

NOTES ON NAPOLEONIC MILITARY OFFICERS IN THE EMPIRE OF BRAZIL

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ABSTRACT

This article sets out to discuss the presence of French military officers who resided and worked in Brazil during the first half of the nineteenth century. According to Patrick Puigmal, many of them were incorporated into various armies throughout Spanish America. They even participated in wars fought by troops involved in independence struggles and, subsequently, in constructing republics which resulted from said processes. Their presence was notorious in Brazil. Even though they may have had important roles, existing research does not evidence memorable trajectories, neither in military life nor in Brazilian politics.

KEYWORDS

French officers – Imperial Brazilian Army – Empire of Brazil.

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CONSIDERAÇÕES SOBRE A PRESENÇA DE MILITARES NAPOLEÔNICOS NO IMPÉRIO DO BRASIL

RESUMO

O artigo trata da presença de militares franceses que viveram e atuaram no Brasil na primeira metade do século XIX. De acordo com Patrick Puigmal, muitos destes oficiais foram incorporados aos exércitos de vários países da América espanhola, inclusive atuando nas guerras nos exércitos envolvidos nas lutas de independência e posteriormente na construção das repúblicas resultantes destes processos. No Brasil foi notória a presença de alguns destes homens. Entretanto, ainda que possam ter desempenhado funções de importância, as pesquisas existentes não evidenciaram trajetórias de grande destaque na vida militar e política brasileira.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Oficiais franceses – Exército Imperial brasileiro – Império do Brasil.

These days political landscape seems to be an inevitable issue when proposing any discussion. In that sense, despite richness and quality seen in Brazilian historiographic research in the last few decades, it is imperative to reflect on how our studies have circulated, in order to evaluate in what ways historical knowledge could be better used to overcome, or maintain, authoritarian projects for society. Besides constantly reviewing our own works, we must especially imagine new means of distribution for such studies, so as to instigate dialogue with society beyond academic realm.

Due to such context, it may seem inadequate to reflect on members of the armed forces, but it is quite the opposite. It is highly important to be discussing History, and no less to be dealing with military activity within processes of establishing republics and republican institutions for social development in Latin American countries. So, this article's aim is to discuss Patrick Puigmal's propositions regarding officers who fought in Napoleonic wars and shortly after migrated to South America in the first decades of the nineteenth century.

Before that, however, I must emphasize that certain Latin American countries have published a larger amount of historiographies reflecting on military issues than Brazil. Due to academic interest and other affinities, research on 1800s from Uruguay and Argentina is what I follow more attentively.

Though they may not be referred to as military historians, – a label not many of us enjoy – researchers in said countries have for decades intently delved into matters involving armed mobilizations as part of analyzed social realities. Túlio Halperin Donghi, regarded as one of the “foundling fathers”³ of Argentinian historiography, still influences younger scholars with his vast and qualified body of work,

³ On Argentinian historiography, see: DEVOTO, Fernando & PAGANO, Nora. *História de la historiografía argentina*. Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 2010; PAGANO, Nora C. La producción historiográfica reciente: continuidades, innovaciones, diagnósticos. In: DEVOTO, Fernando J. *Historiadores, ensayistas y gran público: la historiografía argentina (1990-2010)*. Buenos Aires: Biblos, 2010.

especially the classic “*Revolución y Guerra*”⁴ (Revolution and War). They are also heirs to a wide set of influences, including many other authors, especially Jorge Gelman, Roberto Schmit and Raúl Fadkin, as representatives of the country’s historiographic research, which intertwines political, economic and military themes in its analyses⁵.

Similar standards of quality may be attributed to Uruguayan historiography, though their publishing volume is quite smaller for obvious reasons. As most academic research in History as a discipline, in Uruguay it has been influenced by the field’s different theories. Nevertheless, issues related to Artiguism and Caudillo rural structure, as well as political clashes and the country’s armed mobilization context, remain significantly present in what has been studied⁶. Ana Fega is currently one of the most recognized Uruguayan historians, especially due to her original approach on Artiguist Revolution⁷.

My intention here is not to propose an examination of Platine historiography. These initial paragraphs aim to highlight the fact that war and its players are recognized as key historical agents, albeit with particularities not to be forgotten.

Ensuing wars from independence processes in former Spanish colonies were obviously significant struggles. Even though there has not been anything similar in Brazilian history, it is not difficult to list almost two dozens of somewhat lengthy armed conflicts which took place from North to South of the Empire: with different levels of rad-

4 HALPERIN DONGHI, Túlio. *Revolución y guerra*. Formación de una elite dirigente en la Argentina criolla. 2ª ed. Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI Editores Argentina, 2005.

5 Among other publications, see: GELMAN, Jorge. *Rosas, estanciero*. Gobierno y expansión ganadera. Buenos Aires: Capital Intelectual, 2005; SCHMIT, Roberto. *Ruina y resurrección en tiempos de guerra*: sociedad, economía y poder en el Oriente entrerriano posrevolucionario 1810-1852. Buenos Aires: Prometeo Libros, 2004; FRADKIN, Raúl. *La historia de una montonera*: bandolerismo y caudillismo en Buenos Aires, 1826. Buenos Aires: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 2006.

6 On Uruguayan historiography, see: SOUZA, Marcos A. de. *A cultura política do “batillismo” no Uruguai* (1903-1958). São Paulo: FAPESP, 2003.

7 FREGA, Ana. *Pueblos y soberanía en la Revolución Artiguista*: La región de Santo Domingo Soriano desde fines de la colonia a la ocupación portuguesa. Montevideú: Ediciones de La Banda Oriental, 2007.

icalism, undeniable casualties, rural or urban battles, armed mobilization both from those in uniform and militarized civilians⁸. In other words, we would certainly have a deeper understanding of circumstances revolving the reality of Brazilian Empire, if wars were more frequently regarded as an additional aspect of social realm, such as political, economic, cultural...

These ideas certainly do not lack substantiating support. As it is common knowledge, there have been recently praised historiographic studies in Brazil on Military History, or New Brazilian Military History, according to a collection's title edited by Vitor Izecksohn, Celso Castro and Hendrik Kraay⁹. Among several authors, highlights include works by Adriana Barreto de Souza, Álvaro Pereira do Nascimento, Fábio Faria Mendes, Francisco Fernando Monteoliva Doratio and Peter M. Beattie, major references on the theme for scholars focused on 1800s military issues. There are also important volumes who contributed to the debate's resurgence, such as analyses by Ricardo Salles on Paraguayan War¹⁰, and Wilma Peres Costa on the Army and tumultuous Plata River region in the nineteenth century¹¹. Several others could be additionally listed, since there has been growing interest in military history, which thus originates instigating new studies.

It is key to emphasize that such works are very disparate from traditional military History, also known as battle-history. That is still being produced, usually for military training, and published by specialized houses, such as the Army's Library. In a different manner and with other aims, researchers from many countries have produ-

8 For a general idea of nineteenth-century conflicts, see: DANTAS, Monica Duarte (org.). *Revoltas, motins, revoluções: homens livres pobres e libertos no Brasil do século XIX*. São Paulo: Alameda, 2011.

9 CASTRO, Celso; IZECKSOHN, Vitor; KRAAY, Hendrik (org.). *Nova História militar brasileira*. Rio de Janeiro: Editora FGV, 2004.

10 SALLES, Ricardo. *Guerra do Paraguai. Escravidão e cidadania na formação do Exército*. Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1990.

11 COSTA, Wilma P. *A Espada de Dâmocles. O Exército, a Guerra do Paraguai e a crise do Império*. São Paulo: Editora Hucitec/ Editora da UNICAMP, 1996.

ced versions of military history with the following general objectives and features:

“first of all, to adopt an interdisciplinary perspective implies studying war in broad terms, meaning its relationships to economy, sociology, social psychology, political science, anthropology, philosophy... Secondly, to relativize war as an object exclusive to military history, thus proposing new objects and approaches. Third, to reject military history as subordinate to political history. (...) Fourth – we add – the novelty is a certain “anthropologization” of themes inscribed in military history, such as minority studies in context of wars, cultural identity issues within armies and investigations on long-term cultural traditions associated with the composition of armed forces.”¹²

Along the same lines, Patrick Puigmal understands the significance of military history and its characteristics. In one of his works, he concludes:

“La historia de la guerra, del ejército y de la sociedad militar evoluciona hacia una reflexión sobre el cambio social o cultural ligado primero a los múltiples choques del enrolamiento y del enfrentamiento y, segundo, a la relación entre guerra y formación del Estado Nación. Por tanto, la historia militar se revela como lo que es (o lo que debería ser), un componente indispensable de la comprensión del actuar humano que permite el conocimiento real de los hechos o, por lo menos, dar una visión mas global y completa de estos mismos.”¹³

(The history of war, the army and military society evolves into a reflection on social or cultural change. First, that is connected to multiple clashes of warfare and confrontation; and second, to how war and Nation-State formation relate to one another. Military history, then, is

12 SOARES, Luiz C. & VAINFAS, Ronaldo. Nova História Militar. In: CARDOSO, Ciro F. & VAINFAS, R. *Novos domínios da História*. Rio de Janeiro: Elsevier, 2012, p. 113-114.

13 PUIGMAL, Patrick. Conclusiones: la historia en común. In: GUERRERO-LIRA, Cristian *et al.* *El lazo de los Andes: Diálogos cruzados sobre las campañas de la independencia: de argentinos y chilenos civiles y militares*. Osorno: Universidad de Los Lagos, 2007, p. 150.

revealed as it is (or what it should be): an indispensable component to understanding human accomplishments, which allows for real comprehension of our actions or, at the very least, to provide a more global and thorough vision of these actions.)

As he systematized twenty years of research and publications, Puigmal organized his reflections in nine sections. From his structure, then, despite not being able to thoroughly explore it with due attention, I have formulated a few ideas. Though he worked in Chile for decades, Puigmal is a French researcher, meaning it is important to highlight motivations for his interest in Napoleonic officers.

“No fue y no es para nada intención nuestra transformar este movimiento en el responsable de todo, pero si poner luz en hechos relevantes, a menudo ignorados, voluntariamente o no, que ayudaron a este proceso. No es tampoco el resultado de una intención nacionalista queriendo reivindicar parte de la gloria; nuestro trabajo responde más bien al estudio de un fenómeno en general desconocido, a veces menospreciado, el cual en todos los casos tiene gran relevancia en la actualidad.”¹⁴

(It was not and is not our intention to regard this movement as responsible for everything, rather we intend to shed light on relevant deeds – voluntarily or not, often ignored – which have helped this process. Neither is it a nationalist purpose, attempting to claim part of the glory. Our work can be better understood as the study of a generally unknown phenomenon, at times belittled, which is nevertheless greatly relevant today.)

That said, we can discuss his remarks. A major characteristic of Puigmal’s works is emphasizing a global comprehensiveness of

¹⁴ PUIGMAL, Patrick. Los organismos de formación de los ejércitos de Argentina y Chile bajo la influencia militar napoleónica (1810-1830). In: GUERRERO-LIRA, Cristian *et al.* *El lazo de los Andes: Diálogos cruzados sobre las campañas de la independencia: de argentinos y chilenos civiles y militares*. Osorno: Universidad de Los Lagos, 2007, p. 136.

historical processes, even if he focuses on Chilean history. His arguments are structured in order to understand what occurred in early nineteenth century beyond the national focus which historiographies are usually restricted to. This means the author understands there had been a radical change in the Western world: replacement of absolute monarchic regimes by independent republics via war and revolutions. There was general desire all over America to discontinue relationships with colonial rule, even if it was still not quite clear what they intended to build instead.

I disagree with how Puigmal understands Brazil's case. According to the author, we had a short independence war, via a process led by the throne's heir. That may be a common historiographic comprehension. If we, however, consider the state of absolute chaos in our Regency period (with several demonstrations for distinct political movements, lengthy and bloody armed battles, throughout which many different programs for a nation were presented), Brazil's independence could be better understood as a process lasting up until the 1850s. Only then, after great military effort, as well as several specific treaties and agreements between Portugal and different provincial elites – during which there were both successful events and erratic behaviors¹⁵ – Brazil was transformed into a single unit under the young Emperor's rule.

Analyzed as it may be, several military members participated in establishing these different Latin American nations. They were incorporated into diverse sides of conflicts and, subsequently, set their own trajectories to contribute and solidify institutions in these lands freshly-released from Iberian rule.

Biographic dictionaries published by Patrick Puigmal vividly illustrate this point. According to his data, between 1815 and 1817, out of five million soldiers, Europe reduced their troops to about two million. This means three million people were dismissed from

¹⁵ RIBEIRO, José Iran. *O Império e as revoltas: Estado e nação nas trajetórias dos militares do Exército Imperial brasileiro no contexto da Guerra dos Farrapos*. Rio de Janeiro: Arquivo Nacional, 2013.

positions for which they had been trained, gained experience, and built careers to seek opportunities for social differentiation. A great portion of these men was young and with non-privileged economic backgrounds, since they were sons of peasants. Suddenly, then, their sole professional ability, military service, was no longer necessary. Given this context, approximately 20,000 men left Europe. They were French, English, German, among other nationalities. To quote Puigmal, “soon, there were plenty of political reasons for exile, adding to unemployment.” They justified migration with desire to help and build new societies, generally republics, to fight the Spanish Empire and to venture into the new world¹⁶.

Migration is an absolutely contemporary matter. Once more, then, because a historian’s work factually demonstrates how people move from one continent to the next in order to seek better living conditions, their role can be seen as a scientific task and political necessity. However, albeit expressive as a general phenomenon, the arrival of some thousands of men and their activities in America do not seem to have drawn research attention in countries where they migrated, as stated by the author in section two of his reflections.

There are insufficient records in Brazil to confirm whether European officers worked in favor of republican or liberal movements. Among the *farroupilhas* in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, there were Carbonari Italians, such as José Garibaldi and Luigi Rosseti. Though, as opposed to old Spanish America, on the Brazilian Empire, thus-called Napoleonic officers encountered a previously-established order, even if there were political alternatives taking shape. In other words, they found scarce possibilities to use their ideas and practices acquired with military experience in Europe so as to influence anyone.

Brazilian historiography has not seen, though, any analyses in the proposed direction. A brief research nonetheless shows how it is

16 PUGMAL, Patrick. *Diccionario de los militares napoleônicos durante la independencia de los países bolivarianos (Colombia, Venezuela, Panamá, Bolivia, Ecuador)*. Santiago de Chile: Dirección de Biblioteca, Archivos Y Museos, 2015, p. 35.

possible to identify several European military members who arrived in Brazil to this very scenario and had long-lasting careers. For instance, French-born artillery patron and Itapevi Baron, Emílio Luiz Mallet, whose family fled from Napoleon to Brazil; Gustavo Henrique Brown, Englishman, with high posts in his country's and Portugal's Armies, who also served in Brazil in the 1820s¹⁷; and former Napoleonic officer Pierre or Pedro Labatut, who was investigated for recruiting slaves during the struggle to expel Portuguese from the state of Bahia¹⁸. There are even records of diaries written by soldiers of fortune brought from Europe to serve in Brazil in the early 1800s. Among other nationalities, these include German, Swiss and French men¹⁹.

There are, then, examples aplenty of such phenomenon during the Empire, but Brazilian researchers have not found their presence in the Armed Forces a worthwhile study object beyond individual trajectories. This could be justified by the fact that the total of foreigners on Imperial Army was rather lower when compared to what ensued after the May Revolution in 1810, and also because non-Brazilian officers did not have expressive performances in power instances, nor did they significantly contribute to rearranging military practice.²⁰ Nevertheless, the most important reason might be the fact that Brazil did not require extensive military personnel until the 1830s and,

17 LAGO, Laurênio. *Brigadeiros e generais de D. João VI e D. Pedro I no Brasil: dados biográficos 1808-1831*. Rio de Janeiro: Imprensa Militar, 1938; LAGO, Laurênio. *Os generais do Exército brasileiro: de 1860 a 1889*. Rio: Imprensa Nacional, 1942; SILVA, Alfredo P. M. da. *Os generais do Exército brasileiro de 1822-1889 (traços biográficos)*. 2ª ed., 2º vol. Rio de Janeiro: Companhia Editora Americana, 1940.

18 KRAAY, Hendrik. "Em outra coisa não falavam os pardos, cabras, e crioulos": o "recrutamento" de escravos na guerra de independência na Bahia. In: *Revista Brasileira de História*. São Paulo: ANPUH, 2002, vol. 22, no. 43.

19 SEIDLER, C. *Dez anos no Brasil*. Brasília: Senado Federal, 2003 [1835]; Uma testemunha ocular. *Contribuições para a história da guerra entre o Brasil e Buenos Aires*. Belo Horizonte: Itatiaia, 1975.

20 Vitor Izecksohn analyzed the Brazilian Army's professionalization process and concluded that formative training was offered only in the context of the war against Paraguay. IZECKSOHN, Vitor. *O cerne da discordância: a Guerra do Paraguai e o Núcleo Profissional do Exército*. Rio de Janeiro: E-papers, 2002.

when such necessity presented itself, the enemy had less sophisticated troops than Spanish ones.

In Puigmal's studies, as described by himself, distinct methodological approaches were employed so as to achieve his research aims, such as traditional biography, genealogy, compilation of entries for historical dictionaries, among others; however, he emphasizes prosopography as the best methodological instrument to distinguish the various dimensions of analyzed trajectories.²¹ It is unknown to my understanding any Brazilian scholar researching the nineteenth century, who has utilized prosopography in the above referred manner.

Another far from unimportant methodological decision is broadening documental framework beyond those usually related to military matters. In that sense, besides archives from institutions, the author utilized family documents, personal mail, technical and scientific political appointments, and essentially any available evidence. Regarding one of the works cited – *!Diablos, no pensaba en Chile hace tres años!: Cartas inéditas sobre la independencia de Chile, Argentina Y Perú (1817-1825)* (“Hell, I had not thought of Chile in three years!: Unreleased letters on Chilean, Argentinian and Peruvian Independence”) – he attests to have used the widest variety of sources possible, seeking not only to grasp the characters, their victories and troubles, but also to understand these individuals, who were actively integrated into Chilean society.

Yet another quite interesting characteristic of Patrick Puigmal's work is promoting a network of researchers from various countries. Such concern is related to the fact that examined characters worked in regions only afterwards known as distinct Nation States. In the foreword to one of the works he organized, Eduardo F. Caveieres reflects on nearly unexplored possibilities of common histories shared

21 PUIGMAL, Patrick. *!Diablos, no pensaba en Chile hace tres años!: Cartas inéditas sobre la independencia de Chile, Argentina Y Perú (1817-1825)*, Estudio biográfico y Prosopográfico. Osorno: Universidad de Los Lagos, 2006, p. 17.

by bordering countries.²² As he states, the third volume of his soon-to-be-published “*Dicionário de oficiais napoleônicos durante la guerra de independencia*” (Dictionary of Napoleonic officers during the independence war) will discuss military members who worked in Brazil.

Conclusions and objectives of Patrick Puigmal’s works are, then, quite instigating so as to reconsider foreign presence within Imperial Brazilian armed forces. His body of work will likely lead us to thus far unremarked phenomena. His contributions certainly stimulate inspiring possibilities of dialogue, reflection and collaborative research, in the sense of furthering knowledge regarding nineteenth-century Latin American societies. As underlined by the author, this was a period of many radical transformations towards new and diverse directions. They may even propel us forward to important and redefining discoveries.

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22 CAVIERES, Eduardo F. Prólogo: historia comunes. In: GUERRERO-LIRA, Cristian *et al.* *El lazo de los Andes: Diálogos cruzados sobre las campañas de la independencia: de argentinos y chilenos civiles y militares*. Osorno: Universidad de Los Lagos, 2007.

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