

INTRODUCTION

Burke of the Tropics? José da Silva Lisboa's political thought and the fortunes of
'enlightened reform' in the Luso-Brazilian World, c. 1800-1830

Gabriel Paquette

Junior Research Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge¹

It is a genuine pleasure to present a paper to the members of this seminar, since my academic career began as a student in the M.Phil. in political thought and intellectual history and I owe many intellectual debts to the seminar's long-standing participants. It has come to my attention that it is now customary in this seminar to offer some introductory remarks to the paper itself in order to place the fairly narrow subject in a framework that might be of broader interest, for those whose professional turf is something other than the intellectual history of the Luso-Atlantic world. What follows in the pages to come is a tentative, preliminary attempt to cast a wider net and to ensnare the interest of those who might not at first summon the energy to read a paper on an admittedly rather obscure Bahian political economist.

The first thing that should be stated is that this essay forms one very small part of a much broader project that I am developing, one which will culminate, I hope, in a book that treats the intellectual history of the Portuguese-speaking world in the first half of the nineteenth century. This is a period that is best known for the dissolution of the Portuguese dominion in Brazil and, after 1822, of the emergence of the Brazilian empire. One of the things that jumps out at even the casual student of the Luso-Atlantic history in this period is the way that metropolitan Portuguese institutions were 'exported' to, and 'planted' in, the New World as a result of the Napoleon's invasion of Portugal in autumn of 1807, an action which compelled the royal family and the court to flee, in British ships, and transfer the seat of the monarchy from the Old World to the New. Settling in Rio de Janeiro and remaining there well after the end of the Napoleonic Wars, a 'Tropical Versailles' was constructed, with law courts, ministries, and cultural institutions springing up almost overnight.² For the first time, after three centuries of European colonial rule in the Americas, a colony was the seat of an empire and was ruled directly by a European prince. Such a development had a major impact on the evolution of Brazilian political thought and also on modes of governance in Brazil, a theme that has received less attention than it deserves. I trace one aspect of this broader theme in my

¹ My earlier work dealt with the Spanish Atlantic World. In 2008, Palgrave Macmillan published my monograph entitled *Enlightenment, Governance, and Reform in Spain and its Empire, 1759-1808*, based in large part on my Cambridge Ph.D. dissertation. A long article, "The Dissolution of the Spanish Atlantic Monarchy", published in the *Historical Journal* this Spring, took the story through the decade of the 1820s. In addition to my own research, based in archives in Brazil and Portugal, I am the co-organizer of a collaborative project on intellectual and cultural connections between Europe and the Americas in the 1820s. For further information, please see www.trin.cam.ac.uk/the1820s

² This is a wonderful historical episode, though one that has been recounted numerous times. For the best of these histories, see M. Oliveira Lima, *O movimento da independência* 6 edn (Rio de Janeiro, 1997) and K. Schultz, *Tropical Versailles: Empire, Monarchy, and the Portuguese Royal Family in Rio de Janeiro, 1808-21* (New York, 2001).

paper, focusing on the political economist José da Silva Lisboa, later elevated to the title of Viscount (and then Baron) of Cairu (Cayru).

The transfer of the seat of the Portuguese monarchy to Brazil raises a number of problems that I believe are of broader interest of intellectual historians. First, it forces us to re-think the older category of ‘enlightened absolutism’ and to ask: how did European monarchies adjust to governing on New World soil and how were they compelled to modify styles of rule by the peculiar circumstances of colonial societies? Second, it prods us to think afresh about how European political thought was received, modified, and utilized in the extra-European world. In the case of Brazil, in stark contrast to Spanish America or British North America,³ the efflorescence of a literate culture characterized by polite exchange was stymied by the absence of the printing press (until 1808) and the non-existence of universities (though Brazilians of means and ability could, and often did, study at Coimbra, as Silva Lisboa did). Nonetheless, and particularly after 1808, there were many Brazilian intellectuals and many of them engaged in fierce debates about the suitability of European political and economic ideas to American soil. Does such engagement force us to reappraise the global impact of the European enlightenment? And are older conceptions of the relationship between enlightenment and governance (particularly reform), which often are discussed as a species of ‘enlightened absolutism’ or ‘enlightened despotism’, ripe for revision? It is this second question that preoccupies me at the moment.⁴

Generations of historians, of course, have grappled with the often-elusive intersections of enlightenment and absolutism, of intellectual currents and government policy, of political philosophy and statecraft.⁵ To what extent, and in what manner, did emergent political and economic concepts penetrate the consciousness of monarchs, ministers, and royal councilors, and, subsequently, influence the fiscal and administrative reform programmes inaugurated by many European states in the long eighteenth century? And how were these new policies, and the ideas that underpinned them, interpreted and implemented by magistrates, intendants, and other agents of local government? The conclusions reached by historians who have researched these types of questions have been wide-ranging and hotly contested.⁶ Some scholars even cast doubt on the claim that

³ On this theme, see J.H. Elliott’s magisterial *Empires of the Atlantic World: Britain and Spain in America, 1492-1830* (New Haven and London, 2006).

⁴ What follows is a much-abridged and adapted version of part I of my introduction to the forthcoming edited volume *Enlightened Reform in Southern Europe and its Atlantic Colonies, c. 1750-1830* (Ashgate, December 2009).

⁵ For the purposes of this paper (both the introduction and the paper itself), the term ‘enlightened reform’ serves to encompass the more familiar concepts of ‘enlightened absolutism’ and ‘enlightened despotism’. In this paper, these two terms are considered to be facets, components, or sub-sets of the more expansive, malleable category of enlightened reform. Derek Beales offers an illuminating discussion of the earliest usages of ‘enlightened despotism’ in his *Enlightenment and Reform in Eighteenth-century Europe* (London and New York, 2005); formal discussion of ‘enlightened reform’ in contemporary historiography may be dated from Michel Lhéritier, ‘Le Rôle Historique du Despotisme Éclairé, Particulièrement au XVIIIe Siècle’, *Bulletin of the International Committee of the Historical Sciences*, 1 (1928): 601-612 passim. and his ‘Rapport General: le Despotisme éclairé, de Frédéric II à la Révolution Française’, *Bulletin of the International Committee of the Historical Sciences*, 9 (1937): 185-225.

⁶ For an indispensable review of the historiography of enlightened absolutism, see H.M. Scott, ‘The Problem of Enlightened Absolutism’, in Scott (ed.), *Enlightened Absolutism: Reform and Reformers in Late Eighteenth-Century Europe* (Basingstoke, 1990).

government policy was affected at all by enlightenment thought, no matter how this capacious category is defined. They portray the apparatuses of political power as hostile or at least impervious to, instead of permeated and shaped by, new currents of thought.⁷

The lion's share of the existing scholarship has considered the concept of enlightened reform in the context of developments in Northern, Central, and Eastern Europe.⁸ Southern Europe, let alone Portuguese, Spanish, and French America, largely has been ignored or relegated to the historiographical periphery.⁹ This tendency undoubtedly reflects long-cherished assumptions about the enlightenment itself. As Carla Hesse has noted,

the geography of the advance of the enlightenment thus mirrored that of modernity itself, producing a cultural landscape with advanced and backward areas of Europe, with leader nations and follower nations ... the story of the triumph of light over darkness was a story of diffusion from a Western European core to the peripheries of the continent and beyond.¹⁰

The absence of studies that integrate the histories of European states and their overseas colonies, too, is glaring. In particular, few historians have sought to show how European and ultramarine reforms were fundamentally, and inextricably, linked and how the rhythm, direction, and scope of metropolitan reform was influenced, often decisively, by colonial affairs.¹¹ The unfortunate result of both the prevailing consensus concerning the

⁷ In the case of Spain, for example, one historian adhering to this view is Francisco Sánchez Blanco, particularly his *El Absolutismo y las Luces en el Reinado de Carlos III* (Madrid, 2002).

⁸ In addition to the essays and bibliographical references in H.M. Scott's edited volume, see, for example, Derek Beales, *Joseph II: In the Shadow of Maria Theresa, 1741-1780* (Cambridge, 1987); and Marc Raeff, *The Well-Ordered Police-State: Social and Institutional Change through Law in the Germanies and Russia* (New Haven and London, 1983).

⁹ Though Southern Europe and its Atlantic colonies have been largely marginalized in historiography, there is no paucity of books which engage with the concept in one form or another. Among the most outstanding are: Richard Herr, *The Eighteenth Century Revolution in Spain* (Princeton, 1958); Franco Venturi, *Settecento Riformatore* 5 vols. (Turin, 1969-90); D.A. Brading, *Miners and Merchants in Bourbon Mexico* (Cambridge, 1971); Kenneth Maxwell, *Conflicts and Conspiracies: Brazil and Portugal 1750-1808* (Cambridge, 1973) and Maxwell, *Pombal: Paradox of the Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 1995); Carlo Capra, 'Il Settecento', in Capra and Domenico Sella (eds.), *Il Ducato di Milano dal 1535 al 1796* (Turin, 1984); Giuseppe Galasso, *La Filosofia in Soccorso de' Governi: La Cultura Napoletana del Settecento* (Naples, 1989); Anthony McFarlane, *Colombia before Independence* (Cambridge, 1993); and José Luís Cardoso (ed.), *A Economia Política e Os Dilemas do Império Luso-Brasileiro (1790-1822)* (Lisbon, 2001).

¹⁰ Carla Hesse, 'Towards a New Topography of Enlightenment', *European Review of History*, 13:3 (2006): 500; As Richard Butterwick has pointed out, those who ignore the enlightenment on the periphery may run the risk of missing important aspects of the enlightenment as a whole: 'a flash of light can be disorienting, even blinding at its source. Projected, refracted and filtered, light can be clearer, and its effects more easily analyzed, at a distance, from the peripheries of the illuminated space'. See Butterwick, 'Peripheries of Enlightenment: an Introduction', in Butterwick, Simon Davies and Gabriel Sánchez-Espinosa (eds.), *Peripheries of the Enlightenment Studies in Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford, 2008), p. 6.

¹¹ The exceptions, of course, are notable: Jeremy Adelman, *Sovereignty and Revolution in the Iberian Atlantic* (Princeton, 2006); Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, *How to Write the History of the New World: Histories, Epistemologies and Identities in the Eighteenth-century Atlantic World* (Stanford, 2001); Maxwell, *Conflicts and Conspiracies*; Stanley J. Stein and Barbara H. Stein, *Silver, Trade and War: Spain and America in the Making of Early Modern Europe* (Baltimore and London, 2000) and *Apogee of Empire: Spain and New Spain in the Age of Charles III, 1759-1789* (Baltimore and London, 2003). In the case of Britain and its empire, Richard Drayton's *Nature's Government: Science, Imperial Britain, and the*

enlightenment's diffusion from 'core' to 'periphery' and the Europe-centered approach to reform has been to shroud, discard, or portray as anomalous many aspects of the Southern European and extra-European past.

The scope and contours of enlightened reform must be adjusted in order to accommodate atypical, unfamiliar, or divergent conditions and factors, many arising from the peculiar conditions wrought by colonialism or the vast gulf separating social and economic conditions in Southern Europe from the rest of the Continent.¹² Such an effort raises many questions. Among the most salient of these possible questions are: to what extent may a concept developed in one context (national, geographical, chronological) be applied without modification in another? Does 'stretching' a concept to incorporate distinctive factors dilute its explanatory potency?¹³ Specifically, does the refurbishment of the concept of enlightened reform, compelling its integration of rather unfamiliar phenomena from Southern Europe and the New World, result in unwieldy vagueness and incoherence? Should 'enlightened reform' be overhauled so that data culled from such contexts becomes central—instead of ancillary, imitative, or heterodox—in relation to it?¹⁴ Or should historians of Southern Europe and its Atlantic colonies embrace 'exceptionalism' and develop their own frameworks with little regard for the organizing concepts that structure the broader continental European historiography?

The incorporation of the colonial, in addition to the metropolitan, theatre into the framework of enlightened reform raises further nettlesome questions. Among the most crucial are: to what degree did enlightened reform, particularly in its Iberian and French manifestations, emerge from or reflect the colonial experience? Recent scholarship has suggested the impact of the Americas on the refashioning (and even genesis) of fundamental European concepts, including 'citizenship' in the case of the Spanish

'Improvement' of the World (New Haven and London, 2000), is the obvious exception to the general neglect.

¹² The way that Neapolitan reformers and political writers grappled with the persistence of feudalism is a good example of this divergence between Southern and Central-Northern Europe and the intellectual challenges posed by this gap. John Robertson has deftly summarized the matter: 'Even if the Neapolitans were far from "peripheral" to the enlightenment in the eighteenth century, there is, nevertheless, a sense in which they encountered in the feudal system a social and political reality at the margin, or extremity, of European experience, and found the resources of enlightenment political economy inadequate to the task of its comprehension'. See Robertson, 'Political Economy and the "Feudal System" in Enlightenment Naples: Outline of a Problem', in Butterwick et al, *Peripheries of the Enlightenment*, p. 85; As Miguel Angel Centeno and Fernando López-Alves have made a complimentary point in a very different context: 'the local should help to define the supposedly universal ... the practically monopolistic position of a set of Western European and North American cases within the comparative historical canon has reduced the scope of possible comparisons. It has removed potentially critical variables from the analysis'. See their 'Introduction', in *The Other Mirror: Grand Theory through the Lens of Latin America* (Princeton, 2001), pp. 7, 13.

¹³ In considering this idea, I endorse the conclusion reached by David Cohen and James Mahon, who argue that an 'overly strict applications of classical principles of categorization can lead to the premature abandonment of potentially useful categories ... [this can be avoided] by adopting techniques that do not depend on the assumption that members of a category share a full set of defining attributes'. See their 'Conceptual "Stretching" Revisited: Adapting Categories in Comparative Analysis', *American Political Science Review*, 87:4 (1993): 852.

¹⁴ The questions enumerated in this paragraph are informed by Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra's provocative analysis of dominant paradigms in Atlantic History. See his *Puritan Conquistadors: Iberianizing the Atlantic, 1550-1700* (Stanford, 2006), esp. pp. 231-233.

Atlantic World and ‘republicanism’ in the French Caribbean.¹⁵ Might styles of rule, modes of governance, and the relation between political writers and the framing of policy have been shaped by similar pressures? In short, was enlightened reform something which had more than a casual connection with colonial institutions and the conditions wrought by empire? If so, should the concept of ‘enlightened reform’ be recast in light of this recognized link? It might be useful and revealing, I suggest, to revise the concept of ‘enlightened reform’ so that it reflects a full engagement with overseas empire and ultramarine institutions after the end of the Seven Years War in 1763.¹⁶ It is as a small contribution to this large task that I present my paper on José da Silva Lisboa to the seminar in political thought and intellectual history.

¹⁵ Tamar Herzog, *Defining Nations: Immigrants and Citizens in Early Modern Spain and Spanish America* (New Haven and London, 2003); Laurent Dubois has rightly argued that ‘to understand the Atlantic as an integrated intellectual space ... is the only way to destabilize the still strong, at times seemingly unmovable, presumption that European and European colonists were the exclusive agents of democratic theory. Instead we might understand more about the complex and contradictory inheritances of the enlightenment if we explore the possibility that it was crafted not only in Europe but also in the Caribbean’. See Dubois, ‘An Enslaved Enlightenment: Rethinking the Intellectual History of the French Atlantic’, *Social History*, 31:1 (2006): 7.

¹⁶ One of the major contributions of scholarship informed by postcolonial theory has been to reveal that metropolitan ambitions were never unilaterally imposed in colonies. As Gyan Prakash argues, ‘colonial categories were never instituted without their dislocation and transformation ... colonial power [was] a form of transaction and translation’. See Prakash, ‘After Colonialism’, in Prakash (ed.), *After Colonialism: Imperial Histories and Postcolonial Displacements* (Princeton, 1995), p. 3; on the relevance of postcolonialism to Latin America, see Fernando Coronil, ‘Latin American Postcolonial Studies and Global Decolonization’, in Neil Lazarus (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Literary Studies* (Cambridge, 2004).