

Brazilian History

Brazilian History:

Culture, Society, Politics 1500-2010

By

Roberto Pinheiro Machado

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To Cláudia Mendonça Scheeren

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INTRODUCTION

Brazil is the largest nation in Latin America and the fifth largest in the world. It occupies 3,265,059 square miles in an area extending from about 120 miles above the Equator to approximately 700 miles below the Tropic of Capricorn. The country's northernmost point is found in the city of Uiramutã, in Roraima State, and the southernmost in that of Chuí, in Rio Grande do Sul State. Despite the long distance extending between these points, the country is larger from East to West than it is from North to South. The precise distances are 2,689 miles East–West and 2,684 miles North–South. Brazil's large territory is a legacy from the Portuguese colonial system. Throughout several centuries of colonial rule, Portuguese officials controlled the land with a tight grip in order to keep the colonial revenue flowing into Lisbon. The exploitative nature of the colony worked to preserve its political unity, creating a strong centralized administration that was kept in place even after the end of Portuguese rule. Until 1808, it was primarily a closed territory, with commercial lines limited to those established by the Portuguese administration. Prior to its independence in 1822, all those living in Brazil were either Portuguese, African, or South American aboriginal.

This book provides an introduction to Brazilian history. Its approach is critical and interdisciplinary. Analyses of several aspects of the country's development, such as the economy, the arts, foreign policy, and society appear intermingled in each chapter. The presentation is organized chronologically around the nation's political history, following the successive governments that controlled each of the three major historical periods: the Colony (1500–1822), the Empire (1822–1889), and the Republic (1889–present). The political-chronological presentation follows the most common pattern found in Brazilian books of similar scope, offering thus a perspective akin to that employed by Brazilians in learning their own history. The choice of format aims to facilitate the use of this book as a reference for further research, providing a sequential storyline from which data can be selected, analyzed, and further developed from a clear temporal perspective.

The chronological account is divided into seven chapters that emerge as subdivisions of the three major periods mentioned above. Chapter one examines the Colonial Period, which extends from the arrival of the

Portuguese in South America in the year 1500 until the Brazilian proclamation of independence in 1822. The Colonial Period comprises a long historical phase in which an exploitation colony was gradually established in the newly discovered territory as the result of a capitalist enterprise commanded by the Portuguese Crown. The new land would experience several transformations throughout these three hundred years of fierce Portuguese rule. It would face several foreign invasions, which would alter the territory's material and cultural landscape; it would suffer the effects of the various wars between Portugal and Spain in Europe; and it would finally fall prey to the effects of the Napoleonic Wars, which would cause the transfer of the Portuguese court from Lisbon to Rio de Janeiro, thus creating a new aristocratic society in the tropical territory. This first chapter also discusses how an incipient sentiment of national belonging gradually emerged in the colony, aiding the Portuguese in maintaining their control over that vast territory, which from the beginning was fiercely disputed with other European nations also interested in taking hold of its profitable, fertile land.

Chapter two describes the period of what is called the Brazilian Empire. It begins with the events of 1822, when Brazil became independent from Portugal, and ends in 1889, when a republic was proclaimed. As the chapter unfolds, we will see that Brazilian independence did not ensue from an all-encompassing revolutionary rupture with Portugal. Although clashes between Brazilian and Portuguese troops did occur in specific areas, the transition to autonomy resulted primarily from an agreement between the two contending parties. This allowed for the continuation of several colonial institutions into the newly emerging nation. Such institutional endurance strengthened the grip on power of the same ruling class that had controlled the colony under the Portuguese administration: in spite of becoming free from the direct rule of the Portuguese king, a Portuguese prince took power.

The rule of Pedro I, the heir apparent to the Braganza dynasty, established a monarchical continuity that linked Europe and America politically. This, as the chapter will show, provoked considerable suspicion from Brazil's neighbors. While the former Spanish colonies severed their ties with monarchical Europe more thoroughly, adopting republican systems almost immediately, Brazil remained connected to the European monarchies by ties of blood, that is, by those existing between its Braganza ruler and his European family. The presence of a European monarch ruling a large portion of South America thus became a source of fear among Spanish Americans, who suspected that Brazil might serve as a

transatlantic bridge for European imperialism and for the recolonization of South America immediately after the end of Spanish rule.

Besides the contradictions and disputes between Brazil and its neighbors, the chapter will also discuss how, during this period, the new country's ruling class worked to forge a Brazilian nationality, that is, a general sense of national belonging and of a distinctive national culture. Towards the end of the chapter, we will observe the economic and social factors that led to the Empire's demise. We will see that the country's ruling class, which supported the maintenance of the monarchical system throughout the period, was comprised of a landed aristocracy based on slave labor and on a fierce patriarchal mentality. When slave labor crumbled, so crumbled the monarchy. The way was then open for a new historical period, the First Republic.

Chapter three narrates the events that marked the first Brazilian republican experience. From 1889 to 1930, the country adopted a republican presidential system that was sustained through the offices of ten presidents. The fall of the monarchy had resulted in part from political and ideological disputes between those who, on one side, argued for administrative centralization as the ideal formula for the nation's governance and those who, on the other, defended decentralization and provincial autonomy as a necessity for the maintenance of the nation. The provinces demanded more political and economic freedom than they had theretofore been granted under the monarchic system, which tended to centralize authority in Rio de Janeiro. As the provincial landlords achieved their goal of greater autonomy, the Republic was established in the American federalist model, with presidents being elected every four years. As the chapter will demonstrate, elections, however, were seldom fair, and the rise of a president was primarily a matter of pre-established political arrangements between members of the ruling classes, rather than a result of democratic electoral competition. The republican system was kept on course through the maintenance of a series of economic and political pacts between the central government and the provincial administrations, an arrangement known as the Oligarchical Pact. The arrangement worked well while the country managed to sustain the handsome revenue generated from its foremost export product, coffee. The apparent political stability would come to an end, however, when the world crisis of 1929 prevented coffee returns from satisfying the demands of both the central government and the provincial landlords. The collapse of the American economy in 1929 had profound effects on the Brazilian Republic: as the United States was Brazil's foremost coffee client, and given the monolithic nature of the Brazilian economy, U.S. economic retraction

provoked a severe financial crisis in the Latin American country, giving rise to a political revolution. The ensuing civil war, as we shall see, provoked the end of the period known as the First Republic.

Chapter four examines the revolutionary undertaking that caused the First Republic's demise and proceeds to discuss the main characteristics of the dictatorial period that ensued. It covers the years from 1930 to 1945, with special attention on the rise of nationalism and state-led developmental policies after 1937. As we shall see, this will be a time when the contenders for administrative centralization will win the long-standing struggle for power between the provinces and the central government. We will note that this struggle had assumed clear regional contours during the former period, the First Republic, when the oligarchy ruling the southern province of Rio Grande do Sul became the main proponent of political centralization, vying against the rulers of São Paulo, who profited from the economic freedom allowed by the decentralized federative system. As the chapter will show, the revolution which started in 1930 represented the victory of the southern landlords, who possessed superior military power in relation to the northern provinces. The South's military clout resulted from the historical militarization of the southernmost state, Rio Grande do Sul, which had for centuries been the theater of fierce territorial disputes between Portugal and Spain. The chapter will discuss the fact that Brazil's southern frontiers are the only ones in the nation to have been settled by means of war, a condition that in turn reflects the pugnacious character of the southern landowners who, in 1930, assumed control of the nation. The chapter will also discuss how the political history of Brazil in the twentieth century is in great part the history of the clash between Rio Grande do Sul's military power and São Paulo's economic might. The chapter will end with a depiction of Rio Grande do Sul's dictatorship over the entire nation in the context of anti-communism, nationalism, and the Second World War.

Chapter five starts at the end of the Second World War, when the fall of the dictatorship established in 1937 opened the way to a new period: the Liberal Democracy. The liberal-democratic period extends from 1946 to 1964. It begins with the rise of democracy in 1946 and ends with its fall less than twenty years later. We will see the emergence of a new era in Brazilian political and economic history, with presidential elections resuming after a twenty-year hiatus and with measures for economic liberalization being adopted according to the rules of the Bretton Woods Agreement, which was co-signed by Brazil in 1944. During the liberal-democratic period, Brazilians attempted to do away with the former nationalism of the previous era, and sought political rapprochement with

both the United States and Western Europe. An attempt to open Brazil to the world economy was pursued through the adoption of bold political and economic measures aimed at attracting foreign investments to the country. This was a golden age of mounting economic prosperity and an increased belief in the nation's bright future: the time of the construction of the new capital, Brasília; the rise of *bossa nova*, the new musical style born in the city of Rio de Janeiro; the building of roads, airports, and the implantation of a national automobile industry. The general popular expectation at the time was that Brazil would finally become a modern nation. The democratic and liberal economic endeavor, however, came to an end with a military *coup d'état* that threw the nation into a new period of extreme authoritarianism, ravaging political persecution, increased social inequality, mounting foreign debt, and a series of army generals, most of them from Rio Grande do Sul, succeeding one another in the presidency.

Chapter six narrates this new period of fierce authoritarianism: the Military Dictatorship (1964–1985). This was probably the darkest period in Brazilian history. Historians usually compare it, and mostly unfavorably, to the previous dictatorial experience in the country's republican history, the one that lasted from 1937 to 1945. We will see how the new military rulers managed to remain in power for more than 20 years by forging a series of tacit agreements with the ruling classes, as well as by imposing several forms of control over society. The chapter will show how the fiercely anti-communist dictators used political propaganda to boost Brazil's victory in the 1970 Soccer World Cup in Mexico while state agents committed human rights violations throughout the country in the name of freedom and social order. The chapter will show how an annual double-digit GDP growth rate was achieved by means of compressing salaries and imposing harsh labor conditions on the population; how attempts to colonize the Amazon forest with impoverished inhabitants from the Northeast ended in failure; how the international oil crisis of 1973 put an end to state-driven stellar economic growth; and how the period came to an end in 1985, when the country was on the verge of an economic collapse. Inflation, poverty, foreign debt, corruption, and violence were some of the results of this long period of military dictatorship.

Our seventh chapter covers the years from 1985 to 2010, which fall under what is called the New Republic. Also called the Sixth Republic, this is an extended period that comes up to the present. It starts with the end of the military dictatorship and with the rise of another era of popular high hopes and expectations regarding the country's future and its capacity to achieve economic well-being. We will see how such expectations were soon thwarted when it became clear that the severe financial crisis

inherited from the military period would not end quickly. Starting in 1986, inflation became Brazilians' most feared enemy; and when the Brazilians gathered in a national popular effort to beat the wave of inflation, it just turned into hyperinflation. In 1992, a series of failed economic plans, corruption scandals, and the impeachment of a president made Brazilians question whether the dictatorship had not, after all, been a better political system. Disillusionment became the norm in Brazilian society at large. As the struggle against inflation continued, however, a series of well-planned economic measures achieved what everyone had already given up hoping for. In 1994, the rising inflation rates were finally subdued and the prospects of economic stability opened the way to a new period in which Brazilian rulers attempted to portray the country as an important member of the international community of nations. Foreign policy started being conducted almost directly by the president, and the search for international prestige became an integral part of state policy. The chapter will show how the attraction of foreign investment became a *sine qua non* for the maintenance of low inflation rates, which were in turn sustained through a fixed exchange rate directly dependent on a high level of foreign reserves. In spite of the low inflation, however, the economy failed to grow and the spread of bankruptcies throughout the country, together with high unemployment rates, caused significant popular discontent. In the first years of the twentieth-first century, the low inflation rates were no longer capable of satisfying popular wishes and expectations. Popular dissatisfaction opened the way to surprising political developments that resulted in the electoral victory of the left in the presidential elections of 2002, and the subsequent rise of a new government in 2003. The chapter will finish by relating the successes and shortcomings of the leftist government in office from 2003 to 2010.

This book will end with an analysis of some relevant aspects of Brazilian society after 2010. The aim is to offer a realistic portrayal of some of the major problems the country still faced after the first 510 years of its history. Widespread corruption, a deficient educational system, massive popular protests, general popular dissatisfaction, poverty, hunger, urban violence, and mounting political unrest form a sinister picture of Brazil after 2010.

Before we proceed to the story of the first European encounter with the Brazilian territory during the Age of Discovery, however, we should make one last remark regarding the structure of this book. Together with the presentation of Brazil's political history, the reader will find at the end of each chapter a subdivision dedicated to an analysis of the literature and art of the period. Brazil is a country that enjoys a unique cultural heritage, and

the nation's artistic achievements have been informed by centuries of ethnic mixture. This mixture paved the way for the emergence of interesting forms of cultural syncretism and for a general openness to new ideas, trends, and styles. As Brazilian popular creativity and aesthetic sensibility went on to reflect the country's ethnic diversity, it produced expressions marked by a tendency toward the effacement of the frontiers between popular and classical art, and also favored the development of styles and forms that challenge European aesthetic and ideological dominance. In this sense, Brazilian artists produced works that tend to be almost naturally post-modern in disposition. Brazilian art's syncretic temperament, however, did not prevent it from being embedded with strong nationalist sentiments. Throughout the country's history, nationalism has been an ever-present feature of Brazilian artistic expression. As we will discuss in detail at the end of chapter three, the Brazilian avant-garde movement of the early twentieth century, called *Modernismo*, provides us with a case in point regarding nationalism in the arts. In contrast with the great majority of the international avant-garde movements that spread throughout the world in the first decades of the twentieth century, the Brazilian avant-garde did not adopt all the basic tenets of new European styles and programs, among which figure a tendency towards internationalism and universalism. Brazilian artists of the period attempted to create novelty in art through the discovery of a true national expression. Unlike the cases of Spanish-America, Eastern Europe, and Asia, no consistent Brazilian version of Futurism, Dadaism, or Surrealism is to be found in the country's twentieth-century movements of renovation in the arts. Instead, Brazilian artists promoted a strangely self-centered rupture with the traditional forms found in the previous Brazilian tradition, which they found too foreign and Europeanized. They thus went in search of an anti-European national aesthetic, which became their primary avant-garde intent in the 1920s. As this book will discuss in considerable detail, this would produce lasting effects in the country's artistic output. We will see that twentieth-century Brazilian music, literature, and cinema became marked by a strong nationalist aesthetic, which involved a very peculiar and original expression, but which also tended to come up short in terms of approaching more universalizing and internationally oriented themes through art.

Finally, the author would like to state his hope that this book will be read as a general introduction to Brazilian society and culture. The narrative presented in the following pages is broad in temporal scope, and most of the events recounted could not be approached in sufficient depth. For this reason, the reader should approach the book as an entry into

subjects and events that might then be considered for further study. The history of Brazil fully reflects the country's many complexities, contradictions, and idiosyncrasies. My hope is that the reader will enjoy exploring some of them in these pages.

CHAPTER ONE

THE COLONIAL PERIOD (1500–1822)

From the Discovery to the Colonization

Brazil's official history begins in the year 1500, when Portuguese nobleman and navigator Pedro Álvares Cabral (1467–1520) reached a tract of land in the West Atlantic that he initially thought was an island. The tract of land was immediately named *Ilha de Vera Cruz*, or True Cross Island. Several weeks went by before Cabral understood that what he had found was in fact not an island, but an entire continent. When he realized that the place where he had landed was not completely surrounded by water, Cabral quickly changed its name to *Terra de Santa Cruz*, or Land of the Holy Cross.

After disembarking on the luxuriant tropical shore, Cabral's first task was to make contact with the locals. Natives of fairly amiable disposition inhabited the areas surrounding the Portuguese landing. Some of them were taken onto the Portuguese fleet's main ship, where Cabral offered them gifts. These natives were members of the Tupiniquim, a large tribe of hunter-gatherers of which some 2,500 descendants survive today, inhabiting a reserved area demarcated by the Brazilian federal government in the southeast of the country, close to where this first encounter took place in 1500. This first exchange between the Portuguese and the natives in the new land forms one of the major symbolic events in Brazilian history, one that would assume considerable ideological importance in the future. The encounter is generally construed as the emblematic starting point of the nation, suggesting the idiosyncratic development of interracial exceptionalism, as well as the intentional building of a multi-ethnic national identity. This first encounter would thus become a recurrent theme in the Brazilian imagination. A few centuries later, the word *tupiniquim* would enter the popular vocabulary and would start to be employed humorously, or more precisely self-mockingly, by Brazilians when they attempted to describe themselves in their most genuine characteristics. This witty use of the word would traverse several centuries of usage to be popularized by the early twentieth-century Brazilian avant-garde movement, when artists

attempted to define the national identity as the product of a mixture of indigenous and European elements. The word *tupiniquim* would then come to mean anything originally Brazilian, that is, anything genuinely simple, endearingly naïve, somewhat unrefined, and above all blatantly funny.

Back in 1500, after that first contact was made, Cabral's next task was to take care of religious matters. Four days after his arrival on the South American coast, he ordered his crew to build an altar near the shore and the first Catholic mass celebrated on Brazilian soil took place on April 26, 1500. This religious service is also of great historical and symbolic significance. In its inclusiveness, the Mass engaged the indigenous population in a religious celebration that marked the beginning of a long process of acculturation conducted by the Catholic Church. The indigenous population inhabiting the tropics lived in communal semi-nomadic societies that were naturally integrated within the forested geography of the continent. In contrast with the Europeans, the natives wore no clothes and many tribes were characterized by matriarchal societal arrangements. So the Catholic Church immediately established a process of dressing the natives, attempting to bring them into the sphere of what the Christians conceived as "civilization."

This First Mass thus became the symbolical landmark of the acculturation process that was enacted throughout the construction of the Brazilian nation. It established a myth of peaceful integration and mutual acceptance between the Europeans and the American natives. In doing so, however, it helped mask the truly genocidal aspects of the European conquest of the territory. The mass itself, it should be noted, would feature as a major theme in the future history of Brazilian art and literature. The very celebratory scene would be immortalized 360 years later by one of Brazil's most prestigious nineteenth-century painters, Victor Meirelles (1832–1903). In the 1860s, during the Imperial Period, Meirelles would be officially employed by the monarchy to depict the great historical scenes that forged Brazilian nationality. His *The First Mass in Brazil* (1860) would become one of his most celebrated works.¹

Together with Meirelles' painting, the First Mass also figures prominently in what is considered to be the foundational work of Brazilian literary history, namely the famous *Carta de Pero Vaz de Caminha*, an account written by one of Cabral's officials, Pero Vaz de Caminha (1450–1500), to the Portuguese king, Manuel I, reporting the discovery of the new land—or island, as it was initially believed. The account is dated May 1, 1500, and it describes the land's beauty in ornamented language. The elegant quality of Caminha's writing may justify the classification of his letter as a literary work of art. His account's inclusion in the Brazilian

literary canon parallels that of the *Crônicas de Conquista* in Spanish America, where the reports and descriptions by the first Spaniards in the new world have pride of place in the Hispanic-American canon.² Caminha's enthusiastic description of the land's beauty would serve the purposes of those who in the future would attempt to build a sense of national unity and identity in the territory. The work's rendering of the new land as a magnificent and mythic island would also produce important effects in the future nation's foreign relations. Caminha's idealization of the "Brazilian Island" would have remarkable psychological influence on the Portuguese conquerors, and would thus indirectly boost what we will see as the unrelenting Portuguese obsession for territorial expansion, an expansion that would take place in contention with the neighboring Spanish settlers in the new world. In the centuries following the discovery of the land, the Portuguese rulers would make a series of attempts to delineate the colonial territory on the basis of what historians came to call the "Myth of the Brazilian Island," that is, the idea that the La Plata River, which crossed the southern part of the territory, had somewhere a meeting point with the Amazon River, which ran in the North. The imaginary meeting of the two rivers, much in accord with Caminha's initial account, supported the Portuguese belief that its colonial territory should contain all the land found encased by the two rivers, much as if the territory were in fact an island. If this were the case, however, the Portuguese territory would necessarily include a substantial portion of what is today Argentina. As we shall see, from the contradictions between the Portuguese myth of the Brazilian Island and the reality of the Spanish Viceroyalty of the River Plate, many a war would ensue.³

Cabral and his crew left the newly discovered land at the beginning of May 1500, a few days after the holding of the First Mass. Some thirty years would pass before the Portuguese reached a decision on what to do with their new possession. Around 1530, the Portuguese Crown started sending exploratory expeditions to America. These soon found a lucrative economic activity in which to engage in the new territory, namely the extraction of Brazilwood, a species that was abundant all along the coast as well as in part of the hinterland. The wood had significant economic interest in Europe, where it was valued for the red dye it produced and which was used in the manufacture of luxury textiles. The tree would thus give the future colony, as well as the future country, its name.

Intense felling and shipping ensued in the decades after the finding of Brazilwood. The Portuguese attempted to establish a monopoly on the commerce of the wood throughout the entire territory, which they now considered their own. The product's high profitability, however, soon

encouraged other nations to enter the market, creating fierce competition. The first to vie for Brazilian natural resources were the French, whose fearsome corsairs conducted several attacks on Portuguese ships. The resulting disputes between the Portuguese and the French over the new land and its Brazilwood immediately escalated into something close to all-out war. The French king, Francis I (1494–1547), openly defied the Portuguese and the Spanish in their attempts to secure dominance over the South Atlantic region. The two Iberian nations had signed a controversial treaty in 1494, the famous Treaty of Tordesillas, by which all newly discovered lands in the new world would be divided between Portugal and Spain along a meridian that crossed the Cape Verde islands, a Portuguese territory, and the island of Cuba, which had been discovered by Christopher Columbus on his first voyage to the region and claimed for Spain. Learning of the exclusivist treaty between the Iberians, Francis I uttered the famous phrase: “Show me Adam’s will!”

The Portuguese were thus obliged to arrange a military defense of what they considered to be their rightfully owned territory. During the first decades of the sixteenth century, the growing commerce of Brazilwood led the Portuguese to establish a series of trading posts along the coast. These included warehouses for the wood that was shipped to Europe, and functioned as operational bases for the capturing and enslavement of native inhabitants. The natives were employed directly in the extractive process, the communal experience of the First Mass having given way to the enslavement of the indigenous populations under the guise of capitalist enterprise.

Unlike the Portuguese, however, the French adopted a less violent strategy in their pursuit of Brazilwood. They established alliances with the native Brazilians, just as they would do with the native inhabitants of the northern hemisphere. These alliances strengthened the French conquerors to a point where, in 1528, the Portuguese chief commander for the region, Cristóvão Jacques (1480–c.1530), had to report to the Portuguese king the unfeasibility of defending such a large coast from the subjects of the French king, Francis I. Cristóvão Jacques then suggested a policy of colonization.

By the sixteenth century, the Portuguese had already established a functioning centralized bureaucratic state in Europe. Starting in the year 1385, when a succession dispute resulted in the overthrow of the House of Burgundy by the House of Aviz, the new ruling dynasty had begun to form a centralized bureaucracy that would be responsible for conducting the affairs of the state. Portugal had moved away from the typically decentralized feudal administrative arrangements of medieval Europe

towards a centralized organization in which the ruling classes were directly employed under the king's orders. The nobility thus shared in the government's power and authority, transcending the limits of their individual estates or feuds. This form of political arrangement resulted in the emergence of an administrative structure known as the patrimonial state. The concept comes from German sociologist Max Weber (1864–1920), who described the patrimonial state as the expression of the amalgamation between the public and private realms in a given political entity. In the case of Portugal, the analysis of its emerging patrimonial arrangement, initiated in 1385, comes from Brazilian historian Raymundo Faoro (1925–2003), who argued that the structure of the Portuguese state since the Revolution of Aviz allowed the nobility employed in the governmental bureaucracy to merge its private interests with those of the kingdom. The merging of the personal and the public spheres allowed for the self-interested use of the state; soon the administrative structure, or the state itself, would become the bureaucrat's patrimony, whence the concept of *patrimonialism*.⁴

This was the administrative structure that would be transferred to the new American territory when the Portuguese king realized that his overseas possessions could not be defended without an active colonization policy. When encouraged by Cristóvão Jacques to start occupation, John III employed a scheme to maintain the Crown's ownership over the land while at the same time engaging private investments in it. The king divided the territory into fifteen hereditary captaincies, that is, administrative divisions that were entrusted to the management of men of confidence. The captaincies were awarded to businessmen by means of two specific legal instruments, the *Carta de doação* (Donation Letter) and the *Foral* (Register). These documents gave entrepreneurs the right to explore their allotted captaincy, but the ownership of the land remained with the Crown. Prospects of the existence of gold and silver in the American territory made the captaincy system especially attractive to Portuguese entrepreneurs, who started arriving in Brazil in 1530.⁵

The Portuguese had already employed the captaincy system in the colonization of the island of Madeira. Located in the Atlantic Ocean, around 540 miles southwest of the Portuguese coast, the island had been under Portuguese rule since 1425. A successful captaincy system had operated there since 1440. The remoteness and peculiarities of the Brazilian territory, however, sealed the fate of the captaincy arrangement in the Americas. Of the fifteen administrative units initially devised, only two, those of Pernambuco and São Vicente, prospered. Pernambuco, a captaincy located in the Northeast, thrived from the production of sugar

cane and São Vicente, in the Southeast, prospered mostly from dealing in indigenous slaves. São Vicente would be established as one of the first urban administrative units, or villages, in 1532, during an expedition led by nobleman and military commander Martim Afonso de Sousa (1500–1571). King John III had sent de Souza to Brazil with orders to patrol the coast, get rid of the French, and found the first colonial settlement on the new land. São Vicente prospered to become what is today a portion of the metropolitan area of Santos, a major port city in the state of São Paulo.

In spite of its general failure, the captaincy system lasted for more than two centuries until it was finally abolished in 1754. The system left a lasting impression on the Brazilian territorial arrangement, becoming the basis for the country's future oligopolistic structure of land tenure and distribution. The captaincies allowed for the implementation of a policy of agricultural land partition called *sesmaria*, which was based on practices customary in Portugal. The Sesmaria Act of 1375 was promulgated in Lisbon to counter a food crisis that was plaguing the country at the time. The Act consisted of several dispositions designed to maintain agricultural output, such as the expropriation of unproductive land and the employment of forced labor in sowing and harvesting. When it came to the colonization of Brazil, however, the *sesmaria* was turned into a political instrument whereby the designated administrator of a captaincy transferred the right to cultivate land to private entrepreneurs. Under this disposition, land was distributed in the form of gigantic plots to only a few beneficiaries. In time, this situation gave rise to conflict, as large areas were left unproductive and subject to unlawful occupation. The system generated conditions of unfairness and miscommunication in rural areas. The *sesmaria* system survived until 1822, when the newly independent country, self-denominated as the Brazilian Empire, attempted a series of structural reforms. These notwithstanding, after the official termination of the system in 1822, the ownership of the traditional estates acquired under the legal provisions of the *sesmaria* was recognized by a law of 1850, meaning that in practice the old *sesmaria* arrangement would be sustained.⁶

In any case, at the time of the establishment of the captaincy system, the Portuguese king took measures to consolidate the general control of the colony in the hands of the state. This was done with considerable haste, following the sudden realization of the lack of economic dynamism in the captaincies. In 1549, John III sent another nobleman and military commander, a man called Tomé de Sousa (1503–1579), to Brazil with the task of establishing a centralized local government that would answer directly to Lisbon. From then on, the Portuguese bureaucratic state

apparatus would be directly transplanted to the colony. The *Governo Geral* (General Government) was established at the entrance of a large inlet opening to the Atlantic Ocean some 300 miles north of where Pedro Álvares Cabral had first disembarked on the American continent in 1500. Called Baía de Todos os Santos (All Saints' Bay), the inlet's surrounding areas offered favorable agricultural conditions, with a hot climate and fertile soil. Its geography also facilitated territorial defense. The area had been made into a captaincy entrusted to nobleman Francisco Pereira Coutinho (d. 1547), from whose descendants the land had to be expropriated (Pereira died in 1547, eaten by the members of the Tupinambá tribe, a group of aboriginals who practiced cannibalism against their enemies). The Governor General was entrusted with the task of bringing political and judicial order to the colony. The bureaucratic structure then established comprised three instances of regulation and control that were run directly by Portuguese officials. These were the Ouvidor-mor, who managed the affairs of justice; the Provedor-mor, who conducted the economic affairs of the colony; and the Capitão-mor, who was in charge of defense. The office of General Governor was entrusted to Tomé de Sousa. The administrative unit called *Estado do Brasil* was thus officially created as a Portuguese colonial institution.

The implementation of a bureaucratic state apparatus in the colony meant above all the immediate transference of Portuguese political culture to the new territory. This culture was naturally aristocratic and highly hierarchical. In the absence of the usual feudal system where the aristocracy tended primarily to its agricultural estates, the Portuguese nobility developed distinctive urban habits, which seemed appropriate to their bureaucratic positions. Over time, they acquired a great distaste for any form of manual labor, which was generally considered demeaning to their status. This meant that the appropriate occupation for an aristocrat was primarily that of giving orders. Coupled with the tradition of a patrimonial state, where, as mentioned above, bureaucrats tended to misperceive the public sphere as their own private property, the aristocratic Portuguese political culture transplanted to the colony provided for the spread of fierce authoritarianism and individualism in the local administration. This was enhanced by a logic in which colonial bureaucrats, as the lawful representatives of a power whose center was located overseas, could assume a posture of factual ownership of their offices.

The Portuguese aristocratic bureaucracy would impose severe limitations on the political participation of the general colonial population in the administrative affairs of the settlements. As it developed into a number of

evolving urban centers that gradually emerged throughout the territory, the colony's provincial administration would be carried out in city councils called *Câmaras dos homens bons*, or "City Councils of Good Men." The "good men" in question were those who by law were eligible to assume administrative positions in the government, namely Catholic white men over twenty-five years of age who could prove they owned a significant portion of land. Any Jewish ancestry was considered a just cause to prevent individuals to participate in governmental affairs. The first colonial city council was established in the village of São Vicente in 1532. From then on, those who did not own land, such as merchants and liberal professionals, would be prevented from taking part in politics. This would give rise to a series of civil conflicts, the most remarkable of which broke out in the state of Pernambuco in the early eighteenth century, when the traders of the city of Recife took up arms against the landowners of the village of Olinda in what came to be known as the War of the Mascates (1710). The war reflected an incipient native sentiment that pitted the Brazilians against the Portuguese in matters of colonial administration.⁷

The primary goals of Tomé de Sousa's first General Government in the 1550s were: 1) subduing rebellious indigenous tribes; 2) enhancing agricultural output; 3) defending the territory from foreign invasions; and 4) prospecting deposits of gold and silver in the land. The Portuguese official arrived in the colony with a group of Jesuit missionaries, who immediately went about converting the natives to Roman Catholicism. The Jesuit enterprise was enmeshed in the intellectual debate set in motion in Europe regarding what it meant to be human in a broader international context. This was a time of intense theoretical discussion among Christian theorists and theologians regarding the nature of the soul and its participation in the higher spheres of being. Thinkers such as the Spanish renaissance philosophers Francisco de Vitoria (1483–1546), Domingo de Soto (1494–1560), Francisco Suárez (1548–1617), Bartolomé de las Casas (1474–1566), and the Dutch humanists Erasmus of Rotterdam (1466–1536) and Hugo Grotius (1583–1645) were in the process of developing the principles of what today forms the historical-theoretical basis of international and human rights law. Francisco de Vitoria was especially interested in the moral and legal status of indigenous populations in the new world. In his *De Indis* (1532), the Spaniard, actually the leader of the so-called Salamanca school of philosophy, defended the existence of a soul in the American natives. Such an acknowledgment automatically conferred upon the indigenous individuals the status of creatures of God.

The Portuguese rulers accepted Francisco de Vitoria's ideas and in 1575 the Crown issued an edict prohibiting the enslavement of the

indigenous inhabitants of the colony, except in the case of a ‘just war,’ that is, one started by the natives against the Portuguese. The Jesuits thus had legal support in their efforts to pacify hostile indigenous tribes and integrate them into the emerging colonial society. They would, however, find great opposition from several, very powerful, groups of entrepreneurs and explorers, who preferred to keep the natives as slaves. The most resilient of these groups was that of the *Bandeirantes*, men who lived off activities such as gold prospecting and trading in slaves. As we shall see in more detail in the next chapter, the *Bandeirantes* played an important role in advancing the Portuguese territorial expansion in America. Such advancement, however, took place primarily at the cost of disrupting the traditional forms of life previously established in the original colonial territory.

Aided by the *Bandeirantes*, the General Government established in 1549 would succeed in founding and sustaining Portuguese control over the vast territory discovered by Cabral in 1500. The administrative system of the General Government would only be abolished in 1808, when the Portuguese court was transferred from Lisbon to Rio de Janeiro as a result of the Napoleonic wars. From 1549 to 1808, sixty-one General Governors assumed the function of controlling the colony. Starting in 1640, after a period called the Iberian Union, when Portugal came virtually under Spanish rule, the General Governors would have their status raised to that of Viceroy, and their power would grow accordingly.

Before moving on to a discussion of the territorial invasions experienced during the first two centuries of Brazilian colonial history, we should note that Tomé de Sousa’s first central government became the starting point for fierce metropolitan domination over the new land. The General Government itself functioned as a textbook application of mercantile capitalism, in which all riches found or produced in the colony were immediately embarked to Lisbon. Local reinvestment would be kept to a minimum; the new territory existed to be exploited and the General Government was created with the aim of maintaining the flow of capital to Portugal at all costs. Soon the fiscal burden would become unbearable for the local inhabitants, and important fiscal revolts would ensue. Before those took place, however, and in fact even before the Portuguese General Government had finally secured its grip on the colonial territory, one major obstacle had to be cleared away: the French.

The French Invasions (1555–1560 and 1594–1615)

In 1555, French commander, Nicolas Durand de Villegagnon (1510–1571) led an expedition sponsored by the French Crown to start a colonial enterprise in the tropics. Villegagnon chose one of the best spots on the South American coast to start his venture. The Guanabara Bay, the site of present-day Rio de Janeiro, was a stunning area with geographical features quite favorable for building a settlement. After crossing the Atlantic, the French fleet reached the calm and dark-blue waters that stretch from the Sugarloaf Mountain towards the hilly land bordering what today is the Botafogo beach. Villegagnon had in mind a well-devised plan: with the help of allies in the tribe of the Tamoios he would lure the Portuguese into an ambush near a small island just off the coast. The modest Portuguese defenses would be easy prey for the superior French naval forces.

Much to Villegagnon's disappointment, however, an unexpected explosion in one of the Portuguese defense ships, which would soon be ascribed to divine intervention, scared his men off, and the French fleet retreated. The initial ambush resulted in failure, but Villegagnon succeeded in maintaining control over the island where the French had been hiding to trap the Portuguese. As a result of the commander's obstinate intention to stay and fight the Portuguese, his island became the hub of what was named *La France Antarctique*, the first French colony in Brazil.⁸

This first French invasion of the Portuguese colonial territory echoed important developments taking place in Europe in the sixteenth century, most notably the Protestant Reforms. Villegagnon was a distinguished nobleman and knight of the Catholic Military Order of Malta who, during a previous secret expedition to the Brazilian coast in 1554, had learned of the fierce opposition the Portuguese were encountering from two powerful indigenous tribes, the Tamoios and the Tupinambás. Villegagnon then decided to employ all his political prestige to convince the Catholic king Henry II, Francis I's son, that Brazil would be the right place to build a French colony to which the Protestants could be invited to emigrate. The commander's claim was that, by setting the native inhabitants against the Portuguese, the French Crown would be able to rescue the land from the Iberians and create a realm of religious freedom under French rule, thus earning an opportunity to cast aside the Protestants.

Besides this social and religious objective, Villegagnon's project also aimed at transforming the Portuguese colony into a powerful naval base from which the French Crown would control the world's main commercial routes to India. This was the heyday of state monopoly capitalism, an

economic model that would not be challenged in the Atlantic until at least 1621, when Flemish Calvinists launched the private Dutch West India Company, which would be granted the monopoly over the slave trade and other commerce from the Dutch Crown. Villegagnon thus immediately started the construction of a fortification in the French controlled Serigipe Island, which he had occupied on November 10, 1555. Curiously, the island is known in Brazil today as *Ilha de Villegagnon* (Villegagnon Island), a name that is used in place of its original denomination given by the Portuguese settlers, that is, Ilha de Serigipe. Be that as it may, Fort Coligny, the French headquarters, soon towered over the area. The Fort was named in honor of one of Villegagnon's commanders, the French Huguenot Gaspard de Coligny (1519–1572). The French enterprise, however, soon began to fail. General discontent arose among Villegagnon's men and a mutiny occurred in 1556, caused by the insubordination of a few soldiers outraged at their leader's conservative rules determining that any man who took an indigenous woman should be obliged marry her.

The Portuguese would only defeat the French in 1560, when the third succeeding Portuguese General Governor, Mem de Sá (1500–1572), marched on Fort Coligny, conquering it in the absence of Villegagnon, who had returned to France. Even after that, however, the French were not willing to give up their South American colonial ambition. Together with their allies, the Tamoios, they reorganized their forces and, in 1565, Estácio de Sá (1520–1567), Mem de Sá's nephew, was obliged to establish a local settlement in the area with the aim of blocking the French. The settlement would become the present-day city of Rio de Janeiro. The French forces attacked Estácio de Sá's defense in 1567, provoking a confrontation known as the Uruçu-mirim battle. During the skirmishes, Estácio de Sá was wounded in the eye by a Tamoio spear and died a few days later. The French were finally defeated after this battle and their colony, the France Antarctique, foundered. Estácio de Sá would go down in Brazilian history as a national hero. Today various sites in Rio de Janeiro bear his name: a university, an avenue, and a samba school that parades every year in the city's carnival.

But the French were tenacious. Unsuccessful in the South, in 1594 they came back to the Portuguese colony and now invaded the North. This time their presence would last a little longer: the *France Équinoxiale* (Equinoctial France) was formally established in 1612 on the island of Upaon-Açu, a large landmass just off the coast of present-day Maranhão State. The French turned the Upaon-Açu island into a trading post and renamed it after their king, Louis XIII (1610–1643). The trading post grew into an urban settlement and its French name remained in place even after

the French were defeated. Today the Upaon-Açu island, which harbors the capital city of the Brazilian state of Maranhão, is called São Luís, the Portuguese version of the French king's name.

The French came to control a considerable expanse of territory in the northern part of the colony during the years immediately following 1612, but were defeated again by the Portuguese in 1615. At that time, Portugal was under the rule of Philip III of Spain. The French defeat, however, did not result in the Portuguese achieving final and complete control over the land. Before colonial control could be decisively settled for the Portuguese, one more group of invaders had to be ousted: the Dutch.

The Dutch Invasions (1624–1625 and 1630–1654)

The Low Countries were under the rule of the Spanish Empire until 1581, when a war of independence broke out. Just one year before, in 1580, Portugal and Spain had come under a single ruler, the Habsburg Spanish king, Phillip II (1527–1598). The union of the Portuguese and the Spanish Crowns under a single king was the result of a dynastic crisis that had begun in 1578, when the young Portuguese ruler, Sebastian I (1554–1578), was killed fighting the Moors in the Battle of Alcácer Quibir, in present-day Morocco. With Portugal and Spain united, the Low Countries, in war with latter, turned against the former, vying for what were now Spain's colonial possessions. Among the Spanish territories in America, the Brazilian colony was of special interest, for, by then, it had become one of the world's largest producers of sugar cane. Cane cultivation had been brought to the colony together with the captaincy system, thriving, as we have seen, in the North, especially in the captaincy of Pernambuco.

So, once freed from Spanish rule, the Low Countries, or more properly the Dutch, began their own colonial enterprises in the Atlantic. The first Dutch invasion of the Iberian colonial territory occurred in 1624. The city of Salvador, then the seat of the General Government and the capital of the State of Brazil, was the chosen target for the Dutch West India Company's attack. The Company was a militarized private enterprise run by Dutch merchants. It had been granted a trade monopoly with the Caribbean, as well as control over the slave trade in the region, from the recently founded Republic of the Seven United Netherlands. The occupation of the city of Salvador lasted almost one year; the city was recaptured in 1625 by a combination of Portuguese and Spanish forces.

Unwilling to surrender, the Dutch continued their fierce opposition to the Spanish. In 1628, engaging in a juggling act of piracy and deception, they seized a Spanish silver convoy, taking possession of the precious