

# NATION AND NATIONALISM BASED on the Brazilian experience

CARLOS LESSA

THE 19<sup>th</sup> century was one of nationalist effervescence in Europe, embodied by the implantation of the institutions of the French Revolution and by the development of the forces of production through the Industrial Revolution in England. The New World rupture with the colonial process derives from the emanations of these revolutions. What emerges is a collection of nations with varied genetic processes and distinct patterns of construction.

The virtuous combination of these two revolutions prospers in the union of the thirteen colonies that comprise the United States of North America. The European transhumance occupies Indian territories, forming family-owned ranching properties. Manpower shortages give rise to a labor market that values the wage. After the Civil War, the United States consolidates a dynamic internal market that integrates ranching/farming and industrialization. Haiti soon follows suit, winning independence after a slave revolt and protracted conflict with French troops. Bolívar is a revolutionary attuned to his age: he dreams of a Hispano-American republic wrought of the former provinces. He affirms, somewhat presciently, that only through such a union could Latin America strike a balance with the Anglo-Saxon north. However, his dreams of a Hispano-American Republic are dashed by localist centrifugal forces inherited from the colonial period.

Latin America will give rise to a fragmentation of political forms, almost all precarious. Local conflicts, seeded by the fragile institutions inherited from Spain, mean there are no conditions for the prompt constitution of the Hispano-American Nation States. In some cases, disorder and drawn-out, interwoven disputes prevail. The formation of the states was tardy and riddled with retrocessions. Various border disputes escalate into wars between the fledgling nations. The New World presents the observer with an array of nationalisms and national specificities whose development defies generalizations.

The formation of Brazil follows a political course radically different to the Hispano-American nations. Though it, too, derives from the context engendered by the European revolutionary wave, it is a Lusitanian replica wholly divorced from its Enlightenment rhetoric and republican ideals. The National Brazilian Empire holds Luso-America together, incorporating neither the industrialization nor the institutional models of those two revolutions. The republican ideal fails to prosper in mid-century and will only find its voice with the Republican Manifesto of 1871. Independent Brazil preserves and reinvigorates the institution of slavery and installs a monarchy with the heir to the Portuguese Crown on the throne.

The construction of the nation, as an open system, is adverse to linear circumstantialities, but laden with historical anecdotes. Any essay on this theme will be subject to limitations and fail to map the entire weft of circumstance. Even lacking in information, recording the singular process that led to the formation of the historical nation is an indispensable precondition to its comprehension. The nation is an occurrence, and the Nation State its demiurge. Nationalisms can either precede the formation of a nation, as a kind of blueprint, or succeed it. The Nation State can be thought of as something yet to come, as the materialization of some latent or potential State, something inherited from the past and affected by the present circumstances. Interest should lie in scrutinizing the event rather than in the fruitless search for a national essence. It is the Nation State that condenses, manifests and formats the Brazilian nationality, but it is not, in so doing, an originality. The key is not to tackle the people. In these respects, the Brazilian experience provides a textbook case, as nearly a century separates the institutionalization of the Nation State and the delineation of the nation as a territory and people. Attempting to understand this lengthy process, which will only give issue to a preliminary nation after the Proclamation of the Republic, requires bringing multiple lines of influence to light, the embryos of which lie in the relocation of the Portuguese Court and the preservation of slave labor. It is during this interval that the socio-economic directions that will configure the Brazil-nation - and that sustain it to this day - are set.

From the very outset, the nation passes itself off as eternal. However, its configurations and contents vary over time, ranging from obvious territorial mutations to the development of its people. A sense of belonging to the nation becomes progressively more complex. Perception of nationhood, expressions of national pride and the self-esteem of the citizenry interact, making it difficult to speak of nationalism in the singular.

Slavery, a colonial form, provides the social bedrock and presides over the dynamic of the coffee economy. Keeping the oligarchs' patrimonies intact provides the foundations for the creation of the coffee structure and the territorial occupation of the Fluminense province. It was from Rio de Janeiro, as an urban hub, and its welding with the mercantile system that coffee, now in rapid expansion, secured Brazil a meaningful place within global division of labor. This success enabled the imperial political elite to annul the centrifugal/separatist trend and consolidate a territorial unity, in contrast with the general Hispano-American fragmentation. It is important to underscore the fact that coffee was an inexpressive product in colonial mercantile commerce; its market was developed after the Industrial Revolution and through the Brazilian Empire's coffee production; it was not, therefore, the result of liberal or liberalizing practices.

With a little good will, a researcher may be able to find a word or two by this or that figure or the peripheral fragments of some episode or other that somehow articulate with the discourse of free trade. The Opening of the Ports to Friendly Nations, the formula for modernization suggested to the Portuguese

monarch by the Viscount of Cairu, is often championed as liberal, but this episode has an unequivocal geopolitical template in subordination to England, which had forced the transfer of Dom João VI's court to Brazil in the first place. At the same time, the South-Atlantic slave trade was maintained, thus keeping the patrimonial and social structure of Portuguese America intact. The survival of slavery made the Brazilian Empire an example of a conservative alchemy that preserved the past and immunized it against rupture for almost a century.

In order to properly date the beginning of the Brazilian State, we have to push the clock back to the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. The Lusitanian conquest of Eldorado took place two hundred years later than the Spanish. The Hispanics had already appropriated the silver and gold of the Pre-Columbine Empires and, in the space of two or three decades, had seized the Potosi mines on the Bolivian plateau and the Guanajuato in Mexico. In Portuguese America, it was only in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century that the central Brazilian goldmines would finally be mapped. The search for new goldmines completed the negation of Tordesilhas Treaty and set the perimeters of a gigantic Brazilian territory. The gold economy would link the Brazilian hinterlands to the Atlantic coast, especially through Rio de Janeiro; to the Plata River estuary via the Uruguay/Paraguay basin; to the Northeast, through the São Francisco river valley; and to Salvador, along the Paraguaçu route. The only corner gold left untouched was the Amazonian river system.

Throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, the economic epicenter of the Portuguese kingdom shifted and settled in Brazil. In the new World, the Lusitanian colony prospered incessantly whilst Portugal economically stagnated and back-peddled. The gold rush in the 'Geraes' during that century attracted over six hundred thousand Portuguese, mostly men. The shortage of women encouraged large-scale miscegenation with the Indian and African women. The Portuguese productive base was depopulated and destroyed; after all, Portugal had a population of under two million. Its urban provisions would always depend on "sea wheat" and cod protein, though its own agriculture did produce some foodstuffs. The sapping of manpower lost to the colony broke Portuguese farming.

Brazilian gold, whether raised through taxes or the work of contractors, sustained the luster of the Crown's fruitless works and an enormous retinue of stipended nobles and provided the base for the supply of food and goods to the Portuguese consumer through imports financed by shipments of colonial gold. From then on, Portugal would produce little, except wine, olive oil and salt. The Pombaline attempt to develop the manufacturing sector and restore commerce through the so-called "drogas do sertão", spices from the Brazilian wilderness - in other words, vegetal extractivism from the Amazon -, failed and 19<sup>th</sup>-century Portugal descended into a long period of stagnation. The squandering of Brazilian gold poisoned Portugal.

On the other side of the Atlantic, gold fertilized Portuguese America, seeing the colonial population doubled, with the influx of Portuguese immigrants

and the “importation” of over a million African slaves to work the mines. A grid of towns crisscrossed the Brazilian heartlands. By the mid 18<sup>th</sup> Century, Vila Rica de Ouro Preto, born from a gold-panners’ settlement, had a population of sixty thousand and was the fully urbanized administrative centre of a district of some two-hundred thousand inhabitants, a prodigious demographic roughly the equivalent of the contemporary London. Vila de São Sebastião in Rio de Janeiro consolidated as the administrative colonial seat of the gold trade and the main port of arrival for imported goods and slaves, with links to a series of other ports along the Brazilian coast.

The extraction of gold dust was at once a source of monetary emission and of demand for slaves, foods, beasts of burden, textiles and manufactured goods. In its search for foodstuffs, the gold economy interwove and dynamized various regions of the colony. Initially, it brought in cattle from the Northeastern plains and the Southern pastures, set up important stud farms to supply the colonial logistics and expanded the production of flour, white rum (cachaça), sugar and sun-dried meats for the internal market, through which gold worked its way into the heart of the colonial space, where it distributed its blessings.

With its roots in the slave trade, mercantile capital gained force, giving rise to large capital companies in Rio and other colonial port towns. The slave-based colonial capital progressively diversified into heavyweight players in the tobacco, sugar and cachaça markets. The logistics of the shipping lines from the north and south of Brazil brought jerked beef and other foods to the mines. The trade in slaves and related merchandise was nicknamed “the big adventure”, and branched out into Europe and Asia, trading luxury goods (including porcelain and textiles), metals and weapons for barter with the African slave suppliers. This major market built and ran ships, founded and managed insurance companies, undertook shared shipments, etc. It was the estuary and motor of a vast internal trade network.

The colonial gold accumulated across the network, especially so in large organizations. Though the volumes of gold shipped out of Brazil were undoubtedly considerable, the bigger traders had plenty of tobacco and sugar at their disposal to be able to hold balanced exchanges with the Imperial capital, so they were not the port of departure for Brazilian gold. It must be noted that a lot of gold stayed in Brazil, either as treasury or as the currency of the economy this trade engendered; it was the ballast for a particular monetary and credit system that laid the groundwork from which Brazil, as an Imperial Nation State, could develop its coffee economy.

The growing supply of low-priced Brazilian coffee created a global market for this product as a commodity wage for nations in the process of industrialization, at the same time as it opened up an internal market for products from other regions of Brazil. It is well known that assurances concerning the internal market for jerked beef were decisive to the peace agreement with the Farroupilhas – the main separatist threat. Coffee was not expressive on the world

market prior to the Industrial revolution. However, in a matter of a few decades, the Brazilian Empire would be the producer of over 80% of what was then the fourth most important commodity on the international market in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Unlike the exportation of Portuguese port wine, which was controlled by the English, in the coffee economy, the growers, transporters, traders and financiers were all national.

The key to understanding the permanence of the slave system and Brazil's successful insertion on the global economic scene lies in its inheritance of a national credit-based monetary system engendered by the gold trade and preserved in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century by the continued extraction of the metal. It takes seven years between clearing land for a coffee plantation and the first harvest. The investment in a slave stock, food and tools prior to any returns required long-term financing. Setting up a coffee plantation was a complex microeconomic decision that combined, through the cashier, with a particular mercantile/financial system. Capitalism, an open and global system that shifts and redraws its perimeters in an ongoing drive toward pragmatic expansion, positioned the Brazilian economy squarely in world trade, giving the colonial slave statute a new lease of life.

Brazil had formed a national economy long before actually becoming a nation. It dispensed with a nationalist discourse and was able to keep the idea of a people in the shade. Soon thereafter, the Brazilian State would emerge without rupture from the colonial past, the result of the oceanic transpositioning of the Portuguese Court, on the spur of the Napoleonic Wars. By relocating to the New World at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, Portugal, a satellite of English hegemony, turned Rio de Janeiro into the new seat of the United Kingdom of Portugal, Brazil and the Algarve. By the time Junot invaded Portugal, the Crown, following a long-established plan, was ready and waiting to make the transfer to Brazil, under the escort of the English fleet. So complete was the move that even the royal library, including the few remaining copies of the first edition of *Os Lusíadas*, came stowed in the hull of a ship.

With the transatlantic shift, the colony received the entire superstructure of the traditional Portuguese State, which settled itself upon the bureaucratic and legal framework already installed here. Eighteenth-century Brazil was ready to take its political place as the epicenter of the Lusitanian world, and all because of the centrality of gold. The installation of the Court required a few urban modifications. Among D. João's innovations special mention must be made of the redoubled role of the police in controlling the city. In Rio, upgraded to the new capital, the Crown, its court and the whole stipended apparatus that went with them sent shockwaves through the public coffers. Rio consolidated as an important commercial hub. Dynamically speaking, the Rio of Dom João VI is the nation's first "Brasília".

During this process of urban development emerged an elite that knew how to consume and that had a fascination for imported luxuries. In counterpart, there was also a free urban poor that operated some of the logistical and

commercial services. The powerful families multiplied the number of domestic urban slaves, who lived in symbiosis with the city's poor. Complex clientele and protection networks formed in this urban environment. The outflow of gold was definitively stemmed under Lusitanian controls. In addition to slavery, also maintained were the regime of *sesmaria* (granting of land commissions) and the Church/State connection, with Catholicism remaining the official religion. The Church apparatus, as a projection of the State, would later serve as a base for the agrarian transmutation of land into negotiable property. In short: a transplanted, sedimented and more robust Crown "recycled" the old elites and staved off the republican threat by incorporating them into its court.

The transition to a Nation State came when the heir to the throne, Pedro I, following the paternal advice of João VI, refused to obey the order of the metropolitan courts to return to Portugal. With his decision to "stay put", Pedro I affirmed, with all his authority, his preference for remaining in the best territory of the kingdom. It was a smooth transition to an independent National State: the Luso-colony had transformed into an independent Brazil. There was no rancor whatsoever toward the Portuguese homeland. The colonial elite had never felt excluded or belittled by the Crown. In stark contrast to the Hispanic approach, it was Portuguese practice to allow the ascension of colonial subjects through the bureaucratic ranks. Antonio Vieira, Alexandre de Gusmão and José Bonifácio are, among others, good examples of the upward mobility of colonial subjects in the Lusitanian hierarchy.

With no discontinuity, an independent Brazil emerged without conflict and – with the exception of a few disgruntled protests – little or no tension from the Portuguese. It was the "painless birth" of a Nation State. The fiscal readjustment was insignificant; since the reign of D. João VI, the Crown had "recycled" the taxes it raised, so the ex-colony found itself with a symmetrical budget. Dynastic continuity kept the enriched Portuguese in Brazil and reconfirmed the country's status as prime destination for Lusitanian emigrants, something that would continue into the 1950s. It was an amicable separation. One could argue that it was the "European session" of the Portuguese Empire that separated from the Brazilian, but, one way or another, the marked lack of heroes in Brazilian history comes down to the fact that the separation occurred without bloodshed or violent clashes. There was no need to state a case in favor of secession.

With the social and patrimonial structure preserved, there was no rotation of elites, whose only real worry was the Santo Domingo Revolt, where ex-slaves defeated the French troops and created the first independent Latin American republic. Here, from the very beginning, the colonial elites opted for allegiance to the Bragantine ruler. No alternative system of faith or worldview toppled the established order. For the tiny elite with all the wealth and power, everything stayed the same, with the advantage of the Emperor being more readily accessible on this side of the Atlantic than the king on the other. The

Lusitanian *sesmaria* was later converted into capitalist property by the parochial registry. The legitimacy of slavery was draped in a blanket of silence. In the construction of the nation, the notion of a full citizenry was left untouched. Pedro I remarked that he would do “everything for the people, but nothing through the people”. For the Imperial elite, even the right to free transit would have been inadmissible in Brazil, something assured to subjects across the ocean since the very dawn of Portugal.

The Nation State in the Empire of Brazil is the point of departure for a long march. In the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, this gigantic virtual territory, much larger than that really occupied, was preserved. Without assuming its people, the Empire prioritized the theme of unity and territorial integrity. The Empire gave continuity to the Portuguese geopolitics and focused its attention on estuaries. Brazil was born with a living border only along the Plata basin. In this region, in a bid to maintain free navigation in the basin, the Brazilian Empire experienced some clashes with its neighbors, especially with Paraguay. However, in the Brazilian’s mental repertoire, neither the Platine nations nor the Paraguayans was ever Brazil’s enemy, rather Brazil simply fought against ambitious warlords and dictators. With the separation of the Cisplatine Province, giving rise to the nation of Uruguay, and the clear-sightedness of liberating navigation in the Amazonian river system, it was possible to create conditions for smooth diplomatic negotiations concerning the limits of the Old Republic.

Brazilian geopolitical nationalism developed with neither pomp nor arrogance. The most frequent and obvious source of nationalism surges in the face of dread, as when the Nation State must defend its territory and its people. Nationalism functions as a shield, feeding the threatened with a sense of belonging to some special body. This engenders a chronicalization of feelings of hostility and rejection. This never happened with Brazil, which constituted its nation in the absence of fears or idiosyncrasies. Ours was an enemy-less blend of nationalism, the type that sees identification with the territory and pride in the culture and qualities of the people develop slowly.

The European utopia of civilized and civilizing peace instilled by the French revolution was persistently violated for reasons of State. In the construction of the Brazilian identity, in the absence of enemies, from the very outset Brazilian cultural policy took to renouncing xenophobia. Nationalism as an ideology in Brazil incorporated the virtues of pacifism and neighborliness. It was easy to credit the Brazilian with such virtues.

The imperial elite always lauded Brazilian political stability in contrast to the turbulent trajectories of the Hispano-American proto-nations, with their dictators and bloody internal conflicts. The War of Anglo-Saxon American Independence was given a similar reading.

All nations are ideologically molded by a handful of key ideas; inspired by accidents and configurations that, distilled and mythified, are converted into self-attributed qualities. Brazil did not “demonize” the Portuguese; the only

light repudiation came in the form of a stereotype of Lusitanian dimness, which permits the corollary of exalting the quick-off-the-mark smartness of the Brazilian as a national quality. Up until the mid-1950s, Brazil was the main destination for the Portuguese emigrant, and these constituted its largest immigrant demographic. Portuguese incorporation was always immediate, making the Brazilian welcoming as well as pacifist. In turn, Portuguese descent could be found somewhere in most Brazilian families.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, repudiating racist European doctrines and practices, Brazil openly assumed its mestizo character. This ideologizing of co-existence without ethnic attrition allowed the Brazilian to aggregate the further quality of lacking prejudice; of a national people with the special trait of minimizing and canceling out religious, regional, cultural and ethnic differences. Pride in its miscegenation led Brazil to see itself as a nation that has mixed all of its lines of descent without cultural resistance and assimilated the contributions of other peoples.

As its myth of origin, the Brazilian Empire adopted an Eldorado that consubstantiated the gold of its mines and the lush green of its forest. Visitors from all over extolled the magnificence of Brazilian nature and corroborated its image as a tropical paradise. It was easy to transmute the yellow and green of the Bragança rosette into the “auriverde pendão de nossa patria” of the national Anthem. With time, besides the alchemical transmutation of the colors, the Imperial flag would also adorn the Bragança coat of arms with sprigs of coffee and tobacco in a gesture of *avant la lettre* propaganda for the economy under formation.

The notion of Eldorado contains the permanent promise of a magnificent future. Though it does not show the way, it forever affirms a “magic” future latent in the present. Later, the idea of Brazil as the country of the future, with a future, would convert into one of the convictions behind the national developmentist project.

From the beginning, the political elite sought to consolidate a State that could preserve the national territory and leave the patrimony of the colonial oligarchs untouched. The common denominator was allegiance to the ruler and thus also to his government. They granted Pedro I's successor early majority in order to put paid to potential disruptions during the Regency period.

The Brazilian State suffered no collective disaster. The initial conservatism of its formation remained an historical constant. Brazil managed to abolish slavery without any relevant social conflict; proclaimed the Republic without any Jacobin struggle of any significance; modernized the State by declaring an end to the Old Republic without any real trauma; promoted industrialization without rupturing with the old primary-export oligarchy; went through the Cold War installing a dictatorship and State of exception, which was later substituted by a State of law without any criminal proceedings brought against the military rulers; and managed to install a democracy without first discussing its origins in authoritarianism.



During the Empire, the dominant Rio hub left the distribution of devolved lands and the administration of the regional justice and policing systems to the provincial oligarchs. This rule was further consolidated under federalism, which respected the oligarchies in peripheral regions of the country. This formula suited the desire of the hegemonic elite to mold an economic policy according to its own rights and interests, as it kept the local and regional power of the traditional peripheral elites intact. This basic agreement lasted through the centuries and preserved the agrarian structure. The governmental apparatus and composition always left room for these peripheral elites to reproduce themselves. This was the formula for conservative modernization that postponed and muffled conflicts in the Brazilian federation.

All nations legitimize themselves through an interpretation of the past consecrated as official history. Sometimes the “necessity” rests on a future project assumed by the State in varying degrees of detail, concretion and execution. The notion of Brazil as an Eldorado turns its civilizing, developmental and welfare project into an “escape to tomorrow” that fosters tolerance of the present while glazing over the past with an aura of acceptability.

For the Empire, the creation and formation of nationality imposed the construction of an official history as an explicit task of the State. Hence the foundation of the IHGB - Instituto Histórico e Geográfico Brasileiro (Brazilian Historical and Geographical Institute), with Pedro II himself presiding over sessions. In the second decade of independence the IHGB launched a competition to determine on which bases Brazilian history should be built. The winner was the German scientist Von Martius, who suggested combing the past for episodes of cooperation among the three races (Portuguese, Amerindian and African) that could illustrate the dreams of independent Brazil. It was Varnhagen that would cast the foundations of our official history in 1852, finding in the expulsion of the French and especially the Dutch the perfect example of cooperation among the three races. Portuguese sugar mill owners, rebelling against the Dutch West India Company’s attempts to call in loans, enlisted Amerindians from the Jesuit Missions and African freemen in order to drive out the Dutch. The curious thing about this episode is that the colonists forced Portugal to accept the expulsion, as the Portuguese wanted to cede the Northeast to Holland in return for Dutch support against Spain. The colony’s power in this episode was confirmed by the expedition financed by Salvador de Sá, who used money from the slave trade to build a fleet manned with Potiguar Indians and colonial recruits, which crossed the Atlantic to oust the Dutch from Angola and São Tomé and Príncipe. In so doing, Salvador de Sá was able to restore the supply of servile manpower.

Varnhagen sweetened the event up and turned the Battle of the Guararapes into the proto-episode of Brazilian formation. Upon researching the Amerindians, he encountered a lack of historical information, so he looked to the Minas Gerais *Inconfidência* (uprising) in search of a will-to-independence. Not only was the *Inconfidência* not abolitionist, it actually served up a slave owner

as a martyr. However, making a milestone of the *Inconfidência* was no easy task, as its precepts had left no mark on the Brazilian State, but it did provide a martyr whose image could be galvanized by association with the figure of Jesus Christ. Events in Bahia, such as the Tailors' Revolt, were passed over for having championed social struggle.

The Brazilian past, like the Portuguese colony, provided little material for an official historiography. Hence the literature and cultural movement turned to the Amerindian as the proto-founder of "Brazilianity". Without mentioning the genocide, it was possible to exalt the Indian mother in the form of the "honey-lipped" Iracema, or in the generosity of Paraguaçu, who donated lands to Caramuru, an idealized European. In the collusion of Araribóia the heroic Amerindian could be seen generously fighting alongside the Portuguese to expel the French from Guanabara Bay. In praise of the Indian, who not only provided Brazilians with wombs to fill, but also bequeathed lands, many colonial families "Indianized" their surnames and some towns assumed Tupi designations. The Pre-Columbine Brazilian, still immersed in the Neolithic, had no alters or idols, nor rituals of human sacrifice, which made it much easier for the Jesuits to read the marks of Christ in our Indian than for the Spanish to identify them in the Aztec or Inca. The one "impediment" to this favorable reading was cannibalism, common practice among the Amerindians in response to a lack of protein. Gonçalves Dias (1959), with "I-Juca-Pirama", worked the transformation of Amerindian cannibalism into a mystical communion in which the victorious warriors ate the vanquished as a sign of respect and to perpetuate their power. Thus recovered, the naked Indian, innocent and washed from daily bathing, was in clean and peaceful attendance at the first mass celebrated in Brazil as represented in the historic painting by Victor Meirelles. In fact, alongside Pedro Américo's *Batalha dos Guararapes* at the Museu de Belas Artes, it composes the pictorial threshold of the exaltation of Brazilianity.

The concept of nation was imported into Brazil through romanticism as an artistic movement. A whole generation of Brazilian writers was mobilized by romanticism, for whom the aspiration to nationalism as the consolidation of the Nation-state was the "professional" responsibility of the artist. From the Arcadia of Minas Gerais came the Hellenic form and inspiration that would enable the fledgling Brazilian writer to "Europeize" the Indian symbol, turning him into a colorful and Tropical Greco-Roman replica. Instead of an ermine cloak, the Emperor wore a toucan crow mantle adorned with stylized banana leaves in place of acanthus. As his Masonic name, Pedro I chose Montezuma.

As the Lusitanian's predecessor, the Indian had the added bonus of dispensing with any concept of minority. There are no massacres of millions of Indians on record in colonial Brazil. Amerindian Genocide took the form of a combination of immunological vulnerability to imported infirmities, the disorganization of the family and the tribe and the two-pronged movement of capture as slaves and the conversion of Indian women into wombs at the service

of the colonial Portuguese. On the objective level, the disorganization of the tribal structure saw their territory converted into vacant land by *sesmaria*. The legitimacy of Indian enslavement was silenced by the native's unsuitability as disciplinable manpower; the romantic literature sought the figure of the good master in the landed Portuguese and their relationship with the Christianized Indian. The Bandeirante (colonial crusader), son of a Portuguese father and Indian mother, was later exalted as the brave explorer and producer of this vast territory and wealth. Long though the development of this official history may have been, all history books start with Varnhagen's initial schema. This re-reading was primarily done by aggregating "new" perspectives and adumbrations and it was not the subject of any relevant conflict.

The second great Brazilian historian is Capistrano de Abreu, whose work sought to recover the Amerindian by placing him on a less romanticized footing while advocating the need to study the African contribution. The point Capistrano's work underscores concerns the occupation of the hinterlands. He shows that through the forays from the Northeast and the Bandeirante incursions from the São Paulo plateau there was, from the earliest colonial times, a continuous and intense – and therefore legitimate – occupation of the backlands. Capistrano spoke of the "leather civilization" of the Northeastern drylands and left the exaltation of the figure of the bandeirante to a handful of São Paulo historians.

The historians were the official high-priests of the new cult of Brazilianity. The Brazilian Empire did its best to "issue a passport" to European civilization. The nation suffered the effects of Buffon's theses on the racist and environmentalist doctrines of 19<sup>th</sup>-century Europe. The dismissal of New World nature, which Buffon stigmatized as too young, pest-ridden and unproductive, followed on the heels of the doctrines justifying post-Industrial Revolution colonial imperialism. An environmental curse was cast upon Brazilian lands. In his *History of Civilization in England* (1900), Buckle claims that the tropical climate, given its natural bounty and magnificence, inhibits thrift and dispenses with effort, thus engendering a lazy people. Brazil was this author's example of choice. The search for a response to this "imprecation" inspired the national geographers of the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century to enumerate the topographical and climatic difficulties faced in Brazil. The exaltation of the bushlander as "strong above all else" was part of this retort.

The main and most venous intellectual execration came from Gobineau, who espoused racial "purity" as a potential precondition of a civilizing future. He takes the Roman Empire as an example, attributing its fall to the miscegenation that diluted the vigorous Etruscan blood as other races poured into triumphant Imperial Rome. Gobineau, who was a diplomat to Brazil, portrays the nation as unviable because miscegenation had engendered a race lacking in fiber and creativity and with no future. Brazilian intellectuals rallied against this prophecy in the closing quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Euclides da Cunha (1957) identified the historical formation of a race in the Brazilian interior which he made explicit

in his exaltation of the bushman over the Brazilian mestizo from the coast. Euclides' response would also include the Amazonian caboclo. As a former military engineer, he cites great engineering projects – the transposition of water from the São Francisco River to the semi-arid northeast and the Madeira-Marmoré railway linking the Amazon and Paraná-Paraguay basins - as examples of the potential of the Brazilian “races”.

Up until the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the Brazilian artistic and intellectual agenda came from Europe. D. João VI filtered cultural emanations from France. Despite Junot, he invited the French Mission to develop the Fine Arts in Brazil. Historically, the option for Latinity was a vaccine against the English presence, which had a monopoly on all commercial and financial practices, as well as the diffusion of certain sports. The Imperial elite strove to “live a la France”, pretending to ignore the servant and slave classes despite their proximity. Someone once summed it up by saying “they placed the piano in the living room and left the guitar in the kitchen”. The European paradigm and effort to dazzle Europe persisted up to the first decades of the Old Republic. Pereira Passos and Oswaldo Cruz' urbanistic and architectonic reform of Rio de Janeiro illustrates this. The main theater was a replica of L'Opera de Paris; the roofs of the first buildings along the main avenue were designed not to accumulate snowfall and the cultured rich gentlemen would wear tails and top-hats to the theater, accompanied by ladies draped in furs in the middle of the Rio summer. Nothing attests to this more clearly than the fact that Pereira Passos' determination to reproduce “impeccably Parisian” gardens led him to import sparrows that would become a tropical pest. At the same time as the Rio of the First Republic prided itself on having more public lampposts than the French capital, the city's poor were pushed out into the surrounding suburbs, hillsides and swamplands where the total lack of infrastructure would give rise to the Rio shantytowns. And all to make Rio the “Paris of the Tropics”.

It is easy to see that Brazilian high culture nourished no pretensions to originality nor attempted to deny its origins. Later, when the existence of a wider populous was finally recognized in Brazil, this would help in the integration and assimilation of the popular cultural melting pot. In parallel, the nation remained forever open to each and every new fad and influence from abroad. Brazilian culture always shirked the idea of exporting superficial exoticisms; in artistic production, though the form may have been local, it always tried to be in syntony with what was going on in the world at large.

The evolution and transformations in the Portuguese language illustrate the “openness” of Brazilian culture. During the colonial period, the language of Camões drowned out the *nheengatu*, and all that remains of the Indian tongue are a few lexical vestiges. The African nations also lost their languages, which were fractured by the slave master's habit of never buying too much stock from the same place of origin, making pidgin Portuguese the African's tongue for work and obedience. In his *Casa Grande & Senzala*, Gilberto Freyre (1961) pinpoints

the enormous lexical contribution the Africans made to Brazilian speech in terms of vocabulary and pronunciation, underscoring what he called the “dulcification” of Portuguese.

On the other hand, the enlightened elite always saw the Portuguese language as something of “a tomb of thought”, which accentuated their sense of linguistic isolation and greatly raised the stock of bilingualism and polyglotism. Though the elite knew the academic rigor of the language of Camões, they always eagerly practiced “isms” on the sly, as a demonstration of culture. Through the grapevine of inter-social communication, the vernacular speech infiltrated the pronunciation of the upper stratum, whilst itself incorporating the “isms” and ‘Portuguesifying’ the imported lexicon. During the Second World War, the North-American military bases would throw parties *for all*, a phrase which was corrupted into the present-day *forró*, a very popular brand of music and dance. Not to be left behind, today the Brazilian dispenses with the good old *imprimir* in favor of the neologism *printar*, feeling somehow more technologically-included in the change. Clearly, not cultivating the “purity” of the language also meant that neither was the folklore fossilized or preserved as tradition. The evolution of the Carnival in Rio de Janeiro is a perfect example of the dynamism of culture. From the earliest and crudest street party to the super-productions of the culture industry, with the Rio samba school processions, the carnival has blended everything from Portuguese, African and Venetian sources to characters from French novels and scenographic elements from all over, topped off with the use of creative technological adaptations and industrial raw materials. The same posture can be seen in other areas too. Another curious example - staying with Rio de Janeiro as the main focus of our reflection on Brazil - can be found in the gardens created by the genius Burle Marx, blending tropical plants from all continents. Again, it is pedagogical to juxtapose the geometric gardens and Francophile topiary with the Flamengo Landfill, the product of our national culture. Mixing agoutis and peacocks in Praça da República is the zoological antecedent of this Tropical botanical mix.

Culturally, Brazil was always open to cultural contributions and its creativity lies precisely in the mixing of styles. Without a note of arrogance, it embraces any creation as cast from the assimilated foreign template. Bossa Nova considers itself the offspring of jazz despite its clearly unique musicality. In gastronomy, Brazil works a kind of metamorphosis: the fast-food cheeseburger was morphed into the troublesome to make and cumbersome to eat X-Tudo (Cheese everything), which incorporates and transcends the import. The metamorphosed cannibalism of the Brazilian Indian inspired the notion of a cannibal Brazil that consumes other cultures only to produce its own civilization from the digested meal. The figure of Macunaíma, created as a Brazilian symbol by Mário de Andrade, sketches and designs our anthropophagic culture.

The cultural latencies accumulated over the 19<sup>th</sup> Century earned “manumission” with the First World War. The conflict put an end to the *belle*

*Époque* and to the myth of continuous and peaceful progress with its industrial-scale killing dramatically a la *Pax Victoriana*. The war freed Brazilian intellectuals from the European paradigm and undermined the civilizing contribution of the Old Continent. The Brazilian cultural elite turned its attention to the New World. One contingent of a republican persuasion looked to the United States for its paradigm and reference. It must be recognized that our alliance with Latin America has been clear ever since the approach taken by Brazilian diplomacy at the Hague Convention. The Monroe Doctrine was not read with gullible eyes by Brazilian diplomats. The United States emanated no aura of benevolence, as Brazil had learned well from the way it had swallowed whole Latin-American territories that ought to belong to Mexico. Its interventions in Central America were well known and its appropriation of the Spanish Antilles caused uproar.

Having hitherto lived by French standards, our moneyed elite now turned its aspirations to the American way of life. Our traditional cultural openness rapidly took to transplanting Saxon contributions.

The major cultural novelty in Post-World War One Brazil was not the shift toward the United States, but a certain introspection of research, reading, analysis and greater value placed on the people, its culture, its myths and ways of life. The intensity of this inward gaze would rescue the specificity of the Minas Baroque from the colonial past. Lúcio Costa, an architect from the group that pioneered the study of Ouro Preto, was to become the designer of Brasília, perhaps the most ambitious endeavor of the so-called Athenian School. The cruciform layout was redolent of an airplane of progress that had landed in the empty scrubland. This architect was also the co-author of the Capanema palace in Rio de Janeiro, recognized the world over as a vanguard work of modernism. The syncretism of the building can be seen in the gigantic tile panel, a throwback to our Lusitanian past.

In terms of national construction, the turnkey was the discovery of the people. On one side, a pessimistic perspective: Capistrano de Abreu likened Brazil to the jabiru stork, a large, strong bird that seems to be forever asleep. Monteiro Lobato (1980) created the popular stigma of the Brazilian in the form of Jeca Tatu, a character stripped down to the bare minimum and practically inactive. Paulo Prado, in his essays, identified sadness as a characteristic of the Brazilian ethos. These and other assessments have the obvious merit of stirring up controversy. Jeca Tatu stressed the importance of public health and rallied society to epidemiological combat. Indeed, Lobato uses the public health service to redeem Jeca Tatu, turning him into a modern farmer. From Paulo Prado come various suggestions, whether to Mário de Andrade or Sérgio Buarque de Holanda, none of which can be classified as defeatist. The new inward gaze inspired an explosion of regional literary production and an effort to typify and illustrate the variety of popular and regional Brazilian types. This effort magnified the urban grass-roots and it would be the Rio *carioca* – as the wise guy scoundrel – and the São Paulo *paulistano* – as laborer and city-dweller – that would come to

the fore in this new pantheon. On the rural front, it is the bushman and redneck who emerge as the producers of linguistic and musical culture. Meanwhile, the peculiarities of national political behavior will be put down to the wisdom typical of the folk from Minas Gerais.

To the vision of the landscape is added one of the people, from which the broad strokes of the Brazil-nation will be etched out over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Imperial Brazilian society, in which wealth was measured by number of slaves, had not given the people even the slightest thought. The Republican rhetoric prior to the First World War had not resulted in a single public policy of any social content, unless you count Obligatory Military Service as a citizen-forming policy. The self-styled democracy minimized the voting power of the people by excluding the illiterate and arming a system that readily enabled those in control to defraud the electoral process. By intellectual option Brazil had declared itself mestizo. In the wake of its disillusionment with European civilization, it was the intellectual gaze that picked out and exalted the adaptability, non-prejudice, syncretism and creativity of the Brazilian people. Hence it proudly embraced and valued the African contribution, extolled supra-Catholic forms of religious expression and encouraged a musicality that mixed melodies and rhythms from the most varied origins. It assumed the Azorean presence up in Maranhão and down on the Santa Catarina coast; lauded the contributions of the Germans, Italians, Slavs, Japanese, Jewish and Syrian-Lebanese. This acknowledgement accelerated integration and exchange. The Centre of Gaucho Traditions set up by small farmers in the region of former Italian and German colonies serves as an example.

At the risk of over-simplification, one could say that the Brazilian always relativizes the official history, so discreet is its presence in the Brazilian image repertoire. On the other hand, the popular archetypes are always there: the jangada fisherman, the bushman, the caboclo, the gaucho, the old Negro, the highway bandit, the mulatta, the Girl from Ipanema, the charming rogue, etc. In terms of representation, the Italian descendent can be anyone from the southern European peasant working the coffee plantation to the small wine grower in the valleys of Rio Grande do Sul; the Syrian-Lebanese can take the guise of the “Turk” from the countryside; the Japanese becomes the “japa”; the Portuguese the “portuga”, and so on. These figures are known and nurtured, especially the heroes and the official historical figures. The passion for football, the sport that socializes Brazilian childhood, creates national heroes; the star player reaps unlimited warmth and admiration beyond that reserved for even the founding fathers of the nation.

Analyzing Brazilian popular culture it becomes apparent that there is a capacity to incorporate without resistance but a reluctance to discard. The defining characteristic of this culture is the ease with which it incorporates without rejecting the past. As the Brazilian historical process did not wholly integrate the majority of the Brazilian people into economic modernity and

fully-fledged citizenship, it is an act of existential wisdom to absorb novelty whilst holding on to the past one knows or possesses.

At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century new protagonists arrived on the political scene. As the lights went out on the Empire, the military wing of the bureaucracy emerged as the new demiurge of the State. The establishment developed a concept of nation and assumed a critical stance toward the Imperial elites. This posture first develops during the Paraguay War, when members of the elite called up as volunteers refused to fight and manumitted slaves had to be sent in their stead. Thus begins a discourse on the excellence of the military class in the face of a civic lack on the part of the civilian elite.

The military adhered to positivism. They interpreted the Republic as the apex of social engineering and adopted the US Federalist and Presidential model as their reference. On one level they opted for a potentially strong central power and unmistakable hierarchical principle, while on another they left the hegemony of the peripheral oligarchies intact. From their positivism they derived the motto “Order and Progress”, emphasized social control and exalted the future yet to be constructed. In terms of rhetoric, they spoke of the people and the notion of the common will. There was a democracy with restrictions, as political disputes were seen as a prelude to anarchy. They proposed Obligatory Military Service as the way of shaping citizens. The people had not been a protagonist in the republican founding, though popular factions began to emerge “in and of themselves” from the pores of the Old Republic. Wage-earning rail workers, textile machinists, printers, and so on, adhered to anarcho-unionist theses and organized the first strikes. Trade unions and mutual assistance networks began to appear. 1922 sees the foundation of the Brazilian Communist Party.

One particularly telling episode illustrating the national characteristic of surpassing and erasing the past was the tremendous success of Afonso Celso’s *Porque me ufano de ser brasileiro* (Why I am proud to be Brazilian) in 1943. The author rather ingenuously assembled a manual of the nation’s qualities which was, in fact, a recuperation of the feats of the monarchy. The sheer number of copies sold of successive editions pulls against the Republican discourse of execrating the past.

Non-Portuguese immigrants had to learn the language and the customs of the country and their memoirs clearly relate the lacunas and insufficiencies of Brazilian organization. They knew they had come to stay and integrate dynamically into the nation’s economy and political society. The cordiality of the Brazilian reception, which always took as natural the newcomer’s desire to enter the jobs market and become landowners and proprietors, served to dissolve segregationist tendencies. The sushi we find alongside fava beans and barbeque in self-service restaurants testifies to the assimilation of the grandchildren of the Japanese immigrants. Naturally, the notion of the Brazilian nation as the new country in need of fine-tuning and adjustment inspired the newly-settled immigrant to political participation and militancy.



The Old Republic was practically deaf to the voice of these new protagonists; it sought to recycle history, but without integrating the people as one of its agents. The total absence of proposals for the former slave is symptomatic; there was no universal free public schooling, no facilitated access to land and no compensation mechanism. Social order was maintained through the installation of the contravention against vagrancy, by which the police could arrest anyone suspected of being a vagrant. This elliptical method of blocking the freedom to come and go as one pleased kept its hold over Brazilian life until 1988.

Photo: Monteiro Lobato's family collection (SP)



*Monteiro Lobato in the early 1940s*

For the illiterate former slave there were two alternatives: descend into urban poverty in search of some means of survival or join the ranks of the rural poor, whether in a settlement or as a shifting cultivator on the agricultural frontier.

While the Imperial immigrant policy had been geared toward the rural smallholder, an alternative that was not extended to the ex-slave, under the Republic, the policy of choice was to man the coffee plantations with wage-earning European and Asian manpower, once again excluding the freed slave.

The Old Republic consolidated border agreements. Prior to 1912, Republican diplomacy used negotiation and arbitration to establish borders that would enable Brazil, with Rui Barbosa and Rio Branco, to exalt multilateralism

and equal rights among peoples before The Hague. The Brazilian nation could present itself as a paradigm of international good sense and independence from the major powers. The country's leadership of the Latin-American nations at the Peace Conference was a defining moment for its image of nationality. Brazilian self-esteem could celebrate the achievements of Santos Dumont. The country's effort to present itself as an integral nation on the world stage was crystal clear.

During the Empire, Brazil formed in subordination to England, which had been favored with special customs duty from the very beginning and with diplomatic immunity for all English residents. Brazil had to assume Portugal's old debt to England as its own. English pressure against the slave trade was a flashpoint of tension that only ebbed with the interruption of 1852. From the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century the coffee economy was avid for the technological innovations of steam power. The railroad, steamboat ports and telegraph were all opened to foreign investment, mostly British. The same went for infrastructural improvements. Imperial finances always led back to the London exchange. When Mauá Bank went bust, the influx of British banks intensified. None of this met with Brazilian protest.

With the proclamation of the Republic, the idea of progress as a national goal concretized with Rui Barbosa's Hamiltonian attempt to foster industrial development. It was the embryo of an economic nationalism swiftly snuffed out by the agro-export elite, which branded the industrialization project speculative and financially irresponsible. For those who dreamt of industrial progress, the primary export elites were acting in collusion with the hegemonic powers, which had no wish to see the nation develop industrially. Attracted by the prospect of professionalization, the armed forces were drawn to the notion of the nation's industrialization as a condition of defense – a position strengthened by the First World War. The theme of metallurgical self-sufficiency as a watershed advocated that rather than export iron ore, Brazil should produce steel itself as part of its civilizing progress.

Under this first version, the ideal of progress gave rise to an economic nationalism that, as a doctrine, prioritized industrial and urban development. From the very beginning it was argued that the powers had either vetoed or were indifferent to the dream of industrial development. In short, this nationalism was not against the foreign branch, it deplored its absence and drew upon the action of the State to fill the void, nurturing the national company as an alternative. The idea of a national project that followed this directive demanded the reinforcement of the central power of the State as the draftsman of the future and facilitator of action, and, if necessary, as the substitute for timid private initiative.

The global crisis of 1929 shook up the hegemony of the primary exporter and opened space for a variety of interests to converge upon the proposal of industrial and urban development. The continued exchange rate difficulties gave rise to a second nationalist version, which accused the foreign branches of debilitating Brazil's external situation through the remittance of profits and

dividends while also blaming a lack of exporter effort and technological and scientific research in Brazil. This version prevailed in the form of the Brazilian oil policy and provided the groundwork for a significant national mobilization in favor of state monopoly of petroleum and its derivatives. This nationalism was not against foreign presence, but it clearly strengthened the role of the State as an alternative and prime driver of national development.

The national developmentist project would preside over fifty years of Brazilian development. It was announced as the transformer of the national productive base and as the demiurge of new social agents – companies and workers – that, in cooperation, would lead the nation toward its destiny. The fields, which had lagged behind, would be modernized by this dynamic nucleus.

For the rest of the century, the Brazil-nation, as an ideological component of nationality, was viewed as a country with a dubious past and array of serious present problems, but with an indubitably bright future. A soft national pride, kept in check by self-critical vision, accompanied this process throughout.

The best illustration of this succession is the changing views of Rio de Janeiro. In the Old Republic, there was the explicit pretension of turning the city into the “Paris of the Tropics”, in syntony with the exaltation of the elite. In the lay Republic, which strove to extol the people, the samba school was summoned to the main avenue during Carnival; Cristo Redemptor towered seven-hundred meters above the city, arms outspread; Copacabana beach became the “Princess of the Sea”; Maracanã Stadium affirmed our commitment to football, the great Brazilian passion. Rio became the trademark of Brazilian nationality. Paris was forgotten.

São Paulo, the dynamic nucleus of industrialization, came to be viewed as “the engine room of Brazil” while Rio remained the “spot-lit stage” of nationality. With its status as national trademark, it could accept the economic centrality of São Paulo; never pitting the “Fico” (Stay put) against the “Grito de Ipiranga” (The Cry of Ipiranga – “Independence or Death”) and admitting the emergence of Our Lady of Aparecida, the patron saint of Brazil, from the swell of a São Paulo river. As a stroke of national irony, Brazil is dubbed “The land of Carnival”, an updated and good-humored replica of its old definition as a dessert exporter – the land of coffee and sugar.

## Bibliography

- BUCKLE, H. T. *Historia da civilização na Inglaterra*. São Paulo: Casa Eclética, 1900.
- CELSO, A. *Porque me ufano do meu país*. 12.ed. Rio de Janeiro: F. Briguiet, 1943.
- CUNHA, E. da. *Os sertões*. Rio de Janeiro: Francisco Alves, 1957.
- DIAS, G. *Poesia completa e prosa escolhida*. Rio de Janeiro: José Aguilar, 1959.
- FREYRE, G. *Casa grande & senzala*. Rio de Janeiro: José Olympio, 1961.
- LOBATO, M. *Urupês*. São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1980.

*ABSTRACT* - This essay aims to analyze both Nation and Nationalism concepts according to the viewpoint of Brazilian experience, from colonial roots to our times, from national state birth to the settlement of the Nation and national self-state. The main historical landmarks happen with few preliminary traumas and are “conservative-zed”. Productive forces develop dynamically; demographic expansion and territory occupation continue as society changes and new groups emerge; however, large population segments keep excluded from the welfare economic development should provide. Natives’ self-perception is rather cyclothymical. Both popular and elites culture provide the keys to understand the mutations of national thinking about Brazil, as well as many other features that develop from those two concepts.

*KEYWORDS* - Brazil, Nationalism, Economy, History, Culture.

*Carlos Lessa* is a doctor of economics, professor at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ) and the author of various books. He was decorated with the Cross of the Order for National Scientific Merit in 2004. @ - carlos-lessa@oi.com.br

Translated by Anthony Doyle. The original in Portuguese is available at [http://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?script=sci\\_issuetoc&pid=0103-401420080001&lng=pt&nrm=iso](http://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?script=sci_issuetoc&pid=0103-401420080001&lng=pt&nrm=iso).

Received on 2.11.2008 and accepted on 2.19.2008.