The Independence of Brazil: a review of the recent historiographic production

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Abstract
This article presents a review of the historiographic production on the subject of Brazilian Independence, especially over the last three decades. It highlights the consensus and divergences to be noted in the analysis, and the specific lines of interest in the different studies, while pointing to the research questions that still remain open.

Keywords
Independence of Brazil; liberalism; historiography; bibliography.

Resumo
Este artigo apresenta um balanço da produção historiográfica sobre a Independência do Brasil, especialmente focada nas três últimas décadas. Sublinha o consenso e as divergências na abordagem ao tema e aponta as principais linhas de investigação em curso bem como outras que podem, ainda, vir a ser objeto de estudo.

Palavras-chave
Independência do Brasil; liberalismo; historiografia; bibliografia.

General overview
The first thing to be noted in a general overview of the academic historiography produced over the last few decades on the subject of the independence of Brazil is undoubtedly its great vitality. In Brazil, ever since the interpretations of the process of its political separation from Portugal (which took place in the first few decades of the 19th century) began to free themselves from the unofficial unsavoriness imposed upon them through their association with a history that served the purposes of the last Brazilian military dictatorial governments (1964-1985), they have provided a safe, progressive and constant examination of the subject, blossoming into a variety of themes, focuses and problems and affording their object of study a definitive status as a central point of focus in the thought that has been produced—whether Brazilian or not—about Brazil.

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It is quite true that the criticism leveled against what in many places and in diverse (and frequently imprecise) ways was usually referred to as the “official history” did not relate, in the case of the historiography of Brazil, only to the question of Independence; nor can it be said that the interpretations that for so long had insisted upon this as the supposedly founding moment in the formulation of the Brazilian national identity, full of heroic deeds and supposedly pedagogical aspects in terms of their civic and patriotic teachings, were always the ones that predominated, as is shown by some important works from previous decades (Prado Jr. 1933; Sodré 1965; Fernandes 1975; Rodrigues 1975-76). However, when that criticism became firmly established from the 1980s onwards and, in the Brazilian academic environment, began to provide the direction for specialized historical research in general, the theme of the Independence of Brazil was returned to in a most intense fashion, having as one of its main pretexts the need to “purge” it of the ideological burden and anachronisms that it frequently bore.

On the other hand, the democratic opening up of Brazil in the middle of that decade encountered an academic environment of growing professionalization and specialization, as well as one of increased plurality. Since the middle of the previous decade, there began to be a proliferation of history departments in Brazilian universities geared towards research and teaching, with bachelor’s degrees, licentiate degrees, master’s degrees and doctorates supported by public funding that included research grants awarded at all levels, resulting in a large number of individual and collective research projects being undertaken at ever more competitive institutions. While, on the one hand, such competitiveness has led to the annual production of a vast range of papers, theses, articles, books and chapters that are sometimes superficial and largely irrelevant, marked by simple criteria of quantity with the intention of guaranteeing the place of their authors in the Brazilian academic career structure, on the other hand, such a mass of studies also brings with it many consistent contributions with some merit in terms of the revision and deepening of our knowledge about the Independence of Brazil.

It must also be stressed that Brazilian academic historiography has always been heavily influenced by foreign intellectual currents, being permeable to all types of ideas—revised, criticized, reformulated or simply accepted—particularly those originating from French authors. The French renewal of studies about politics in general in the late 1970s and the early 1980s had a powerful impact on Brazil, contributing to a return to studies about the country’s Independence, although the most significant non-Brazilian contributions to the theme undoubtedly came from the Portuguese and American historiographies.

Specifically in relation to the Portuguese historiographic production, its preferred treatment continues to be not the idea of a direct political rupture between Brazil and Portugal but rather the creation of some of the conditions that were essential for this to be able to happen, arising from the internal splits observed in the United Kingdom after the transfer of the Court to Rio de Janeiro and which resulted in the constitutional movement of 1820. The so-called liberalism, a fundamental theme of this historiography since the 19th century, continues to be of interest to scholars studying the history of that country, which inevitably helps to shed light on our understanding of the Independence of Brazil. In some cases, as we shall see later on, we find the correct establishment of an indissociability between the political dynamics of both spaces.

Thanks to its recent advances, the historiography of Brazilian Independence has become so dense and varied as to earn the right to some historiographic reviews (Graham 2001; Siqueira 2006; Malerba 2006b; and also, to a certain extent, Carvalho, José 2008), in which one can note the early outlines of a chapter about specifically Brazilian thought about Brazil (Costa 2005), while non-Brazilian historiographies are given their first treatments as a subject of study (Castro 2005; Kraay 2005a).

Both in Portuguese and English, the Independence of Brazil has also been afforded some good syntheses, which seek to incorporate academic contributions in didactic formats that are accessible to the general public (Bernardes 1983; Novais & Mota 1986; Algranti 1987; Oliveira, Cecília 1995b; Oliveira 1999a; Lyra 2000; Souza, Iara 2000; Slemian & Pimenta 2003; Oliveira, Cecília 2005a). In English, there is at least one work that, besides offering a good general synthesis, is full of important interpretive insights (Barman 1988), while in Spanish there is an excellent attempt to draw an analytical comparison with the Spanish-American process (Halperin Donghi 1985). By attempting the important task of bringing together both academic and everyday historical knowledge, such works end up offering “states of the art” that help to explain different