



EDITORIAL NOTE

The bicentennial of the independence of Brazil - what now?

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There are commemorative dates that come wrapped in expectations, inviting reflections and discussions about the past, present, and future of a country. This is definitely the case for the 200th anniversary of the independence of the fifth largest country in the world, which officially separated from Portugal on September 7, 1822. But little was announced from the present federal government about celebrations. The most important events seem to be the arrival of the heart of D. Pedro I (1798-1834) and the reopening of the Ipiranga Museum in São Paulo. The federal government also considered transferring the traditional military parade from Avenida Presidente Vargas, in downtown Rio de Janeiro, to the Copacabana waterfront. Regarding this latest “innovation”, the benefits of having tanks and troops marching through the streets of perhaps Brazil’s best-known postcard are questionable, at best. There is a general expectation of the outcome of this 7th of September which, by the way, will take place in the middle of a campaign in an election year.

The arrival of the heart of the first Brazilian emperor is causing some controversy as there is no clear purpose for this action. For almost 188 years, the heart of D. Pedro I, who declared the country’s independence, has been guarded by the religious entity Irmandade de Nossa Senhora da Lapa, in Porto, at the emperor’s own request, who in Portugal is also known as D. Pedro IV. The Brazilian government asked to borrow this very

delicate relic, preserved in a formalin solution, to which Porto officials agreed, but disagreement to this initiative is still popping up everywhere (e.g., G1 2022), on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean. A similar action was carried out for the 150th anniversary of Brazil’s independence, when the bony remains of Dom Pedro I were requested by the military government of that time. Received with state honors, after traveling to various places in the country, the emperor was laid to rest in the Monument to the Independence of Brazil in São Paulo. Also known as the Ipiranga Monument, the remains of his wives, Maria Leopoldina (1797-1826) and Maria Amelia of Leuchtenberg (1812-1873), are also buried there. It should be noted that D. Pedro I declared in his will that he wanted his body (but not his heart) to be returned to the colony he freed, what can be seen as a justification of this action five decades ago. According to the information available in the news, the heart will be returned to Portugal the day after the commemoration of the bicentennial of independence and Brazil will cover all the costs (e.g., G1 2022).

On the other hand, the reopening of the Museu do Ipiranga is very welcome and raises expectations from the public. Inaugurated on September 7th, 1895, this museum is linked to the University of São Paulo (USP) since 1963. Being one of the most important symbols of Brazilian independence, it was closed in 2013 due to the precariousness of its facilities. The Museu do Ipiranga houses one of the most

precious paintings of the country. Entitled *Independence or Death*, it was created by the artist Pedro Américo (1843-1905) in 1888 (the year of the abolition of slavery in Brazil). The efforts of the government of São Paulo with the private sector enabled the renewal of this institution and will undoubtedly be one of the highlights of the independence bicentennial commemoration.

More on museums, the Museu Nacional/UFRJ, victim of a major fire in 2018 (e.g., Zamudio et al. 2018) that ironically happened in the exact year it had celebrated its bicentennial, announced that the restoration of the historic facade will be concluded for the commemorations (e.g., Bergamo 2022). As the former residence of the Portuguese Royal Family and, later, the Emperors of Brazil, this building is closely linked to Brazilian history, and has always been considered a site for natural sciences and anthropology (e.g., Dantas 2008). As has been pointed out before, the reconstruction of the Museu Nacional/UFRJ is very important for Rio de Janeiro and for the country (e.g., Kellner 2019), and any development of this project is also very welcome, particularly during this year (see below).

Coming back to the independence celebrations, the colony's path to the free state was quite a long and complex one - as these issues usually are. Some attribute the arrival of the King of Portugal and the Portuguese Royal Court as the starting point of this process (e.g., Baeza 2008). After the Napoleonic wars, unrest in Portugal led King D. João VI (1767-1826) to return to Portugal against his will, leaving his son, D. Pedro, to rule the colony. On September 2nd, 1822, Maria Leopoldina, who was directing state affairs while her husband was away on a trip to São Paulo, held a council meeting at the São Cristóvão palace (since 1892 the headquarters of the Museu Nacional/UFRJ), where the definitive independence of Brazil was put under discussion

(e.g., Lustosa 2006). As a result of the meeting, letters and documents were sent to D. Pedro and culminated in the declaration of independence on September 7th. The meeting in the palace led by the future empress was conceived by the artist Georgina Albuquerque (1885-1962) in the painting *Session of the Council of State*, created in 1922, one century after it had taken place.

Still regarding the historical part, it is interesting to point out a very unusual sequence of events involving the situation of colonizer and colony. D. Pedro, son of the King of Portugal (D. João VI), proclaimed the independence of Brazil and, with the death of his father, returned to Europe, becoming D. Pedro IV. In other words: the person who freed the colony is accepted back to rule the colonizing country. Then, that same person abdicates the Portuguese crown in favor of his eldest daughter, D. Maria da Glória (1819-1853), born in Brazil, who ended up reigning in Portugal. That is: a native of the former colony becomes the queen of the colonizing country. This very intricate and interesting history once again demonstrates the strong ties between Portugal and Brazil.

The aftermath of the country's independence is controversial. Contrary to what is generally thought, there were several conflicts in the colony, not all in favor of the liberation from Portugal. In addition, several portions of the population mainly formed by Africans and originary people of the former colony, continued to be enslaved, and did not benefit from the emancipation (e.g., Neves 2020). It should be noted that Brazil was one of the last nations to abolish slavery, which took place only almost seven decades after the country's independence.

The surprising lack of preparation for the commemoration of the bicentennial of Brazil's independence might be tentatively explained by several factors, including COVID 19, which took the world by surprise (e.g., Martelli Júnior et al. 2020). Officially considered a pandemic by the

World Health Organization in March 2020, it is still a matter of great concern and focus of attention for scientists, judging from the large production of publications (e.g., Oliveira et al. 2021), which has been reduced but is not expected to cease soon.

Some might also argue that the war caused by Russia's invasion of Ukraine contributed to overshadowing this significant date, but this is not very convincing as the war broke out in February 2022 and preparations for the bicentennial of the independence of Brazil should already have started long before that.

In any case, there seems to be little to celebrate, especially for the scientific community that has been negatively impacted by the constant reduction in funding, particularly in the last years (e.g., Oliveira et al. 2020). This delicate situation seems to have no end, seriously affecting the development of science in the country, even periodicals (e.g., Kellner 2021). Despite several attempts to draw attention to the fact that without science there is no future for any country, there was no success in convincing decision-makers, even on this important date for the commemoration of the bicentennial of independence. The general feeling is that another important opportunity has been lost to reflect on the past and discuss the present in order to support a more prosperous future.

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