

PONTIFÍCIA UNIVERSIDADE CATÓLICA DO RIO DE JANEIRO  
COORDENAÇÃO DE CURSOS, EVENTOS E PROJETOS ESPECIAIS  
PÓS-GRADUAÇÃO EM LÍNGUA INGLESA

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**BATTLES ON CANVAS: A HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL-SEMIOTIC  
APPROACH TO PEDRO AMÉRICO'S PAINTINGS RELATED TO THE  
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Monografia apresentada ao Programa de Pós-Graduação em Letras da PUC-Rio como requisito parcial para a obtenção do título de Especialista em Língua Inglesa.

Orientadora:

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Rio de Janeiro, RJ

Setembro, 2017

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to thank my advisor, Vera Selvatici, for her availability when all seemed lost, her support, and valuable advice.

I am also very especially grateful to Maria Isabel Cunha, Bebel, who did not give up on me, and who did everything possible so I could finish this monograph.

I am also thankful to Márcia Lobianco Vicente Amorim for helping me in the beginning, and for accepting the task of examining this monograph.

Very special thanks to my wife, Agnes, for her support, patience, comprehension, and words of wisdom. Without her, I would not have made it.

## **ABSTRACT**

This monograph aims to discuss the signs and meanings embodied by two paintings by Pedro Américo de Figueiredo e Mello, a Brazilian painter who lived in Rio de Janeiro in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, relative to battles of the Paraguayan War that lasted from 1864 to 1870. The analysis made herein combines a historical perspective to a semiotic perspective, based on the principles of the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), using some concepts of the *Grammar of Visual Design* by Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996) as analytical resources. The objective here is to analyze these paintings and compare them with each other to capture traces of a certain representation of the Brazilian nation, as well as the elements of a so-called national identity that is constructed in opposition to the image of the “other”.

**KEY WORDS:** Paraguayan War, Pedro Américo, Historical Painting, SFL, Grammar of Visual Design.

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

This monograph aims to discuss the signs and meanings embodied by two paintings by Pedro Américo de Figueiredo e Mello, a Brazilian painter who lived in Rio de Janeiro, capital city of the Brazilian Empire in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The paintings belong to a very specific style known as Historical Painting and are relative to battles that occurred during the Paraguayan War (Guerra do Paraguai).

The analysis made herein is intended to be not only historically based, but also based on the principles of the Systemic Functional Linguistics, considering some concepts of the *Grammar of Visual Design* by Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996), which is also based on concepts of social semiotics developed by Halliday (1978). The objective here is to analyze these paintings separately and to compare them with each other, highlighting the similarities and differences between them, and emphasizing the presences as well as the absences, because both are equally important and are derived from an elitist discourse about nation and civilization. By doing that, one can notice on these paintings a certain representation of the Brazilian nation, as well as the elements of a so-called national identity that is constructed in opposition to the image of the “other”. In short, a certain reading among many other possible readings of these paintings is intended, so that we can capture traces of a particular society and a particular social experience in a particular point in time.

The interest in studying the Paraguayan War, particularly the considerably large imaging production generated by it, first came to mind when the author of this monograph was still an undergraduate student of History. Then, I was focusing my attention on the use of images as historical sources, or as indicia of the past in the present (BURKE, 2004), and the many photographs and paintings regarding this war, the steep contrast between them, and the nuances they embody and represent, caught my attention. In History School, students are presented to the idea that images are also documents to be studied; they also have a message to convey, despite the absence of written texts.

The Paraguayan War was largely pictorially documented and many historians and other scholars have written about the many pictures generated by the conflict in Brazil, such as Salles (2003), Toral (2001), Silveira (2009). These works try to encompass a large number of pictures of different types, such as photographs,

paintings belonging to different artistic styles, cartoons and caricatures published in the press, etc. These different pictures are often analyzed together and compared to each other, despite belonging to different genres and styles. One of the main problems of this kind of analysis is, for example, Toral's (2001) conclusion about the Historical Painting style in Brazil. According to him, this style was largely criticized in Europe, being considered anachronic in the European artistic milieu at the same time it was being produced in Brazil. This conclusion, however, ignores the importance that this style of painting had to the Brazilian society at that particular moment. If the Brazilian society produced and consumed that kind of painting at that moment it is because it was somehow important and relevant in some way. Whether it was anachronic in Europe or not, is not important.

As such, as a historian, I understand that almost everything that surrounds us may be and should be historicized. It is something that is part of my formation. However, it must be done in a cautious way. Considering the contributions of other subjects and sciences is important. More than comparing different pictures to each other, it is important, first, to try to understand what each of them has to communicate, understanding them not only in their historical context, but also in their social and cultural context. By making an analysis from the point of view of the Visual Grammar together with an analysis historically based, the objective, again, is to verify how the paintings materialize and transmit meanings that reaffirm the ideas proposed at that context and by that society.

This paper is organized in 5 chapters. Chapter 2 presents some historical events regarding the war and some social characteristics of the Brazilian Imperial Era which may help us understand the war and which enables a better understanding of the paintings. Chapter 2 also presents brief accounts of the battles depicted on the canvases, because isolating the discourse from the experience to which it makes reference is not historically advisable in any case.

Chapter 3 is a review of the use of images as historical evidence, as well as some concepts from the point of view of the Grammar of Visual Design (KRESS; VAN LEEUWEN, 1996). The chapter also comprises a review of the use and meanings of the many images generated by the Paraguayan War.

Chapter 4 defines the concept of Historical Painting, presents descriptions of the canvases and analyzes them, trying to understand what the paintings represent and the ideas they embody.

Chapter 5 presents final comments about the subject and concepts discussed herein.

## **2. A BRIEF ACCOUNT OF THE PARAGUAYAN WAR**

The Paraguayan War is no easy subject to be discussed. Actually, as Salles (2003) says, it is a “forgotten memory” of the History of Brazil, a piece of our national and collective experience that, when it eventually comes to our minds, it is “badly remembered” (SALLES, 2003) and comes together with shame and blood stains. Almost one hundred and fifty years after its ending, some of us still feel guilty and responsible for what happened in Paraguay between 1864 and 1870. Some believe that Paraguay, especially its President Francisco Solano López, was the great villain; others believe that the Triple Alliance is to blame for purposely slaying the Paraguayan people, and dangerous concepts such as “genocide” come into discussion. Some believe that England, motivated by greed and economic interests, orchestrated an ingenious plot to trigger an armed conflict in South America with the intention of destroying the so-called bad example provided by a slightly probable and poorly historically based Paraguayan independent industrialization.

The history of the conflict has several controversies of various kinds regarding its origins, causes, motivation, developments, number of casualties, results, etc. However, the war is unanimously considered by scholars and historians to be the greatest, most brutal and bloodiest war that has ever been waged in South America. The conflict opposed the Triple Alliance – Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay – to Paraguay from 1864 to 1870.

The causes of the war are complex and are connected to the several agreements, disagreements, changes and interests that marked the relationships of the four nations involved with it at the time. The year 1862 may be considered the key to understanding the conflict (DORATIOTO, 2002). In 1862, Argentina finally achieved its unification and centralization after years of internal fighting and disputes. Also in 1862, Francisco Solano López became president in Paraguay and began his policies to make his country an indispensable participant in the region international affairs. Due to the historical Argentine interest of annexation of Paraguay under its rule, López tried a secret approach to the Argentine provinces of Entre Ríos and Corrientes, where resistance still existed to the new centralized government of Buenos Aires. Furthermore, in 1862, Uruguay was ruled by the

*blancos*, a political party of liberal orientation, contrary to the interests of Argentina and the Brazilian Empire, then, a stable and centralized monarchy ruled by Pedro II.

Traditionally, the Paraguayan government is considered as the great aggressor. However, it is possible to say that what actually triggered the conflict was the attitude of the Brazilian government towards the Uruguayan issue (DORATIOTO, 2002). For simplicity, since 1861, the *blanco* government in Uruguay began to implement a series of actions that directly affected the interests of the Brazilian monarchy, as well as the Argentine government, in the country, for example, the taxation of goods produced by slave labor used by Brazilians that owned properties in Uruguay, which made these goods cheaper than the Uruguayan goods produced by free labor.

In 1864, feeling insulted by the actions of the Uruguayan government, the Brazilian government issued an *ultimatum* that presented several demands that should be met within six days. Refusal would result in military action. The idea was to force the *blancos* out and replace them with the *colorados*, the Uruguayan conservative party, allied to Brazil and Argentina, and which had been conducting armed revolts in the country since 1863. Without options, the Uruguayan president asked for Solano López's help, the Paraguayan president, who officially protested and threatened to take active measures, being completely ignored. In September 1864, Brazilian troops invaded the Uruguayan territory, aligning themselves to the *colorados'* forces, which culminated with the *blancos'* defeat. In December 1864, Solano López, honoring his agreement with the Uruguayan government, declares war to Brazil and Paraguayan troops invade the Brazilian province of Mato Grosso.

Solano López made a huge strategic and judgment mistake which had an enormously high cost. In 1865, he asked the Argentine government, which was still neutral regarding the war, permission for his troops to cross the country in order to invade Rio Grande do Sul, in southern Brazil. His request was denied. Thus, López ordered the invasion of Entre Ríos and Corrientes, where he hoped to find support, declaring war to Argentina and splitting his forces into two battle fronts. Furthermore, also in 1865, the *blancos* finally surrendered in Uruguay, and, in May,

the Triple Alliance comprised of Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay was formed. Paraguay was alone and, at the end of the war, in 1870, the country was ruined.

The Paraguayan War may be considered an Absolute War (SALLES, 1990). The concept of Absolute War was elaborated by Carl von Clausewitz in his book *On War* first published in 1832<sup>1</sup>. Clausewitz was a Prussian General that fought the French revolutionary armies in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, and was impacted by the strength and military strategies of Bonaparte's army. An Absolute War can be defined as a war that involves every social sector, every citizen, in a certain way, whether by actual physical recruitment and fighting or by other symbolic and ideological ways. Furthermore, an Absolute War may also be defined as a war in which one of the main objectives is the destruction of the enemy. Thus, the Paraguayan War may be defined as such since it was a conflict that affected its participants in a nationwide level. It was the first national conflict of the region and all the societies of the countries involved were affected and mobilized by it in different ways and different levels in terms of actual fighting, propaganda, ideology, economy, etc. As for Paraguay, the great loser, this concept is particularly true. The country had its entire population somehow actually affected by the war, whether in terms of population mobilization, starvation, misery and disease. At the end of the war, the country was destroyed.

The Brazilian Imperial State dealt with the war as a subject of national importance (DORATIOTO, 2002; SALLES, 1990; TORAL, 2001). The war presented itself as an opportunity for the government to minimize some of the divergent voices that could be heard in the political arena. Also, it was a moment of great patriotic impetus at a time when the Brazilian monarchy sought to fabricate and embody the idea of a Brazilian nation. It was a time for the Brazilian society to prove its high level of civilization compared to a brutal foreign enemy with a population comprised of barbarian Indian featured people. The first symbol of this effort was the creation of spaces for the participation of Brazilians from different social levels in the army. The decree that created the corps of "Volunteers of the Homeland" (Voluntários da Pátria) was one of the first measures implemented by

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<sup>1</sup> CLAUSEWITZ, Carl Von. *On War*. London: Wordsworth Editions, 1997 [1832].

the Brazilian State after the declaration of war, and the emperor himself enlisted symbolically as the First Volunteer.

However, after the first year of fighting, the war became virtually unpopular (DORATIOTO, 2002; SALLES, 1990; TORAL, 2001). Its unexpected long duration, the traumatic defeat of the Allied forces in the Battle for Curupaity (1866), the brutality of the battles, the diseases, particularly cholera, which killed more men than the battles themselves, and the high costs of keeping an army in fighting conditions in a foreign territory, after 1865, were some of the causes for this unpopularity. In Brazil, the war raised many questions about the Brazilian society, and many divergent voices began to be heard again, and they were stronger this time. Particularly, slavery issues began to be openly debated, especially because of the large participation of Negroes in the Brazilian army as a solution for keeping the number of soldiers in fighting conditions, and the idea of abolishing slavery took its place in the center of the political debates.

With respect to the war itself, only two battles are of special interest for this study, since they were selected to be represented on Historical Paintings that magnify the greatest military accomplishment of the Brazilian Empire, honor the emperor and materialize a certain image of the Brazilian nation. On the canvases painted by Pedro Américo, the Army and its commanders are the ones who play the most important roles. Brief accounts of those battles are provided hereinafter. The canvases that represent them will be analyzed in chapter 4.

## **2.1 THE BATTLES**

Before analyzing the paintings, it is important to understand what they represent.

### **2.1.1 The Battle for Avahy – December 11<sup>th</sup>, 1868<sup>2</sup>**

After taking the Paraguayan fortress of Humaitá, at the margins of the Paraguay River, the allied troops, comprised now basically of the Brazilian army, initiated the final effort that made possible the occupation of the Paraguayan capital, in January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1869. This final effort is known as the “Dezembrada”, which is a series of battles that occurred in December, 1868, and were responsible for the

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<sup>2</sup> The account of the battles is based on Doratioto's *Maldita Guerra* (2002).

almost complete destruction of the Paraguayan army. However, it did not represent the end of the war, since Solano López chose not to surrender, in spite of all the evidences that the war had already been lost, abandoning the capital together with what remained of his army, which represented one more whole year of chasing and fighting.

For the purposes of this paper, however, only one of these battles is really important because this was the battle chosen and painted by Pedro Américo: the Battle for Avahy. After defeating the Paraguayans in Itororó, in December 6<sup>th</sup>, 1868, the allied troops marched to reach the rearguard of the Paraguayan army in retreat. Under the orders of Solano López, General Caballero, defeated in Itororó, had the mission to intercept the march of the allied army, now under the command of the Marquis of Caxias – the future Duke of Caxias – a very talented Brazilian General, appointed by many as the great responsible for the allied success in the war. Five days after Itororó, in December 11<sup>th</sup>, 1868, the battle for Avahy was fought. Specialists consider the choice for engaging the allied army in Avahy to be another one of the many mistakes made by López, since this was a site without any military importance that could be easily sieged by an enemy with a much superior numerical strength (DORATIOTO, 2002).

The fighting lasted for five hours on a slightly steep terrain crossed by the Avahy Stream. Up on a hill from where he could have a wide view of the enemy positions, Caxias gave instructions for the attack. At 8 a.m., General Osório began his march downhill in order to cross the stream and reach the Paraguayan troops. A heavy rain began to fall the moment Osório crossed the stream with his troops, under heavy fire, reaching the front of the enemy lines. Because of the rain, the obsolete Paraguayan spark rifles were useless, even though, the battle was ferocious and confusing. As it had already happened in Itororó, Brazilian soldiers began to weaken and fall back without orders to do so. The situation was so serious that Caxias himself had to abandon his command position uphill to prevent Brazilian soldiers from running from battle. The same happened to Osório, who moved from one side to another to force his soldiers to hold their ground. At that moment, an enemy bullet hit his jaw, which injure he hid with a piece of cloth and continued to fight until the bleeding forced him to retreat.

After a while in which their only concern was the Brazilian infantry and artillery, the Paraguayan troops had to form ranks to face the Brazilian cavalry that finally approached, but they were completely defeated. Out of the five thousand soldiers under Caballero's orders, the Paraguayan General managed to save less than two hundred. Brazilian soldiers buried three thousand Paraguayan dead soldiers and the Brazilian forces suffered two thousand casualties, among dead and injured men, and one thousand and two hundred Paraguayans were made war prisoners. The teenagers that also made up the Paraguayan troops were not spared (DORATIOTO, 2002).

### 2.1.2 The Battle for Campo Grande – August 16<sup>th</sup>, 1869

After the occupation of Asunción, the Paraguayan capital city, in January 1869, Caxias considered that his mission had been accomplished and the war ended. Thus, without waiting for the authorization of the Brazilian government, he decided to leave Paraguay and returned to Rio de Janeiro. The Emperor, Pedro II, who insisted that the war was not to be ended until the capture of Solano López, was not pleased with the General's decision, but awarded him the title of Duke, the highest one of the Brazilian Empire. The Emperor's son in law, the Count d'Eu, was the one chosen to replace Caxias as Commander-in-Chief of the Allied Forces in Paraguay.

Being informed about López's whereabouts, the Count d'Eu ordered the pursuit. While marching to reach the enemy position, the Allied Army encountered the Paraguayan rearguard in Campo Grande. Thus, on August 16<sup>th</sup>, 1869, the battle for Campo Grande was fought. This was the last great field battle of the war and it began at 8:30 am lasting for eight hours, which demonstrates the surprising resilience of the already ruined Paraguayan army. In this battle, twenty thousand allied soldiers engaged six thousand Paraguayan soldiers. The Count d'Eu himself was the one in command of the Allied army. According to Doratioto's (2002) analysis, based on the memories of the Viscount of Taunay, the Paraguayan commander did not take any action that would prevent the Brazilian forces from calmly choosing and taking attack positions. Paraguayan resistance was limited to low intensity, remote and sparse rifle and artillery shots. Many young Paraguayans participated in this battle, who were between 14 and 15 years old. Among the dead

Paraguayan soldiers, children wearing false beards were found so as to look like adults (DORATIOTO, 2002).

During the battle, the Paraguayan commander made his forces retreat in an orderly way and across a stream, settling on the other bank, where they had eight cannons and were protected by mounts of earth. When the Brazilian infantry tried to cross the stream, there was an intense combat. After this first failed attempt to cross the stream, the Count d'Eu ordered the artillery to be positioned in front of the enemy cannons causing great mortality on the Paraguayan side. Then, the Imperial Cavalry finally arrived at the battlefield launching a devastating attack against the enemy forces which was followed by the infantry attack. The Paraguayan defeat was complete.

The battle for Campo Grande was the last great battle of the war. One thousand and two hundred Paraguayans were made prisoners and two thousand of them were killed. The weaponry they used in battle was obsolete. Some of the weapons apprehended after the battle were so old that they were unknown to the allies. This, together with the lack of proper military training of the Paraguayan army, largely composed of inexperienced people, explains, according to Doratioto's analysis, the disproportion in the number of casualties: the Allies had twenty-six dead and two hundred and fifty-nine wounded soldiers (DORATIOTO, 2002).

### **3. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

This chapter comprises a review about the importance and issues of the use of images as historical evidence, as well as presents some concepts that will be used, in chapter 4, in the analysis of the paintings from the point of view of the Grammar of Visual Design (KRESS; VAN LEEUWEN, 1996), which was developed from the idea of language as a social semiotic system conceived by Halliday. The chapter also comprises a review about the use and meanings of the many images generated by the Paraguayan War.

Images, especially ancient images such as the paintings analyzed herein, are important sources of historical evidence because they present indicia of past experiences (BURKE, 2004) and help specialists in their search for understanding these past experiences when words are absent (BAXANDALL, 1991). Images also convey a particular message and may be subjected to semiotic and discourse analyses (VAN LEEUWEN, 2005).

Burke (2004) defends the use of images as historical evidence, or, as he says, evidence of the past in the present. According to him, similarly to texts and oral testimonies, images are also important forms of historical evidence. However, Burke warns that the use of images raises some troublesome issues. The argument is that images are silent witnesses and that translating their testimony into words is a difficult and dangerous task, because the images analyzed by historians and specialists may have been created to communicate a message of their own, but these specialists often ignore this message in order to read these images in between the lines, seeking to learn something that the artists did not know they were teaching. In order to use the evidence effectively, it is necessary to critique the source and be aware of its weaknesses and limitations.

Another historian who defends the importance of images as historical evidence is Baxandall (1991) who informs us that the major social history materials are scarce and that much of the most important experience cannot be translated into words or numbers and, therefore, do not appear in documents, attributing to this the importance of what he defines as "pictorial style". Like a text, one must learn to read an old picture and perceive the typical social experience of an era on it.

Language can also be defined as a system of cultural and social signs. Communicating through the use of language, whether written, oral, gestural or pictorial, is to reproduce a whole system of culturally, socially and historically defined symbols, signs and values (HALL, 2005; HALLIDAY, 1978; VAN LEEUWEN, 2005). As part of the societies that surround them (HALL, 2005) and as a product of their own time (BLOCH, 2001 [1949]), human beings are not capable of communicating in a neutral way, without the many social influences that affect them daily. Therefore, to communicate is to mean and “to mean is to act semiotically” (HALLIDAY, 2013, p. 16).

Halliday is the one responsible for coining the concept of language as social semiotics (1978), stating that language is explained as expressing meanings that are created within a social system. Van Leeuwen (2005) argues that semiotics resources are not restricted to speech, writing and picture making, Therefore:

“Almost everything we do or make can be done or made in different ways and therefore allows, at least in principle, the articulation of different social and cultural meanings”. (VAN LEEUWEN, 2005, p. 4)

Van Leeuwen also states that every semiotic resource has a semiotic potential, defined as the potential for making meaning. The systematic investigation of semiotic data, in order to comprehend its meaning, is one of the main characteristics of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which also states that discourse must be analyzed in context (WODAK, 2004).

Thus, pictorial language can also be defined as a semiotic resource, since images, with or without verbal resources, also carry meanings and are often used to convey messages of various kinds, such as advertisements, signs and artistic works. Bezerra et al (2011), when presenting the main concepts of the Grammar of Visual Design by Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996) describe some categories that can be used when analyzing images. Regarding their functions, images may have a representative function, interactive function and compositional function.

Regarding their representative function, images may be defined as narrative images and conceptual images (BEZERRA et al, 2011).

- *Narrative images*: they construct a certain experience on space and time, depicting participants which are involved in an event or which act or react with respect to other participants.

- *Conceptual images*: they describe and/or categorize participants on an image regarding individual characteristics, identities and shared traces and features, which make it possible to perceive these participants as members of a group.

Further, narrative representations may have four different processes: action processes, reaction processes, mental processes and verbal processes (BEZERRA et al, 2011). For the purposes of this paper, however, only two of them seem proper for the analysis to be done herein, namely, the action processes and the reaction processes, both of which may be further divided in transactive and non-transactive processes.

As for conceptual representations, they focus on the attributes and identities of the participants involved, which are often divided in groups or categories and are presented in a part/whole relation. Another characteristic of this type of representation is less detailing of the image background, which places the focus on the participants and their attributes (BEZERRA et al, 2011). Two of the main processes presented by the conceptual representations are classificatory and symbolic processes. Classificatory processes represent participants so as to highlight their common characteristics that define them as belonging to a certain category. Symbolic processes are defined by the presence of elements that add extra value to an image since they are no intrinsic to it.

According to the ideas developed by Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996) the paintings analyzed in this essay are narrative representations. Their Grammar of Visual Design elaborates some features and concepts present on narrative images. According to them, narrative structures always have a vector while conceptual structures never do. When participants are connected by a vector, they are depicted as doing something to or for each other. The actor, thus, is the participant from which the vector departs (KRESS; VAN LEEUWEN, 1996)

“The vectors may be formed by bodies or limbs or tools ‘in action’, but there are many other ways to turn represented elements into diagonal lines of action.” (KRESS; VAN LEEUWEN, 1996, p. 57)

When the action involves at least two participants connected by a vector, it is defined as a transactive action. A non-transactive action is defined by the presence of only one participant and only one vector. The same logic is applied to the reaction processes performed by those defined as reactors. Here the vector is formed by an eyeline, “the direction of the glance of one or more of the represented participants” (KRESS; VAN LEEUWEN, 1996, p. 64). If the glance of the reactor has an identifiable target, it is a transactive reaction, if the glance has no identifiable target, it is a non-transactive reaction.

From the point of view of interactional function, images involve two kinds of participants: represented participants, which are people, places and things depicted in images, and interactive participants, the people who communicate with each other through the use of images, namely, producers and viewers of images. These participants are involved in three kinds of relations: relations between represented participants, relations between represented and interactive participants, and relations between interactive participants – what they do to or for each other through images.

“Interactive participants are therefore real people who produce and make sense of images in the context of social institutions which, to different degrees and in different ways, regulate what may be ‘said’ with images, and how it should be said, and images should be interpreted.” (KRESS; VAN LEEUWEN, 1996, p.119)

The relations between represented and interactive participants may be performed by different visual resources (BEZERRA et al, 2011):

- *Contact*: the eye contact between the represented participants and the viewers. If the participant establishes direct eye contact with the viewer, the resource is called *Demand* and defines a personal/close relation between them. If there is no direct eye contact, the resource is called *Offer* and defines an impersonal relation between them;
- *Social Distance*: the participant may be represented as being close to or far from the viewer, in the positions of close-up, medium shot and long shot, establishing levels of intimacy;
- *Attitude*: the angle formed between the body of the represented participant and the viewer in the vertical axis. This angle also indicates relations of approximation and distance between participants and viewers;

- *Power*: the angle formed between the body of the represented participant and the viewer in the horizontal axis. The angle here establishes relations of power. If the participant is in a higher position with respect to the reader, then the participant has the power. On the other hand, if the viewer is in a higher position, then, the viewer has the power.

As for the compositional function, it is related to the organization of the elements represented on the image (KRESS; VAN LEEUWEN, 1996). This function has three main aspects:

- *Information value*: the placement of elements, which provides them with specific informational values according to the position they occupy on the image, such as left and right, up and bottom, and center and margin;
- *Salience*: the presence of resources used to attract viewer's attention, such as placement on foreground or background, relative size, colors, etc.
- *Framing*: the presence or absence of frames, such as dividing lines, expressing connection or disconnection between the elements on the image.

In relation to the use and meanings of the many images generated by the Paraguayan War, what seems interesting is the large amount of works and publications on the subject. This is due to the large amount of images produced during the war. Photographs of battle scenarios; some of them, taken even during the battles, try to capture the action and crudity of the war. But most of the photographs depict officers and Volunteers of the Homeland, who were photographed by photographers present on the front. Many of these officers pose next to their Paraguayan prisoners. Most of the photographs were sold in the cities of the countries involved. Toral (2001) argues that this contributed even more to the unpopularity of the conflict, since these photographs presented the humanized image of the enemy.

Silveira (2009) analyzes a series of cartoons published during the wartime to demonstrate how the so-called "satirical arsenal" of the Brazilian Court's illustrated press disqualified the enemy, creating a certain image about him, as well as a series of prejudices that he believes to be present among us even today. According to Silveira, the illustrated press was used as a weapon against the enemy, creating the image of the barbarism and cruelty of Solano López. Toral (2001) finds Silveira's

thesis difficult to support, arguing that the Empire, as far as it is known, did not sponsor any of the illustrated newspapers. On the contrary, these newspapers positioned themselves quite freely in relation to the events that occurred during the Brazilian Monarchy era. According to Toral, the illustrated press was opportunistic, seeking to be in tune with the public opinion about the war. When the conflict became unpopular, from 1866 on, the press began to attack it; when the proximity of the victory made it popular again, the press changed its mind.

Salles (2003) also uses images to study the conflict that mobilized the country in the second half of the nineteenth century. One point that seems important to be highlighted in this use of images by Salles, and which is also connected to the object that the present paper intends to analyze, is the contrast between the photographs and the paintings of the war. In the paintings, the Brazilian army appears with beautiful uniforms and weapons, commanded by great Generals. On these canvases, one can see the face of national heroes. The photographs show anonymous faces, sometimes dressed in rags. The absence of black soldiers in the paintings is striking, because they are present in large numbers on the photographs. It is known that, due to the long duration of the conflict and the increasing difficulties in recruiting soldiers for the fighting, the Brazilian Imperial State was led to legitimize the liberation of slaves so that they could be sent to the battlefields as Volunteers of the Homeland. This contributed to the Brazilian army being formed by a large contingent of black soldiers, which is revealed by the photographs and minimized by the paintings. According to Salles, the Brazilian Empire minimized the importance of the black soldiers in the war, praising great generals and their great deeds in battle in paintings and monuments in which the presence of black soldiers is barely noticed.

#### **4. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION**

This chapter defines the concept of Historical Painting, presents descriptions of the canvases and analyzes them, trying to understand what the paintings represent and the ideas they embody, approaching them as a product of one particular society. In order to try to understand the meanings embodied by the paintings, the analysis will combine the categories conceived by Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996) in the visual grammar, described in chapter 3, with a historical perspective.

The two paintings analyzed herein belong to a particular painting style produced in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Brazil. This style is known as Historical Painting and was performed by artists graduated from the Imperial Academy of Fine Arts in Rio de Janeiro. The two main painters who performed such work in Brazil are Vitor Meirelles de Lima and Pedro Américo de Figueiredo e Mello. However, this study is concerned only with Américo's paintings about the war against Paraguay because they are the ones that present the steepest contrasts between Brazilians and Paraguayans.

The Historical Painting was no easy task for the painter. The style had to be magnificent as a convention, and the paintings generally reached huge dimensions. Another characteristic of this kind of painting was the high degree of idealization of the historic event depicted that normally embodied several philosophical, literary and mythological values and symbols. Thus, these paintings also required a great investment of time, study, materials and labor of the artist. These particular artistic works should provide a moral sense to History. These are some of the reasons why the Historical Painting had to be sponsored, whether by private institutions, private individuals or by the government (CARDOSO, 2007). In our case, both of Américo's paintings were sponsored by the Imperial State.

This, however, was not a specific issue of the Brazilian case. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, battle paintings were requested and sponsored by governments worldwide. Battle images are a clear form of propaganda that offers the opportunity of depicting officers, commanders and generals in a heroic and virtuous way. Sometimes, the commander is depicted on top of a hill, above the battlefield and the armies engaged in battle, a position from where he observes the development of the battle and gives

instructions and orders to his forces (BURKE, 2004). In *Batalha do Avay*, Pedro Américo depicted the Marquis of Caxias exactly like this.

According to the visual grammar (KRESS; VAN LEEUWEN, 1996), the two battle paintings analyzed herein are narrative representations because they depict the participants as involved in processes of action and reaction, whether transactive or non-transactive. Also, the presence of vectors establishes the interaction between the participants or mental processes.

As an absolute war, the Paraguayan War mobilized the artistic production that was also responsible for producing a particular discourse about the conflict. By representing one particular image of the Brazilian nation, opposite to that of the enemy, the canvases by Américo are inserted in a process of symbolic mobilization, even though they were produced after the end of the war. They glorify the biggest triumph of the Brazilian nation and its Emperor over the so called Paraguayan barbarism and the cruelty of Solano López's regime. In a way, the paintings legitimate the Brazilian action against Paraguay and perpetuate an image of superiority of the Brazilian civilization.

#### 4.1 *Batalha de Campo Grande (1871)* <sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The title of the paintings were not translated, not only because they may be seen as official documents, but also to differentiate the paintings analyzed from the battles they represent. For example, the Battle for Campo Grande is depicted on *Batalha de Campo Grande*.



Figure 1: *Batalha de Campo Grande*. Pedro Américo, 1871. Oil on canvas. 332 X 530 cm. Petrópolis, RJ. Museu Imperial.

The canvas, measuring 332 x 550 cm, was executed in the style of Historical Painting, by initiative of Pedro Américo himself, in a context of patriotic exultation due to recent news about victories in the war. Américo was already a professor at the Imperial Academy of Fine Arts and, for the execution of his artwork, he chose a theme that mobilized the whole country at the time. The painting was finished only in 1871, one year after the end of the conflict, but, still in 1869, the very year of the battle represented, Américo had already decided the theme. *Batalha de Campo Grande* achieved success in the artistic milieu and in the press and ended up being bought by the imperial government. We can say that Américo took a risk, because the conflict, unexpectedly long and exhausting, had lost its initial prestige. However, as André Toral states, the proximity of victory seems to have brought back some of this lost prestige (TORAL, 2001)

The scene is grayish, covered by the smoke of the cannons, the reason why it is not possible to distinguish the characteristics of the terrain or the rest of the forces that face each other. However, it is possible to see the stream near which the fight actually took place. At the center of the picture, being crossed by the Count d'Eu and the rest of the men who come after him, lies the stream that the Paraguayan commander ordered his men to cross, sheltering themselves by mounts of earth on

the other bank, where they also had eight cannons taken by the Brazilians soldiers after intense combat, as previously described in the account of the battle.

At the center of the picture, on top of a pyramidal structure comprised of three men, and mounted on a beautiful white horse, there is the figure of the hero: the Count d'Eu, then, Commander-in-Chief of the allied forces in Paraguay. Throughout the picture there is no one in a higher position than his. Over the Count there is a luminosity that highlights the central event relative to the rest of the composition. In front of him, composing yet another element of the pyramid, also mounted on his horse and with his left hand injured, there is Captain Almeida Castro, who holds the reins of the Count's horse, attempting to prevent His Highness from going any further and risking his life even more. To the left of the observer, there is the last figure that composes the pyramidal structure and the central event of the canvas: Colonel Enéas Galvão who orders Captain Almeida Castro to release the reins of the Count's horse.<sup>4</sup>

According to the Grammar of Visual Design by Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996), these three characters are salient with respect to the rest of the composition. These three men are depicted in a way intended to immediately draw the viewer's eye and they are the actors of the most important action on the canvas. Although not out of scale, they are the largest image of participants on the whole scene and the position that they occupy on the scene (horizontal plane), slightly different if compared to the other participants (diagonal plane), also highlights their presence.

Particularly, with respect to the Count, one could say that he is salient within the salience. He is the most elevated figure on the canvas, on the top of the pyramid, mounted on the only white horse on the entire composition, which is rearing in an elegant pose, making the Count look even higher. There is a luminosity that shines on the white horse highlighting even more the presence of the Count. He is the hero. There is no eye contact between the Count and the viewer, which is referred to as *offer* (KRESS; VAN LEEUWEN, 1996) and establishes an impersonal relation between the Count and the viewer. Also, the Count is in a position of power with respect not only to the other participants on the canvas, but also with respect to the viewer, since he is depicted in an elevated position.

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<sup>4</sup> The identification of the participants is made by Toral (2001).

When this battle occurred, in 1869, the Count d'Eu was Commander-in-Chief of the Allied Army in Paraguay. Furthermore, he was married to the Heir to the Brazilian Throne, the Emperor's daughter. His presence demands respect and allegiance, even on the canvas. He was depicted in a way that represents his role in the Brazilian Monarchy and that highlights his valor. As a good example of relations between represented and interactive participants, the viewer, as part of the Brazilian monarchist society, should be able to understand this.

In the background, following the vertical plane that passes through the right arm and the saber of the Commander-in-Chief, we can see Major Benedicto de Almeida Torres; ahead of Torres and to the left of the observer, we can see Captain Alfredo Escragno de Taunay, future Viscount of Taunay, mounted on his horse and holding his saber. Behind Taunay, on the background of the canvas, we can see Colonel Moraes, and two unknown black soldiers. On the extreme left of the canvas, mounted on his horse and with his left arm extended, there is Captain João Mendes Salgado, which precedes an infantry corps. In the lower left corner, strangely obscure, there is Friar Fidelis d'Ávila who, on his knees and holding a wounded soldier in his arms, casts a pleading look to the heavens. The wounded man in the arms of the Friar is Captain Arouca who died after being hit by a Paraguayan bullet.

The two black soldiers are placed on the background and, thus, have their action minimized. They are basically the only unknown soldiers among those depicted in the Brazilian Army. The foreground is reserved to the heroes. One could say that there are many Paraguayan soldiers in the foreground, which is true. However, they are there as a contrast with respect to the Brazilian Army. They are the Goal (KRESS; VAN LEEUWEN, 1996) to which the Brazilian Army act.

The presence of the Friar in the foreground is also significant. He holds a Brazilian soldier in his arms and looks to the heavens. The representation of the Friar is curious for two reasons. He is in an obscure corner of the canvas and, according to the Viscount of Taunay<sup>5</sup>, who fought the battle that day, there was no Friar when the battle occurred. He is represented on the canvas by choice of Pedro

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<sup>5</sup> Visconde de Taunay. *Memórias*. São Paulo: Edições Melhoramentos, s/d, p. 359. Apud Maraliz de Castro Vieira Christo. "Quando subordinados roubam a cena: a Batalha de Campo Grande de Pedro Américo" In: *Saeculum – Revista de História* [19]; João Pessoa, jul./dec. 2008. Available at: [http://www.cchla.ufpb.br/saeculum/saeculum19\\_dos03\\_christo.pdf](http://www.cchla.ufpb.br/saeculum/saeculum19_dos03_christo.pdf) Accessed on 12 August, 2017.

Américo, who represents, in this manner, a religious idea. The painter places God, associated to the idea of victory, justice and rightfulness, on the Brazilian side, giving to this idea a privileged position in the foreground. As previously stated herein, one of the characteristics of the Historical Painting style is that it was meant to give a moral sense to History and depict the events in an idealized way (CARDOSO, 2007). In order to accomplish that, the painter had to use symbolic resources that could be identified by the viewers. The Grammar of Visual Design (KRESS; VAN LEEUWEN, 1996) defines this as a symbolic process, which is defined as an element that adds extra value to the image by representing something that is not necessarily intrinsic to it.

Américo's canvas seeks to convey the idea of movement. This can be seen, in addition to the main scene with the three central figures, in other details: the gestures and movements of the horses; the projectiles still in their aerial trajectory in the upper left corner of the canvas. In the lower right corner, the Paraguayan cannon at the moment of firing; to the left of the cannon, the Paraguayan soldier in a red shirt about to strike the Brazilian soldier in firing position with his spear; to the left of this Paraguayan soldier, perhaps the most significant element of the idea of movement: another Paraguayan soldier, who falls after being hit by a bullet. He takes his hand to his head and splashes the water of the stream while falling. His rifle, dropped by him, is suspended in mid-air.

Referring again to the Grammar of Visual Design (KRESS; VAN LEEUWEN, 1996), the picture has many vectors, which add to the idea of movement. The main vector identifiable on the picture is the one formed by the three central characters who form the pyramidal structure, namely, the direction in which their horses go: from left to right. There is also a vector from Almeida Castro to the Count, also making him an important actor performing a transactive action. Further, there is a vector from Enéias Galvão to Almeida Castro, also a transactive action. They are the main actors on the canvas. The brave Count who wishes to take the lead risking his life; the Captain who tries to protect him and receives an arresting command for insubordination.

As a whole, the Brazilian Army may also be seen as an actor. There is a vector that indicates a transactive action of the Brazilian Army with respect to Paraguayan

Army, presented as a reactor who performs a transactive reaction. The Paraguayans occupy a small area of the lower left corner of the canvas and are presented as cornered and defeated.

Pedro Américo was criticized, at the time, due to a detail in the representation of the hero. The count is prevented from taking the lead by one of his subordinates, which was interpreted as a minimization of his performance and his heroic role, which, then, was transferred to his subordinate officers who take all the initiative of the scene. However, Pedro Américo was inspired by several other battle scenes he had seen during his studies in France and Italy, where several commanders had their horses retained by subordinates (TORAL, 2001). Perhaps, Américo wanted to emphasize the heroism of the officers and give a prominent role to the Army. To this end, he took advantage of a true event, since, according to Taunay's account of the battle, Almeida Castro did indeed hold the reins of the Count's horse. For the painter, this, perhaps, was the most significant fact.

However, the most important issue for this study is the flagrant contrast between the two armies engaged in battle. The Brazilian Army is fundamentally white, presenting beautiful blue uniforms, as well as modern and better quality weapons. The protagonists of the scene, in addition to the Count, are all officers of the army, mounted on horses, portrayed in moments of bravery, determination and heroism: the bravery of the Count who tries to take the lead, and the heroism of his subordinate officer who tries to stop him to protect his life. Also, we can see the Volunteers of the Homeland, brave Brazilians who decided to fight for the national cause in Paraguay. The figure of the Friar who, as Taunay states, was not present during the battle, provides a religious meaning to the painting.

As for the Paraguayans, they are semi-naked and barefoot, many of them are dressed in rags and fighting with wooden spears and other obsolete weapons. Their facial features are ferocious and their traits are fundamentally indigenous. They are barbarians. In spite of this, they exhibit beautiful bodies that demonstrate the anatomical knowledge of the painter highlighting a reference to the classical art, typical of this style of painting. Under the horses of the Count and the two officers surrounding him, one can see a fallen and torn Paraguayan flag, a symbol of defeat. There is, however, an absence: the Paraguayan boys, whose presence in the

Paraguayan army has been observed and documented by many Brazilian soldiers (DORATIOTO, 2002), are not there. Killing children does not seem very civilized.

The painting was finished in 1871, and was officially presented to the Imperial Family in the same year. Many articles were written about it in the press. The canvas was well received and, after many requests and suggestions in newspaper articles, and by art experts and other personalities, Pedro Américo's "patriotic work" was finally sold to the War Minister, Baron of Jaguaribe, in January 1872. *Batalha de Campo Grande* was later presented to the public at the 1872 Exhibition of the Imperial Academy of Fine Arts.

#### 4.1.2 *Batalha do Avahy (1872 – 1877)*



Figure 2: *Batalha do Avahy*. Pedro Américo, 1872 - 1877. Oil on canvas, 600 X 1100 cm. Rio de Janeiro, Museu Nacional de Belas Artes.

In the sky, gray and heavy clouds show that it was a rainy day when the Brazilian troops, led by the Marquis of Caxias, faced and defeated the Paraguayans in Avahy. Despite the smoke of cannons in the air, one can still see the terrain that stretches out of sight. In the distance, one can see the light of the sun, which already begins to burst through the dark clouds. Some projectiles fired by the artillery are still in their aerial trajectory, suspended in the air. On a vast expanse of land, Brazilians and Paraguayans face each other in an atrocious combat.

On an elevation of the ground, on the left, one can see the Commander-in-Chief Marquis of Caxias giving orders and instructions for the battle. The General is surrounded by his General Staff, composed of Brigadiers Baron of Penha and José Luiz Menna Barreto, Captain Luiz Pereira da Cunha, who watches the fight with binoculars, and Colonels Luiz Alves Pereira and Candido Xavier Rozado. In front of Caxias and his General Staff, a group of Paraguayan soldiers on their knees begging for mercy.<sup>6</sup>

In the foreground of the painting one can see Lieutenant Alves Pereira, mounted on his horse, holding firmly two Paraguayan banners and surrounded by enemies. One of them is about to strike the Lieutenant with his sword, and the other, with a face transfigured by ferocity, attacks him with his wooden spear. The Brazilian soldier lying on the ground and trying to save the Lieutenant from the Paraguayan with the spear is Lieutenant Cunha Telles. More to the left, mounted on a cannon, with his arm raised and holding the cap, is Cadet Seraphim, who became famous for his bravery and recklessness and who died, a few days later, on the battle that took place in Lomas Valentinas.

Still in the foreground, on the extreme right of the picture, one can see figures that seem strange to the scene: a woman, an old man, a girl and a cow, apparently struck with a spear by a young Paraguayan boy. According to the catalog of the Exhibition of 1879 of the Imperial Academy of Fine Arts<sup>7</sup>, it is an "indigenous" family that emigrated in a "peasant car", and that was surprised by the battle. To the left of the unfortunate Paraguayan family's car is General Osório riding his horse, holding his saber and guiding his men. On the left side of his face, one can see the wound in the jaw that Osório actually acquired during the battle. Although not exactly in the foreground, Osório was made salient by the painter. The General was highly admired by fellow officers, soldiers and by the Brazilian allies because of his valor. During this battle, even after seriously injured, he continued to fight until the moment when the bleeding forced him to stop (DORATIOTO, 2002). Osório was made more salient than Caxias who was the Commander-in-Chief.

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<sup>6</sup> The identification of the participants is made by Toral (2001).

<sup>7</sup> AIBA. 1879. *Catálogo das obras expostas na Academia das Bellas Artes em 15 de março de 1879*. RJ: Typografia de Pereira Braga e C.

Available at: [http://www.dezenovevinte.net/catalogos/1879\\_egba.pdf](http://www.dezenovevinte.net/catalogos/1879_egba.pdf)

Accessed on 12 August, 2017.

In more remote planes, there are, behind Osório, and more towards the center, Lieutenant-Colonel Sá e Brito that falls fatally wounded; above the car of the Paraguayan family, the Baron of Triunfo; and, further, following the straight line from the soldier who aims the revolver close to Osorio, Colonel Câmara mounted on his horse. In the distance, we see Paraguayan and Brazilian battalions facing each other. There is the stream of Avahy, a branch of the Paraguay River, near which the fighting took place.

The picture has a multiplicity of participants and, consequently, a multiplicity of vectors that point to multiple directions and that define multiple actors and reactors, reinforcing the idea of action. The canvas is huge and was made to convey the idea of greatness of the deed performed by the Brazilian Army. As in *Batalha de Campo Grande*, with respect to the interaction between represented participants and interactive participants, there is no eye contact between these participants, characterizing an offer, and the represented participants are all in long shot with respect to the viewer, which creates an impersonal distance between them. However, the size of the canvas makes the viewer feels overwhelmed and somehow diminished by the scene represented.

Ricardo Salles (2003), when analyzing the picture, points out something very important. This Américos' canvas inverts the traditional arrangement of images in battle paintings. On *Batalha do Avahy*, it is the soldiers, situated in the foreground and the center of the canvas who dominate the central axis of action, instead of great personalities. The most salient participant on the canvas is neither Caxias nor Osorio, but Lieutenant Alves Pereira, who holds the Paraguayan banners and is attacked by three Paraguayan soldiers. In the main scene, on the center of the canvas, one can see the Volunteers of the Homeland who run in the direction of the viewer, indicating an approximation and identification between them (KRESS; VAN LEEUWEN, 1996). In the exact center, a curiosity: Pedro Américo portrayed himself as a Volunteer of the Homeland, the one with the number 33 on the cap.

In comparison to *Batalha de Campo Grande*, some repeated patterns can be observed. Brazilian soldiers are all dressed in beautiful blue uniforms, holding their sabers and armed with rifles and other modern weapons. The Imperial Army is fundamentally white and it is possible to recognize the faces of the national heroes,

already mentioned above. There are also the Volunteers of the Homeland risking their lives to defend the outraged national honor. Black soldiers forcibly recruited for the war, or the slaves, freed on the condition of fighting in Paraguay or offered by their masters to do so in their places cannot be easily identified. The acts of cowardice reported by the Marquis of Caxias and other army officers are not depicted. Those men are examples of patriotism and virtue. They represent the image of the civilized and civilizing Brazilian nation

The enemies are ferocious and are depicted naked and barefoot. They fight with obsolete weapons such as wooden spears and old and technically inferior pistols and rifles. Some of them are dressed in rags and rustic fabrics. In the foreground, we see Paraguayans in a situation of misery. One of them is firing in the direction of the Brazilian lieutenant who holds the banners with a pistol visibly old, even for the time the canvas was painted, if compared to the modern revolver of the Brazilian soldier next to Osório. Another one takes advantage of the situation to steal from corpses, constituting a symbolic process (KRESS; VAN LEEUWEN, 1996) that opposes the Paraguayan villainy to the Brazilian virtue. The only black soldier clearly visible on the canvas is there among them, apparently dead.

*Batalha do Avañy* is a monumental canvas. It is the largest canvas in the history of Brazilian art and measures 600 X 1100 cm. At the top of its frame there is a huge coat of arms on which the monogram "PII" (for Pedro II) can be seen. It was painted between 1872 and 1877 in Florence, Italy, where it was first exposed, with great critical success. It was exhibited in Brazil only in 1879 during the General Exhibition of the Imperial Academy of Fine Arts.

Particularly interesting, as mentioned above, is the steep contrast between Brazilians and Paraguayans on both canvases. The Brazilian Army is presented as fundamentally white, dressing beautiful uniforms, and holding modern weapons, while the Paraguayans are portrayed as semi-naked and barefoot Indians – one of the main stigmas of slavery in Brazil is that slaves did not wear shoes –, with ferocious facial expressions, fighting with ancient weapons and wooden spears, in acts of villainy, cowardice, and misery. This portrayal of the Brazilian Army is highly idealized and has no basis on the documentation and photographs of the period regarding the war. According to these documents and photographs, in

addition to the accounts of men who fought the war, the Brazilian Army was fundamentally comprised of black soldiers: slaves that were freed on the condition of fighting the war, and black and poor free men that were recruited by force and sent to join in the fighting (DORATIOTO, 2002; SALLES, 1990, 2003).

## 5. FINAL COMMENTS

The analysis of the two canvases based on a combination of historical and semiotic perspectives suggests that the paintings analyzed herein embody the main characteristics, ideas and values of the Brazilian national identity defined and shaped by the action of the Imperial State (SALLES, 1996) and shared by the Brazilian society. The historical perspective introduces some of these ideas and values shared by the Brazilian society in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, facilitating the understanding of the paintings by taking them as a product of a particular era of the Brazilian History and by connecting them to the historic experience that they represent. The semiotic perspective, especially the resources defined by Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996), helps the understanding of this shared set of values since they allow us to perceive the importance given by the painter to certain attributes, elements, and signs that have a symbolic value and/or that highlights some aspects that can be interpreted as conveying a particular message.

During the Brazilian Monarchy Era, the artistic production, which included the Historical Painting genre, also had a function of producing a myth of nationality able to inhabit the collective imagination, transcending artworks and artists (SALLES, 1996). The facts of the past should be perpetuated in these canvases of monumental proportions, which should present them not only with precision and verisimilitude, but also with a certain idealization of what has happened, highlighting its moral implications (TORAL, 2001). This idealization may be done by the incorporation of symbolic processes that add extra value to the image (KRESS; VAN LEEUWEN, 1996), as the Friar, whose presence gives a moral and religious meaning to *Batalha de Campo Grande*, and the Paraguayan thief in *Batalha do Avaity*, who symbolizes, in that context, how vile the Paraguayans are.

The canvases were painted in a context of growing dissatisfaction with the servile institution, when ideas of race inequality were commonplace, which increased the discomfort generated by the fact that the State depended so much on slaves and black men to fill the ranks of the Army in Paraguay. As such, it is interesting to notice that they are not completely absent on the paintings analyzed herein, but are placed in the background and in the margins, which minimizes their importance (KRESS; VAN LEEUWEN, 1996), and makes it difficult for the viewer

to easily identify them. Again, these pictures embody an image of a civilized and civilizing nation which, taking into consideration the ideas of the period, could not comprise the presence of black men and slaves (SALLES, 1996). These canvases, sponsored by the government, materialize the image of nation that the Imperial State fabricated over the years, as well as demonstrate the image that the painter had of a civilized nation. An image that found echo and support in the imperial society (Americo's works have achieved great public and critical success). Therefore, Américo's paintings sought to place Brazil on the side of civilization, in flagrant opposition to the so-called Paraguayan barbarism.

Also significant is the importance that Américo gives to the army. After the war, when *Batalha do Avañy* was painted, the army gained political weight and claimed for itself an identification with the national whole, also forged on the battlefields in Paraguay (SALLES, 1990). In this painting, it is the army, represented by the Volunteers of the Homeland, that occupies the foreground and the center of the canvas. Furthermore, the Volunteers run in the direction of the viewer, which, according to Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996), symbolizes a degree of involvement between them.

This representation of the army allows us to perceive the national character and the symbolic role given to it, as well as the growth of its importance after the conflict. Before the war, the army played a secondary role and was complementary to the activity of the National Guard (Guarda Nacional), which had much more prestige, since the regular army was considered a place for unemployed and disqualified people. The war caused the Imperial State to reorganize the army, striving to modify its image, transforming it into a national institution worthy of receiving Brazilians of all social conditions in its ranks (SALLES, 1990). The prominent place occupied by the army in the paintings suggests this growing prestige in the post-war era (KRESS; VAN LEEUWEN, 1996).

The Paraguayan War was an Absolute War. It mobilized material and human resources on a large scale in the countries involved, and the great loser ended the conflict destroyed. At a time when the South American nations were consolidating themselves, the war had repercussions on the strengthening of the countries involved and on the national images that these States sought to forge. The symbolic

mobilization was also fundamental for the construction of an image of the enemy as opposed to the national image. Caricatures, news in newspapers, photographs and lithographs are embedded in this process of constructing a discourse about the enemy and the war, as well as the paintings. These, for the most part, were executed after the end of the conflict, in the next two decades, but they embody an image of nation in opposition to the image of the Paraguayan enemy, also legitimizing the imperial military action against Paraguay. However, more important than expressing a certain image of the enemy, these paintings reveal an idea that the Brazilian society had of itself. They materialize a set of values, signs, and beliefs shared by the Brazilian elite. They represent the image of an imagined community (ANDERSON, 2008) that is constructed in opposition to the image assigned to the enemy.

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