

Nonwhites and Brazilian
independence in comparative
perspective

Não-brancos e a
Independência do Brasil em
perspectiva comparada

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Abstract: The independence movements in the Americas in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were all born of alliances between elites and the subaltern, most of whom were nonwhites. This article compares the roles of Brazilian nonwhites in the independence struggle to the activities of those in British and Spanish America. The focus is on three groups: slaves, free people of color, and indigenous people. Some members of these groups took the initiative to join revolutionary movements, but many were forcibly recruited. Each group had their own agendas, but few of their demands were reflected in the new constitutions that were adopted. **Keywords:** revolution, independence, slaves, Indians, free people of color.

Resumo: Os movimentos de independência nas Américas nos séculos XVIII e XIX nasceram de alianças entre elites e subalternos, a maioria dos quais não eram brancos. Este artigo compara os papéis dos não-brancos brasileiros na luta pela independência com as atividades daqueles na América britânica e espanhola. O foco está em três grupos: escravos, negros livres e indígenas. Alguns membros desses grupos tomaram a iniciativa de aderir a movimentos revolucionários, mas muitos foram recrutados à força. Cada grupo tinha suas próprias agendas, mas poucas de suas demandas foram refletidas nas novas constituições que foram adotadas. **Palavras-chave:** revolução, independência, escravos, índios, pessoas de cor livres.



Introduction

The independence movements in the Americas in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were all born of alliances between elites and the subaltern, most of whom were nonwhites. This article compares the roles of Brazilian nonwhites in the independence struggle to the activities of those in British and Spanish America. The focus is on three groups: slaves, free people of color, and indigenous people. These groups experienced the age of revolutions in their own way, with their own hopes and fears.

Slaves

What set apart the slave populations was a particular rumor that resonated in slave circles. The rumor asserted that the monarch or other authorities had issued a decree emancipating the slaves, but that the decree was withheld by local authorities and landowners. This rumor had surfaced all over the Americas since at least 1669, appearing now and then in slight variations. Sometimes, for example, slaves repeated the claim that one of them or somebody they knew had seen the decree. In sporadic cases, the extended freedom was not total, and instead slaves would be a few days off per week. While an expression of prevalent sentiments, the rumor enhanced the willingness of slaves to take action in order to receive the freedom to which they thought they were entitled. It was not uncommon, therefore, for this rumor to spawn slave revolts (KLOOSTER, 2014).

The enthronement of a new king, debates in the metropole about the abolition of slavery, or the adoption of new laws could all activate the rumor, which was much less prevalent in years when such circumstances did not apply. In Brazil, it was the proclamation of a new Portuguese law in 1773 that raised the expectation of freedom among slaves in Paraiba. This law announced both the emancipation of those whose great-grandmothers had been slaves and the freedom of children born to enslaved women in Portugal and the Algarve. In the belief that the law also applied to Brazil, slaves and free people of color in Paraiba eagerly spread the news, not only by word of mouth but also by distributing copies of the text of the law. What helped convince the slaves that the law was not merely intended for Portugal were the words “and its dominions,” which do appear in the document, although not in relation to Portugal but the Council of Commerce (PALACIOS, 1998, p. 132; SILVA, 2001,



p. 126-144).

The rumor seems to have originated locally and not imported from afar. It seems that in most locales at any given time, some slaves were convinced of both the illegality of their status, but also of the existence of liberating decree. Their belief gained currency when it was allegedly corroborated by outside proof. One area where the rumored freedom regularly appeared on the surface was Antioquia in New Granada. In 1768, 1781, 1798, 1804, 1806, 1809, 1811, and 1812, the notion took hold that a *cédula* of the King of Spain had freed the slaves with one exception: slaves in the mines of in San Juan in Popayán rebelled in 1811 in the belief that a black queen had come to the Americas to free them (JIMÉNEZ OSPINA, 2017, p. 37-39). It was not the only time that slaves attributed the gift of freedom to an African monarch. In Martinique, a rumor circulated in 1768 that the king of Angola would soon arrive at the head of an army and take all blacks with him to Africa. Likewise, rebelling slaves of the Kongo nation believed in Cuba (1812) that the king of Kongo had ordered their freedom in letters he had sent and had dispatched soldiers to help them in their revolt (CHILDS, 2006, p. 161; SCOTT, 2018, p. 78-79).

Indispensable for the belief in an emancipatory document to be embraced was the role of free people as the source of information. The rumor about a decree in Virginia in 1730 may have been started by a white sailor who told slaves “that the King of England had ordered they should be all set free.” Nineteen years later in Venezuela, a sergeant of the free blacks may have been responsible to start the rumor, while in Paraíba in 1773 several free men of color were named by witnesses as disseminators, including a shoemaker, a slave-owning painter, and a sergeant-major of the *pardo* militia, who also worked as music teacher (GARCÍA CHUECOS, 1950, p. 67-76; MCCONVILLE, 2006, p. 177; RAMOZ GUÉDEZ 2001, p. 459-460; SIVA, 2001, p. 131, 134-135). The combination of reformist and revolutionary activity in Europe and the Americas during the Age of Revolutions thus enabled the rumor of an emancipatory decree to appear with great frequency, spurring slaves to action, as it did at the start of the Haitian Revolution. The rumor also popped up in Medellín (New Granada), where in 1812 a group of slaves approached the tribunal of justice, claiming to represent more than ten thousand fellow bondspeople. Perhaps misinterpreting the constitution of Antioquia, which had been promulgated a few months before and which was saturated with the metaphor of liberty, they believed that there was a decree that had freed them. After all, the first article of that constitution said that God has endowed men equally with certain natural,



essential, and imprescriptible rights, the main ones of which were liberty, legal equality, security, and property. Predictably, the authorities arrested the group (CHAVES, 2011, p. 87-89).

The rumor did not bypass Brazil during its independence period. In February 1821, a juiz ordinário of the vila de Óbidos (Grão-Pará) made public an edict that prohibited the import of *ladino* slaves. This caused much commotion among blacks and Indians, who loudly proclaimed that they were free, which caused them to be punished. Perhaps building on the same rumor, a certain Celso told slaves in the district of Igarapé-Mirim (April 1823) that they were free. As a result, slaves committed acts of violence (BRITO, 2008, p. 162-163).

In May 1822, a slave revolt broke out on Itaparica Island near Salvador in which the notion of royal emancipation featured. 280 plantation slaves killed the new overseer after they had in vain protested against the man's appointment. In response, the local militia killed 32 rebels and wounded 80. One idea that was said to have fueled the uprising was that the king had freed the slaves, but the masters refused to honor their liberation (REIS, 1993, p. 53). What may have led them to this belief is unclear.

In Minas Gerais, slaves found signs of impending emancipation in news from overseas. A judge there was convinced that discussions about liberty in Portugal's constitutional Cortes were construed by local blacks as meaning that on Christmas 1822 or shortly afterwards on the Day of Kings, they would receive letters of freedom (KIDDY, 2002, p. 176). Elsewhere, slaves also championed their own form of *shintismo*, as they did in Pará, where they interpreted the province's support of constitutionalism as being tantamount to their own freedom, but they waited in vain to be released from their bondage (NOGUEIRA, 2009). This belief did not die down quickly and may have induced slaves to flee from their masters, as many did in July, August, and September 1822. In that last month, an official memorandum issued in Belém stated that it "has long been observed in this city that the blacks have presented themselves in public, and privately with their masters, with a certain haughty air, speaking of a charter of freedom which they said was coming" (SALLES, 1971, p. 250). Likewise, in the province of São Paulo, authorities noted a correlation between discussions about a constitution that referred to freedom and increased criminal activity by slaves. A plan by slaves to rise in rebellion in July 1821 was viewed in the same light by the captain-major of Itu, who mentioned that the rebels aimed to obtain by violence the freedom that the King had granted them, but that their masters were hiding. This idea also emerged among slaves in nearby Porto Feliz,



although the authorities of Itu discerned that it was not the King to whom local slaves attributed their emancipation, but rather the Constitution (RICCI, 1993, P. 226-228).

That the King, who had for so long been the wellspring of freedom in the eyes of rebelling slaves, had abandoned their cause in the eyes of some was underlined in the *Correio do Rio de Janeiro*, in an article that pointed an accusing finger at Father José Pinto da Costa Macedo, whose pen name was Philodemus. The newspaper wrote that when a black cobbler came to his house to pick up some boots at the order of his master, da Costa Macedo received him with great civility, ordering him to sit next to him. You should not be surprised, he said, because everyone is equal, everyone is a citizen. The Cortes had decreed the end slavery, but the King was hiding the decree in order to maintain the captivity of people who were now citizens. The *Correio* added that da Costa Macedo told the cobbler that he would let him know when it was time for the slaves to kill their masters, offering them money and weapons.²

This widespread rumor was not the only reason why slaves often chose the royalist side. Many simply refused to take up arms on behalf of their masters when these supported the cause of revolution. These slaves expected to achieve their ideal of freedom or at least to obtain more freedoms sooner under monarchical rule. North American slaves were emboldened to run away from masters not just because of the escalating crisis between the Thirteen Colonies and the metropole, but specifically by a proclamation issued by Virginia's governor Lord Dunmore. He promised slaves coming to his side that those who would take up arms for the king would be manumitted. The result was massive marronage: fifteen hundred men, women, and children made their way to Norfolk, where the men were enrolled in the newly formed Ethiopian Corps. A similar large-scale slave flight to the British camp happened three years later, in 1778, after British troops had conquered New York (GILBERT, 2012; HORNE, 2014; MORGAN; O'SHAUGHNESSY, 2006; NASH, 2006). Slave flight also marked the Spanish American independence wars, in which many runaways claimed to be have been born free, and that of Brazil in 1822 and 1823, when numerous enslaved workers escaped to the main Bahian camp of the independent forces. These men, however, had not been lured by the promise of freedom. (BLANCHARD, 2008, p. 128-129). On the other hand, they seem to have been incited to rebel by the Portuguese, at least according to Brazilian accusations, and two hundred slaves attacked Brazilian troops near Salvador in December 1822. Defeated only after heavy fighting, fifty-two of them were



executed and the others flogged (REIS, 1993, p. 54).

Overall, the contribution of slaves to the North American revolutionary war was the smallest, with enslaved men accounting for no more than four percent of the war effort on either side. Slaveholders were usually reluctant to allow their slaves to fight on the battlefields, while authorities worried about arming them, since they could use their guns to start a revolt. Although that concern did exist in the Spanish colonies, it did not prevent the recruitment of large numbers of slaves. They formed the core of José de San Martín's Army of the Andes, which was key to the victory of the insurgents in a large part of Spanish America, while three out of every ten soldiers in Quito were enslaved (HÜNEFELDT, 2010, p. 279). If many of them did not have a choice in the matter, as their masters had volunteered them, those who could choose often signed up for army service because of the prospect of being freed in exchange for military service (BLANCHARD, 2002, p. 508-509).

The strategies to achieve freedom varied among slaves. Some counted on royal support, others believed that they could use the courts, yet others ran off, some tried rebellion or availed themselves of military service to one of the warring sides as a road to liberation. In none of these cases, though, there was an obvious connection to the freedom invoked by the creole elites that sought independence.

Free people of color

Several decades into the life of each American slave society, free people of color emerged as a distinct stratum. They were, as a classic book title has aptly described them, "neither slave nor free" (COHEN; GREENE, 1972). Having shed their status as slaves without being allowed to enjoy many of the rights free whites enjoyed. Their social position was deliberately legally anchored as both middling and humiliating. In the French colonies, the Code Noir of 1685, which provided the legal foundation for the slave regime, formally stated that the newly freed would not be treated differently from those who were born free. Other articles of the same code, however, showed that special rules applied to freedmen, who were still marked by their past as slaves – a racial criterion based on skin color was not mentioned. It meant that freedmen would be punished in the same way as slaves for stealing cattle and would receive a much higher fine for hiding maroons than other free persons. Laws introduced at later dates aimed to keep free people of African descent remained segregated from whites



by making it harder for the former to obtain their freedom and to enter into marriages with whites (NIORT, 2004, p. 65-74). In Spanish America, free people of color were considered foreigners, who technically remained subjects of monarchs of African countries from which their ancestors had left. They could not count as residents of the Spanish colonies because they had moved there against their will (MORELLI, 2020, p. 82). Still, complete segregation did not occur. Free people of color usually shared the same lifestyle, deprivation, and hopes and fears of the poor white segment of the population. They also joined hands with them in plebeian crowd action across the Americas.

Everywhere, the numbers of the free people of color rose throughout the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth, as for instance in Minas Gerais where they made up 31.9 percent of the population in 1776 and 41.7 percent in 1821 (LANGFUR, 2006, p. 131). In Saint-Domingue, the free colored population grew even faster in the years before the revolution, almost reaching parity with the whites. In that prosperous French colony, free people of color were not all alike. As in most other American colonies, free blacks generally occupied lower positions, hamstrung as they were by their skin color and – perhaps equally important – their visible connection to a slave past. Free *gens de couleur* who owned land or conducted trade were almost invariably free mulattoes (BARTHÉLÉMY, 1995). Free blacks also tended to face more obstacles to climb the social ladder in Brazil. One important factor were the networks of which they were part. The Tailors' Conspiracy in Bahia (1798), for example, showed how unlikely it was for an alliance between *pretos*, on the one hand, and *pardos* and whites, on the other, to work (KRAAY, 2001, p. 257). Free mulattoes tended to have many more contact with whites and not only because of their white fathers, who had often manumitted them. In Cap Français, the largest town of Saint-Domingue, the two groups lived in the same neighborhoods and sometimes even under the same roof, and artisans of color often maintained close social and economic ties with whites. At the same time, there were tensions with the so-called *petits blancs*, the lower-class whites, often poverty-stricken recent immigrants from France who saw the *gens de couleur* as economic rivals and embraced a racist discourse, since whiteness was their only asset (ROGERS, 2009, p. 72-73). In one part of Brazil, the independence process underlined that at the end of the day, people of color were more vulnerable than whites. Colored men in Ceará massively resisted their recruitment in 1823, because they feared it would mean losing their freedom (CÂNDIDO, 2018, p. 210).

Nowhere in the Americas did their freedom mean that people of color



were seen as equal to the whites, but they did acquire certain rights. In Saint-Domingue, they enjoyed the rights to get married, draw up contracts, and bequeath and inherit property (ROGERS, 2009, p. 66). Free men of color tended to work as artisans, occupying positions that used to be the preserve of whites. The growing economic significance of this population group led to backlash in the form of various sets of restrictive measures that differed from place to place. In Brazil, they were barred from certain professions, such as medical doctor, lawyer or goldsmith. Other laws forbade the use of certain types of clothing or jewelry. Not everywhere, however, were the new laws enforced. And in some parts of the New World connivance allowed free men of color to function in positions that were taboo elsewhere. In Lima, for example, most surgeons and physicians were *pardos* (mulattoes) (SILVA, 2015, p. 575). In general, however, people of color received little or no formal schooling. In Caracas, they often learned to read and write in workshops of barbers and shoemakers (SORIANO, 2018, p. 43-45).

Besides as craftsmen, free colored people in Brazil and elsewhere in the Atlantic world distinguished themselves by their military service. By serving in the militia, they improved their social position and performed tasks that filled them with pride (CASTELLANOS RUEDA; CABALLERO ESCORCIA, 2010, p. 52-54). The French declaration of war on Great Britain at the time of the American War of Independence enabled free people of color to gain military merit. One of two volunteer units set up in Saint-Domingue was free colored, which was deployed on the North American mainland and on the island of Grenada (GARRIGUS, 1992; LESUEUR, 2018, p. 209-210). Free people of color were also given an increasingly important role in Martinique and Guadeloupe (LOUIS, 2012, p. 1, 127). Guadeloupe's free men of color were charged with the somewhat contradictory task to both police the slave population and to see to uphold a system in which as many men as possible were released from slavery at their masters' wish. Since 1768, against the backdrop of continuing Anglo-French rivalry, French policy aimed at stimulating manumission of skilled slaves and thereby boost the ranks of free militiamen. Militia service was thus for slaves a way to obtain their freedom (RÉGENT, 2007, p. 43-44).

At the start of French hostilities against Britain in 1778, men of color were enrolled in a military combat unit for the first time (DUBOIS, 2004, p. 119-123). Similarly, Cuban free men of color played a role in the American War of Independence as participants in Spanish conquests of British strongholds (KUETHE, 1986, p. 104, 106, 107; PLACER CERVERA, 2015, p. 167, 176;



SÁNCHEZ, 1994). Serving in the militia was so popular among Cuba's free colored population that by 1770, one in five males was a member of the militia (KLEIN, 1966, p. 21). As in other Spanish colonies, these men enjoyed *fuero* rights, which, historian Matt Childs has written, "included access to military courts, exemptions from certain taxes, tribute payments, and labor levies, and the right to bear arms, something long denied to the population of African ancestry" (CHILDS, 2006, p. 83). Men who had served for more than twenty years could ask for retirement and had the right to a small pension.

Free blacks and mulattoes also played an important military role during the various independence wars of Latin America. This process began during the British invasions of Buenos Aires in 1806 and 1807, during which free mulattoes and slaves took up arms to defend their city against the intruders. Having helped the United Provinces of the Río de la Plata obtain independence in 1816, Buenos Aires' free blacks and mulattoes gained such confidence that they protested a government order three years later that they be garrisoned. Most of the members of the free black and mulatto militia refused to go along, since the order meant that they could no longer reside in their own homes. Besides, they associated the confinement with slavery. The government eventually relented, allowing the militiamen to return to their homes (DI MEGLIO, 2003, p. 60-64). Such a protest would, of course, have been unthinkable in colonial times, but the realization that the independence process provided them with unprecedented possibilities to carve out a better position for themselves must have motivated these men.

In Mexico, five provincial companies of *pardo* (free mulatto) and *moreno* (free black) militias, made up largely of rural workers, were involved in the independence movement led by José María Morelos. Later, blacks and mulattoes joined the new insurgent leader Vicente Guerrero, an avowed proponent of equal rights (VINCENT, 1994, p. 261; VINSON, 2004, p. 164-165). In Brazil, free colored people were also active during the period of independence and, as in Mexico, usually in their own militias. In June 1821, the president of Pernambuco's junta created two companies, one for mulattoes and one for blacks. Unlike the Cartagena militia, both companies had officers of African descent. Likewise, 69 free men of African descent formed part of the militia called Leais Paulistanos, which left the province of São Paulo for Rio de Janeiro in February 1822 to protect Prince João (SILVA; SOUZA, 2014).

In the Rio de la Plata, free men of African descent tended to join white plebeians in demonstrations or military action (DI MEGLIO, 2011). That happened not



only in Buenos Aires but throughout Upper Peru (Charcas), where the mulatto leader Francisco Ríos was not only closely connected to the population of African descent – which made up no more than one-tenth of the people – but his vast social network also crossed ethnic boundaries, including other plebeians (AILLÓN SORIA, 2010, p. 264-266). Likewise, blacks and mulattoes supported the 1817 Pernambuco revolt as they realized that the end of the absolutist regime could provide an opening to them to begin to break down their subordination. But they were, of course, not alone. What made them stand out was that they were punished very harshly in the wake of the movement's defeat, certainly compared to white supporters (BERNARDES, 2006, p. 239). The revolt that broke out in Pernambuco six years later – the Pedrosada – had a more explicitly ethnic character. Military Governor Capt. Pedro da Silva Pedroso, himself described as a mulatto, led an uprising that caused the local junta to lose control of the center of Recife for a week. Numerous lower and middle-class people of color joined the movement and used the opportunity to hurl insults at whites and release blacks and mulattoes from prison (MOSHER, 2008, p. 57-62).

If the Pedrosada had radical overtones, the revolt started by Vincent Ogé in Saint-Domingue in 1790 was unambiguously aimed at seizing power. This exceptionally wealthy free man of color had hoped for a peaceful conquest of equal rights, but when that failed, he organized an army of 300 men that was no match for the troops sent after them. Ogé paid the ultimate price for his rebellion when he was condemned to death (GARRIGUS, 2011). Much more successful were the actions of free pardo militiamen in Cartagena de Indias. That city's largest neighborhood of Getsemaní was home to a substantial population of free mulattoes and blacks, most of whom were militia members. In November 1811, they stormed, heavily armed, into the meeting where the recently established junta was deliberating, exerting pressure to declare independence. The Creole junta members gave in, although they decided not to accept the free colored demand to have black officers command black militias (MÚNERA, 1998, p. 178).

In the province of Caracas, pardo militiamen initially continued their support for the colonial regime after the arrival of the news from Bayonne that Napoleon had forced King Fernando VII to relinquish his throne. Within two years, however, they had become supporters of an end to the status quo. How did they arrive at such a new position? In the late colonial period, Venezuelan pardos often used legal means to gain the same privileges as the white



population. In their petitions to the courts, they emphasized their honor and stressed their pure bloodlines, their devotion to Christianity, ancestry, and their dignified professions. In other words, they spoke the language of the *ancien régime* (PELLICER, 1996, p. 132, 135). Their transformation to revolutionaries was actually deceptive. Pardo militiamen certainly welcomed the opportunity to rise to the rank of colonels, but as historian Clément Thibaud has explained, they could only conceive of political equality if that meant that they had become legally white. Their goal was not to overthrow social hierarchies (THIBAUD, 2015, p. 33).

In turn, the new authorities usually ignored the principle of equality and did not move to end the special status of free people of color. In Chile, for example, the “Batallion of the Disciplined Infantry of Pardos” may have been replaced in 1813 by the “Batallion of Infantrymen of the Fatherland,” but beyond the name, nothing changed. All its members remained pardos (CONTRERAS CRUCES, 2011, p. 68). It was not different in Brazil. The president of Pernambuco’s government junta, Gervásio Pires Ferreira, created two army companies in 1821, one for mulattoes and one for blacks, called “Bravos da Pátria” and “Monta Brechas,” respectively. Although both had their own officers, Ferreira’s decision was more typical of the *ancien régime* than of one adhering to legal equality.

It would, then, be a mistake to assume that the independence movements necessarily benefited free people of color. Nor were royalist leaders automatically opposed to equal rights. The Spanish commander chosen to pacify New Granada, Pablo Morillo, proposed to the Crown that free pardos and mestizos of legitimate birth be granted the same privileges as whites. In response, a decree was issued that said that mulattoes, blacks, and zambos (the offspring of blacks and Indians) who fought for the Crown were to be offered Spanish citizenship. This decree, of course, failed to provide equality for most free colored men (BLANCHARD, 2008, p. 30-31). A similar law that was introduced in France in 1791, which gave equal rights to taxpaying free colored males who were born of free parents – a small group of mulattoes – led to so much backlash that the law did not remain on the books for long. By contrast, the Cortes of Lisbon was more enlightened, deciding in August 1822 that free colored men would be active citizens with full voting rights. This article, however, was not inserted in the Constitution of 1824 (GARRIGUS, 2006, p. 243, 258-259; SILVA, 2015, p. 591). The Spanish Cortes restricted the number of free people of color who would receive equal rights, although they were allowed to enter universities and



seminaries. In practice, free men interested in enrolling in these institutions did, however, still face obstacles (MORELLI, 2020, p. 126).

The transition to new regimes did not fundamentally alter official policies. Black and mulatto army officers in Bahia who had sided with the imperial regime may have been rewarded with promotions and pensions, but as a group they did not advance much (KRAAY, 2001, p. 136, 139, 224). For his part, Simón Bolívar expressed a widely shared white *pardocracia* in his correspondence: the fear that pardos would organize, eliminate the white elite, and perhaps free the slaves (HELG, 2003). The fear of a slave revolt led the governor of the Dutch island of Curaçao to warn against introducing equality for free colored people. The danger, he wrote, lay in the close relations these had with slaves, encouraging the latter to obtain such rights. If they were supported by their free brethren, the total ruin of the colony would be near. Not only in Curaçao, but in all American slave societies, the most important lesson that white authorities drew from the Haitian Revolution was that free men of color and slaves should remain separate (NATIONAAL ARCHIEF, 1797; THIBAUD, 2015, p. 40). In view of its official policy of racial harmony, Colombia may seem to have been an exception to this rule, but on close inspection it was not. When light- or dark-skinned free men of color obtained a post in the local government and sought to impose their authority on the white elite, they were invariably accused of instigating race war. The same fate awaited ambitious Venezuelan pardos (LASSO, 2007; MORELLI, 2020, p. 174-181). Where it was professed, then, racial harmony only existed on paper.

Indians

It is difficult to sketch a general picture of the situation in which the numerous groups of indigenous people of the Americas found themselves on the eve of the independence movement in their countries. There were vast differences between them in terms of social integration, economic position, relative autonomy, and control of land. Brazil distinguished itself by the fact that slavery among Indians still existed. What Indians everywhere did have in common was a great devotion to the overseas monarch. Another common element was that the period of independence was only a stage in a much longer struggle for survival.

In the English colonies in North America, it became increasingly difficult for Indians to remain in their ancestral lands as the eighteenth century



progressed. The British defeat of France in the Seven Years' War had profound consequences for Indians on the frontier of English territory, for with the disappearance of New France, which had been a major obstacle to colonists settling wherever they wished, was removed. The only hope the Indians had left was their protection by the British monarch, who in a proclamation issued just after the war forbade colonists to settle beyond the Appalachian Mountains. In doing so, he sought to limit the land grants that land companies issued and to stop the warfare between Indians and settlers. Nevertheless, the colonization of western territories increased rapidly (CALLOWAY, 1995, p. 23; CALLOWAY, 2006, p. 109-110; WARD, 2003, p. 3-4). The continued (legal) existence of indigenous slavery in Brazil explains the fear among its Indians not only of losing their lands, but their liberty as well. Indigenous re-enslavement was not unlikely in, for instance, Goiás, where the enslaved black labor force had declined (KARASCH, 1998, p. 402). Likewise, in Ceará, Indians' participation in the independence period was fueled by the fear of a possible return to slavery. When they organized a peaceful demonstration in September 1822, they believed that "fetters were being forged far away to imprison us" and that they would become slaves within three months (COSTA, 2019, p. 509-510).

One factor that tied indigenous people in both Brazil and the Spanish colonies to the empire in which they resided was the veneration of their monarch. This was partly due to the conversion of the Indians under the umbrella of the Patronato Real, which allowed the Iberian Crowns to direct missionary activity, of which converts were made aware. In Brazil, moreover, missionaries had presented the king as a mythical, all-powerful figure. The belief in these qualities of the royal leader was rekindled by the arrival of the Royal Court in Rio de Janeiro and the acclamation of the king's son as emperor. At the same time, Indians understood their relationship with the overseas monarch as an economic and political pact. In exchange for their loyalty, natives received rights and protection from the Crown. In practice, this meant that indigenous people could appeal to the king when local large landowners took their lands (ECHEVERRI, 2016, p. 13-14; SÁNCHEZ GÓMEZ, 2009, p. 268-269). Such consideration must have weighed in favor of indigenous alliances with Portuguese troops. On key occasions, indigenous men were mobilized to fight side by side with the royalists, such as the Pernambucan revolt of 1817, and four years later, when they helped defeat a junta in Pernambuco that defied monarchical rule and sided with the Cortes in Lisbon.

In New Spain, historian Eric Van Young has explained, indigenous people



were loyal in the first place to their own communities. They certainly tended to pay homage to the monarch, but without recognizing all royal claims on their community. Nonetheless, many Indian towns experienced some form of messianic fervor centered on the person of the distant King or local surrogate figures (VAN YOUNG, 2001, p. 458-459, 463-466). Their understanding of their relationship to the Crown explains, of course, the support of many Indians for a continuation of royal rule throughout Spanish America. At the same time, natives realized that the crisis of monarchical rule offered them the opportunity to renegotiate their relationship with the Crown, enabled by their military service on behalf of the king (ECHEVERRI, 2016, p. 132).

In one respect the Indian outlook in Spanish America differed from that of the natives in other parts of the Americas. They did not wage their struggles in the first place for the sake of preserving their lands (ECHEVERRI, 2016, p. 155-156). The independence movements in the Spanish colonies were not out to seize Indian lands, although there were exceptions to this rule. In the area of Buenos Aires, for example, Indians resisted increasing encroachment on their land tooth and nail, especially since the new authorities expedited the process by expanding the frontier without prior negotiations with the Indians. As a result, attacks by indigenous groups on frontier settlements ensued (RATTO, 2008, p. 149). When Indians were not explicitly at odds with independence fighters about alleged agrarian injustices committed, they were often still upset about structural inequalities. Village uprisings of natives in New Spain did not reflect a comprehensive ideology, but the sacks of rural estates were in themselves a statement about perceived wrongs (VAN YOUNG, 2001, p. 439).

In light of the above, one would expect indigenous communities in Spanish America to side with one of the two warring parties. To what extent was that the case? It was certainly true in large parts of New Granada and Peru, where natives massively chose the royalist side, but there are also numerous examples of natives who chose to ally or join with the independence fighters. In Mexico, they formed the majority of the soldiers in Hidalgo's improvised army that grew by leaps and bounds in 1810 until it was 80,000 men strong. It is important, however, to realize that this was no purely indigenous movement, but a multi-class and multiethnic one. Even when Indian notables embraced the insurgent cause, they tended to collaborate with non-Indians. (FERRER MUÑOZ, 1999, p. 527; VAN YOUNG, 2001, p. 147).

Some who joined Hidalgo's army were motivated by the chance that they could engage in plunder, and others by the abolition of the head tax known



as tribute. In the colonial era, tribute payments had been an expression of the Indians' loyalty to the Crown as well as their subordination to colonial elites. They were not static and subject to negotiation by individual Indians, many of whom left their hometowns as they sought to change their status. Most of them would not have become exempt from tribute payments, but ended up in a different official demographic category, whose tribute was lower than Indians remaining in their villages. In general, tribute was a flexible and ambiguous form of taxation, which therefore lent itself to negotiation (ALBIEZ-WIECK, 2018).

During the independence era, tribute at times was again the focus of the natives' negotiations with warring parties. Insurgent indigenous leaders in Upper Peru made it clear in a document they wrote around 1811 that they were not seeking independence but wanted to renegotiate their ties with the colonial government. They had stopped paying tribute, but promised to do so again once they knew whom they should pay (SOUX, 2008, p. 25-26). Native complaints about tribute had led the protector of the Indians in Peru to suggest its abolition, a recommendation adopted in 1810 by the Council of Regency that ruled Spain then, although that measure only applied to New Spain. The decree was published there by a newly arriving viceroy, three weeks after Miguel Hidalgo had announced that he would eliminate tribute when he issued the rallying cry (the Cry of Dolores) that started Mexico's independence process (HAMILL Jr, 1966, p. 107-108, 114-115, 118-123). In other parts of Spanish America, the end of Indian tribute was also decreed by insurgent creoles, from Socorro (New Granada) to Chile to the Río de la Plata, invariably to lure indigenous fighters to their side. In areas with a large native population, the abolition caused serious financial deficits, as in Peru and Guatemala, whose governments tried to abide by the measure of the Cortes of Cádiz that confirmed the abolition, as decreed by the Council of Regency. In the audiencia of Quito, royalists and insurgents alike simply ignored that decree, which would have left the treasury empty and thus hampered military action. For the same reason, Peru's Viceroy José Fernando de Abascal reintroduced tribute under another name. After his restoration, King Fernando VII opted for the same solution when he ordered tribute collections to resume in all areas under Spanish rule, although the tribute was henceforth called "contribution" (POLLACK, 2016, p. 110-116, 119-121, 128).

While natives had previously paid the tribute faithfully, in many parts of the Peruvian viceroyalty they put up resistance against Abascal's policy. In



one Indian town, whose priest had encouraged the population to refuse paying tribute, the men withdrew to the hills and the women attacked the collectors (GLAVE, 2008, p. 391). Both in Lower and Upper Peru, communities rose in revolt and joined the insurgent armies after King Fernando's reinstatement of tribute payments (ECHEVERRI, 2016, p. 153; SOUX, 2008, p. 29-31).

Like in Spanish and British America, Brazilian Indians operated in both camps, as in Pernambuco and Alagoas during the revolt of 1817 (DANTAS, 2015, p. 90). Sometimes the leaders of one of the warring factions shied away from recruiting Indians for fear of an Indian uprising (GUEDEA, 1986, p. 18). At the same time, there were many Indian communities in the Americas which remained aloof in a struggle that was not theirs. Even then, it was often impossible to escape warfare. In Upper Peru, for instance, many Indians were forcibly enlisted or contributed to the royalist war efforts by providing food and horses or moving cannons from one encampment to another (SOUX, 2008, p. 44). Still, at least six "little republics" of natives were set up in the Río de la Plata that defied both sides (MCFARLANE, 2014, p. 160-161, 184, 186, 197). And some Mapuche caciques in Chile attempted to adjust to the war between royalists and patriots without involving themselves more than needed (ZARLEY, 2019, p. 123).

No indigenous rebellions occurred in Brazil on the scale of those that split Peru during the age of revolutions. Tupac Amaru's massive revolt, in which more than 100,000 persons died, was not yet connected to the independence era, but it showed the potential collective might of indigenous people. The Inca-descended leader targeted not only tribute, but also the hated sales tax and the forced Indian purchase of goods, and he expropriated food and livestock from officials and landowners. The movement enabled many poor Indians to let off steam by engaging in sacking and looting, which helped create the notion that Indians were not politically interested (WALKER, 2014, p. 25, 47). One lesson from Tupac's defeat was that Indian revolts could not succeed unless they involved an alliance with creoles. That condition was met in 1814 in Cuzco, when radical creoles, who dreamed of an independent country that included Lima, Buenos Aires, and Montevideo, lacked manpower to revolt on their own. They sought and received support from thousands of Indians, who captured the royalist town of Arequipa, but were eventually defeated (HAMNETT, 2017, p. 169-172; LYNCH, 1986, p. 167-170).

Indians were victims of violence on a large scale during the American Revolution. On the western frontier of the Thirteen Colonies, tension had mounted in the middle decades of the eighteenth century. The victory of Great



Britain in the Seven Years' War, which removed the Indian's potential French allies from the scene, was followed by the abovementioned Proclamation by King George III. When soldiers tried to contain the flow of British settlers into Indian territory, many a colonist began to rethink their loyalty to the empire. Soon, however, it was only Indians who stood in the way of fulfilling settlers' dreams of possessing new lands. As a consequence, violence against Indians became ubiquitous, in part because both Patriots and Loyalists fought each other elsewhere and saw the West as peripheral to their objectives (GRIFFIN, 2007, p. 133). Violence was sometimes meted out by British soldiers, but more often by the rebels, who punished natives for siding with Britain or simply wanted to make land available. Apart from destroying Indian villages, the insurgents' strategy – copied from the French and the British – was to burn Indians crops late in the season. Starvation and disease were known to be the inevitable results (CALLOWAY, 1995, p. 47; KNOUFF, 2004, p. 163; TAYLOR, 2006, p. 100-102). One Indian nation that suffered from such invasion was that of the Cherokees. In the course of a few months in 1776, rebels annihilated thirty-six of their towns, followed by another eleven three years later. Nor did these expeditions constitute an aberration, as evidenced by the instructions insurgent leader George Washington sent to one general, in which he ordered “the total destruction and devastation” of indigenous settlements. Such actions elicited a response from Indians that came in the form of violent raids of settler communities.

In Brazil, Prince Regent João set the tone for similarly violent acts against Indians. Three months after his arrival in Rio de Janeiro, he enabled settlers to move into the Eastern Sertão by declaring war on the Botocudo Indians. What followed was something unprecedented in that area. One historian has written: “The wholesale slaughter of Indians spread rapidly through the forested regions of eastern Minas Gerais, inland Espírito Santo, and southern Bahia.” (LANGFUR, 2006, p. 272-273, 277).

Despite such policies of extermination, indigenous Brazilians ended up acquiring certain constitutional rights. Debates in the Luso-Atlantic world were affected by the Spanish constitution of Cádiz (1812), which abolished Indian tribute and forced labor and awarded Indian males citizenship. They were therefore allowed to participate in elections. The deliberation at the Lisbon Cortes also ended up enfranchising the Indian population, even though those without enough income to sustain themselves, and later the illiterate, were excluded from the vote (SÁNCHEZ, 1994, p. 258). Indians had already been



allowed to take part in the election of representatives to the Cortes in Lisbon. On that occasion, the Tapuya believed that their new political role would enable the elimination of their forced to labor as domestic slaves, as soldiers, as field hands, and in manufactures (SANTOS, 2013, p. 62).

The indigenous response to the changing world around them was not uniform. Commoners in Spanish America tended to support the principle of equality, which they found enshrined in the constitution of Cádiz, whereas the caciques were keen to hang on to the status quo, which guaranteed their continued authority and status (ECHEVERRI, 2016). In the end, the outcomes of the independence movements were mixed throughout Indian America. While natives gained rights, they often lost autonomy. If forced labor came to an end, the appropriation of their lands accelerated, at least in the United States and parts of Brazil (LEMOS, 2004, p. 171-172).

Conclusion

The independence wars of the Americas could not have succeeded without the contributions of nonwhites, who played a lead role in the revolutionary dramas. The cross-class alliances of which they formed part were key to the dismantling of the old regimes. Many nonwhites, however, were forcibly recruited into armies on both sides, while others did all they could to remain neutral. At the same time, Indians, slaves, and free people of color had their own agendas, which they pursued within the contexts of the various independence movements and imperial crises. Their agency contributed to the legal changes that benefited many subalterns, at least of paper. In practice, however, their struggles did not end with the construction of new, independent regimes.

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Notas

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²CORREIO..., (1822).