

# ICI COMME LA-BAS: EUROPEAN THOUGHT AND THE IDEATIONAL CONSTRUCTION OF NATIONAL IDENTITY IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY BRAZIL

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## *Resumen*

El siguiente artículo examina las influencias de propuestas intelectuales europeas en la formulación de proyectos socio-políticos en el Brasil del siglo XIX. El análisis se centra en publicaciones de inspiración romántica de la mitad del siglo, así como en las proposiciones positivistas de las últimas décadas del periodo. Mientras intelectuales de Brasil miraban a Europa como fuente principal de sus propuestas artísticas, el campo intelectual nacional todavía estaba muy poco desarrollado y las élites locales creían que el futuro del país dependía de su liderazgo en la construcción de una identidad nacional autónoma.

Palabras claves: *Brasil, identidad nacional, intelectuales, movimientos socio-políticos, cultura europea.*

## *Abstract*

The article examines the influences that European intellectual constructions exerted on the formulation of socio-political projects in Brazil in the nineteenth century. The analysis centers on Romanticism-based literary publications of mid-century, paying additional attention to the propositions advanced by the Positivism of the last quarter of the century. Even though nineteenth-century Brazil intellectuals saw Europe as the main source of

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influence for their own cultural projects, in Brazil the intellectual field was much less developed and members of local elites believed the future of their country depended on their direct involvement in leading the construction of an autonomous national identity.

Key words: *Brazil, National Identity, Intellectuals, Socio-Political Movements, French, European Culture.*

### *Introduction*

This article examines the impact that European intellectual, artistic, and philosophical constructs exerted over Brazilian public intellectual engaged in defining a national identity for their country over the course of the nineteenth century. The piece is centered on an important body of influential, mostly French-inspired Brazilian publications that helped shape the cultural and political milieu of the nation in the period. After a brief description of the cultural context of the early years of the new nation, the article analyzes some of the most influential Romanticism-styled literary magazines published in Brazil around the second quarter of the century. This section is then complemented by an analysis of Positivist-influenced political studies published in Brazil in the last quarter of the century. As a whole, the piece scrutinizes the fact that throughout the period Europe, especially France, served as the main source of cultural influences for the different Brazilian intellectuals taking part in the socio-political and cultural dynamics of formulating a nationalist self-image for their country.

The close interaction between Brazilian and European elites was a hallmark of nineteenth-century Brazilian thought. By being in close contact with French cultural centers, Brazilian authors were inspired to emulate the latest European intellectual, cultural, and artistic movements in their own place of origin. However whereas in Europe the intellectual field was already well established by early and mid-nineteenth century and acting politically tended to be more a matter of personal choice, in Brazil the arena for intellectual engagement was much more restricted given that it was only with the unfolding of the century that the intellectual profession would be consolidated. Moreover, even though nineteenth-century Brazil intellectuals considered France to be the main source wherein they sought the latest cultural fads, in their own country, the intellectual field was much less well defined and members of the local elites shared the view that the future of their nation depended largely on their own participation in formulating and implementing projects in support of an autonomous and viable national project.

### *National Cultural Revival in the Search for Political Independence*

Following the Napoleonic invasion of the Iberian Peninsula, the transferring of the Portuguese Royal Court to Brazil in 1808 to Rio de Janeiro radically transformed the capital of Portugal's most important colonial possession. This process led to a major urban cultural renewal along the lines of the Europeanization of customs. Inserted in the logic that sponsored these transformations was the notion that much of Brazil's backwardness derived from its racial mix, which included a significant presence of African descents, many of whom lived in the new administrative seat of the Portuguese empire. To remedy such a situation, the promotion of a new wave of European immigrants, and the establishment of European-like institutions such as a Royal Library, Observatory, and Press, a state-owned Bank, and a Botanical Garden, which were all seen essential measures towards civilizing the tropics.

Similarly, in 1816, the only European imperial monarch to ever rule from the colonies, the Portuguese ruling-king in exile, John VI commissioned a group of French intellectuals to create a French-inspired institution in Rio as a way to overhaul the state of the arts and sciences in the country. Many of the invited members of the so-called French Mission would consist of former Bonapartists who found in Rio an interesting haven for the promotion of their own reformist plans in a time of Restoration in France. The main artistic style these same French artists helped disseminate in Brazil in the early years of the nineteenth century was the Neo-classicism of the Napoleonic architectural reforms, a cultural trend which marked a major break from the traditional baroque artistic style of the colonial period in Brazil.

The leading figure of this so-called French Mission was Jacques Lebreton, former director of the French Art Academy, and this selected group of French intellectuals included also names such as those of J.B. Debret (painter), Augusto Taunay (sculptor), and Grandjean de Montigny (architect).<sup>1</sup> A similar type of artistic mission but this time composed of Austrian intellectuals arrived in Rio in 1817 with a group of artists which included another famous painter of the time, M. de Rugendas, and important naturalists such as Johann Baptist von Spix, Georg von Langsdoff, and Carl Phillip von Martius. The latter would become especially influential in Brazil after

<sup>1</sup> França, Jean Marcel de Carvalho, *Literatura e Sociedade no Rio de Janeiro Oitocentista*, Imprensa Nacional, Rio de Janeiro, 1999.

having proposed the initial guidelines for the creation of a distinctive national history for country, in an essay submitted to a contest promoted by the Brazilian Historical and Geographic Institute (IHGB) —institution created by the Brazilian Emperor Pedro II in 1838 on the basis of the Institut Historique de Paris where many Brazilian intellectuals gathered in the period, as will be detailed below.<sup>2</sup> Additional intellectuals, particularly from France, would end up in Rio out their own initiatives, having similarly exerted an important role in helping shape the initial stages of Brazil as an independent nation. These included Ferdinand Denis, French historian who would write several influential books on Brazilian history and culture, and who argued for the creation of Brazilian literary canon; as well as the French botanist Étienne Saint-Hillaire who produced detailed accounts of the country's regional customs and physical settings, all of which would be similarly utilized by later proponents of emerging nationalist propositions and political projects, as will be further explained below.

As all of these examples demonstrate, close intellectual exchanges between Brazilian and European elites was a hallmark of nineteenth-century Brazilian ideational and political constructs. Since colonial times almost all families of means in Brazil would send their male children to study in Europe, most often in Coimbra, but also in French cities such as Montpellier and Paris. As the political processes that culminated in the formal political independence of the country in 1822 implied a clear political, cultural, and economic detachment of its former colonial ruler, Brazilian elites alternatively had their heirs spend time in other European countries, predominantly in France, in order to further their intellectual formation. In Europe, Brazilian students learned the new intellectual trends and acquired new social attributes that allowed them, upon their return, to exert considerable influence over other social and political groups. Along these historical lines, “the Franco-Brazilian connection which predated the national independence would endure well into the twentieth century”.<sup>3</sup> While this geographical displacement represented a more explicit cultural link between the two sides of the Atlantic, access to emerging French cultural concepts did not depend exclusively on direct physical contact between writers, teachers, artists, and

<sup>2</sup> Lopez, Luiz Roberto, *Cultura Brasileira: de 1808 ao pré-modernismo*, Edurgs, Porto Alegre, 1988.

<sup>3</sup> Barman, Roderick J., “Brazilian in France, 1822-1872: Doubly Outsiders”, *Strange Pilgrimages: Exile, Travel, and National Identity in Latin America, 1800-1990s*, Ingrid Frey and Karen Racine (eds.), S.R. Books, Delaware, p. 24, 2000.

thinkers in Parisian cafés. In fact, urban upper and middle-class Brazilian professionals (*i.e.* judges, lawyers, clerks of the up-and-coming national bureaucracy, journalists, merchants, etc.) traditionally absorbed European cultural propositions by reading imported books. This action allowed them at least some understanding of the European cultural dynamics, which were increasingly admired and emulated.

The gap between the Brazilian social reality and the aspirations of its European-inspired national elites is a recurrent theme in the history of Brazil, which at many points in time would lead to the advocacy of change. In specific, propositions in favor of reforming the national mores were a central focus of most intellectual formulations already at the time of national independence, and, from this moment onwards, Brazilian intellectuals would play a leading role in the processes involved in articulating a sense of national identity for the new country.<sup>4</sup> An important example of a nineteenth-century Brazilian, European-educated intellectual can be found in José Bonifácio de Andrada e Silva, commonly referred to as Bonifácio, a typical figure of the late enlightenment who wrote extensively about Brazil and its future since before the time of the national political independence. Bonifácio (1763-1838) went as a young man to Europe to study law and mineralogy in Portugal, Italy, and Denmark, having later become an instructor at the influential University of Coimbra.

Upon his return to Brazil, in 1819, he would be very instrumental in convincing Pedro de Alcântara, the heir to the Portuguese Crown, who was serving a regent prince in Brazil in 1882, to declare the country's independence. Bonifácio became Brazil's first foreign minister and served as President of the country's first constitutional assembly, coordinating the process of writing the nation's first constitution—which would not be adopted by the emperor given the liberal inspirations of the document and the emperor's atavistic absolutist inclination.<sup>5</sup> Bonifácio was also actively involved in publishing articles in one of the first Brazilian newspapers (*O Tamoio*) in Rio de Janeiro between the years of 1820 and 1823, where the so-called Patriarch of the Brazilian independence presented his vision for the future of the country. For him, Brazil had to undertake several actions in order to

<sup>4</sup> Burns, E. Bradford, "The Intellectuals as Agents of Change and the Independence of Brazil, 1724-1822", *From Colony to Nation: Essays on the Independence of Brazil*, A.J. Russell-Wood (ed.), The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1975.

<sup>5</sup> Andrada e Silva, José Bonifácio de, *Projetos para o Brasil*. Companhia das Letras, São Paulo, 1988.

become a viable nation, including emancipating its slaves, promoting a plan of national land reform, and fostering a path of national industrialization—none of which would be carried out during his life-time but rather become recurrent themes in the long and protracted path of national development of the country to this day.

While basically espousing traditional Liberal ideas which were part of his European training, for most of his contemporaries Bonifácio's ideas seemed too radical and he would be eventually sent into exile by no other than the emperor himself in 1823. Yet indicating well the role played by some local intellectuals of the time, in most of his writings Bonifácio saw the national political and economic elites as excessively detached from what he called as the "real problems of the country." He was particularly adamant in his critique of their lack of a clear sense of national identity as, in his view, the very future of the country depended upon the creation of a national Brazilian character, *i.e.* a shared sense of nationality that could reflect the national, cultural, legal, and linguistic unity of the country. Fair to his own Liberal outlook, he was a moderate optimist who believed that Brazilians could be made into nationals, "[g]iven their barbarous living conditions were altered, their mores were transformed".<sup>6</sup> Moreover, Bonifácio argued that

Brazilians are enthusiasts of the beautiful, friends of freedom, obedient to justice, and only ignorant due to the lack of instruction. They possess a natural talent for creativity, are generous, and capable of great deeds if not too much detailed attention is required.<sup>7</sup>

This sense of optimism notwithstanding, Bonifácio consistently expressed a very limiting position regarding the acceptance of diversity in the promotion of a national Brazilian culture. In fact, in his view, promoting progress depended on racial and cultural homogenization, a position that would be recurrently manifested, even if different formats, by subsequent generations of Brazilian intellectuals. Moreover, some of the most important issues present in this positions are related to the project of creating a modern, unified, and prosperous nation in the molds of the civilized European world. Along these foundational lines, in the following two sections, I examine how different generations of Brazilian intellectuals dealt with these

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 95.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 185.

very same topics during two largely European-inspired ideational (cultural and artistic) movements of the nineteenth century in Brazil: The Romanticism that shaped that 1830s and 1840s, and the Positivism-influenced *scientificism* of 1870s and 1880s.

### *Creating a Nation: Romanticism through the Eyes of Literary Magazines*

Once formal independence was achieved in 1822, many Brazilian intellectuals adopted a strong nationalist tone in their artistic, literary, journalistic, and science-oriented production. Many of these increasingly socially engaged thinkers would find in European, mostly French Romanticism a rich source of themes and styles which could serve the needs and aspirations of the emerging nation, at least as perceived them to be. Evidently European Romanticism had to be adjusted to the Brazilian reality where the focus of the artistic production could not be centered on providing a critique of the commodified bourgeois lifestyle. Instead, Brazilian Romantics would engage themselves in the effort of fostering a cultural identity for the country and their printed words would become a vehicle for promoting a nationalist ideology.

As a whole, Brazilian Romantics demonstrated a high degree of concern for what they defined as *Brasilidade* and resorted to the notion of *Indigenismo* to argue for the sense of artistic originality and political independence they were seeking. Recurrently articulating concepts such as that of nation and people, Brazilian Romantics helped construct a national image that valued the country's tropical primitiveness in a mythic, idyllic literary fashion, where archetypical indigenous elements were portrayed as the essence of the nation.<sup>8</sup> In this fashion, this imported but nationalized artistic movement exalted the country's natural physical attributes and exuberance along the lines of the earlier writings of, mostly French, European scholars who had visited the country in the first few years of the century. In such a literary vein, indigenous Brazilians were depicted as the utmost potentiality for the new nation being forged and the entire process of colonization of native populations, and their constant resistance to this very dynamic of domination, would be simply erased from the accounts advanced by Brazilian Romantic authors; who were consistently interested

<sup>8</sup> Coutinho, Afrânio, *An Introduction to Literature in Brazil*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1969.

in articulating a forward-looking mostly French-inspired national project.<sup>9</sup>

In specific, in 1836, a small group of young Brazilian students residing in Paris would make public a Romanticism-inspired collective reflection about their nation of origin while also advancing their own personal aspirations as upcoming members of the national elites. Published in Paris but in the Portuguese language, *Nitheroy - Revista Brasiliense de Ciências, Letras e Artes* (Brazilian Magazine of Sciences, Arts and Letters) had as its most important audience not the community of émigrés, but rather the Brazilian members of the elite still residing in Brazil and the publication of the magazine would serve as a fundamental source for spreading new intellectual ideas in the context of the young nation. *Nitheroy* most consistent editorial features were the rejection of the colonial cultural heritage, seen as still present in Brazil despite its formal political independence, and the construction of an original sense of national identity for the country. Despite its grandiose ideals, however, the magazine was short-lived as only two issues would ever be published.

The main articles were written by its soon-to-be influential editors: Domingos José Gonçalves de Magalhães, Manuel Araújo Portoalegre, and Francisco de Sales Torres Homem. The three writers would return to Brazil shortly after the magazine was discontinued, later that year, only to become important public figures involved in the publishing business, academic and research institutions such as the IHGB. With the rise of the Second Brazilian Empire (1840-1889), and the consolidation of the country's political stability and growing economic success of its coffee exports, these writers would become involved in governmental affairs when the emperor Pedro II, an intellectual in his own right, would grant them the following nobiliarchic titles: Gonçalves de Magalhães would become the Viscount of Araguaia, Porto Alegre the Baron of Santo Angelo, and Torres Homem the Viscount of Inhomirim.<sup>10</sup>

Considered as the main vehicle for the promotion of Romanticism in Brazil, *Nitheroy* offered the first generation of Brazilian Romantics a new aesthetic outlook for their nationalist endeavors. In fact, even if some of the notions that the magazine advanced were not completely new —such as the

<sup>9</sup> Lopes, *Cultura Brasileira*, p. 43.

<sup>10</sup> Pinassi, Maria Orlanda, *Três Devotos, Uma Fé, Nenhum Milagre: Nytheroy, Revista Brasiliense de Ciências, Letras e Artes*, UNESP, São Paulo, p. 19, 1998.

need for creating a genuine Brazilian literature which had been argued by Ferdinand Denis, among others— their systematic and collective propagation, as articulated in the pages of *Nitheroy*, defined the features of Romanticism in Brazil. And the very name given to the magazine represents well the nationalist exaltation espoused by the magazine supporters and subsequent members of this diffuse but influential cultural movement. *Nitheroy* is an indigenous word that describes the natural beauties of the bay surrounding the city of Rio de Janeiro.<sup>11</sup> In its first issue, one of the magazine's editors, Magalhães articulated the need for an autonomously Brazilian literary canon by complaining about the limited literary works produced by Brazilians. He alternatively expressed a sense of confidence that a new era for Brazilian literature was about to start amidst the pains of the first years of nationhood. In his own words, “[t]he state of national commotion and artistic scarcity are not ominous but rather the presage of a brilliant future; nations like men need experience, an entire series of vicissitudes forming comparative frames for great productions”.<sup>12</sup>

While France experienced some of the most turbulent years of its post-revolutionary period, in the pages of *Nitheroy*, a new generation of privileged young Brazilians posited the possibility of a promising future for their nation given that a new, French-trained intellectual generation undertook the appropriate measures to steer the country in the correct path of modernity. The magazine indeed aspired to serve as a herald of modern ideas and, in its second issue Pereira da Silva, an important member of the *Nitheroy* group declared that the Romantic movement represented the affirmation of increasingly needed humanistic values amidst a context of social fragmentation and disillusionment. In the words of the autor: “[As the] goals of French Revolution spread across the globe, Romanticism may now carry them on in a more humane fashion, shining even more on its light; while the former unraveled truly humanistic lights, the latter is currently the beacon for the whole globe”.<sup>13</sup>

Along these conceptual and creatively merging largely irreconcilable goals, such as those of the French Revolution with those of the subsequent Romantic School, Pereira da Silva argued for a forged line of historical

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 46.

<sup>12</sup> Gonçalves de Magalhães, D.J., *Nitheroy, Revista Brasiliense de Ciências, Letras e Arte*, Dauvain et Fontaine, Paris, vol. 1, p. 113, 1836.

<sup>13</sup> Pereira da Silva, J.M., *Nitheroy, Revista Brasiliense de Ciências, Letras e Arte*, Dauvain et Fontaine, Paris, vol. 2, p. 236, 1836.

continuity in order to advance his own nationalist agenda. Seemingly unaware of how much he had forced his hand in approximating the neo-classical inspirations of Revolution with those of Romanticism, this author also expressed frustration with the stage of development of the literature then in existence in Brazil. He even criticized his own contemporaries for having until that point mostly negated the beauty of Brazil's natural exuberance, as well as the richness of its *folk* habits and culture. In his view, Brazilians should rather "appreciate their own national elements, remembering that the poet, in order to be deserving of such a name, must be a historian, a philosopher, an artist, and a politician for the nation".<sup>14</sup>

Already in 1836 and then in subsequent years, *Nitheroy* became very influential among elite circles in Rio where Magalhães' personal writings were especially popular. In his work titled *Essays on History of Brazilian Literature*, published in the first issue of the magazine, the author considered to be first Brazilian Romantic would seek out to demarcate what a national Brazilian literature should aim to be. For him "[l]iterature is the expression of a people's most sublime ideals, most philosophical concepts, most heroic morals, most beautiful nature, it is the animated portrayal of its highest virtues and desires".<sup>15</sup> Influenced by European Romantics such as Mme. De Stael, but especially by the French Romantic writer François-René Chateaubriand and French Eclectic philosopher Victor Cousin, Magalhães argued that, as a newly independent nation, Brazil had to embark into a new literary project capable of reflecting the entire range of political transformations that had begun taking place in the country starting in 1808 and most specifically after 1822. In his own words, "[o]nly one idea should occupy every thought, an idea until then unknown to all: the idea of the motherland, which dominates everything as all is done for its sake or on its name".<sup>16</sup>

Even though the *Nitheroy* group was not entirely original in its claims for a national literature and in its confidence about the artistic potential of the new country, many of its members offered not only statements of intentions but also clear guidelines for what a Brazilian literature should be: It should serve a social integrative function, demarcate a new historical moment for the country, and express the original character (genius) of the nation. Moreover, despite its very brief existence, the magazine would

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 239.

<sup>15</sup> Gonçalves de Magalhães, *Nitheroy*, p. 123.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 126.

perform an important role in coalescing an entire new generation of Brazilian authors around key notions that would rise to become prevalent in the literary, artistic, and cultural spheres for decades to come. In fact, starting in 1837, when the three magazine editors would return to Rio de Janeiro, a period of intense cultural dynamism would start taking place. The number of poetic publication soared, several literary magazines were consolidated, the first social novels started publication, the reading public increased, and the literary intellectual acquired greater respectability in the social milieu of the elites.<sup>17</sup>

As these prolific intellectual debates indicate, the creation of a national literature was increasingly considered to serve as an intrinsic element in the process of imagining and forging the new nation. In effect, by the mid-1870s, a new generation of Brazilian intellectuals came to fore along a harsh critique of the Romantics. The main criticism of these latter writers was not the nationalist goals of their predecessors, however, something which actually inspired both groups of engaged intellectuals, but rather the emotional tone of their stylistic format; as will be examined in the third section of this article. Before we proceed, however, it is important to mention that in the early 1840s new literary magazines began circulation in Brazil where many of the original objectives espoused by the *Nitheroy* group were advanced. One of these magazines was the *Minerva Brasiliense* (published between 1843 and 1845) which also intended to serve as a means of promoting artistic, scientific, and literary works. The magazine was published in Rio under the initial editorial guidance of Francisco Sales Torres Homem. Magalhães and Porto Alegre also contributed regularly with articles on different topics.

*Minerva* did not make formal claims to a specific creed as its predecessor in Paris. Instead, it made the point of expressing points of views of different intellectuals, who, nevertheless, shared the goal of promoting higher levels of artistic and scientific production. Indeed, as national politics became more stable with the rise of Pedro II to the throne, in 1840, the magazine slowly became less involved in the political debates, becoming instead a key vehicle for the literary and scientific discussions undertaken at the national salons of the time.<sup>18</sup> In order to reach a wide national audience, the

<sup>17</sup> França, *Literatura e Sociedade*, p. 125.

<sup>18</sup> Lopes, Hélio, *A Divisão das Águas: Contribuição ao Estudo das Revistas Românticas: Minerva Brasiliense (1843-1845) e Guanabara (1849-1856)*, Conselho Estadual de Artes e Ciências Humanas, São Paulo, 1978.

*Minerva Brasiliense* covered a wide range of topics in a language attempted to be accessible to different publics. Also, eyeing the growing feminine audiences, the magazine began publishing chapters of social novels in 1844. The magazine was published twice a month, and its second editor, Santiago Nunes Ribeiro, declared, following the spirit of the *Nitheroy* magazine, that the role of the writer of the time was to lead national creativity to its full realization, demonstrating the *Brazilianess* of our literary production through works of art expressing the uniqueness of the country.<sup>19</sup>

Similarly, the magazine called *Guanabara* (published between 1849 and 1856), which included Porto Alegre in its editorial board, also played a significant role in promoting a national identity in mid-nineteenth century Brazil. This monthly offered a synthesis of the main events that had taken place in several regions of the country. *Guanabara's* main significance derives from the fact that it was in many of its pages that important artistic works, mainly in poetry, found their first publication. Gonçalves Dias, considered the most relevant poet of the first generation of Brazilian Romantics published many of his poems in the magazine; and Joaquim Manuel de Macedo published the first Brazilian Romantic novel in the pages of the magazine in 1849. The magazine was largely funded by Pedro II who valued the magazine as a means of publicizing domestic Romantic production works; and its termination is, in fact, seen as marking the end of the first, nationalist, indigenous-themed phase of Romanticism in Brazil, which was followed by works more centered on urban, existentialist, and tragic themes. Still, despite this change in focus, Romanticism was directly involved in the promotion of projects of national construction presented by most of the important literary magazines of the second and third quarters of the nineteenth century. As an illustration of these dynamics, in an article published by *Guanabara* in 1853, Porto Alegre claimed that

[a]rt cannot progress, cannot create a school, nor acquire greatness, unless it becomes national. The importation of talents is similar to the cultivation of exotic plants in greenhouses, which can never become acclimated, growing deep roots in the ground. The national is where the body is, where the heart is; in it we will find the legitimate enthusiasm and the faith to infuse a whole idea that speaks the truth with all of its local colors.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 78.

<sup>20</sup> M.A. Porto Alegre, "The State of the Arts and Industries in Brazil", *Revista Guanabara*, Rio de Janeiro, vol. 40, p. 22, 1853.

During the Second Empire, Pedro II was keenly involved in promoting a modern, independent, but still highly Europeanized national culture in Brazil. He financed the studies and the publication of works of many of the Romantic authors, and had been directly involved in the creation of the IHGB. The nation was thus conceived within the ambivalent polarity between identity and difference, between a state that praised its European civilizational roots but also claimed its uniqueness.<sup>21</sup> By the mid-1840s, the consolidation of political stability was mirrored by the proliferation of a largely free press, the establishment of salons, coffee houses, reading rooms, and many different libraries, particularly in the city of Rio, all dynamics that helped consolidate a reading public in Brazil. While this public sphere was being formed and expanded, recently founded Law Schools would also provide an arena for intellectual developments in Brazil, starting in the late 1830s, but becoming increasingly important by middle of the century, performing key roles in the processes leading to the political transformations of 1889, when the monarchy was deposed and a Republican regime was inaugurated.

In fact, the Recife and the São Paulo Law Schools were directly involved in the formation of the new generations that would occupy themselves with ‘forging’ the newly independent nation. In these Schools, the exaltation of national artistic works, mainly in literature, by several student-run publications became one fundamental way to affirm a unique Brazilian sense of identity. Ironically, the advancement of nationalism was done by means of notions provided by foreign authors. Lord Byron and Alfred de Musset were extremely popular authors among the generation of students situated between the 1840s to the 1860s. Additional authors included Chateaubriand and Victor Hugo, and literary mastery was judged in terms of how one could be involved in the literary creation of the nation, seen as a high goal to which one should strive for, which could unify one’s compatriots in a common project and where everyone could derive meaning from.<sup>22</sup>

As new political developments took place throughout the century, many of which served to tarnish the emperor’s figure as standing above the nation —especially after 1868, when Pedro II dissolved the Liberal cabinet

<sup>21</sup> Ventura, Roberto, *Estilo Tropical: História Cultural e Polêmicas Literárias no Brasil 1870-1914*, Companhia das Letras, São Paulo, 1991.

<sup>22</sup> Kirkendall, Andrew J., *Classmates: Male Student Culture and the Making of a Political Class in Nineteenth-Century Brazil*, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, 2002.

given the need to strengthen support to the head of the Brazilian troops in the War of Triple Alliance—a new generation of Law School's graduates would, once again, assert their role. At this time, new European cultural movements would provide the language to coalesce the emerging generation in to a common project. This language was that of modern science, and the political project was a mixture of Abolitionism and, to many but not all, Republicanism. This new generation found its main expression in what has been defined as the *Recife School*, which advocated a scientific approach to the study of Brazil as the only viable path towards national development. This new conception implied a sharp rejection of subjective and sentimental types of writings in both literary and historical works. An examination of this new critical perspective is presented in the pages that follow.

### *Re-Creating the Nation: Positivism and the Case of the Scientific Schools*

As we have seen, the Brazilian Romantic generation of 1830s and 1840s offered for the first time a systematic approach to the study of Brazilian national history, arts, and sciences. This outlook involved a nationalistic exaltation of the country's resources, one that assumed that a, mythically defined, plentiful nature should serve as guide in the construction of a national identity manifested in an independent domestic literature.<sup>23</sup> However, by the early 1870s a consistent reaction against the Romantic Movement began to be articulated by a group of intellectuals who coalesced in the city of Recife, largely around academic debates taking place at the Recife Law School. The group represented a hybrid, uniquely Brazilian outlook into Brazilian history, arts, literature, and science, based upon inspirations provided by the European Positivism and Social Evolutionary thought. This anti-Romantic reaction was directly related to a period of socio-political agitation in Brazil following the Paraguayan War (1864-1870), and it expressed a political counter-argument against key elements of the monarchical structure. These included an eclectic and spiritualist philosophy that linked the Catholic theology with the throne, Romantic literary and artistic styles, traditional conceptions of law and public administration, slave-based agro-exporting economy, and, naturally, the monarchical regime itself.

<sup>23</sup> Ventura, *Estilo Tropical*, p. 47.

Conversely, Positivism was one of many European philosophical ideas that found widespread acceptance in Brazil in the late nineteenth century as an organized defense of knowledge based on scientific methods.<sup>24</sup> It is worth noting that the intellectual developments taking place in Recife found resonance in other regions of the country, such as in Fortaleza, Porto Alegre, São Luis, Belém, and São Paulo; but in none of these places a similar purposeful intention for a self-portrayal as a School was found. Tobias Barreto (1839-1889) and Silvio Romero (1851-1914) are the most important intellectuals of the *Recife School*, denomination given by Romero to a various group of thinkers, most of them former law students of the Recife Law School (such as Arthur Orlando, Jose Veríssimo, Graça Aranha, Clóvis Bevilacqua, Araripe Junior, Sousa Bandeira, Farias Brito, etc.), who reacted against the Romanticism still prevalent in the intellectual circles in Rio and proposed the substitution of these canons by a science-based reflection about the country's persistent challenging socio-economic landscape.

Despite their close friendship, Barreto and Romero did not agree in important positions. While the former tended to posit a more naturalist (at times in very racist language), evolutionist outlook, urging the spreading of systematized studies of the evolution of the sociological characteristics of the people; the latter was a bit reluctant to buy so easily into these new propositions, his anti-romantic Outlook notwithstanding. Barreto was more of a transitional figure whose writings still demonstrated a clear philosophical metaphysical influence, whereas Romero was as influenced by Herbert Spencer's Social Evolutionism as by Auguste Comte's mid-century Positivism.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, though Barreto still attributed some value to philosophical reflection, Romero consistently denied any possibility of separating natural science from social sciences (or spiritual sciences as he worded it). For him, "[i]t is no longer possible to speak of natural sciences in opposition to sciences of the human spirit. This antinomy had been indeed one of the greatest hurdles for the development of science in the past."<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Auguste Comte (1798-1857), the leading exponent of French Positivism, maintained that man had no knowledge except of phenomena and that this knowledge was relative. He also posited that history revealed certain immutable laws that could serve as the basis for a social science and that all phenomena was subject to invariable natural laws.

<sup>25</sup> Moraes Filho, Evaristo, *Medo 'a Utopia: O Pensamento Social de Tobias Barreto e Silvio Romero*, Nova Fronteira, São Paulo, 1985.

<sup>26</sup> Romero, Sílvio, "Filosofia do Direito," *Estudos de Literatura Brasileira*, Primeira Série, Rio de Janeiro, p. 294, 1901.

Their idiosyncratic elements all the same, for Barreto and Romero, as well as for most of those involved in the movement, rejecting the literary and philosophical canons of the Romantics was closely associated with a similar rejection of the social, political, and economic context of the country in the aftermath of the Paraguayan War. Despite the political stability of the empire and the figure of the patriarchal philosopher king, represented by Pedro II, Brazil faced many problems as manifested in its difficulties in winning a war with a backland, much smaller and poorer country. The harsh criticism against a perceived inferior status of the intellectual development in Brazil offered by Barreto and Romero in many ways reflected a broader rejection of socio-economic context of the nation at the time. In their socio-political critique, both authors argued that Brazil possessed no literary or philosophical works of universal appeal, something which reflected the overall level of underdevelopment of the country. Usually along pessimistic lines, Barreto and Romero advanced a profound preoccupation with the state of country, particularly regarding the intellectual direction the country should follow.<sup>27</sup>

The cultural renewal of the anti-romantic generation of the 1870s represented thus the introduction of Naturalism, Evolutionary Biology, and European Scientificism in both the literary and political debates of the time. The movement attempted to promote an objective study of the 'national character' in analyses that were structured on the notions of race, nature, and nation. Additionally, these studies espoused evolutionist models that could articulate in positive terms a sense of nationality.<sup>28</sup> If the earlier Romanticism deployed a nationalist discourse that attempted to consolidate the newly created state, Romero, in particular, argued in defense of a modern language of social analysis that could position Brazil in a similar standing to the developed countries of the time, particularly England, France and Germany. Predicated on the need for a modern, universal language and technique for social examinations and intervention, this more internationally-focused narrative was still closely connected to a nationalist goal of reshaping the nation in a more modern, scientific-based fashion.

More than doctrines, which he criticized as the prevalent eclecticism, Romero wanted to establish a method, one that could lead to systematic understandings of the county, deriving from concrete examinations not

<sup>27</sup> Medina, Maricela, *Tobias Barreto (1839-1889): The Intellectual Odyssey of a Nineteenth-Century Brazilian*, Ph.D. Dissertation, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan, 1986.

<sup>28</sup> Ventura, *Estilo Tropical*, p. 63.

philosophical reflections. Similarly, in his studies of folklore, legends, popular poetry and music, Romero presented an analytical framework of evolutionist inspiration that argued for the uniqueness of the Brazilian character deriving from its unique ethnic composition of three formative races (white, Indian, and black), which should, nevertheless, be shaped into an aggregated whole under the auspices of the white European culture. It is clear that he found Positivism a useful system of thought which offered not only a promising classificatory tool for ideals and political propositions in a politically unstable moment, but also a detailed self-image of the country at the same time self-reflective and promising. Positivism justified and explained the nation evils by pointing to areas where scientific progress was still lacking, and by placing the country within a hierarchical system of development for human societies, defined by different phases that nations undergo in direction to development. And he indeed argued for new studies in national literature that could incorporate cultural matters through a historical perspective.<sup>29</sup>

In many ways, the 1870's marked a turning point in the history of intellectual ideas in Brazil as it demarcated the emergence of new theoretical propositions largely inspired on Positivism and the latest vein of social evolutionism in Europe, mainly in its combination of the Social Darwinism of Herbert Spencer. Similarly, the 1870s generation directly influenced the creation, expansion, and consolidation of modern, scientific research in various national academies, museums, and research institutes in the field of medicine, social and natural history, and geography.<sup>30</sup> In the end, the main relevance of what became known as the Generation of 1870, whose main participants were the writers of the Recife School derives from their role in introducing into Brazil new historical models of analysis that argued for scientific study of the country's reality. This renewed promotion of European ideas of natural history and science in the last decades of the nineteenth century in Brazil provided an essential conceptual tool for a profound reinterpretation of the country's self-image.

### *Conclusion: Making it National as a Civilizational Crusade*

This article advanced the notion that European intellectual movements were key ideological elements utilized in different socio-political and cultural

<sup>29</sup> Romero, Silvio, *A Filosofia no Brasil: Ensaio Critico*, Deutsche Zeitung, Porto Alegre, 1878.

<sup>30</sup> Schwarcz, Lília Moritz, *O Espetáculo das Raças: Cientistas, Instituições e a Questão Racial no Brasil, 1870-1930*, Companhia das Letras, São Paulo, 1993.

projects devised by Brazilian intellectual throughout the nineteenth century. In fact, writers, artists, social commentators, politicians who increasingly occupied themselves with matters of national identity since the formal establishment of the country early, obsessively attempted to define the characteristics that the country should assume in order to become a modern, civilized, European-like nation.

By the same token, despite individual differences and styles, most members of the intellectual elite shared the notion that the future of their country depended on their own involvement in formulating projects that could produce a unified, autonomous, and cohesive national identity. In their views, Brazil was an incomplete project, a nation in formation, a country under construction, where a new nation was taking shape. Increasingly themes involving Brazilian history, geography, language, literature, politics, ethnicities, all became subjects of study for the self-defined intellectual guides of the nation. They believed to be the social segment most capable of offering the viable social projects that could reflect the country's true vocation—which was assumed as necessary should levels of national success be achieved.

Honest to its professed faith in Romanticism-based ideals, even if these were adapted to the national Brazilian context, the generation of 1830s claimed that the aspiration of nation building should guide the entire range of cultural, artistic, and intellectual developments taking place at the time. An idealized transcendental and, at the same time, national exuberant nature, combined with elements of indigenous and folk cultures, became increasingly valued as the source of inspiration for writers and artists of various sorts. Ideationally constructing the nation and its cultural attributes provided thus guidance for differences realms of activity, such as politics, economics, arts, literature, philosophy, and science, thus serving as an element of socio-cultural integration. A national historical narrative was thus formulated, in which Brazil was positioned within the course of universal history as moving towards an European-like culture.

As the Romantic logic began waning by the middle of the 1870s—when the reality of war brought to the fore the latent frustration to many that an idealized nation was not efficiently responding to the real needs of their society—European formulations provided, once again, the guidelines for new intellectuals propositions and political projects. The century would come to a close with a new intellectual outlook, largely defined by contemporary European conceptions of science, which nonetheless was articulated in similarly nationalistic terms. The nation had then become ill and had to be cured.

In the end, as indicated above, despite their differences in specific claims and approaches, members of both of these two influential Brazilian intellectual generations of the 19th century saw Europe as the main source of inspiration for their elitist conceptions of national identity that helped define some of the most important socio-political and cultural developments of the country's first eight decades of independent political life. Ironically, it was along very similar ideational lines that a new generation of intellectuals would come to fore in the 1920s attempting to promote, once again, a cultural revival in their country, this time around with elements provided by European Modernist ideals and propositions.

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