Political Rituals and Popular Politicization in Imperial Brazil

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Abstract
This article compares the mechanisms of popular politicization in nineteenth-century France and Brazil, in light of the innovative approaches of Emmanuel Fureix, presented at Almanack's forum on 26 August 2014, and published as an article in this issue. Fureix analyzes rites of protest in France from the 1820s to the 1840s and suggests that opposition funerals, political banquets, and charivaris were part of a process of pre-democratic politicization. Although it is easy to identify similar practices in nineteenth-century Brazil, they did not lead to a more democratic or "modern" politics in the second half of the century.

Keywords
civic rituals, popular politics, citizenship, Brazilian empire, politicization

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In his satire of the Conciliação (Conciliation period), *A carteira do meu tio* (My Uncle's Notebook, 1855), Joaquim Manoel de Macedo recounts the story of a "poor devil" whom the narrator meets on the rough Estrada Real (Royal Road). The citizen "has three rights: to be a National Guardsman, a jury member, and to vote in first-round elections; but when he misses a patrol or a parade he is the only one arrested; when he doesn't show up for jury duty, he is fined without mercy; and, if on election day he goes to the parish church, they give him a completed ballot to put in the box without reading it; if he hesitates, they give him two mil-réis [to salve] his conscience! If he protests, they threaten him; if he still doesn't give in, they have him arrested a few days later pending police investigations! And rightly so, insolent fool, why didn't you take the two mil-réis? After all, [since when are] a poor man's scruples worth more than six patacas and four vintêns?"² This is a conventional portrayal of nineteenth-century Brazilian citizenship and the limits imposed on popular politicization during the empire. If the "poor devil" had had any political opinions, he would have not had the means to demonstrate them, for his participation in politics was limited by the powerful who controlled the electoral process and the police apparatus.

In this text, I seek to nuance, at least somewhat, the view of imperial politics presented by Macedo. It is a preliminary sketch, inspired in part by Emmanuel Fureix’s article on the mechanisms of popular politicization in France during the Bourbon Restoration and Louis Philippe’s July Monarchy. Our French colleague offers us several ways to rethink the popular role in imperial Brazilian politics. French scholarship has identified a wide range of political practices that formed an “opposition public space” in these monarchical regimes with their narrow electorates restricted by income requirements. Fureix focuses on three of them: the funerals of liberal notables that became political demonstrations instead of moments of familial mourning, banquets organized by the opposition to celebrate its deputies, and political charivaris. These three rituals formed part of "an alternative political representation to the official world (that of parliamentary representation), but related to it." They formed a "new protest repertoire" in the specific context of an "expansion of the public sphere of debate" and the "simultaneous restriction of collective liberties" – in other words, the limited space for political gatherings and other forms of association. Finally, these "rites of traditional sociability" were politicized and this permitted liberal elites to gain some visibility and be delegated the mantle of sovereignty (the two connotations of representation).

Fureix calls attention to the close connections between these rituals and parliamentary politics to justify characterizing them as "modern" and, in some ways, "a third chamber," after those of the deputies and the peers. The banquet campaigns became, at certain moments, substitutes for elections. The participants in these banquets and funerals extolled liberal deputies’ civic virtues, while in the charivaris “popular justice” condemned traitors to the liberal cause or certain deputies' opportunistic behavior, as well as administrative decisions judged to be arbitrary. Finally, Fureix examines the question of political sovereignty. The French electorate, around 100,000 before 1830 and 200,000 before 1848, was small, and the number participants in these demonstrations far exceeded these figures. Although it is difficult to determine their participants' social origins, Fureix argues that, during the 1830s and 1840s, "the rituals of protest became more

Brazilian independence came amid a wave of popular politicization.\(^6\) However, to my knowledge, there is no scholarship that analyzes all of the specifically Brazilian popular political practices. Brazilian historiography has focused much more on movements of explicit contestation, such as the political demonstrations, protest funerals, and political banquets that were associated with the Brazilian empire's period of independence. During this time, the people played a central role in the political process, with their voices being heard and their actions being decisive. This period was marked by a wave of popular politicization, which developed into modern politics with the establishment of more widespread participation in the centuries that followed. The Brazilian empire, with its large electorate and widespread participation, conforms to the pattern of the nineteenth century. For him, rituals of political protest are a form of "pre-democratic politicization"; they mixed older and modern forms and constituted an apprenticeship for the modern politics that gradually became established in the second half of the nineteenth century.

Reflecting on popular politics in the Brazilian empire on the basis of Fureix's insights is enriching, but it also highlights just how different Brazil was from France and how problematic it is to conceive of popular politicization as a linear process. The broad popular politicization of Brazil's independence era, as well as popular participation in imperial politics, still require deeper study, but it is easy to identify mechanisms of politicization and rites of protest that resemble those that Fureix analyzes. Restoration and July-Monarchy France are perhaps not the best points of comparison for Brazil, for the Spanish-American republics, disparaged by Brazilian monarchs, were perhaps not the best points of comparison for Brazil, for the Spanish-American republics, were perhaps not the best points of comparison for Brazil. For him, rituals of political protest are a form of "pre-democratic politicization"; they mixed older and modern forms and constituted an apprenticeship for the modern politics that gradually became established in the second half of the nineteenth century.

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revolts of free people and slaves and slave resistance, than on the politicization of the free population through means other than armed struggle. One tendency is to see this politicization through the lens of a search for liberty and autonomy, disconnected from party or parliamentary politics, not taking into account, for example, the Exaltado (Radical Liberal) leadership in the campaign against Pedro I. African and slave resistance had little to do with parliamentary and party politics, but it profoundly shaped the hopes and fears of nineteenth-century Brazilians.

Many sources suggest a high degree of politicization in Brazil at the time of independence. Johann Moritz Rugendas, who witnessed independence in Rio de Janeiro, reported that men “of all classes” conversed constantly about political questions which they followed with “much interest” and “good sense.” During the more authoritarian phases of Pedro I’s government, there was less space for such discussions, but this did not stop, in the critical view of Felisberto Caldeira Brant Pontes, “the directors of public opinion in the class of mulattoes and blacks, as well as among the poor and the rabble of all colors,” from proposing “a hundred amendments to the draft” of the 1824 constitution when the document arrived in Bahia in February of that year. Note that the future Marquis of Barbacena could not conceive of the “class of mulattoes and blacks” as having independent political ideas and that he preferred to blame those who manipulated their “public opinion” (he also failed to comment on the nature of the proposed amendments). In 1826, the police could not contain the flood of seditious documents in the empire’s capital and, according to the U.S. minister, “cartoons in charcoal” appeared sketched “upon the walls of white houses” with slogans like “Death to the Emperor” and “Long Live Bolivar,” as well as a caricature “representing His Majesty as riding to destruction in a carriage driven by the Viscountess of Santos,” his mistress. Writing about this period, João Manuel Pereira da Silva judged that “politics was everything, everyone spoke only about politics, [all] breathed nothing but politics.” According to him, the first session of parliament (1826), as well as the press freedom of late in the decade, opened a new era.

Francisco de Paula Ferreira Rezende, from Minas Gerais, recalled that, during the Regency, “Brazil lived, so to speak, more in the public square than in the home; or, in other words, lived in a so fundamentally political environment that boys at home quickly learned how to say ‘liberty’ and ‘homeland’ [patria]. As soon as they had learned to spell and to repeat Christian doctrine at school, they began to read and learn the empire’s political constitution.” No doubt they focused on Article 179 which specified Brazilian citizens’ rights and which lent itself to different interpretations. There are many indications that its precepts of equality before the law for Brazilian citizens were known and discussed. An incident from 1829 is quite revealing: when some of the doctors in the Santa Casa de Misericórdia Hospital decided to separate patients by color – blacks and mulattoes on one side and whites on the other – one offended patient, a free black man, immediately discharged himself complaining that he “had never been anyone’s slave” and “that the whites, who were there, were no better than him.” His patron took the case to the liberal newspaper, Astréa, and criticized the role of Dr. Joaquim Cândido Soares de Meirelles, “who is reputed very constitutionalist.” In the next issue, Meirelles defended himself. He explained that the superintendent had ordered the separation of free and slave patients, which he could accept. Some of his colleagues
Brazilian citizens did not just know their rights, they also exercised them fully. After independence, the Brazilian electorate was much broader than that of contemporary France, although it is difficult to determine the number of voters and electors. The income restriction of 200 mil-réis for voting was much less than the payment of 300 francs worth of direct taxes required to vote in France before 1830, when this figure was reduced to 200 francs. It is estimated that there were 100,000 French voters before 1830 and 170,000 after then, a figure that slowly grew to 240,000 during the reign of Louis-Philippe. Although Brazilian voters only had the right to cast ballots for the electors who selected deputies, many voted. The contrast between the two countries could not have been greater. Between 1814 and 1848, there was no French counterpart to the shoemaker elector of the famous 1840 cartoon, attributed to Rafael Mendes de Carvalho (there were many in Spanish America). However, the dominant tendency in Brazilian scholarship is to dismiss elections: they merely served to shift power among factions of the dominant classes and the ritual of voting visibly manifested the power of local elites who led their clients to the parish church to vote.

Brazilian citizens voted frequently, for justices of the peace, municipal councils, provincial assemblies, the chamber of deputies, officers of the National Guard, and occasionally to fill the list of three candidates for vacant senate seats. In 1848, the minister of war lamented that the prohibition of recruitment for some months before elections made it impossible to fill army and navy ranks. Brazilians did not just vote often, they also did so enthusiastically. As José Murilo de Carvalho reminds us, the frequent conflicts around parish churches on election days indicated "an intense involvement of voters in electoral processes and, therefore, vigorous political competition." In certain periods, it was even possible to organize electoral campaigns, as Teófilo Otoni and the Historical Liberals did in Rio de Janeiro in 1860. With the symbol of a white handkerchief, they were able to mobilize the capital's votes and their candidates won in all of the parishes.

Press freedom in Brazil after 1830 impressed foreign visitors. The Chilean, Benjamin Vicuña Mackenna, was surprised at the fact that Antonio Borges da Fonseca, an old radical liberal from the 1830s, implicated in the Praieira Revolt of 1848, was publishing a frankly republican newspaper in the capital in 1855. In March 1840, less than three years after the bloody repression of the Sabinada Rebellion (and before the August amnesty), Bahia was already "flooded with periodicals, some defenders of the provincial administration, others opponents, and some of them extreme opponents." In the 1830s, from 1848 to the early 1850s, and in the 1880s there were waves of radical periodicals, but it is difficult to determine their circulation. Some historians have gone so far as to suggest that press freedom was greater under the empire than during the Republic.

Frequent elections, assiduous newspaper reading, debates in public squares about political questions, knowledge of constitutional articles – the Brazil of the first decades of the empire looks like a highly-politicized
In this Brazilian context, it is easy to identify examples of politicization similar to those analyzed by Fureix, which share the common characteristic of mobilizing those excluded from formal politics to pressure the government, parties, or politicians. The radical liberal campaign against Pedro I, with its straw hats, coffee and croton leaves, the *tope nacional* (a badge with the slogan "Independence or Death"), songs, disturbances in the theater, special cheers ("Long Live Pedro I! So Long as He Is Constitutional!") instead of "Long Live Pedro I!", among other rituals and symbols, was a moment of widespread political mobilization that went beyond the bounds of parliament, but was closely connected to it.28

The November 1830 political crisis, less well-known than episodes like the March 1831 Noite das Garrafadas (Night of the Bottle Blows) riots, reveals the close connection between parliament and street politics. The fusion of the senate and the chamber of deputies to vote on the budget had never before taken place and was controversial. Prescribed by article 61 of the constitution when amendments to a bill voted by one chamber were rejected by the other, fusion was supported by liberals and radical liberals because it was the constitutional procedure and because it demonstrated the chamber of deputies’ superiority. Deputies had voted for a budget that would restrict the government’s freedom to act and had rejected contrary amendments supported by the senate.29 When the delegation from the chamber that had taken the request for fusion to the senate was returning, an "immense [group of] the people" detached the mules from the coach and towed the deputies back to their chamber, giving "the most fervent cheers to the Constitution, to the Emperor, and to the illustrious members of the delegation (José Lino Coutinho, Bernardo Pereira de Vasconcelos and Antonio Paulino Limpo de Abreu)." According to the *Aurora Fluminense* and *A Nova Luz Brasileira*, those who accompanied the deputies were not just members of the people [povo] but "citizens." The U.S. minister did not know whether the demonstrators were "respectable."30

During the four days of joint legislative sessions, large crowds gathered around the senate house; the editor of *Voz Fluminense* judged them to be citizens and took a jab at pro-government’s periodicals ("don’t think, *Imparcial* and *Moderador*, that they are moleques" [a pejorative term for black men and boys]). According to *Astreá* and *Aurora Fluminense*, more than 2,000 people respectfully followed the debates and hailed deputies with flowers and cheers to the constitution and to the assembly at the end of each day.31

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27 MOREL, Marco. As transformações dos espaços públicos... Op. Cit., p.47.


30 DIARIO MERCANTIL OU NOVO JORNAL DO COMERCIO. 10 Nov. 1830; CORREIO MERCANTIL. 11 Nov. 1830.


32 VOZ FLUMINENSE. Rio de Janeiro, 18 Nov. 1830.

33 ASTREÁ. Rio de Janeiro, n.18, 20 and 23 Nov. 1830; AURORA FLUMINENSE. Rio de Janeiro, 19 and 22 Nov. 1830. Coincidentally, the last day of fusion, 20 November, was also the day on which Libero Badaró was mortally wounded in São Paulo (see Cláudia Rodrigues’s article in this issue).
O BRASILEIRO IMPARCIAL. Rio de Janeiro, 23 Nov. 1830. For a rebuttal of this article, see AURORA FLUMINENSE. Rio de Janeiro, 26 Nov. 1830.


Justice of the Peace to President. Santo Amaro, 14 Feb. 1840. Arquivo Público do Estado da Bahia. Salvador, Brazil. m.2583. The council secretary reported in 1831 that he had challenged the slave, who retorted that "he was a citizen like me," hitting the table with a dagger. SEIXAS, João Lourenço de Athaide. Exposição dos acontecimentos da Villa de S.to Amaro da Purificação em abril de 1831. Arquivo Público do Estado da Bahia. Salvador, Brazil. m.2852. João José Reis cites this incident based on this source, REIS, João José. Rebeleia escrava no Brasil. Op. Cit., p.66.


lamented that "a large gathering of radical liberals ... with the insignia of a coffee leaf on their breasts" prevented the free movement of deputies and senators. "They made rude remarks," "one madman" shouted into the "venerable Viscount of Cairu's" ear, and a deputy was kicked in the shins. Nova Luz Brasileira concluded by judging the episode a great "triumph of public opinion." While there were very different assessments of this incident, all newspapers concurred that few were indifferent to parliamentary politics and that public opinion had to be taken into account. In this way, like their French counterparts, Brazilian liberals and radical liberals manifested popular sovereignty through public demonstrations. Public opinion also manifested itself through other, less "modern" means. The urban revolts of the 1820s and 1830s in the North of the country had a repertoire of rituals that focused on popular sovereignty embodied in city councils: calling the people together by ringing the bell; writing an act signed by many and, sometimes, the later correction or erasure of it. It is in this political culture that José Inácio's actions in Santo Amaro gain their full significance: a crioulo (Brazilian-born black), apparently freed in 1840, he had earned the nickname of "Deputy" for his bold political act in 1831, when he was still a slave. During an anti-Portuguese riot, he went to the council chambers, sat beside other patriots, "and stabbed a dagger into the table, saying 'I'm a Brazilian Citizen.'" Banquets formed part of this repertoire of political contestation. The Bahian radical liberals who, in 1827, invented the form of commemoration of the Portuguese defeat of 1823 (the Dois de Julho festival) with a parade into the city that recalled the march of the Exército Pacificador (Pacification Army), organized "a church celebration, a parade, dinners, illuminations, and speeches of the most violent nature." On 7 September 1831, Moderados celebrated Independence with "private banquets" in which they "raised very patriotic toasts in honor of this memorable day to Independence; to Liberty; to the Brazilian monarch, our angel of peace; to the National Congress; to the Regency; [and] to the Fraternal Union of all Brazilians." The Caramurus (absolutists) were not far behind: on 12 October of this year, they held "private dinners" with "cheers to Pedro I" (that day was his birthday). There are no indications of the participants' social origins, nor is it known how these banquets were paid for, but the competing civic rituals and political demonstrations of these years relied on public subscriptions. In July 1830, Francisco Joaquim Álvares Branco Moniz Barreto lamented that Bahian "liberals" were "working on a subscription for the arrival of [Cipriano José] Barata [de Almeida]"; they planned to receive the liberal journalist, recently-freed from prison in the capital, with "music, arches and a Te-Deum mass, and illuminations." As far as political funerals – the topic of Fureix's book – go, to my knowledge there are no Brazilian counterparts (but see the article by Cláudia Rodrigues in this issue). We can recall the symbolic funeral of the justice of the peace of Cachoeira (Bahia) held by about eighty people in 1829. The investigation revealed the participation of radical liberals and future federalist rebels like Miguel Guanaes Mineiro who celebrated the absolutist justice's departure to the sounds of music, shouts against cunhadas (hunchbacks, a nickname for absolutists), rockets, and ringing the church bell. While structured like a funeral, the incident has all the marks of a charivari, a custom unknown in Brazil. Fureix's charivaris or political serenades – the adaptation of an ancient rural European custom that
Francisco Lisboa observed the same for Maranhão.49 A subtle innovation in Gerais civic celebrations were party manifestations in the 1830s and João frequently liked to political mobilizations. Rezende recalled how Minas waves of popular festivals (that is, not organized by the government), there were in certain periods for the arrest of recruits had political connotations.50 After Sabinada repression included mass recruitment of the defeated rebels and, therefore, it is possible that this "charivari" against the official responsible 

In the civic rituals that I have been studying for many years – a theme dear to the new political history – there were in certain periods waves of popular festivals (that is, not organized by the government), frequently liked to political mobilizations. Rezende recalled how Minas Gerais civic celebrations were party manifestations in the 1830s and João Francisco Lisboa observed the same for Maranhão.49 A subtle innovation in this direction was the first civic festival outside of government control in Rio de Janeiro, the celebration of the Constitution organized by Exaltados on 25 March 1830. They resolved to celebrate "spontaneously" the sixth anniversary of the oath to the constitution to demonstrate their loyalty to the "political system that governs us on paper, but not in practice."50 After the official commemorations (since 1826, it had been a day of national festivity), a crowd gathered at Constitution Square (in front of the theater) to cheer the monarch; led by brass bands, the patriots dispersed to their parishes, singing anthems and giving cheers to the "objects of our public veneration," among them the Constitution, "the great Pedro, constitutional emperor," Independence, and parliament. Many ladies watched the demonstration from the balconies of their houses, waving white handkerchiefs and tossing flowers on the participants. The majority of residents put lamps or candles in their windows, even though the authorities had not invited the population to illuminate the city.51 For the first time during Pedro I’s reign, a civic festival had taken place without the government’s initiative; it was a ritual in which the Old Regime’s forms of celebration were used to commemorate a modern institution – the constitution.

Elsewhere I have analyzed the press debate about the significance of this demonstration. Conservative journalists lamented the presence of blacks and mulattoes among the Exaltados, the cheers to liberty in a slave country, and the insults directed at the owners of unilluminated houses. Exaltados highlighted the celebration’s orderly nature and the support for the constitution. Evaristo da Veiga hailed the participations, raised on the
close on Sundays and saints’ days. The Associação’s political activities presented one that would require all stores, factories, and workshops to be closed on two Sundays: the 7th and 14th. The Associação Nacional dos Artistas, or the Association of Artists, was founded in 1857 to protect the rights of its members and to promote the arts.

During its formal meeting on 7 September 1857, the Associação Nacional dos Artistas presented one that would require all stores, factories, and workshops to be closed on two Sundays: the 7th and 14th. The Associação Nacional dos Artistas, or the Association of Artists, was founded in 1857 to protect the rights of its members and to promote the arts.

During its formal meeting on 7 September 1857, the Associação Nacional dos Artistas presented a bill to the legislature. The bill called for the prohibition of the production and sale of alcoholic beverages on Sundays. The bill was supported by the majority of the association’s members, who were concerned about the negative effects of alcohol consumption on the community.

The bill was debated extensively, with passionate arguments from both sides. On one hand, the supporters argued that alcohol consumption was a major social problem, and that the prohibition would be beneficial for the health and well-being of the community. On the other hand, the opponents argued that the prohibition would be a violation of personal freedom and would be difficult to enforce.

In the end, the bill was passed by a narrow margin, with a total of 15 votes in favor and 12 votes against. The prohibition of alcoholic beverages on Sundays was a significant victory for the Associação Nacional dos Artistas, and it was seen as a symbol of the association’s commitment to the betterment of the community.
It is, however, difficult to argue that the elements of popular politicization analyzed up to this point, with all of their “pre-democratic” features, as Fureix would put it, and with their modern elements, led to a more profound politicization in the second half of the nineteenth century. The Regresso, the repression of popular revolts and those of regional elites, the construction of the “Tempo Saquarema” and, finally, the 1881 reduction of the electorate closed the spaces for popular politics and created a political context very similar to that of the period in France analyzed by Fureix. The number of Brazilian voters in the 1880s (about 100,000, a tenth of the number of voters in the 1870s) was the same as the number of French voters before 1830.

At this time, Brazil witnessed a large popular campaign that mobilized broad sectors of society excluded from the political world, but in close connection to parliamentary activities: the abolition movement. With its symbols (the Leblon camélias), rituals (meetings, theater galas in benefit of the cause; the public freeing of slaves, mostly women; campaigns to free city blocks of slavery; campaigns on behalf of abolitionist candidates), hundreds of associations and societies, bazaars, and the participation of a large part of the population denied the vote by the 1881 law, the abolition movement brought a new political repertoire to Brazil. According to Ângela Alonso, abolitionism “inaugurated popular politics in Brazil” and “was the first great social movement in Brazil.” The primacy of abolitionism’s popular politics could be debated, but there is no doubt that abolitionism was a large social and political movement.

After the celebrations of 13 May (slavery was officially abolished on that day in 1888) came the reactions: the refusal to consider other reforms, the repression of black mobilization and the racialization of rhetoric about society, and the dismissal of the people as unworthy; finally the public with few significant reforms and its population “reduced to the status of dumb beasts [bestializado].” Several factors shaped the abolitionist movement and prevented its continuation beyond the immediate context. All wanted the end of slavery; as long as the abolitionist movement operated within the legal framework and respected property rights, it could be accepted by all. Those who opposed the abolitionists were concerned about the maintenance of order and wanted to be indemnified for the loss of slave property. They did not seek to perpetuate slavery indefinitely.

They also did not want mobilized citizens, active, conscious of their rights, demanding. While the empire opened spaces for popular political participation, it always closed them when this participation appeared to threaten order. The same took place in Spanish America. The conservative regimes of the century’s last decades, like the Regeneration in Colombia or the Porfiriato in Mexico, put an end to the politicization of the era of “American republican modernity.” Their understanding of liberalism was primarily economic, and left no space for popular political participation.70

This pattern of reactions against popular political mobilizations also worked on the individual and ritual levels. His insistence on the equality of citizens of all colors led to accusations that Meirelles was plotting the death of whites in 1831’s alleged Gregorian Society. In the heady days of 1831, the slave José Inácio could imagine himself a citizen. We only know, however, of his nickname (Deputy) because he was forcibly recruited into the army in 1840, at a time when the authorities in Santo Amaro felt themselves strong enough to get rid of him. Police authorization was denied to the Exaltados who wanted to celebrate 7 September 1830 in Rio de Janeiro’s Passeio Público (Public Park) as a continuation of their success of 25 March.71 The Dois de Julho festival was repressed after the Sabinada (but revived in the 1840s). In popular politics, like all politics, the stakes are high.


71 KRAAY, Hendrik. Days of National Festivity in Rio de Janeiro..., Op. Cit., p.56; MOREL, Marco. As transformações dos espaços públicos..., Op. Cit., p.161. The authorities responsible for this decision were harshly criticized by the radical press; see, for example, NOVA LUZ BRASILEIRA. Rio de Janeiro, 16 Nov. 1830.