras coloniais: sobre a comunicação política, 1640–1807', *Prohistoria*, 21 (2014), 3–26.

⁵C. R. Boxer, *Os Holandeses no Brasil* (Recife, 2004), 166–9; E. Cabral de Mello, *Nassau, Governador do Brasil Holandês* (São Paulo, 2006), 114–17; E. Odegard, *Graaf en Gouverneur, Nederlands-Brazilië onder het bewind van Johan Maurits van Nassau-Siegen, 1636–1644* (Zutphen, 2022), 118–20; F. T. Luciani, *Municípios e escabinos: poder local e Guerra de Restauração no Brasil Holandês (1630–1654)* (São Paulo, 2012); J. A. Gonsalves de Mello (ed.), *Fontes para a história do Brasil holandês: a administração da conquista* (Recife, 2004), 301–6; Gonsalves de Mello, *Tempo dos flamengos*, 127–8; J. van den Tol, *Lobbying in Company. Economic Interests and Political*

Johan Maurits van Nassau-Siegen convened this assembly in August 1640. It spanned nine days in Recife, the colonial capital of the Dutch Brazil. Comprising fifty-six members of the local elite from Pernambuco, Itamaracá and Paraíba, either councillors or delegates from their respective communities, representing the people of the colony, the assembly addressed the Dutch government's proposal for military cooperation with Portuguese settlers to alleviate violence in the interior. In addition, religious, legal and governmental proposals were presented to the assembly.

This article redresses the balance of attention given to the respective assemblies by providing an analysis of the Tapesserica Assembly, exploring the reasons why it was convened, as well as its connections with Indigenous political culture prior to the arrival of the Europeans in Brazil. It also explores the Indigenous perspective on the Dutch–Portuguese wars and demonstrates the role of the Potiguara as historical agents.

The Potiguara and their political organisation

The Potiguara, part of the Tupi linguistic family, lived along the coastal areas from Maranhão to Itamaracá. Describing the political culture of coastal Indigenous peoples in Brazil is challenging. Historians, anthropologists and archaeologists seeking to reconstruct these peoples' political organisation prior to the arrival of the Europeans have come up against a lack of written sources – a central problem and an obstacle to accurate analyses. Moreover, the European records produced in the first decades by travellers, cosmographers and missionaries from Portugal, Spain, Italy, France and many other countries must be read carefully because of their tendency to generalise and their ethnocentrism. Nevertheless, scholars have been able to discern several patterns in the various European accounts that allow us to be more precise.⁶

Like many Tupi people, the Potiguara organised themselves in different *aldeias* with estimated populations ranging from 500 to 2,000 people.⁷ Distinct *aldeias* could maintain peaceful or hostile relations with each other. The residents of individual *aldeias* would frequently forge alliances against common enemies to defend their territory. No *aldeia* took a leading role, although some had a higher concentration of military forces and greater influence than others. There was no central political authority. Power was fragmented, and a single *aldeia* could have more than one leader. This pattern was observed among most Tupi-speaking peoples. Furthermore, they had the capacity to organise themselves politically and set aside their differences for the sake of the group.⁸ Leadership within an *aldeia* was typically vested in experienced elders,

Decision Making in the History of Dutch Brazil, 1621–1656 (Leiden, 2021), 54–68; Navarro, 'O direito no império holandês', 169–83.

⁶F. Fernandes, *Organização social dos Tupinambá* (São Paulo, 1963).

⁷C. Fausto, 'Fragmentos de história e cultura Tupinambá: da etnologia como instrumento crítico de conhecimento etno-histórico', in *História dos índios no Brasil*, ed. M. C. da Cunha (São Paulo, 1992), 383–5; J. Hemming, *Ouro vermelho: a conquista dos índios brasileiros* (São Paulo, 2007), 245–72; J. M. Monteiro, 'The Crises and Transformations of Invaded Societies: Coastal Brazil in the Sixteenth Century', in *The Cambridge History of the Native Peoples of the Americas*, ed. F. Salomon and S. B. Schwartz (Cambridge, 2008), 978.

⁸Fausto, 'Fragmentos de história e cultura Tupinambá', 383–4; Fernandes, *Organização social dos Tupinambá*, 320–7.

distinguished warriors and skilful orators. In times of war, leaders of neighbouring *aldeias* might meet to convene war councils and coordinate strategies. Certain leaders tended to emerge during periods of conflict, assuming positions of greater authority than typically held in peacetime. However, this was a temporary phenomenon. Tupi-speaking peoples often fractured when leaders disagreed, and the dissenting group would form a new *aldeia*.⁹

Early European accounts reveal that the Potiguara had a troubled history with the Portuguese. Initially they received the Portuguese well and formed alliances with them. But Portuguese exploitation led to war against European colonisers: the Potiguara would become a serious threat to settlers in Pernambuco, Itamaracá and Paraíba. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, some Potiguara *aldeias* were also actively allied with the French in territorial disputes with the Portuguese. When the French were expelled from Paraíba between 1570 and 1610, the Potiguara resistance was broken and some groups of Potiguara, formerly allied with the French, were brought back to the Portuguese side.¹⁰

Aldeamentos became a common destination for those who accepted Portuguese rule. The Benedictine, Franciscan and Jesuit missions established in north-eastern Brazil operated in the *aldeamentos* to educate, convert and organise the Indigenous populations for work.¹¹ In the *aldeamentos*, the Potiguara became familiar with the European institutions and found a way to petition the central powers using an important skill they had learned: writing. Indigenous writing was a reality for certain groups, especially the leaders, who were the main mediators between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous.¹² This is an important aspect to which we shall return when discussing the Tapesserica Assembly.

Some of the Potiguara did not want to submit to Portuguese hegemony and found refuge in the interior of Paraíba and Ceará.¹³ But those who sided with the Portuguese joined them in an expedition that defeated the French, who had settled in Maranhão in 1612. Potiguara were the core of the force, together with another Indigenous nation, the Tabajara, who undertook the reconquest of Maranhão in 1615.¹⁴ Thus, at the beginning of the seventeenth century, the Potiguara were divided between those who

⁹B. Perrone-Moisés, 'Bons chefes, maus chefes, chefões: elementos de filosofia política ameríndia', *Revista de antropologia*, 54 (2011), 857–83; Fernandes, *Organização social dos Tupinambá*, 320–7.

¹⁰Hemming, *Ouro vermelho*, 245–72; Meuwese, *Brothers in Arms*, 95–6; S. B. R. de Brito, 'A conquista do Rio Ruim: a Paraíba na Monarquia Hispânica' (Ph.D. thesis, University of Salamanca, 2020), 54–112, 173–239.

¹¹Brito, 'A conquista do Rio Ruim', 226–37; D. B. G. de Meneses Ferreira, 'Os governadores dos Índios do Estado do Brasil: Ascensão, consolidação e decadência (1630–1755)' (Ph.D. thesis, Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, 2022), 86–94.

¹²E. Neumann, *Letra de índios: cultura escrita, comunicação e memória indígena nas reduções do Paraguai* (São Bernardo do Campo, 2015), 67–70; M. R. C. de Almeida, *Metamorfozes indígenas: Identidades e cultura nas aldeias coloniais do Rio de Janeiro* (Rio de Janeiro, 2013), 158–9.

¹³Brito, 'A conquista do Rio Ruim', 199–208; P. Ibáñez Bonillo, 'La conquista portuguesa del estuario Amazónico: identidad, guerra, frontera (1612–1654)' (Ph.D. thesis, Universidad Pablo de Olavide de Sevilla/University of St Andrews, 2015), 157.

¹⁴A. Carvalho Cardoso, 'Maranhão na Monarquia Hispânica: intercâmbios, guerra e navegação nas fronteiras das Índias de Castela (1580–1655)' (Ph.D. thesis, Universidade de Salamanca, 2012), 127–70; Ibáñez Bonillo, 'La conquista portuguesa del estuario Amazónico', 182–7.

followed the Portuguese and those who took a different path. Their internal conflicts and their struggles with the Portuguese continued throughout the seventeenth century.¹⁵

The Dutch and the Potiguara

From 1624 to 1654, the Dutch West India Company seized part of north-eastern Brazil. This private company was created in opposition to the Habsburg monarchy as the Dutch Republic sought to sustain competition with and resistance to Iberian colonial projects. Over the course of the Eighty Years War (1568–1648), the Dutch worked to weaken the Iberian transatlantic trade that was essential to the Spanish and Portuguese economy, endeavouring to open Spanish and Portuguese colonial seaports to their shipping. Their interest in Brazil was primarily focused on sugar, but they were also concerned with tobacco and brazilwood. Previously, the Dutch had imported sugar and brazilwood via Portugal.¹⁶

Brazil, integrated into the Spanish crown after the 1580 Spanish takeover of Portugal, became a major target of Dutch military operations when commerce between it and the Dutch Republic faced restrictions imposed by the Habsburg crown. The initial Dutch assault on Brazil resulted in the invasion and occupation of Salvador, the capital, in 1624. But the Dutch could not hold the position and, after a siege in 1625, they were expelled. Two fleets under the command of Boudewijn Hendrikszoon and Andries Veron, sent to reinforce the besieged Dutch forces, arrived in Brazil too late.¹⁷ After abandoning the attack on Salvador, the Dutch sailed north in search of a safe harbour to care for their sick after a long Atlantic voyage. They anchored in Paraíba. It was there that the Potiguara first encountered the Dutch.¹⁸

The Potiguara perceived the arrival of the Dutch vessels in Paraíba as an opportunity to challenge the hegemony of the Portuguese colonists. They helped the Dutch with provisions and, together with them, attacked Portuguese settlers. Soon, however, they found that the Dutch did not intend to prosecute further attacks in Brazil at this time. While the fleet under Hendrikszoon set out to seize Puerto Rico and establish a position to attack the Silver Fleet, which periodically sailed between Spain and her colonial territories, the group commanded by Veron sailed to Elmina, in West Africa, with the intention of capturing strategic ports for the transatlantic slave trade. A number of the Potiguara joined the Dutch expedition to the Caribbean and eventually made their way to the Netherlands. A few of them are mentioned in Dutch sources: André Francisco, Antônio Francisco, Antônio Paraupaba, Gaspar Paraupaba, Luís Gaspar and Pieter Poty.¹⁹

¹⁵G. K. Alves Vieira, 'Entre perdas, feitos e barganhas: a elite indígena na capitania de Pernambuco, 1669–1732', in *A presença indígena no Nordeste: processos de territorialização, modos de reconhecimento e regimes de memória*, ed. J. P. de Oliveira (Rio de Janeiro, 2011), 69–90.

¹⁶C. Ebert, *Between Empires: Brazilian Sugar in the Early Atlantic Economy 1550–1630* (Leiden, 2008), 192–3; C. R. Boxer, *The Dutch Seaborne Empire 1600–1800* (1965), 21–5.

¹⁷H. den Heijer, *De geschiedenis van de WIC* (Zutphen, 2002), 35–9.

¹⁸L. Hulsman, 'Brazilian Indians in the Dutch Republic: The Remonstrances of Antonio Paraupaba to the States General in 1654 and 1656', *Itinerario*, 29 (2005), 53.

¹⁹Gonsalves de Mello, *Tempo dos flamengos*, 207–9; J. de Laet, 'Historia ou Annaes dos Feitos da Companhia Privilegiada das Índias Occidentaes desde o seu começo até ao fim do anno de 1636 por Joannes de Laet', *Annaes da Bibliotheca Nacional*, 30 (1912), 95–7.

After the defeat at Salvador in 1625, the Dutch devised a new plan to conquer Brazil. Now Pernambuco was the target, but its fall in 1630 did not lead to a Dutch advance into the interior of the colony. To strengthen their still vulnerable position and acquire access to the hinterlands, the Dutch tried to dominate territories further north, in Paraíba and Rio Grande. To do so, they counted on Antônio Paraupaba, Gaspar Paraupaba and Pieter Poty, all of whom returned to Brazil in 1631 and acted as guides, interpreters and mediators with other nations, such as the Tarairiú in the backlands of the Rio Grande and the Ceará, a Tapuia-language people.²⁰

Initially, native groups in Pernambuco and Paraíba hesitated to form alliances with the Dutch, whether out of loyalty to the Luso-Spanish colonists or apprehension in light of the wars of the past and their brutal consequences.²¹ The reluctance of these natives to support the Dutch, fostered by Indigenous supporters of the Iberian Monarchy and missionary activity, delayed the Dutch advance. Their qualms could also be related, first, to their reading of the conflict among the Europeans and, second, to the inability of the Dutch to expand their presence in the territory. It was only after the initial years of the war that the Dutch finally began to gain dominance throughout the region. By 1635, some native groups felt more confident in changing their alliances to the Dutch, having less cause to fear Spanish-Portuguese repression, because it was clear that the Dutch colony was now sufficiently stable.

The collaboration of Potiguara and Tarairiú allies allowed the Dutch, after some time, to move more safely through the territory, especially in the northernmost part. Between 1635 and 1641, through the mediation of Potiguara and Tarairiú, some of the Indigenous groups from Maranhão, Ceará, Rio Grande, Paraíba, Itamaracá and Pernambuco also made agreements with the Dutch and joined their troops, playing an important military role against the Luso-Spanish forces in Brazil. Antônio Paraupaba, initially an interpreter and mediator, rose to prominence and became a key Indigenous agent of the West India Company in Brazil, alongside fellow-Potiguara Pieter Poty.²²

Native involvement in the Dutch projects in Brazil proved vital to the success of the war against Portugal and Spain, and to the Dutch colonial enterprise. These Indigenous peoples sought to make deals that seemed most convenient for their groups. They took decisions and negotiated according to their agendas whenever possible. This led to many confrontations between the Company's authorities and their native allies. Leaders such as Paraupaba and Poty seem to have been following distinct plans that sometimes diverged from Dutch demands, resulting in conflicts, revolts and the renegotiation of agreements.²³

The Tapesserica assembly in context

The Potiguara assembly that convened in Tapesserica in 1645 had its origin in the Potiguara demands for self-governance, improvement of their conditions and the

²⁰E. van den Boogaart, 'Infernal Allies: The Dutch West India Company and the Tarairiú 1631–1654', in *Johan Maurits van Nassau-Siegen 1604–1679: A Humanist Prince in Europe and Brazil*, ed. E. van den Boogaart (The Hague, 1979), 523; Meuwese, *Brothers in Arms*, 142–3.

²¹Meuwese, 'For the Peace and Well-being of the Country', 83–4.

²²Gonsalves de Mello, *Tempo dos flamengos*, 212–14; Meuwese, 'For the Peace and Well-being of the Country', 13, 69.

²³Gonsalves de Mello, *Tempo dos flamengos*, 216–20; Meuwese, *Brothers in Arms*, 163–72.

desire of the Dutch to pacify their native allies. There were numerous tensions between the Potiguara and the Dutch. One of them arose from the efforts of the Dutch to convert the Potiguara to Calvinism. This process involved congregating natives in *aldeamentos* controlled by Calvinist ministers and European commanders (*commandeurs*). In early 1635, the Dutch also appointed a director to 'supervise and centrally administer' all the Indigenous *aldeamentos*.²⁴

Many cases of mistreatment arose from the interactions between European *commandeurs* and natives. Living in an *aldeamento* implied the Potiguara were turned into a labour force for the Europeans. Abuse, exploitation and enslavement of natives were key grievances against *commandeurs* and colonists, particularly in areas remote from Dutch government offices. Continuous military campaigns in Brazil, and also in West Africa,²⁵ further burdened the natives, since the Potiguara from the *aldeamentos* were regularly summoned and mobilised to wage wars in the Portuguese-Spanish occupied areas. Some groups allied with the Dutch defected and fled to the interior. Outbreaks of severe illness depopulated the *aldeias* and *aldeamentos*. Some natives revolted, killing the men of the West India Company garrisons in Ceará and Maranhão.²⁶

Aware of increasing tensions with the local government, native leaders, including Antônio Paraupaba, organised themselves to negotiate directly with the head of the West India Company in the Netherlands. Once in Amsterdam, the Potiguara conferred with the Company's board of directors and in November 1644 received a letter from them emphasising their right to freedom and self-government, albeit still under Dutch supervision. These were not the only points addressed in the 'Letter of Freedom for the Brazilians' (*den brief der vrijheden voor de Braziliaenen*), and it is possible to see in this manuscript all the main points of discussion of the Tapesserica Assembly of 1645.²⁷ It is evident that the Tapesserica gathering is inextricably linked to the Potiguara negotiations with the Dutch in November 1644. But this was not the first time that Dutch representatives had met with Indigenous leaders of various groups to discuss their alliances. Previous such meetings were held in July 1639 and again in the mid-1640s. This is the context in which the Tapesserica Assembly occurred in 1645.²⁸

After the gathering, on 11 April 1645, the Potiguara presented Dutch officials with a written remonstrance of their demands (Figure 1). It is noteworthy that in the initial lines of the written remonstrance, the Potiguara emphasised their letter of freedom and other rights granted by the Company directors in 1644.²⁹ They called upon the

²⁴Meuwese, 'For the Peace and Well-being of the Country', 154, 227–31; R. Vainfas, 'O Plano para o Bom Governo dos Índios: um Jesuíta a Serviço da Evangelização Calvinista no Brasil Holandês', *Clio*, 27 (2009), 150–61.

²⁵Meuwese, 'For the Peace and Well-being of the Country', 170–1; K. Ratelband, *Nederlanders in West-Afrika, 1600–1650* (Walburg, 2000), 103–4; List of the military, other people and Brazilians who are going to sail on the ships commanded by Admiral Jol on 30 May 1641, The Hague, Nationaal Archief, Archive of the Old West India Company, NL-HANA_1.05.01.01_56, document 237.

²⁶Gonsalves de Mello, *Tempo dos flamengos*, 216–20; D. Guzmán and L. Hulsman, *Holandeses na Amazônia (1620–1650)* (Belém 2016), 14; R. Krommen, *Mathias Beck e a Cia. das Índias Ocidentais* (Fortaleza, 1997), 61–5.

²⁷Copy of the Brazilians' freedom letter, 24 Nov. 1644, The Hague, Nationaal Archief, Archive of the States General (1576–1796). NL-HANA_1.01.02_5757_0561–0563.

²⁸Meuwese, 'For the Peace and Well-being of the Country', 161, 171–83, 296.

²⁹The Potiguara wrote: 'First, we present the letters given to us by the Noble Lords XIX in Holland, dated 24 November 1644, in Amsterdam, concerning the freedom granted to us and other inhabitants of Brazil'. Daily Minute of the Political Council in Brazil, 11 Apr. 1645. NL-HANA_1.05.01.01_70_1214.

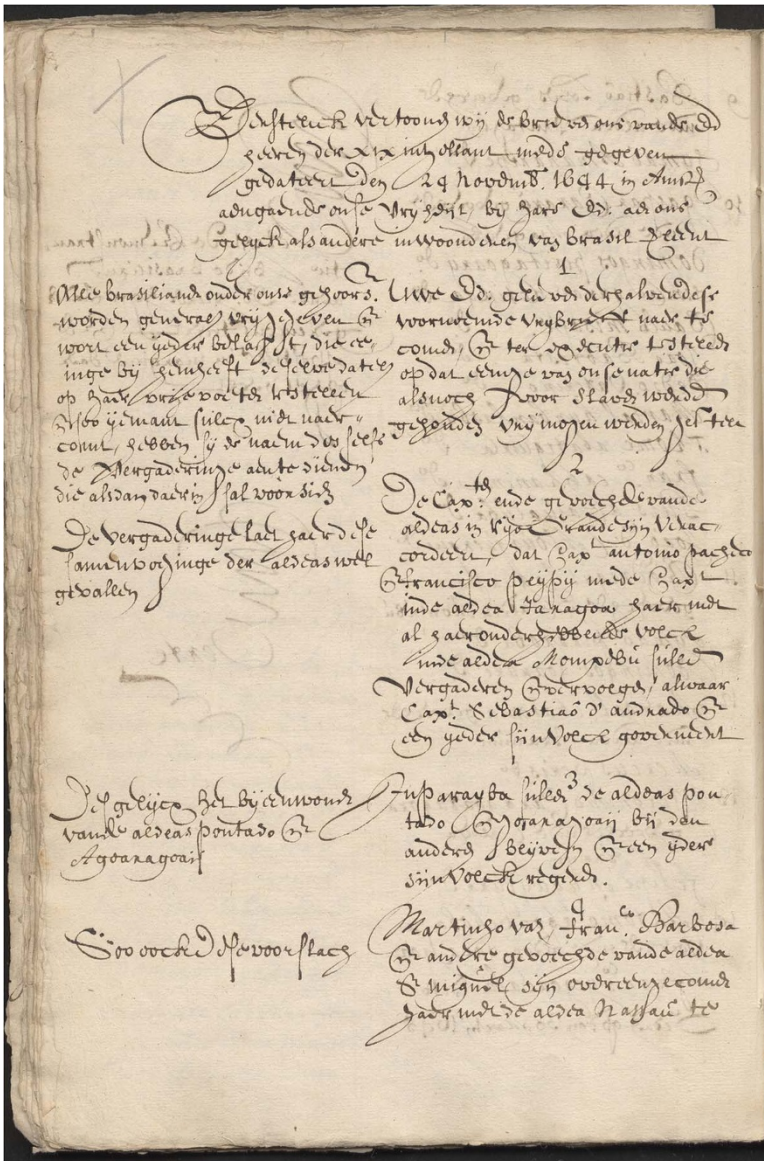


Figure 1. The Potiguara Assembly in Tapesserica 1645.

Source: Statements by Potiguara representatives and the Dutch government's response. Daily Minute of the Political Council in Brazil, 11.04.1645, The Hague, Nationaal Archief, Archive of the Old West India Company. NL-HaNA_1.05.01.01_70_1214. Reproduced under Creative Commons License.

Dutch in Brazil to comply with the law of native freedom and underlined that the natives were not to be exploited or oppressed. The Potiguara demanded that the Dutch set free any peoples held as slaves in the territories governed by the Company.

The Potiguara also requested permission to merge certain *aldeamentos*, namely those of Rio Grande, Paraíba, Itamaracá and Pernambuco. The need to do so was probably the result of severe depopulation in the 1640s caused by war and disease. Additionally, they asked for more ministers for their churches and schoolmasters in the *aldeamentos* so they could bolster the Protestant cause among the natives. This demand for ministers could be seen as a gesture of goodwill on the part of the Potiguara towards their Dutch allies. It should not be seen as submissive, since the acceptance of Calvinist ministers in their *aldeamentos* also provided the natives with more interlocutors with the Dutch government and more opportunities to receive the benefits of this relationship – tools, clothing, weapons, salaries for those attached to the army, and, above all, the right to secure the lands adjacent to the *aldeamentos*.

Lastly, during the gathering, the Potiguara also voted for the establishment of three native *câmaras* (municipal councils) in Itamaracá (with the *aldeamento* Tapesserica as capital), Paraíba (with the *aldeamento* Mauritia as capital) and the Rio Grande (with the *aldeia* Orange as capital). These would have jurisdiction over some other *aldeias* and *aldeamentos* in those areas. Moreover, the Potiguara voted and elected *hoofden* (heads or principals) for these *câmaras*, namely Domingos Fernandes Carapeba for the *câmara* of Itamaracá, Pieter Poty for the *câmara* of Paraíba, and Antônio Paraupaba for the *câmara* of Rio Grande. Additionally, the assembly chose *schepenen* (magistrates) for all those *câmaras*, specifying every name chosen and demanding that the Dutch approve and endorse those selected, as can be seen in their remonstrance.³⁰

Dealing with serious financial problems and reducing their garrison numbers in Brazil, the Dutch government in Brazil was ever more reliant on their Potiguara allies to defend their colony. For that reason, they agreed to all the native demands.³¹ Carapeba, Paraupaba and Poty were sworn in as heads of the *câmaras* on 12 April.³²

The *câmaras* created by the Potiguara may have been based on the structure of *câmaras* in the Portuguese world, with which the Potiguara were familiar. Other Portuguese *câmaras* in colonial Brazil served as central institutions linking local powers and colonial administrative institutions. In Brazil, they survived virtually intact until the beginning of the nineteenth century.³³ The members of the Portuguese *câmaras*, the *vereadores* (temporary magistrates), were elected every three years. In addition to the *vereadores*, who were chosen from among the most prominent settlers, a procurator, a clerk and a treasurer were elected. These *vereadores* met weekly to discuss the day-to-day affairs of their region. The *almotacé* judge, responsible for overseeing the city, its supplies and its security, was elected from among the *vereadores*. Even the setting of taxes could be part of the *vereadores'* prerogatives. All decisions were taken by

³⁰Daily Minute of the Political Council in Brazil, 11 Apr. 1645. NL-HANA_1.05.01.01_70_1214–1221.

³¹B. R. F. Miranda, *Gente de guerra: origem, cotidiano e resistência dos soldados do exército da Companhia das Índias Ocidentais no Brasil (1630–1654)* (Recife, 2014), 29, 50; Daily Minute of the Political Council in Brazil, 11 Apr. 1645, The Hague, Nationaal Archief, NL-HANA_1.05.01.01_70_1214–1221; Gonsalves de Mello, *Tempo dos flamengos*, 220; Meuwese, *Brothers in Arms*, 170–2.

³²Daily Minute of the Political Council in Brazil, 12 Apr. 1645, The Hague, Nationaal Archief, NL-HANA_1.05.01.01_70_1223.

³³R. Vainfas, *Dicionário do Brasil colonial (1500–1808)* (Rio de Janeiro, 2001), 88–90; A. J. R. Russell-Wood, 'Local Government in Portuguese America: A Study in Cultural Divergence', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 16 (1974), 187–231; C. R. Boxer, *Portuguese Society in the Tropics: The Municipal Councils of Goa, Macao, Bahia and Luanda, 1510–1800* (Madison, 1965).

vote, and the presidency was held by the oldest member of the council. At the end of the seventeenth century, following its secession from Spain, the Kingdom of Portugal introduced the figure of an external judge (*juiz de fora*) to preside over the work of the council. This was an attempt to limit local power and autonomy.³⁴

The paucity of sources prevents us from saying much about the Potiguara *câmaras*. But there are similarities between the *câmaras* organised by the Potiguara and the Portuguese colonial *câmaras* in the way their representatives were elected. A head or principal and some magistrates were elected by the main leaders and officials of each *aldeia* and *aldeamento*. We can assume that part of the role of the head and the magistrates was to negotiate with the colonial powers. Moreover, it was an institution with limited power and autonomy, dependent on the approval of the Dutch government in Brazil. It was, however, a body capable of articulating local interests and framing collective remonstrances. In their remonstrance, the Potiguara use the terms *hoof* and *schepenen* to refer to the head and the magistrates elected to their *câmaras*. The Dutch government, when commenting on the Potiguara *câmaras* and the election of their members, refers to the heads as *regenten*. These Potiguara *regenten* seem to have played a military role. The functions of administration, justice and mediation were perhaps combined with the need for these elected heads or regents to lead their people in war. But this is a topic for further investigation. The terminology used by the Dutch shows that they understood the *câmaras* in terms of their own structure of provincial and city councils, with magistrates (*regenten*) that elected mayors (*burgemeesters*) and other temporary magistrates (*schepenen*) for city administration. The Dutch adopted and adapted the *câmaras* as part of their structure for the government of European settler communities in Brazil.³⁵ As in the Portuguese colonial world, a local administrative power structure was formed. This comprised members of the local elite and settlers of European descent, including both Portuguese and Dutch individuals. They shared seats in these *camers* – as the Dutch called them – and acted as arbiters in matters of local life. Initially, the *schepenen* were more involved in judicial matters, their main function being to hear civil and criminal cases in the first instance. They later became advisers to the Dutch government in Brazil. In addition to minor legal issues, they deliberated on the supply of trade goods and urban problems, and they created and collected taxes. At times, they performed duties similar to those of the mayors (*burgemeesters*) of the Netherlands.³⁶ But not only in Brazil. The Dutch also replicated and adjusted their forms of political representation elsewhere abroad, as can be seen in Jim van der Meulen's discussions of assemblies in North America and Formosa elsewhere in this volume.³⁷

³⁴G. F. C. Souza, 'Os homens e os modos da governança: a Câmara Municipal do Recife do século XVIII num Fragmento da História das Instituições Municipais do Império Colonial Português' (Masters thesis, Universidade Federal de Pernambuco, 2002), 15–99; Russell-Wood, 'Local Government in Portuguese America', 216, 229.

³⁵F. T. Luciani, *Municípios e Escabinos: Poder local e Guerra de Restauração no Brasil Holandês (1630–1654)* (São Paulo, 2012); M. Neme, *Fórmulas políticas no Brasil Holandês* (São Paulo, 1971).

³⁶Boxer, *Os holandeses no Brasil*, 183–4; H. Wätjen, *O domínio colonial holandês no Brasil* (Recife, 2004), 303–7; Navarro, 'O direito no império holandês', 136–51.

³⁷Jim van der Meulen, 'Traditions of Assembly in Three Dutch "Lands" in the Seventeenth Century', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, this volume.

The organisation of the assembly

How then was the Tapesserica Assembly organised? And who should be credited with authoring the remonstrance delivered by the Potiguara to the Dutch government in Brazil? Although the Potiguara remonstrance contains a very detailed register of the decisions taken at Tapesserica, the list of participants, their rank, and the names of the *aldeias* and *aldeamentos* that sent representatives, there is no information on the coordination and procedure of the gathering. It is not known who conducted the meeting or who gave speeches at the assembly. The proceedings may have been led by the most prominent Potiguara leaders, warriors and elders, as is customary in the Tupi tradition.³⁸

Johannes Listry, director of the *brasilianen*, as the Dutch called the natives of the coast, may have played a prominent role in the assembly, since according to the remonstrance he was possibly the only Dutch representative to attend the meeting. The captain of the *aldeamento* of Tapesserica, Domingos Fernandes Carapeba, may have opened the proceedings and welcomed those who travelled from far away to participate in the discussion. It is also safe to assume that Antônio Paraupaba and Pieter Poty, the main mediators between the Potiguara and the Dutch, played key roles in the assembly and led the meeting alongside Listry and Carapeba. The Tupi language must have dominated in Tapesserica, but Dutch, Portuguese and other languages were also used for translation and communication.

Since all we have is a copy made by the Dutch of the written remonstrance of the Potiguara, we cannot be sure whether this is a full transcription or just a summary of the original. Nevertheless, there are indications that this copy may reflect the original language of the remonstrance and in some ways preserve the voice of the Potiguara. Part of it is a description of the meeting written in the third person, but when reporting on the Potiguara demands, the secretary of the Dutch government in Brazil, who recounts in the Daily Register of the Dutch Government what happened in Tapesserica, repeatedly uses the expression 'our nation' or '*onse natie*' (first, sixth and seventh remonstrances) instead of 'their nation'. There are other traces of the Indigenous original as well, among others: 'we request' or '*wij versoecken*'; 'as the ... promised to us' or '*gelijck ons ... beloft*' (fifth remonstrance); 'we have chosen these people' or '*wij hebben dese personen ... gekosen*'; 'our gathering and council deliberations' or '*onse vergaderinge ende raetslagen*'; 'we ask' or '*wij versocht*'; 'Therefore done and decided in our gathering' or '*Aldus gedaen ende beslooten in onse vergaederinge*' (seventh remonstrance).³⁹

In addition to the personal and possessive pronominal forms used, the remonstrance submitted by the Potiguara contained the names of the signatories, as the Dutch secretary had transcribed their names on the copy. He even copied the name of an Indigenous writer who also signed the remonstrance, Clement da Silva. Silva seems to have been the one responsible for recording all the decisions of the assembly and preparing the written remonstrance. As mentioned earlier, many Potiguara from the *aldeamentos* were literate and learned how to address the European institutions through writing.

³⁸Fernandes, *Organização social dos Tupinambá*, 286–7.

³⁹Daily Minute of the Political Council in Brazil, 11 Apr. 1645, The Hague, Nationaal Archief, NL-HANA_1.05.01.01_70_1215–1216.

With this information, and with the evidence obtained from the transcript of the remonstrance, it is safe to affirm that we have a hitherto unrecognised piece of Indigenous writing in the Daily Register of the Dutch Government. What was the language used in the original manuscript? Given that the secretary of the Dutch government transcribed the remonstrance, it is fair to assume that it was written by the Potiguara in Dutch, since their intention was to present it to the Dutch government for approval. Paraupaba and Poty, both of whom had Dutch, might be seen as co-authors. Yet given that among the Potiguara decision-making was vested in the collective, and that the remonstrance had been discussed and agreed by all those present at Tapesserica, this document too should be seen as the work of a collective.

The Potiguara remonstrance is one of a kind, but it contains formal elements observed in other writings of the period. The appropriate mode of address to the Dutch government, the lucid account of the Assembly's debates, and the *eschatocol* (the final section of a document) compatible with the style of other formal texts of the time demonstrate masterful command of the Dutch language. There are other examples to show that some Potiguara were capable of writing in Dutch, such as Pieter Poty's letter to the government of the West India Company in Recife, dated 1631. In it, Poty tells the Dutch that he has approached other Indigenous peoples who might be brought over to the Dutch side. Poty mentions meeting a man called Maraca Patira from Rio Grande, who told him that 'the Tapuia and Pepetama Indians [from Rio Grande] had made a truce and agreed to wage war upon the Portuguese and their allies'.⁴⁰ The most extensively studied examples of Potiguara writing are the series of Tupi letters exchanged between the Potiguara Antônio Felipe Camarão, Diego da Costa, Diogo Pinheiro Camarão, Pieter Poty and Simão da Costa which recount the dramatic events of the Potiguara involvement in the Dutch–Portuguese wars. The letters illuminate Indigenous relations, divisions, perceptions of the wars fought and the spread of writing among some of the Indigenous peoples of north-eastern Brazil.⁴¹

Conclusion

The aftermath of the Tapesserica Assembly brought both achievements and challenges for the Potiguara people. Portuguese settler revolts, just two months later, disrupted the missions in the *aldeamentos* and affected the plan to merge *aldeias* and *aldeamentos*. The Dutch faced not only opposition from Portuguese rebels but also the potential defection of their native allies.⁴² Even so, the Potiguara aspirations for self-governance found some success. For instance, the leadership positions of Carapeba, Paraupaba and Poty were recognised by the Dutch West India Company. Paraupaba remained regent of Rio Grande until assuming the post of 'Regent of the Brazilian Nation' (*Regidoor van*

⁴⁰Letter of Pedro Poty, c. 1631, The Hague, Nationaal Archief, Archive of the Dutch West India Company. NL-HaNA_1.05.01.01_49_118_0001.

⁴¹E. de Almeida Navarro, 'Transcrição e tradução integral anotada das Cartas dos índios Camarões, escritas em 1645 em Tupi Antigo', *Boletim do Museu Paraense Emílio Goeldi*, 17 (2022), 1–49; P. Souto Maior, *Fastos Pernambucanos* (Rio de Janeiro, 1913), 149–56.

⁴²H. Hamel, A. van Bullestrate and P. J. Bas, 'Relatório apresentado por escrito aos Nobres e Poderosos Senhores Deputados do Conselho dos XIX' [1646], in *Fontes para a história do Brasil holandês*, ed. Gonsalves de Mello, 219–20.

de Brasiliaensche natie) when a vacancy appeared in 1649.⁴³ The Portuguese captured Pieter Poty in the second Battle of Guararapes (1649), and he died in captivity. Carapeba lost his position and was banished from the colony for committing a crime in 1649.⁴⁴ The outcomes underscore the complex challenges faced by Indigenous leaders in navigating colonial power dynamics.

Often considered a mere footnote in the history of the Dutch–Portuguese wars in Brazil, the Tapesserica Assembly illuminates the native perspective in the South Atlantic conflict. It reveals to us elements of native governance and the role of the Potiguara as historical agents, deciding their destiny in a world continuously changing. Historians see the gathering as summoned by the Dutch government in Brazil and a by-product of the European agenda. There is some truth to this, but when reading some of the resolutions recorded in the Daily Register of the Dutch Government in Brazil, it is possible to discern the native project. The Dutch may have conceived the governance system, but the Potiguara undeniably played a crucial role in shaping it, choosing representatives, and maintaining a decentralised power structure. Despite the rise of leaders such as Paraupaba, Poty and Carapeba during the war, the Potiguara retained their tradition of no centralised power.

Coming to grips with the pre-European context is essential to understand the dynamics of both the Tapesserica Assembly and the subsequent native *câmaras*, and to recover forms of collective governance and decision-making among Indigenous peoples in Brazil. As well as being evidence of the transformative effect Europeans had on native lives, this gathering demonstrates the Potiguara capacity to negotiate with their allies, and adapt, transform and survive in times of war and devastation.

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⁴³Extracts and records of the resolutions of the High and Mighty Lords of the States General of the United Provinces of the Netherlands, 12 Jul. 1656, The Hague, Nationaal Archief, Archive of the States General (1576–1796). NL-HaNA_1.01.02, 4846_0220.

⁴⁴Hulsman, 'Brazilian Indians in the Dutch Republic', 54–5, 77–8; Meuwese, *Brothers in Arms*, 172–80.

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