

Seeing the Nation through the Territory: some Historiographical Frameworks

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Recent approaches to the study of Brazilian Independence have provided a new framework for the classical interpretations of the emancipation process (see Costa, 2005).² In the last fifteen years, the bibliography on this subject has grown enormously, and comparative analysis with the Spanish American processes has gained greater density, depth, and contrast. However, the so-called Brazilian *exceptionalism* is still one of the major issues yet to be examined: how to explain the continuity and legitimacy of the House of Braganza's sovereignty in South America? How was it possible to maintain the territorial integrity of Portuguese America given the fragmentation of Spanish America? In his article "Why Was Brazil Different? The Contexts of Independence"—first published by the Council on Foreign Relations on April 25, 2000 —, Kenneth Maxwell (<http://www.cfr.org/americas/why-brazil-different-contexts-independence/p3747>; Maxwell 2012: 161-193) intertwined internal and external aspects of the economic and geopolitical dynamics that led to the longevity of the Portuguese Crown in the South America. In contrast to this, however, João Paulo Garrido Pimenta argues that the Brazilian case was not so different from that of the rest of Spanish America, explaining that, in choosing a republican system (except in Mexico for a very short term), they did not differ greatly from a constitutional monarchy: in both cases, the compatibility between state, territory, and nation was fully realized (Pimenta, 2011; Slemian; Thibaut, 2013).

In turn, John Elliot stresses another kind of *exceptionalism* when comparing the thirteen Anglo-American colonies with the bureaucratic colonies of Spanish America. Nevertheless, his argument is also suitable for describing the Portuguese legacy, as he emphasizes the post-Independence continuity of colonial political patterns, and the long endurance of the shadow of the *black legend* (Catholicism, inquisition, and censorship), which explain the fragility and failure of the liberal regime in Catholic America. In his view, Anglo-American societies better embodied the civic virtues of "consent and the sanctity of individual rights" (Elliot, 2006:411).

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² See also the other twenty-six authors who have followed the trends of contemporary debate.

Adopting a transnational perspective, Gabriel Paquette and Jeremy Adelman have shown the complex and entangled relationship that existed between the Iberian Crowns and their American possessions (Paquette, 2013: 1-16). The era of Atlantic revolutions had different consequences in the two Iberian empires: the policies of enlightened reformism either led to a rupture with the Metropolis, as in the Spanish case, or enabled the reaccommodation of the administrative and mercantile ruling class, as in the case of Portugal (Adelman, 2006: 5-8).

The conservative or moderate nature of Brazil's political emancipation is a fairly consensual historiographical statement (Novais, 2005: 183-194). But let us first recall some current historiographical approaches from the 1970s: first, those that identify a growing discontent with the metropolitan policies among the American subjects, which resulted in new political identities and a sense of belonging that was expressed by either provincial or continental patriotism (Jancsó, 1997:387-437 and Jancsó; Pimenta, 2000: 389-440). A second major approach rejects any kind of patriotic awareness or new political identity in the making of the new independent state, emphasizing that there was no radical rejection of Portuguese sovereignty (Holanda, 1962: 9-39; Dias, 1972: 160-186). Between these two perspectives, we still need to better understand the political language of the upper and working classes with respect to the geographical space that would later become the nation of Brazilian citizens (Jancsó; Pimenta, 2000 and Schwartz, 2003: 217-271). My aim here is to highlight a key problem in the process of the building of the Brazilian national state: the preservation of territorial integrity and its connections with the political action guided by the principles of enlightened reformism.

One of the greatest challenges facing Brazilian historians has been to demonstrate that emancipation was not the natural process that many nineteenth-century historians stated it to have been when they claimed that the Brazilian branch of the Portuguese tree had become too heavy to remain united to its trunk for much longer. This naturalistic image was used to explain the relationship between the colony and the mother country (Salgado, 2006: 68-85; Guimarães, 2011). The historians of the Brazilian Historical and Geographical Institute, founded in 1838, for example, sought to establish the beginning of a new era in 1815. They argued that becoming part of a United Kingdom would elevate Brazil's political status, which in turn would enable Luso-Americans to enjoy active diplomatic representation in international courts (Dias, 1972: 160-186). Although the historians of the Brazilian Historical and Geographical Institute situated the real breakdown in 1815, what mattered most to Portuguese historiography was the diplomatic

agreement whereby the Independence of Brazil was recognized by the Portuguese Crown under the treaty of 1825 (Rodrigues, 1969: 125-138). The agreement established that the possessions of Angola, Guinea and Mozambique would remain under Portuguese sovereignty (Alencastro, 1979: 401-403).

Whereas from a political and diplomatic point of view, the years of 1815 or 1825 may have been important, from an economic perspective the new era began with the abolition of the mercantile monopoly of the Crown in 1808 and 1810. Caio Prado Jr. suggests the contradiction that marked the political emancipation process: the separation was one result of enlightened reformism (Prado Jr., 1942: 363). The transmigration and establishment of the Portuguese Court in Rio de Janeiro was undoubtedly the key aspect for understanding the new political status gained by Brazil in the nineteenth century and the main factor that shaped the singularity of Brazilian Independence, particularly in comparison with the provinces of Spanish America.

According to Oliveira Lima, the Independence of Brazil was an amicable divorce (Lima, 1922: 103). From Sergio Buarque de Holanda's perspective, the events of 1822 were just another aspect of the liberal revolutions of Porto and Lisbon; Independence did not acquire any national significance until the abdication of the king in 1831 (Holanda, 1962: 13-23). Only after this event did Brazil complete its metamorphosis from colony to nation.

To some extent, this debate focused on identifying the different interest groups that led the process of a negotiated pact of independence in the short and long term. In other words, the debate about Independence is also, essentially a debate about the degree of continuity and discontinuity between the colonial and postcolonial period in terms of various aspects: administrative, fiscal, commercial and socio-cultural (Costa, 2005: 53-118).³

In the 1970s, one of the main issues debated in Marxist historiography was the role of proto-national consciousness in the development of the political process, which at the time was called the *tomada de consciência da condição colonial*, or the emergence of anti-metropolitan resentment, expressed, in particular, in the *Inconfidência* movements of the late eighteenth century. To explain the political emancipation of Portuguese America, Fernando Novais and Carlos Guilherme Mota linked the Luso-American context to the more general crisis of the mercantilist system triggered by the North American and French constitutional revolutions (Novais; Motta, 1986). According to these authors, the emancipation of Brazil should be simultaneously read as being part of the breakdown of old colonialism, the construction of national states, and the new division of labor in the world markets. This

³ This is an important article that presents the main trends of these aspects. See, also the article by Pimenta, 2009.

broad chronological framework focused on the political impact of the Atlantic and Hispanic revolutions on the periphery. It further maintained that political emancipation was a chapter in the major global transformation of the capitalist system that strengthened competition between imperial powers (Mauro, 1972: 38-47).⁴ In the case of Brazil, the emancipation was also the result of the greater economic prosperity obtained in the context of the Napoleonic wars and the complete breakdown of the Atlantic economy (Arruda, 1980: 635-655).

According to Fernando Novais, the enlightened reforms of Dom Rodrigo de Souza Coutinho and the establishment of the Portuguese court in the Americas had extremely positive effects for the economy and the politicization of Portuguese American elites. This explains the non-radical features of the emancipation of Brazil, which Novais called the conservative revolution because it maintained the slavery production system. Anyway, in his view, people had already expressed an explicit desire to be Brazilian before the events of 1822. This desire can be identified by the expectations of the *Geração de 1790* [the Generation of the 1790s]—this expression was coined in Kenneth Maxwell's article to describe an elite group from Brazil that had graduated from the University of Coimbra—who are considered to have been the main formulators and executors of enlightened reformist policies (Maxwell, 1973: 107-144). Educated under the influence of the Pombaline Enlightenment, many of them occupied strategic positions in the Portuguese state apparatus, where, as scientists and administrators, they proposed solutions to the problems faced by the Portuguese Empire (Lyra, 1994; Cardoso, 2001: 80-81; Cantarino, 2016).

Like Fernando Novais, Kenneth Maxwell underlines the importance of the process of the politicization of colonial elites, pointing out their open opposition to excessive metropolitan control because it led to conspiracy movements, particularly in the states of Minas Gerais, Rio de Janeiro and Bahia. In his essay, Maxwell reconstructed the international political and economic circumstances which fed the hopes nurtured by the American Portuguese that they could extend their influence within the Portuguese empire.

For Maxwell, the project of a federative empire was to find in Rodrigo de Souza Coutinho its most complete formulator: “this collaboration between Brazilian intellectuals and enlightened ministers produced an imperial idea, Luso-Brazilian in inspiration, which moved beyond nationalism to a broader imperial solution, and sought to diffuse metropolitan-colonial tensions,” configuring itself in the end as an element of cooptation

⁴ Also important is the work by Godechot, 1972.

and accommodation among elites. Fernando Novais, on the other hand, focused his analysis on the disconnections between the theory and practice of enlightened reformism due to the structural contradictions and tensions provoked by the impossibility of promoting metropolitan and colonial development in a single system. He stresses the argument on theories of capitalist development in the peripheries, pointing out the fragility of the compromise proposed by the Generation of the 1790s on both sides of the Atlantic. In contrast to what happened in Spanish America, where Carlos III's reformism accentuated the polarization between American and Peninsular subjects, Fernando Novais argues that the repercussions of enlightened reformism in Portuguese America facilitated the accommodation of interests reached between the provincial elites and the ruling classes, thereby avoiding political radicalization during the crisis of mercantile colonialism (Novais, 1979: 213-297). Both Maxwell and Novais based their arguments on the assumption that reformism resulted in the politicization of the local elites, who began to reclaim and reaffirm their provincial identities with greater intensity.

If we look at Maria Odila Leite da Silva Dias' pioneering essay from 1968, we can see that she studied the cultural attitudes of the Portuguese American elites, and, unlike Maxwell and Novais, argued that they did not expect independence. In this study, she described the affinities between the scientific background and state policies, focusing on the development of the empire. Silva Dias identified close ties between the political behavior and the cultural styles of this generation that was involved in the making of the independent state (Dias, 2005: 94).

However, these three authors center their analysis only on the links between Portuguese America and the metropolis, excluding the other parts of the Portuguese Empire from their interpretation. This aspect may be considered as the main shift in perspective to have occurred in recent years, with contemporary historiography now being more concerned with the transnational or interconnected study of the independence processes, whether in the political, diplomatic, social or economic field. The effects that the Independence of Brazil had on the other parts of the empire still need to be studied in greater depth, however. Researchers have recently shown the impact of independence on the Atlantic Slave Trade that supplied the ports of Brazil. Portuguese and Brazilian merchants maintained their partnership in the slave trade until almost the end of the 1840s as current historiography has pointed out (Alencastro, 1986 and 2004; Alexandre, 1998:61-86); however, less attention has been given to the Asian colonies, which are a territory that still remains to be investigated.

Over the past fifteen years, there has been a major shift in the historiography of the empire as numerous historians have begun to examine the transcontinental itineraries and careers of the members of this elite, whose role in the search for natural wealth (and not only in Portuguese America) guided the economic development of the empire. This is perhaps the most relevant contemporary historiographical trend, namely the tendency to study more closely the role of the Generation of the 1790s in widening the geographical scope of the elite's circulation and operation (which was no longer limited to the South American continent), while also taking into account the experiences acquired in other parts of the Portuguese Empire (Curto, 1999; Kury, 2004; Raminelli, 2008 and Domingues, 2012). In this sense, military institutions and academies, along with Masonic networks and the press, constituted spaces for socialization and politicization that escaped local logic and shaped new spheres of public opinion among the various elites in the different corners of the Portuguese Empire (Morel, 2005; Barata, 2006). Historians currently emphasize the cosmopolitan culture of the so-called Generation of the 1790s, whose experience, whether through administrative positions or through scientific missions, facilitated the development of a pragmatic view of how to deal with the imperial dilemmas.

In recent years, however, Brazilian, Portuguese and Anglo-American historians have debated the repercussions of the establishment of the Portuguese court in Rio de Janeiro, which promoted new political practices and enlarged the public sphere. The Crown in Rio de Janeiro changed the balance of power at the regional level and transformed the dynamics of the imperial trade; the reinforcement of fiscal control over the provincial elites of Northern Brazil (Bahia, Pernambuco, and Pará) is one of the main causes of the emergence of a regional resentment against the elites from Rio de Janeiro, Minas Gerais and São Paulo. These internal tensions produced a civil war on both sides of the Atlantic, so that the elites in Rio de Janeiro disputed with Lisbon their right to be at the center of the political decision-making; the sovereignty of Rio was conquered with concessions and privileges, and by force as well. The annexation of the *Banda Oriental* (Cisplatina) in 1817 was an important chapter in this expansion of the borders of the Portuguese American Empire. I mentioned earlier how Maria Odila L. Silva Dias emphasized the need to abolish the long-lasting image of a colony fighting against a metropolis. Until the middle of the century, she argued, political actions were not framed within a nationalist discourse. Only after the 1830s or 1840s do we notice the emergence of a national consciousness.

So, the explanation for the political unity and territorial integrity of the new state after independence is based on two major approaches: one underlines the homogeneity and

common legal background of the elites formed by the magistrates who had graduated from Coimbra University (Carvalho, 1982: 378-398); the second emphasizes the pact between the ruling elites, the slave traders and the slave owners (Alencastro, 1979:395-419). According to this latter view, one of the key factors in the cohesion of the upper classes was the threat of a slave uprising. Moreover, racial tensions and the fear of Haitianism were crucial to the formation of the identity of elites. However, the importance of the fear of an uprising of slaves as a factor determining national unity has been questioned, in view of the assimilationist aspect of the Portuguese constitutional law regarding the integration of freed slaves (Marquese; Berbel; Parron, 2010: 150-220).

Another way of thinking about the alliances between the ruling classes and ruling is offered by the works of Antonio Carlos Robert Moraes and Ilmar R. Mattos, both of whom pointed out the strategies of regional elites in aiming to expand their control of the land and the indigenous labor force, both before and after 1822. These historians sought to link the process of expansion into the hinterlands and the conquest of internal borders to the consolidation of the external sovereignty (Mattos, 2005: 271-300; Moraes, 2007: 497-505).

But the question of territorial integrity still remains to be examined. Why the new Brazilian state did not split into pieces after independence (as happened in Spanish America in the third decade of the nineteenth century) is one of the most intriguing questions yet to be explored. In the case of the Northeastern region of Brazil, Evaldo Cabral pointed out that none of the local republican parties, not even the radical federalists, questioned the territorial unity of Brazil. Despite the vast territorial dimensions and the real danger of fragmentation before and after independence, he argued that colonization succeeded in shaping a global consciousness of the Brazilian space as a single body (Mello, 2001: 69-115).⁵

The idea that Portuguese America had natural boundaries formed by two river basins—the Amazon and the River Plate—representing Brazil as an island was well described by the diplomats of the nineteenth century, who insisted on the geographical explanation for the formation of territorial boundaries, according to the geopolitical thinking of that time (Magnolli, 1997). This pre-existing and consolidated image was, to some extent, a geographical ideology that had been disseminated by Portuguese diplomats since the Treaty of Utrecht, mainly in the international public and diplomatic sphere (Kantor, 2010). In Alencastro's view the fact that Portuguese America maintained its unity

⁵ See also Mello:2014.

improve many historiographical bias, mainly centered in a territorial narrative of the State Building (Alencastro, 2015: 26)

Although Brazil was presented abroad as political unity; domestically, from at least the mid-eighteenth century onward, a genuine effort was made to reorganize and reorder the civil and ecclesiastical administration of the territory. In this respect, the itineraries and careers of military and naval engineers—besides the activity of lawyers and interests associated with the maintenance of the slave trade—also established an important support for the territorial unity of the future independent state.

Historians such as Varnhagem and Capistrano de Abreu tended to reinforce the idea that the external borders and territorial unity constituted the new nation's legacy from Portugal. In their view, the real challenge faced by the new State was the establishment of the territory's internal borders. The most dramatic threat of all was the danger of territorial fragmentation. Nevertheless, unlike the westward expansion of the USA, the conquest of the Brazilian hinterland was never completed. As far as we know, the effective occupation of the land took place in ebbs and flows of population and depopulation, discontinuity and dispersion in time and space. There is however a general consensus that Brazil was formed along the edge, or from the outside in. In other words, external sovereignty was achieved before the internal process of integrating the different parts of Portuguese America had been completed.

The reality created by successive treaties from the mid-eighteenth century onward enabled the symbolic and material presence of Portuguese administration in the most remote areas. The expeditions for the demarcation of the territory and the construction of fortresses had a huge impact on the Indians and the Maroon communities living in border regions. From the second half of the eighteenth century onward, the Platine, Andean and Amazonian borders progressively gained centrality in diplomatic offices, exemplified, in concrete terms, by Dom Rodrigo de Souza Coutinho's creation of the Maritime Royal Society (Kantor, 2010a).

However, colonial territoriality should not be confused with the geopolitical unit that became consecrated as Brazil in the post-independence period. Luiz Felipe de Alencastro suggests that the colonial and post-colonial spatial matrix may only be understood in the light of the geography of the slave trade, or, in other words, through the incorporation of an African space as an arena for the social reproduction of slave labor. The colonization process left a territorial archipelago—except for the interregnum of the exploration of the Golden Mine in the middle of eighteenth century. According to Alencastro's analysis: "independence

brought political autonomy to a territory undone by the shifting of the interior land trade to maritime coast.” (Alencastro, 1997:14). In his perspective, a new spatial matrix emerged from 1750 until 1850, remaining untouched until the abolition of the slave trade, the Land Law and the arrival of European immigrant workers.

In other words, to better understand the emancipation process in Ibero-American nations, we must first investigate the specific contexts that defined the degree of territorialization experienced by the state during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (the expansion led especially to the military annexation of Cayenne and the *Banda Oriental do Rio Uruguay* [East Zone of the Uruguay River]). According to Ilmar R. Mattos, after the establishment of the Court, the true expansion did not encroach on neighbors but instead headed towards the interior of the continent; the non-contiguity and the possibility of political fragmentation within Portuguese America was even more threatening than border conflicts with the emerging Spanish American republics.

This macro-structural interpretation remained quite dominant until the beginning of the twenty-first century. However, in recent historiography, there has been a greater effort to apply anthropological interpretations, following the arguments that boundaries are better understood from below, or from the local level rather than from the State’s perspective or at the level of diplomacy (Herzog, 2015: 243-267). In this respect, many historians have been trying to focus on how different social actors identified themselves as belonging to a particular body politic, but at different levels: local, regional, intra-continental, intra-or inter-imperial (Gonçalves, 2013: 211-234).

Returning to geography, we should therefore ask what place or role geographical narratives had in the formation of early national identities at different scales: imperial, continental, Atlantic and regional. What were their repercussions on the transformation of *Dynastic States* into Nation States in the first two decades of the nineteenth century? How did new conceptions of citizenship (North American and French revolutions) change the way that contemporaries conceived of the territory and their attachment or connection to the land? What was considered to be common knowledge regarding external and internal boundaries? Did geographical representation of the nation affect the process of building states, or nations, for that matter? These are some questions that have been worked upon in recent historiography (Biaggi; Droulers, 2000; Peixoto, 2005; Cezar, 2005: 79-99).

Regarding the great cartographic synthesis made by Antonio Pires da Silva da Pontes Leme: *New Lusitania or Portuguese America and the State of Brazil* (see figure 1), commissioned by Dom Rodrigo de Souza Coutinho in 1797, Jaime Cortesão stated: “[in]

the famous map by Silva Pontes, Brazil reveals a vast territory, which was exploited, delimited, organized and defended like an immense body that generated a soul of its own.” According to his analysis, “the New Lusitania map revealed a geographical consciousness, which was one of the strongest reasons for proclaiming independence,” (Cortês, 2009: 381-388). In fact, the map of New Lusitania shows precisely this situation through its graphic composition, since it tries to demonstrate the contiguity, uniformity, and integration of the continental domains of the Portuguese Crown in South America. However, this perception of the geographical and political body was not shared by the local elites, nor did it express a sense of national belonging. Nowadays, we can say that Cortês’s interpretation is clearly anachronistic, since the political actors did not want to create an independent state, but rather to expand their privileges and autonomy within the Portuguese Empire.

If we look at the map depicted by a popular cartographer who called himself the old mulatto Anastacio de Sant’ Anna, we can see how this subject of the Portuguese Crown answered our concerns. He made an atlas of all the American provinces existing in the year of 1817 and dedicated it to the local elites and also to young people. In it, he explains that the maps of military cartography have many errors that should be corrected (see figure 2: Sant’ Anna, 1817).

Comparison of the two maps reveals that his is not as accurate as the New Lusitania geographical chart, but it clearly expresses the desire to rename the territory with its original Indian place names. The native or patriotic identity expressed in this map reveals that new ways of seeing the territory had emerged on the eve of independence; however, if we analyze the way in which he depicted the external borders, we can see his concern to ensure the Portuguese sovereignty. From his perspective, Brazil was already a political body (Souza, 1999).

Indeed, the crisis of the old regime and the transformation of the dynastic state into a nation state led to the emergence of new territorial identities able to articulate the interests of the working classes with the interests of the upper classes, since they both shared a common geographical ideology as Antonio Carlos Robert de Moraes wrote (Moraes, 2005). The social groups that lived by the slave system, whether directly or indirectly, aimed to keep their social and economic privileges as owners and traders of the labor force, while the free and poor people could expand their access to land, with some degree of autonomy, especially in the first half of the nineteenth century, despite the escalation of the violence against the Indian people, and the intensification of the slave

trade and forced recruitment of African labor (Cunha, 1992; Araujo, 2001, Motta, 2009 and Carvalho, 2012:75-88).

Fig. 1



Source: Antonio Pires da Silva Pontes Leme. *Carta Geographica de Projecção Esférica da Nova Lusitania ou America Portuguesa Estado do Brazil, Lisboa, a 1797*. Exemplar do Observatório Astronômico da Universidade de Coimbra. Cf. Jose Ramos Bandeira. *Universidade de Coimbra*, tomo I, Coimbra, 1943, pp. 115 e 117.

Fig. 2



Source: Anastacio de Sant'Anna. *Guia de Caminhantes*, Bahia, 1816-17. Fundação Biblioteca Nacional (Rio de Janeiro).

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