

## A Mestizo and Tropical Country: The Creation of the Official Image of Independent Brazil

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In 1838, sixteen years after the political independence of Brazil, a new institution was created – the IHGB (Brazilian Historical and Geographic Institute) – dedicated to the drafting of a new historical agenda, one more clearly identified with the young country now emancipated from its former Portuguese metropolis. Even more interesting was its first open competition, organized in 1844, whose title, ‘How to write the History of Brazil’, already revealed the institution’s intentions. First prize went to the acclaimed German scientist Karl von Martius, who advocated the idea that the country should define itself through its unrivalled mix of peoples and colours: ‘The focal point for the historian ought to be to show how, in the development of Brazil, established conditions are to be found for the perfecting of the three human races, placed here side by side in a manner hitherto unknown’. Drawing upon the metaphor of the Portuguese heritage as a powerful river that should ‘absorb the streams of the races India and Ethiopica’, he envisaged the emergence of a Brazil characterized by its unique miscegenation. It is no accident that the then recently installed Brazilian monarchy invested so much in a tropical symbology that mixed the traditional elements of European monarchies with some indigenous peoples and a few Blacks, and included a lot of fruit. Though it was complicated to highlight the Black participation because of the memory of slavery, this did not prevent the royalty from painting a picture of a country characterized by its own distinct racial colouration.

And thus was provided a model through which to think ‘and invent’ a local history, one formed from the view of the foreigner and the good old rigmarole of the three races. The Empire was prodigious in the production of a series of official images linking the State with representations of a miscegenated nation. From the first engraving produced by the independent country – the ‘Stage Curtain’, painted by the French Neo-Classic artist Debret in 1822 – up to the paintings celebrating abolition in 1888, the Empire took great care to produce a well-woven representation. There are hundreds of images, texts, coins, coats of arms, etc., that picture the country from the standpoint of miscegenation as much as they expose a hierarchy: in a nation where 90 per cent of the population were African slaves, the selected national representation emphasized nature and the indigenous peoples.

In effect, the liberation movements in America closely overlapped with the nationalist era in Europe, with which they maintained a certain dialogue. However, as Benedict Anderson (1991) shows in the Latin American case, there was not, first and foremost, a distinguishing language (as the colonies spoke the same language as the metropolises) and, moreover, the movements were led by the elites rather than by groups from the middle-class. With so many specificities, what we must see in the Latin American case is an alternative model. The question is, in Michiel

Baud's words, 'to what extent can we see specific forms of nation-building in Latin America and, thus, a different social history of Latin American societies' (2005, 486).

The Brazilian example is even more paradoxical. In this case, instead of a republic, what took hold was a European monarchy couched in a 'longstanding' tradition. It is worthwhile insisting on the manner, inspired, once more, in Anderson, in which a community was imagined and, once imaged, modelled, adapted and transformed. New vocabularies were created, new ways of thinking of the land in parental terms (motherland, patria) and how everything – from the 'discovery' through independence and up to miscegenation – was transformed into something 'natural'. Indeed, this type of nationalism could be considered a 'cultural artefact', historically created in the sense of guaranteeing a legitimacy founded in a profoundly emotional and, at times, sentimental undertaking. In this, we are not all that far from the idea of 'imagined communities', as in Brazil too there was an attempt to confer antiquity upon a recent process, universality upon localized experience and an almost religious aspect upon an evidently political instrumentality.

For this reason, what was created was an imagined political community (more than simply invented, as the term suggests consciousness and exteriority), founded upon certain cultural roots that were, at this time, selected and delimited. In this manner, the recent past became something 'memorable', just as the premeditated was given an air of continuity. In this sense there was nothing better than allying a religious community with a distant royalty, one that could bestow antiquity upon what was entirely recent and precisely dated. Sacral language, paintings that allied the past with the present, mythic narratives, a new agenda of facts and events – all this conferred legitimacy upon the New State that established itself in 1822. There was a juxtaposition of cosmic elements, just as there was a new visuality that would convince the predominantly illiterate population of the new reality. On the other hand, orchestrated by the State, the official discourse presented an ontological (and supposedly true) reality with the monarchy at its core and with a new concept of history and temporality to guide it. In parallel with all the other emancipative and nationalist movements erupting in this context, what emerged was a whole new cosmology.

The objective of this text is, therefore, to reflect upon how Brazil, in its initial official images, was characterized by its singularity: a mestizo and tropical monarchy. This essay will make use of varied and original iconographic sources and texts emblematic of the Brazilian imperial period from 1822 to 1889.

### **The court theatre**

In 1822, a new project was begun in Brazil that ran entirely counter to the example set by the other American republics that had formed within the same context. This conservative project sought to guarantee the continuance of the slavery system and the *status quo* through the imposition of the symbolic figure of the king as the highest representative of the State. Thus, in the midst of a context coloured by the Monroe doctrine, a monarchy emerged that was surrounded by republics on all sides. It was precisely for this reason that it was necessary to make an outward show of emancipation both within the country and abroad. Indeed, internally it was

necessary to secure the royal project across the length and breadth of this immense country, which, especially when compared with the diminutive profile of the new Latin American republics, seemed more like a continent than a nation. On the other hand, given the continent's recent republican tradition, the monarchy was looked upon with distrust.

Perhaps this was why the State invested so heavily in ritual and in a form of court theatre, the 'first act' of which was to stage the novelty of the tropics and the different races that comprised them. After all, how does one explain a monarchy managing to linger for around seventy years in the middle of this American context? How can one understand a Bragança royalty, or Bourbon and Hapsburg royal houses for that matter, managing to take root in a tropical environment surrounded by Indians, Blacks and Mestizos? Far from the luxurious European capitals, the imperial Brazilian capital of Rio de Janeiro in 1838 possessed 37,000 slaves for its 97,000 inhabitants, while by 1849, with the population now standing at 206,000 people, the number of captives had risen to 79,000. 75 per cent of these slaves were, on average, African, a fact that gives some indication of the importance of the coloured population in Rio de Janeiro at that time. And yet it was the indigenous groups, far removed from the Court and systematically decimated, which were transformed into a symbol of the monarchy. Excluded from reality, they came to life in their representation – in the paintings and allegories, in the sculptures and noble titles.

In this environment, the Brazilian Court and its palaces represented islands with European pretensions surrounded by predominantly African seas on all sides. First-hand accounts from the time relate how the streets thronged with Blacks – whether slaves or freemen – engaged in greatly varied occupations and indelibly marking their surroundings with their own particular gestures, colours and expressions. And yet the picture was altogether different in the official symbology, where the Indian emerged as the highlight against the backdrop of the South American tropics, with the Black portrayed for a long time as a 'submissive object'.

To raise a few isolated elements: what exactly does it mean to invent a royal court on South American territory and formulate its rules according to the most faithful tradition of medieval Europe, but adopt indigenous names and titles? How does one explain a prince decked out in all the majestic garb of the finest courts, but topped off with a shoulder shawl of toucan feathers in the style of an Indian chief, worn over a cloak decorated with sprigs of coffee and tobacco? And what can be said about the Santa Cruz farm, taken from the Jesuits upon their expulsion and protected by the Portuguese monarchs who resided there, which boasted an inordinate number of slaves specialized in liturgical singing? How can one understand a monarch who sat before the Brazilian stands at the Universal Expositions – veritable parties for the exhibition of the technological and industrial feats of budding capitalist nations – exhibiting his own crown alongside indigenous products and popular artistic production?

On the other hand, if we are to believe the version that declares that the term 'Empire' was to be used not only as a reference to territorial expansion, or as a homage from Dom Pedro I to Napoleon – who, according to Dom Pedro's biographers, was his major influence – but also as an allusion to the Emperor's part in the Feast of the Divine, we would find ourselves before a regime that had engaged in

dialogue with the local cultures from its very foundation, thus creating new meanings for longstanding traditions. In such a place, miscegenation could have transformed into an instrument sufficiently powerful to show the particularity and identity of the new monarchy establishing itself therein.

These themes, individually and taken together, speak of a ‘tropical monarchy’ that was as alien to the context of the Americas as it was to the courts of Europe. The Brazilian monarchy had to face other difficulties in its quest for recognition: there was a boycott by the other American nations, and at the same time communications with Europe were strained (caused by distrust of the Imperial state’s continued and close relations with Africa and the slave trade).

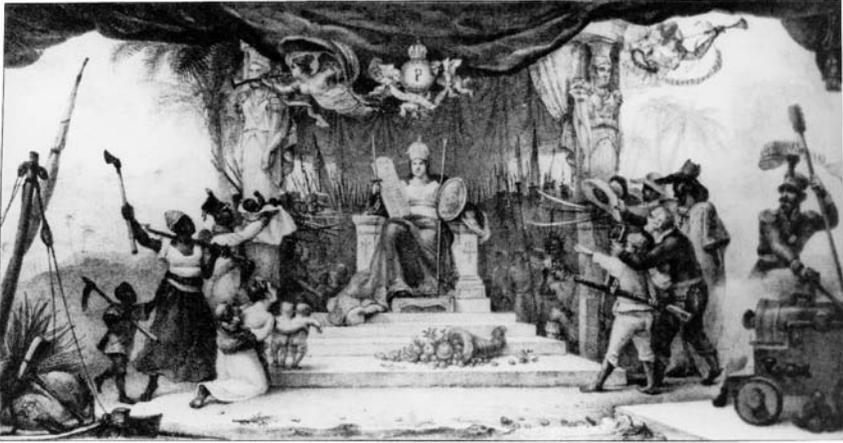
Even after recognition from the English and the Portuguese, there still seemed to be a need to distance the Brazilian monarchy from the idea of the anarchy that was so commonly associated with the American republics, and from the ‘trading of souls’ and the persistent and widespread slavery system upon which the local economies and societies were based. It was for this reason that from the very beginning a great deal was invested in a representation that would be at once distinct and yet common to this remote and distant empire. It was common insofar as it consistently sought to assert the European origins of this monarchy – which could be traced back not only to the Bragança, but to the Bourbons and Hapsburgs as well – and the civilizing character of the Empire, so accustomed as it was to new technologies and ideas of progress. Nevertheless, it was also a whole new social and geographic reality separated by the Atlantic. An old destination of intrepid voyagers, Brazil had long been known as a land of great flora – with its Eden-like vegetation – but also as the country of extreme miscegenation, with its Indians and slavery. There was, therefore, no way to ignore the tropical and racially mixed facets of the fledgling monarchy.

### **The ‘Pano de Boca’ (stage background): a grand inauguration**

A stage background was the reason for the choice of the French artist Jean Baptiste Debret to produce the Empire’s first official iconography. Debret arrived in Brazil in 1816 along with a French mission whose objective was to bring neoclassical art to the tropics. If the mission’s main purpose at first was to establish a miniature academy in the Portuguese colony, reality soon showed its role to have much more to do with the production of the setting the new monarchy wished to assemble.

As it had been with D. João, so would it continue to be with his son, Dom Pedro I, who directly commissioned Debret to produce a large work representing the capital importance of the act of coronation.

Indeed, Debret produced an allegory in 1822 that was to serve as the theatre stage background for a play celebrating the coronation of D. Pedro I as the first Emperor of Brazil. Debret, a neo-classicist and direct disciple of David, perhaps in virtue of the heightened social sentiment of his school, found it difficult to establish a dialogue with a context so different to his revolutionary France. Praise of virtue ought to materialize in an ideal form and through the characterization of neoclassical heroism, and yet, faced with the daily reality of slavery and of a relocated court, it seemed difficult to translate these formal idealisms into a reality so



**Figure 1.** Jean Baptiste Debret, 'Pano de boca' (Stage Background) in *Viagem pitoresca e histórica ao Brasil* (1822)

entirely alien to their presuppositions. Nevertheless, the allegory must have pleased its patron, as in it we see the Brazilian Empire not only in all its splendour, but in all its originality as well. According to Debret, the representation had to show '... the general loyalty of the Brazilian population to the Imperial government, seated upon a throne covered with a rich tapestry drawn above it across the tops of palm trees' (1823/1978:326).

In fact, the painting synthesized a number of disparate elements of the new nationality: the inauguration of a more or less formalized representation of a monarchy that had installed itself in South America and which sought to be translated into tropical elements and the racial mix of its population. If the image was not clear enough in itself, then Debret's description of it filled in the blanks. When both are taken together we can see the manner in which the 'pano de boca' condenses into one single scene the fundamental elements of the new identity. The throne, positioned exactly at the centre of the scene, ensures that the eye is drawn toward the figure of the Emperor – with the letter 'P' and the crown just above his head –, here allegorically modelled on the figure of a woman holding aloft the Constitution, the greatest symbol of occidental progress.

The canvas was conceived around the idea of a new civilization being formed at that very time in the tropics. A cluster of Blacks in a 'posture indicating loyalty' shares the scene with a pale-skinned Indian woman carrying 'earth-coloured' children. There are more Indians in the background, bows and arrows in hand, who declare their loyalty, while in and through the image the Caboclos, representing the mixed people of the country, reclaim 'the level of civilization they can reach'. The cornucopia positioned at the centre of the scene is of all tropical fruit, as are the palm-trees and the vegetation that complete this decidedly exotic painting. Finally, waves from the sea lap against the throne, which represents the Atlantic that both separates them from civilization and unites them with it. In short, coming from an artist who had taken such care in creating a series of symbols for this unique court – including portraits, uniforms and decorations – the 'pano de boca' comes across

as the grand icon of a State created under the sign of distinction.

Setting the new Brazilian monarchy apart from its Portuguese origins, these new symbols of the land acquire an altogether inaugural character, as if all history had begun with the act that established the independent nation. United and bonded by royalty, represented here in the form of a woman seated upon the throne with the text of law in hand, a miscegenated nation arms itself to defend a constitutional monarchy legitimised by the adhesion of 'its people'. Nevertheless, despite all the exuberance of the details, there is an unresolved rigidity in Debret's picture: it was impossible to forget the existence of slavery, which was actually what made this Brazilian monarchy so unique. Therein lay the great contradiction of the Empire, one that Debret's brushstrokes could not dispel. How, after all, was one to affirm an image of civilization and constitutionality for a monarchy established in a slave-based society?

### **The Indian as the favourite symbol**

And so a 'very special' mixture was rendered official. In a slave-based country like nineteenth-century Brazil, only an idealized Indian would do as the symbol of the young nation. At the same time, it must be said that such a representation was by no means new, as the figure of the Indian had been associated with the country since its very first representations. Whether on maps, canvases, medals or seals, it was always the image of a tropical and racially mixed (white and Indian) nation that prevailed. On the other hand, even if the quills of the chroniclers and illustrators accentuated the Eden-like aspect of Brazil from a natural perspective, a shadow of suspicion always hung over its people: 'men without faith, without law, without king', Gandavo was to declare, summarising his reactions to the polygamy, nudity and, above all, to the cannibalism.

As such, one could say that the Empire 'invented' more than just Indianism. If such images were indeed manipulated by a political elite, they were far from arbitrary. Through the centuries, what was being affirmed here was a representation that united nature and the native, the landscape and man.

It is precisely in this context that the activities of the IHGB (Brazilian Historical and Geographic Institute) come to the fore, as the institute was to become the principal source of official images of the State from 1850 onwards. It was there, at the IHGB, that one could find the historians who would create a new agenda of facts and events, where one could find the artists who would turn the details of the chroniclers into canvases and the writers who would serve as vehicles for this type of representation. From the 1840s on, it was this very enclosure that would come to house the Brazilian romantics, especially after the monarch, D. Pedro II, had become such an assiduous frequenter of the establishment and encourager of its work. From that time on, the IHGB confirmed itself as a centre of active studies, favouring literary research, stimulating intellectual life and serving as a link between the intellectuals and the official organs. Largely made up of the 'good elite' of the Court and some literary individuals who would meet on Sundays to discuss pre-selected themes, the IHGB sought to reclaim the national history, remoulding it in accordance with a model replete with outstanding figures and important person-



**Figure 2.** A representation of Brazil from the sixteenth century

ages to be exalted as national heroes. The goal of this establishment was to found a national historiography for this young country, or, in the words of Januário da Cunha Barboza (Rev. do IHGB, 1839), to *'no longer leave the task of writing our history up to the speculative genius of foreigners....'*

If the State provided 75 per cent of the institution's funding from the very beginning, from 1840 on Dom Pedro II would go so far as to frequent its meetings with rigorous regularity and even have its headquarters relocated to the Imperial Court. After all, this was an ambitious project that would not only strengthen the Monarchy and the State, but national unification itself, something which would also necessarily be cultural unification.

There was no shortage of models, but there would be originality in the copy. Little by little romanticism emerged as the path most favourable to the self-expression of the recently formed nation, as it provided concepts and models that would enable the State to affirm its uniqueness, and thus also its identity, in contrast with the colonial capital more closely identified with classical tradition.

The literary project had already taken shape by 1826, when Ferdinand Denis and Almeida Garret called attention to the fact that Brazilians ought to concentrate on describing the country's nature and customs, placing particular emphasis on the Indian, which Denis considered the land's 'most primitive and most authentic inhabitant'.

But it was only later that romanticism associated itself with a project of clearly nationalist character. Towards the end of the 1850s a set of writers emerged that

included Gonçalves Magalhães, Manuel de Araujo Porto Alegre, Joaquim Norberto de Sousa e Silva, Joaquim Manuel de Macedo,<sup>1</sup> Gonçalves Dias (critically considered the only writer of this generation of any genuine worth), and Francisco Adolfo de Varnhagem (1816-1878), one of the founders of Brazilian historiography.<sup>2</sup> It was these writers who came to frequent the IHGB from 1840 onwards, using its magazine first published in 1839 as the preferred vehicle for their ideas. It must also be said that the official and respectable character of this establishment, especially given the constant presence of the Emperor, helped ensure the acceptance of this group and of their project for literary renewal. It was with the Emperor's arrival on the scene and under his patronage that Brazilian romanticism became an official project, part of a true nationalism, which would go on to write about what it considered to be 'local matters'. Though little was known about the Indians, Brazilian literature was awash with epic novels featuring Indian chiefs and heroes and wild love affairs set against the backdrop of the virgin forest.

If the task of forming a new pantheon of national heroes pertained to historiography, it was in literature that the project acquired its greatest visibility. In this context Magalhães published his *A confederação dos Tamoios* (The Tamoio Confederation, in 1857), which was directly financed by the monarchy, and which, after a long period of preparation, was anxiously awaited as the definitive document that would demonstrate the national validity of the indigenous theme. Returning to Rousseau's model of the 'noble savage', Magalhães produced, made-to-order, what was intended to be the greatest national epic to centre on the figure of the Indian hero, and all his acts of bravery and sacrifice. Dedicated to the Emperor, the book offered a storyline in which indomitable native Indians were pitted against villainous Portuguese colonizers.

Inspired by an article of 1834 by Balthazar da Silva Lisboa, the work tells the saga of the Tamoyo nation and its fight for freedom against Portuguese aggressors – here portrayed as savages and adventurers. And yet the antagonists were not limited to the above-mentioned groups. Just as the whites could be broken down into brutish Portuguese colonizers (who seemed to represent the impurity of the act of turning a free nation into a slave-state) and religious whites (Jesuit priests in league with the future Empire), so too could the Indians be divided into camps. On one hand there were the wild and (in virtue of their simplicity) catechised barbarians, while on the other there were the aborigines, as free and indomitable as nature itself. In this battle of colours, the side that came out on top was the one that recalled purity, namely the Portuguese of the future Empire (representing national unity, but, above all, the Christian faith that would attach itself to the sacrifice of the natives) and the Indians who managed to remain unspoilt by civilization.

It was thus that literature gave ground to the official discourse and that the Indian, now transformed into a model of nobility, assumed its role as the great sacrificial lamb in the history and genesis of the Empire. As a role model, the Indian emerged as a hero and victim in a process that swept him aside. Born free, killed in liberty. The first mass – the theme of this painting by Vitor Meireles de Lima – brings to a close the destinies of the various characters in this novel. Everything is symbolic in this painting, with the Church at the centre, the State at its side, the Indians gathered around and, finally, nature itself in a form reminiscent of a cathedral. As the 'burden of civilization', the Empire both imposed itself through its

representation of the Indian and also *upon* the Indian, its great victim.

Besides Magalhães, Gonçalves Dias also warranted the Emperor's attention, upon whom the national significance of a movement like this was by no means lost. Considered an important Brazilian romantic author, Gonçalves Dias brought the Indian into poetry. Working from historical and ethnographical documents from the times, Gonçalves Dias created a poetics dedicated to the formation of the nation, of a virgin land, untouched prior to its first contact with civilization. Over the course of his *Primeiros cantos* (First cantos, 1847), *Segundos cantos* (Second cantos, 1848) and *Últimos cantos* (Final cantos, 1851), Dias, long admired in the country, dedicated many poems to America and its peoples.



Figure 3. Vitor Meireles de Lima, 'The first mass' (1860)

His most celebrated poem, *I-Juca-Pirama*,<sup>3</sup> brought to Brazil the model of heroic cannibalism made famous in Montaigne's *The Cannibals* (1850) and in the texts of such travellers as Thevet and Leris. As in a ritual meal, only the brave were eaten, their indomitable spirits remaining free even in death. This is the theme of G. Dias' poem, which tells the story of a brave Tupi warrior who is taken prisoner by the Timbira. While awaiting his own death, the Tupi warrior fears for the fate of his father – old, weak and blind – whom he had served as a guide. The drama of the poem centres on the question of the bravery of the warrior hero. Faced with the

lamenting and weeping of the young Tupi, the Timbira decide to free him, as one does not kill and eat a coward. Thus his reunion with his father is marked by disappointment. The old Tupi laments his son's weakness and curses him for it.

In response to this reaction the young warrior leaves his father's side and decides to prove his bravery by confronting the Timbira alone, who subsequently recognize the Tupi's value and confer upon him the honour of a sacrificial death. And so father and son are reconciled. At the end, as if to guarantee the 'veracity' of the narrative, Gonçalves Dias has an old Timbira remember the heroic deeds: 'And at night in the tepees, if anyone should doubt what he told, he would prudently say: – "my boys, I saw it myself"' (525).

In this manner the Indian was to emerge as a symbol of purity, a role model of honour. In the light of such fundamental loss – sacrifice in the name of a nation and sacrifice amongst his own kind –, what comes to the fore is the image of an idealized Indian whose qualities are underlined in the construction of a great nation. Between the literature and reality, the true national history and the fiction, the boundaries seemed tenuous. In this case, history was in the service of a mythical literature that was working alongside it to select the origins of the new nation.

1865 saw the publication of a novel that became a sort of icon for this generation, despite the contradictions inherent in its author's inclusion among the Indianists. *Iracema*, José de Alencar's best-known novel, not only offered the typical themes and landscapes so dear to the genre, but its very title (playing with the letters) contained an anagram of the word 'America'. The novel tells the story of a 'honey-lipped virgin' set against the mythologized backdrop of the untouched scenery of the Brazilian Northeast at the beginning of the seventeenth century. The work represents, once more, the birth of Brazil by means of indigenous sacrifice. The main couple – Martim and Iracema – symbolize the first inhabitants of Ceará, and it is from their union that will stem a new and predestined, miscegenated race. In the middle of the story Iracema dies so that her child, Moacir ('the son of suffering'), may live, while Martim leaves the beaches of Ceará to found new Christian centres elsewhere, so that, from that moment on, all may have '*one single God, as they have one single heart*' (175).

Once more, far from the reality of nineteenth century Brazil, marked as it was with slavery, white and Indian heroes share an inhospitable environment. If there are any barbarians Indians in it, they are restricted to a handful of small, isolated groups. Like the Europeans, the people of the wilderness are above all noble. It is a nobility conferred not by title, but by their gestures and actions.

However, Alencar's experiments with Indianism had not started with *Iracema*. Originally published in instalments in the *Diário do Rio de Janeiro* between January and April 1857, his novel *O Guarani* was published in book form that same year. Set in the seventeenth century, the main character and hero of the story is Peri, the romantic interest of the fair Ceci. By choosing the title 'O Guarani', Alencar intended to represent the Brazilian Indian as he had been at the first moments of contact with the white man, back when he 'was still in full vigour and not degenerate, as he would later become' (1857/1995, 27).

Peri is the very image of the noble savage: strong, free as the wind, loyal and correct in his actions. The plot hinges on two central points of tension. On the one hand, Peri protects the family of the Portuguese nobleman, D. Antonio de Mariz

(Ceci's father), from attack by the barbarian Aimorés. On the other, he helps to unmask the plots of the wicked Loredano, an adventurer who is only out for the family's wealth and Ceci's feminine charms. Once again, the conflict is between nobles and savages. The savages are the Aimorés and the white adventurers, while the nobles are those who warrant the title through their bravery and the loftiness of their actions. It is in this manner that Peri's nobility resurfaces again and again throughout the novel, as if to indicate the happy encounter between a white nobility that had come to Brazil from Europe and the 'noble of the earth', thus giving rise to a truly mixed nobility. Unable to prevent the tragic slaughter of the Mariz family, Peri sets out to at least save Ceci, whom he venerates with a passion, but from whom he is separated by their distinct natures – she is a 'child of civilization', while 'he is the son of wild freedom' (157). They end the story together, swept away by the flowing river, giving voice to an almost Platonic love between the Indian and the 'virgin blonde'.

Years later, in 1870, an opera by Antônio Carlos Gomes entitled *O Guarani*, a libretto inspired by Alencar's novel of the same name, opened to great acclaim at the Scala de Milão. Also funded by D. Pedro II, Carlos Gomes work combined the European norms with the desire to squeeze out what were considered the most original aspects of our culture. Comprised of romantic music composed over an indigenous base, it sought to affirm an identity that was at once the same and different.

Attacked head-on by historians like Varnhagen for being what he called 'Caboclo patriots', the Brazilian Indianists became increasingly more popular and were successful in imposing their representation of the Indian as a national symbol. Furthermore, by turning literature into an exercise in patriotism, this genre won over an official place in the State's plans. This tendency to value picturesque landscapes and peoples, the typical over the generic, found a privileged symbol in the figure of the Indian. The romantic Indian as an ideal image not only embodied what was most authentic, but also most noble in terms of constructing an honourable past. Quite unlike the Black, whose presence was a constant reminder of the shameful situation of slavery,<sup>4</sup> the Indian made it possible to evoke a mythical, unifying origin.

Brazilian nature also fulfilled a parallel function. If there were had no medieval castles, ancient churches or heroic battles to commemorate, they certainly had the largest rivers and the most beautiful tropical vegetation. The Monarch and the nation were represented amid palm trees, pineapples and all manner of tropical fruits, thus highlighting the exuberance of an unrivalled natural wealth. The royal ritual followed this mestizo, tropical style to the letter through an uninterrupted mixing of local and foreign elements.

But the cultural project gradually slipped beyond the circles restricted to the intellectuals and began to win over the urban middle classes as well, who came to see it as the answer to their aspirations towards national affirmation. If Indianism was initially a means towards obscuring the country's Black problem, little by little, through its epic poems, novels, grandiose canvases and operas, the movement started to exercise a clear influence over broader sectors of society and, above all, over the court. Indianism would also arrive at the level of political iconography and would become a part of official ceremonies and of the way Imperial power was represented. The Indian would even take its place in blazonry, alongside sugar cane, coffee and other symbols of tropical production. And so Indianism ceased to

be a merely aesthetic element in the images of the day and was incorporated into the very representation of royalty itself. On the other hand, sharing space with classical allegories and featuring as it did in the iconography of the State, what emerges is an almost white Indian figure heavily idealized in a tropical environment. In the following image, alongside the cherubim and allegories, you will see Indians as the incarnation of a mythical and authentic past, seeming to legitimize the monarch (immediately after the consecration).



**Figure 4.** 'Dom Pedro sagrado por indígenas da terra e divindades', litho, around 1840. National Library.

### **The Imperial Academy of Fine Art: An official image for a mixed nation**

Also at the Imperial Academy of Fine Art – created in 1826, though largely set up during the reign of the young monarch Dom Pedro II – the romantic vein that had elected the exotic as the local symbol proliferated and adapted itself to Pedro II's projects in other areas.<sup>5</sup> On the pictorial level the Academy was to be largely responsible for a radical transformation: the relegation of the baroque to the background while neoclassicism came to the fore, principally at the court and in some capital cities. However, it was only during the Second Reign (1841-1889) that the Academy came to enjoy a more stable situation, especially in the function of public and private assistance from the monarch. Practicing a policy similar to that of the IHGB, the Emperor started to distribute awards, medals, scholarships and financing for study abroad, as well as assiduously participating in the annual 'General Fine Art Exhibitions' and distributing insignia to the most celebrated artists.

It was therefore no accident that the Emperor was so frequently painted in this locale and associated with Indianism. A good example of this is the dialogue between the painting by Pedro Américo – whose work entitled '*D. Pedro II na abertura da Assembléia Geral*' (D. Pedro II at the opening of the General Assembly)

shows the Emperor in his majestic garb, complete with crown, gown lined with embroidered coffee and tobacco sprigs, toucan feather mantle and sceptre with gilded serpentine tip, and the sculpture by Francisco Manoel Chaves Pinheiro, both from 1872. In these works the monarch mixes with an Indian chief as if, on the symbolic plane, both realities were interchangeable.



**Figure 5.** Pedro Américo de Figueiredo e Melo, 'D. Pedro na Abertura da Assembléia Geral' (1872), oil on canvas, M.I.

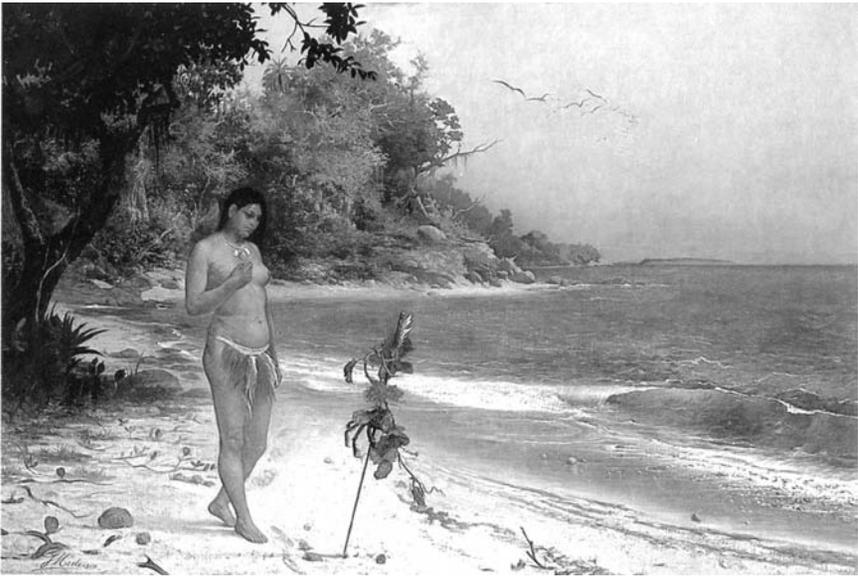


**Figure 6.** Sculpture by Francisco Manoel Chaves Pinheiro, 'Índio simbolizando a nação brasileira' (1872), 192 cm

In this place, however, the exaltation of the exotic, of nature and the romantic Indian became a hallmark of pictorial production. As the producer of all official images of the Empire from then on, the Academy would impose not only styles, but themes: the nobility motif, the portrait, landscape and historical painting would all be in vogue. Largely produced abroad, in virtue of the financing policy, these works presented an idealization of the landscape and people coherent with the perspective of someone looking in from afar, with no actual contact with the reality.

This is the case with *Moema* (1866) by Vitor Meireles de Lima, *Iracema* by José M. Medeiros (1881) and *O último Tamoio* (The Last Tamoio, 1883) by Rodolfo Amoedo, all of whom were part of the Indianist circle that formed in the 60s (the movement came later to painting than it did to literature). In all of these works the passive, idealized Indian makes up the scene without altering it in any fundamental way, being practically an element glued onto the tropical landscape.

Brazilian romanticism therefore achieved great penetration using the Indian as a symbol. The Indians – decimated in the forest – had never been so whitely painted, just as the Brazilian monarch and culture were becoming more and more tropical. After all, this was the best answer for an elite that questioned itself incessantly about its identity, about its true singularity. Given the rejection of the black slave and even the white colonizer, only the Indian was left as a worthy and legitimate representative. Pure, good, honest and brave, they behaved like kings in the exuberant setting of the Brazilian forest, and in perfect harmony with nature.



**Figure 7.** José Maria de Medeiros, 'Iracema' (1881), Museu Nacional de Belas Artes

As one can see, the imagination often loses ground to the didacticism that can confer the necessary credibility upon a novel or a painting. Travellers, chroniclers and historians leave the compendiums to the footnotes that accompany the texts, which in turn come to serve as the bases for painting. Once again, history and myth walk hand in glove: yes, the Indian had existed in a remote and glorious past and it was he, duly mythologized, who inspired the romantic dramas produced at the Court, the grandiose canvases set in the tropics, the beautiful operas that presented the exotic, yet noble Empire to the outside world. As the saying goes: *'si non é vero, é ben trovato'* (if it's not true, it was well made up). Or, to use Gonçalves Dias' version: 'My boys, I saw it myself'.

Despite the criticism from the realists at the end of the nineteenth century, who considered the genre as being too imaginative and subjective, the romantic representation took root in Brazil. Its popularity owed more perhaps to its process of invention, re-elaboration and adaptation to the tropical reality than to what was artificial and foreign in it. Like a good tropical savage, the mythologized Indian allowed this young nation to make its peace with an 'honourable past', while proclaiming a promising future.

Such was the absorption of the symbol that it became the preferred material of the satirical press of the 1870s. Angelo Agostini, in the *Revista Ilustrada*, would select the figure of the Indian as the symbol of a nation that is being hoodwinked; it was a turn of fate: from the model of patriotism to a symbol of dissent.

### **Hidden slavery: on a certain miscegenation**

We all know that official memory works rather like an exercise in 'remembering little and forgetting much' and, in the case of the Brazilian Empire, the saying fits



**Figure 8.** Drawing by A. Agostini. *Revista Ilustrada* (1876), Instituto de Estudos Brasileiros, São Paulo

perfectly. After all, the monarchy selected one type of image and representation and at the same time set about obscuring the reality of slavery, which it did not so much as give a secondary role. The photographer Cristiano Júnior, for example, took a series of photos of Brazilian slaves which he could only sell abroad, as there was no space for such images within the country.

In fact, whenever present, the slaves served as mere reminders of the necessary ‘loyalty’, without meddling in any way in this project that was at once civilizing and so particular. This is why they serve no other function on medals, in paintings or on emblems than to complement the scenes portrayed, as if they were only there to make up the numbers in the composition of the image. Even during the abolition, Blacks were only ever present on a secondary level, as if their liberty were a gift and not a victory.

The Brazilian Empire constructed an idealized and racially mixed image of this nation. The nobility of the earth, the nobility of the forest – whites and Indians – would reveal a singular mixture, one which would enable the country to find, in a defined past, a mythologized origin. As Andersons says, nations do not have clearly identifiable births and deaths. If they ever do happen, they are not ‘natural’, but are the result of men’s hands and their politics. In Brazil, a specific nationalist movement put the king at the centre of the State, and created a new agenda of events, heroes and dates. Antiquity, tradition and monarchical prestige were linked with a kind of cosmological time that associated the indigenous with the new European laws. Museums, academies and historical institutes were put together to create this mythical history, where past, present and future were mixed. It was a type of ‘empty time’, as Walter Benjamin has said.

In this sense, the grand visibility of the State was created with the help of novels, paintings, poems, and history, allowing a new country to be ‘imagined’ that combined a traditional monarchy with the new colours of the American nature and its population. People, regions, languages, products – everything was used to create the image of this tropical monarchy mixed with different human groups, habits and cultures.

Nevertheless, the success of this ‘invention of the State’ had also a date of expiration. Quite different would be the view of the social Darwinist scientists of the late nineteenth century who saw in this racial mixing the ‘supreme degeneration’ and proof of the unviability of the nation. Even the culturalist analysis view of the 1930s, though with the terms of the equation reversed, led theorists like Gilberto Freyre to find in this racial mixture – though in this case, between whites and Blacks – a ‘sublime’ singularity.

It is not our task here to delve into these other intellectual contexts, but suffice it to say that Brazil has always defined itself, at least in the official sphere, by its particular racial mix. Just like the river metaphor used by Von Martius, and mentioned at the opening of this text, it would be the task of the intellectual to identify and select a certain mixture that could guarantee, in its turn, a certain identity.



**Figure 9.** Photograph of slaves by Cristiano Jr. taken between 1864-1866



**Figure 10.** Statue representing the Abolition of Slavery in Brazil (1889), Museu Mariano Procópio (Juiz de Fora, Brazil)

Perhaps Nina Rodrigues, a late nineteenth century physician from Bahia, was right on target when she quipped that ‘if a country is not rich enough to make itself recognized for its economy, nor old enough to be known for its tradition and antiquity, then it had better be interesting’. Brazil was, in this sense, ‘interesting’ because it was mixed and had a tropical king. Certainly, Brazilians had gone about selecting a particular miscegenation (that excluded Blacks), but this has often been highlighted in many nationalities. National identity is always a social phenomenon that is selective; it illustrates an apparent continuity and emphasizes a loss of memory. Brazil was so similar with other American countries and yet so different.

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## Notes

1. Macedo is best known for his novel of manners *A Moreninha* (1844), the first bestseller in Brazilian literature. Besides his career as a novelist, Macedo also dedicated himself to writing plays, chronicles and poetry. He also served as secretary of the IHGB.
2. In addition to writing monographs based on first-hand documentation Varnhagen also located unpublished texts and wrote, between 1854 and 1857, the *História Geral do Brasil* (General History of Brazil), an important two-volume work in which he constructed one of the first models for thinking about Brazilian national history. Unlike most of his group, Varnhagen held an anti-romantic view of the Indian, which he presented as savage, cruel and bereft of humanizing beliefs, which, in his view, justified the merciless actions of the colonizers.
3. Literally translated from the Tupi language, the title of the poem means 'what there is to kill and what is worthy of death'.
4. One must not forget that the pressure to do away with slavery was becoming increasingly heavy at this time. However, given the adverse political context, Brazil was to be the last country to abolish slavery, doing so only in 1888, after both the United States and Cuba.
5. In fact, the origin of the Academy dates back to 1816, to the arrival in Brazil of the Mission of French artists, among whom were such renowned individuals as Jean Baptista Debret, historical painter; Nicolas A Taunay, landscape painter; Auguste Taunay, sculptor; and Auguste H. V. de Montigny, architect, among others. The brothers Zefêrin and Marc Ferrez, the former an engraver, the latter a sculptor, joined the Mission a little later, arriving in Brazil in 1817. In 1820 the school was transformed, by decree, into the Royal Academy of Drawing, Painting, Sculpture and Civil Architecture, though came to be known simply as the Academy of the Arts from the end of the same year. In 1827, a final decree changed the name once and for all to the Imperial Academy of Fine Art. Of the founders, only Debret and Montigny remained, as well as Felix E. Taunay and the Ferrez brothers, who had technically not been members of the French Mission.

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