

HENDRIK KRAAY: *Days of National Festivity in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 1823-1889*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2013.

In his new book, Hendrik Kraay unveils a detailed panorama of politics, symbols and social groups associated with the Brazilian imperial patriotic calendar and with special national events (royal entries in Rio de Janeiro, commemorations celebrating the end of the Paraguayan War, royal birthdays and marriages). Its twelve chapters generally follow a chronological order, albeit with some exceptions.

The introduction gives a brief historiography concerning the role of symbols and rituals in the modern state, an anthropological theory on rituals, a description of Rio de Janeiro's urban space where such rituals were performed, and also presents the author's sources and his methodology.

The following two chapters cover the construction of the days of the national calendar during the "Primeiro Reinado." Chapter 3 presents the decline of two dates in the national calendar and describes one of the largest commemorations of the Brazilian nineteenth century: Pedro II's coronation in 1841. Chapter 4 turns to the patterns of civic rituals during the "Conciliação," from 1840 to 1860, when civic rituals were routine and aroused very few controversies. During those years the national calendar was reduced to three days. Chapter 5 describes the polemic surrounding the inauguration of the equestrian statue of Pedro I (1862), the largest civic ritual after the coronation of his son. The next two chapters, 6 and 7, which are the most interesting, analyze the popularization of Independence Day (September 7) and the culture of theater galas, the official rituals that marked the end of all national festivities.

The three remaining chapters examine the decline of civic rituals that coincided with the flow of criticism towards the monarchy in the 1870s, when the aging Emperor, Pedro II, became more and more reclusive and kept a low profile. The last chapter examines popular participation in September 7 festivities with the decline of the monarchy, a process of retreat of the elite from the ritual and its takeover "from below."

In the epilogue, one finds a brief discussion of the republican civic calendar of the 1890s after the overthrow of the Empire. The book concludes with a brief consideration of twentieth-century Brazilian national holidays compared to those of Spanish America. The author calls for additional studies on the theme. The wide panorama integrates many aspects of imperial life, which few contemporary studies have managed to do, but at the cost of unbalancing the book.

Correctly stressing that the link between public festivities and the building of the nation relies as much on politics as on culture, the book relates the conventional narrative of Brazilian political history. By doing so each official commemoration becomes, at the end, a manifestation of political debate.

Furthermore, when Kraay criticizes the idea that civic rituals had a role in the creation of a Brazilian “national identity” (p. 85) between 1823 and 1837, one key point that has been advanced in recent years by some Brazilian historians is elided. The point is that during the first decades of post-independence, Brazil’s “nation-ness” was undefined. The sense of being a “nation” was deeply unstable, for many had other allegiances, such as loyalty to their provinces. In this sense, “nation,” “monarchy,” “constitution,” and “independence” didn’t conflate immediately (as they would do later in the 1850s). “Nation” had mainly a political meaning. As a consequence, the success of some days of national festivities (particularly September 7), from the description presented in the book, did not rely on transcending the political realm, but rather seems to have precisely succeeded in defining it, for all the factions fighting each other from the abdication of Pedro I in 1831 developed from a common ground. In a way, even the bitter divisions about the meaning of some dates reinforces a sense of belonging to the same nation. Kraay only mentions *en passant* (p. 135) the nation-state framework surrounding the political controversies aroused in those days of national festivities. In a study on rituals, this connection would be clarified by some sort of conceptualization along the lines of nationalism (in terms that the nation-state is the utmost sovereign entity) as a “civic religion,” a most compelling discussion when one bears in mind that – as Kraay himself points out – so many of Brazilian patriotic commemorations derived from colonial times, when Catholicism was embedded in almost all aspects of power relations. This perception supports the explanation about the stability of some archaic rituals, such as Te Deums, *beija-mãos*, royal processions and public illuminations. The appeal to magical aspects of power may have added powerful connotations to civic rituals and helped to forge a modern entity – the Brazilian nation.

These considerations could answer the question of why the monarchy remained popular even during its “decline” from 1880 on. The evidence presented by Kraay reveals many interesting characters and a rich popular culture of claiming public spaces for personal use. However, *Days of National Festivity* doesn’t go much beyond the usual amazement, for he correctly argues that it would be impossible to explain the lasting popularization of the monarchy in light of the documents available (as some have done) as a political commitment by the common people (mainly Afro-Brazilians) to the monarchy. Perhaps the argument could be that at the dawn of the monarchy what took place was a recuperation of the popular festivities of 1855-1860 at the end of the Paraguayan War. In a few decades, parts of Rio de Janeiro’s *povo* seems to have embraced the consolidation of the nation-state and the possibility of enjoying the festivities in the streets opened by political

stability, gradually forcing authorities to allow their presence, small as it was. Appealing to Pedro II and Princess Isabel could be a way to ensure it, congruent with Afro-Brazilian rituals around the traditional monarchy.

This brief review doesn't do justice to the extensive research done by Hendrik Kraay in a landmark work. Its impressive research manages to articulate a large array of sources: the press, pamphlets, official documents of many sorts, photographs, caricatures, personal memories and more. At the same time it is a political, cultural and social history told from an original point of view. Finally, it calls for future studies, the most compelling, we think, about the history of civic rituals on the "rebellious" provinces of Pernambuco and Rio Grande do Sul.

João Paulo C. S. Rodrigues

Universidade Federal de São João Del Rei