CHAPTER TWENTY FIVE

IMPERIAL COMPETITION
IN THE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY
AMERICAS

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INTRODUCTION

This chapter traces the various ways that imperial competition influenced the development of Spanish and Portuguese America in the long eighteenth century. The restoration of Portugal’s Independence, recognised in 1668, brought a long epoch of symbiotic and peaceful relations between Portuguese and Spanish America to an end. It initiated a new period of intense rivalry that would shape the strategies of both Iberian empires, for the question of boundaries required resolution, particularly in areas considered economically valuable. Luso-Spanish rivalry cannot be considered in isolation, however. Portugal’s alliance with an ascendant Britain had significant consequences for Luso-Spanish relations whereas Spain’s seemingly interminable conflict with Britain in the Old World and the New shaped its own approach to rivalry with Portugal in the Americas. Imperial competition and collaboration are analysed in the context of major geopolitical disputes of the eighteenth century, particularly the War of the Spanish Succession, the Seven Years War, the American Revolution, and the French Revolutionary Wars, which contributed significantly to the crises of empire that ultimately unravelled the Iberian empires in the Americas.

THE WAR OF THE SPANISH SUCCESSION

While Luso-Spanish relations had their own dynamic in the Americas, bearing the imprint of the dissolution of the Union of the Crowns between 1640 and 1668, Luso-Spanish relations also must be situated against the broader panorama of imperial competition with other non-Iberian polities in the Americas. Of these, the most important were Britain and France in the eighteenth century. The Dutch Republic, of course, had been a major rival in the previous century, but after the Dutch were expelled from the northeast of Brazil, they were less a rival than a nuisance in the eighteenth century, as its major Caribbean entrepot of Curaçao remained a mitochondrion of contraband with Spanish America. The respective relations of
Spain and Portugal with an ascendant Britain and revivified France during and after the War of the Spanish Succession are then an appropriate point of departure for studying imperial competition.

It must be recalled that Britain was the first major power to recognise the parvenu Braganza dynasty in the mid-1650s, a renewal of an alliance that dated back several centuries (even if latterly it had fallen into abeyance). The price of this alliance was steep, entailing the cession of Bombay. Yet it provided the fledgling Portuguese regime with an ally in the face of potential Spanish revanchism. Of course, as the War of the Spanish Succession (1702–1714) and later the Seven Years War (1756–1763) showed, in continent-wide wars, Britain did not prioritise its Iberian ally to the degree that statesmen in Lisbon imagined that it should. Nevertheless, in the main, the British alliance served to keep Spanish ambitions at bay.

The eighteenth century began with the outbreak of the War of the Spanish Succession, whose impacts were long-lasting, both on the equilibrium between the European nations, especially the Iberian ones, and on colonial conquests. It involved almost the entire continent and was the result of a confrontation between the Bourbons and Habsburgs for the throne of Spain (Borges 2003, 6–8). Behind this backdrop, however, various other questions emerged, such as the rivalry between France and England for global hegemony and between these and the Iberian Crowns; disputes for the control transoceanic trade, especially the slave trade, and for colonial spaces. For these reasons, the conflict was not limited to the Iberian peninsula, nor just to Europe, extending to the colonial territories, the case of South America, where France, Portugal, and Spain disputed territories (Furtado 2012, 253–276).

The absence of a direct heir to the Spanish Throne led Charles II, after examining various possibilities, to name as his successor Philip of Bourbon, Duke of Anjou, who as a great grandson of Louis XIV, also appeared in the French line of succession. The future Louis XV was the great grandson, not the son, of Louis XIV during childhood had delicate health, which created uncertainties about the succession to the throne. With the vacancy of the Spanish throne in January 1701, the Cortes, meeting in Madrid and Barcelona, recognised the Duke as the new king, naming him Philip V. Concerned with a possible Franco-Spanish union, Austria, England, Holland, Sweden, Denmark, and various German principalities established in the Treaty of the Hague, signed in September, the Great Alliance. The increase in tension between the parties triggered a war which began in the North of Italy and in the following 11 years, spread through the German principalities, the Low Countries, the North of France, and the Iberian peninsula, involving almost all the European nations against the Franco-Spanish coalition, which ended up reverberating in colonial possessions (Borges 2003, 8–13).

Portugal’s initial position was favourable to the Bourbons’ pretensions and the crown sought to maintain neutrality in relation to the conflict. Under the command of the then ambassador in France, José da Cunha Brochado, on 18 June 1701, Philip V was recognised as king of Spain. English reaction was immediate. In September of the following year, as the request of Ambassador John Methuen, this treaty was annulled and another signed with England (Serrão 1982, 223). Its text stipulated that at the end of the war, Portugal would have the right to territories on the frontier with Spain - in Estremadura and in Galicia—and a guarantee of the possession of the recently established Colónia do Sacramento, located on the northern bank.
of the mouth of the River Plate (Ramos et al. 2009, 344), reflecting the expansionist Portuguese desires on the two continents. In December 1703, solidifying this alliance even more, a commercial agreement was signed, which became known by the name of the English ambassador—the Treaty of Methuen (Cardoso et al. 2003). Both this commercial agreement and the defensive and offensive alliance divided the Portuguese ruling elite, which was reflected in the Council of State, which split between pro-French and pro-English factions, with the former being acid critics of the commercial advantages granted to England.

The Methuen Treaty enshrined British penetration of the Portuguese market. It permitted the duty-free entry of woollen goods into Lisbon and Porto while offering Portuguese wine (and other products) reciprocal advantages in the British market. From the early eighteenth century onwards, the massive influx of Brazilian gold was used by Portugal to reduce deficits and purchase foreign (mainly British) goods, with deleterious effects for Portugal’s domestic manufactures. Portugal thus found itself in a curious and ultimately unsustainable position. Its possession of increasingly lucrative possession of Brazil was secured in exchange for British penetration of its markets and the attendant drain on gold, especially, that this entailed. In the short term, the benefits outweighed the costs, but declining mineral yields made the Luso-British bargain less appealing than it originally had been as the century progressed.

While the British alliance structured Portugal’s approach to imperial competition both in the Americas and in Europe, it was the French alliance and seemingly perpetual conflict with Britain that most influenced Spain’s conduct. The result of the War of the Spanish Succession was that Bourbon monarchs sat on the thrones on either side of the Pyrenees. These powers entered into the so-called Family Compact, which meant that their foreign policy would be closely aligned. Given that both France and Spain had many causes for conflict with Britain, the successive Family Compacts (as several aspects of the alliance between the two Bourbon powers would be adjusted as the century progressed) set the stage for a century of rivalry and competition with Britain (McKay and Scott 1983). Of course, several causes of dispute predated Spain’s alliance with France. Most prominently, Britain had seized the strategic territorial toehold of Gibraltar in 1703, upsetting Bourbon plans for dominance in the Mediterranean. In the Americas, conflict continued to simmer, as Britain refused to relinquish the territory it seized from Spain—notably Jamaica—in the mid-seventeenth century and its North American colonies prospered economically and expanded demographically, creating eager consumers for the tropical commodities of Spanish America.

The biggest prize Britain carried away from the War of Spanish Succession, besides Gibraltar, was the thirty-year asiento contract (1713–1739) it wrested from Spain at the Peace of Utrecht. By the treaty’s terms, the English South Sea Company received the lucrative asiento, the exclusive right to import slaves into Spanish America. The asiento also served as cover for contraband trade. As Spanish America became more prosperous, and its population expanded, demand for European goods was high and contraband traders were all too happy to meet that demand. Burgeoning demand, combined with the breakdown of the flota system (convoy transatlantic transport), ensured that colonial monopoly was a legal fiction for much of the eighteenth century.
All of this had significant implications for Luso-Spanish relations. As Brochado feared in defending neutrality, the change in the direction of its foreign policy led war to its territories in Europe and overseas. In January 1704,

Franco-Spanish troops attacked Beira and Alentejo in force, taking without resistance Salvaterra, Segura, and Zibreira, while Monsanto and Idanha-a-Nova fell by assault. ... Castelo Branco did not take long to fall, ... and afterwards Portalegre and Castelo de Vide. North of the Tejo River, Penamacor was attacked.

(Serrão 1982, 226)

In Southern America, the French advanced from Guiana to the northern bank of the Amazon River or Maranhão, and destroyed the remaining Portuguese forts, while the Spanish attacked Colónia do Sacramento in the south.

Throughout the eighteenth century, Portuguese and Spanish America was the stage on which the conflicts between the two Iberian nations reverberated, which demanded the redefinition of their territorial limits, systematically disputed in wars, and the negotiations in the treaties which followed them. For Portugal, this was much more than a simple question of frontiers, since during the eighteenth century Portuguese America gradually emerged, replacing Asia, as the principal ultramarine source of wealth for the kingdom. This justified the effort of moving its western and southern frontiers to more distant regions, populating territories which according to previous treaties were Spanish by law; these territories will be understood as terra incognita, as sertões waiting to be colonised, and rapidly claimed by the Portuguese Crown. Sertão referred to a region far from the sea and from all parties, or an area “between territories” (Bluteau 1739, 613). For Spain, competition with Portugal over the territory of the New World had two principal effects. First, it was a spur to cartography, natural history, and the improvement of infrastructure to connect frontier and coveted interior zones with populous and increasingly prosperous cities. Second, given rampant contraband and the maritime threats posed by the Dutch and especially the British, the resolution of conflicts with Portugal, which finally came in the late eighteenth century, was a geopolitical necessity, however reluctantly this was acknowledged by statesmen in Madrid.

THE AMAZON RIVER AND COLÓNIA DO SACRAMENTO

In the first half of the eighteenth century, the points of territorial disputes between European nations on the frontiers between their South American conquests were concentrated in two regions: the Amazon in the north and the mouth of the River Platte in the south. In relation to the former, the dispute was primarily between French and Portuguese and concentrated around the so-called Cabo do Norte, which ran along the northern bank of Amazon River, or Maranhão, and the Vicente Pinzón River. In relation to the latter, it was centred on the dispute between the Spanish and Portuguese over the northern bank of the River Platte, especially Colónia do Sacramento (Almeida 1957; Furtado 2012, 253–276).
France’s interest in the northern bank of the Amazon escalated after 1663, when the French Equinoctial Company was created, with the aim of encouraging the occupation of the Guiana region under its flag. In 1688, “the French project to control the land and the Amazon was put into action” (Almeida 1991, 38). In this year, commanded by De Ferrolles, French troops threatened the Portuguese fort of Araguari, “but it was only in 1697 that they decided to attack the fortresses of Macapá and Parú, which were destroyed, leading to the beginning of the Luso-French conflict” (Almeida 1991, 38).

With the aim of resolving this dispute, in 1699, Louis XIV and Pedro II signed a Treaty of Friendship and Alliance, in which they agreed to define the limits of their possession in the Amazon region. In November, a Portuguese commission was appointed to determine the frontier with French Guiana and in 1700 the Provisional Treaty was signed (Brandão 2002, 121). By the terms of this treaty, the Portuguese agreed to evacuate and demolish the forts constructed on the north bank of the Amazon; in turn, “France committed itself provisionally to not construct any settlement on the north bank of the river and to leave the land between Macapá and the Iapoc River (Oiapoque) or Vicente Pizón to be regulated later” (Levasseur 1889, 2). However, during the War of the Spanish Succession, France again advanced on the north bank of the Amazon, imposing severe losses on the Portuguese, destroying the local forts which had not been abandoned, such as Araguari, Camaí, and especially Macapá (or Massapá). In addition, Rio de Janeiro suffered two invasions by French pirates (Jean-François du Clerc, in 1710, and René du Guay-Truin, in 1711), though these invaders did not form any permanent settlements. The first was repressed, but the second managed to sack the city and to seize the gold that had been stored, awaiting the Portuguese fleet (Fragoso 1965, 73–203).

Colônia do Sacramento was established in 1680 on the north bank of the River Plate, near its mouth and opposite Buenos Aires, by a Portuguese expedition, consisting of five ships, with around 440 people, including settlers and military, sent by Dom Manoel Lobo, governor of the Southern Department or Repartição Sul (Almeida 1976, 333–341). The foundation of the colony had the immediate objective of facilitating the access of Luso-Brazilian traders, especially those from Rio de Janeiro, to trade with Spanish possessions. As they were paid in silver, some of what was mined in the Andes came by contraband to Brazil (Almeida 1991, 167).

Colônia’s establishment provoked an immediate reaction on the part of Spain and a few months later it was attacked and destroyed by an expedition sent by the governor of Buenos Aires. In 1681, due to the Provisional Treaty signed by Portugal and Spain, its territory was returned to the Portuguese, which sent a new expedition to restore the fortress and repopulate it. This treaty, “signed on 1 May 1681 between the king Dom Pedro, of glorious memory, and Carlos 2, king of Castile”, defined that the possessions of the two crowns in the River Platte region would respect the principle of “al presente la tiene” (ANTT. MNE. Correspondência entre diplomatas portugueses e secretários de Estado. Cartas de dom Luís da Cunha para o Reino. Livro 793, Paris, 1724, ff. 285–286); in other words, in the case of the Portuguese it was limited to the fortress constructed in 1680. However, it was not only reconstructed, but the colonisation was expanded, establishing an agricultural belt of farms and plantations around it to support the residents.
In the context of the War of the Spanish Succession, the then Governor of Buenos Aires, Afonso Valdes Inclán, recruited the regular troops, aided by more than 4000 village Indians and, in October, lay siege to the fortress. With this strategy it was intended to starve the inhabitants and cause them to capitulate. Artillery attacks were intermittent until March 1705 when the Governor Sebastião Veiga Cabral abandoned the fortress, bringing with him the Portuguese troops quartered there, the civilian settlers, including those from around the neighbouring areas, and the arms and munitions which he managed to embark on the squadron sent to rescue them (Cesar 1970, 83–84).

THE CONGRESS OF UTRECHT AND ITS IMPACT ON LUSO-SPANISH TERRITORIES IN THE AMERICAS

The peace terms that ended the War of the Spanish Succession were negotiated at the Congress of Utrecht. Its preliminaries occurred in London between 1711 and 1712, and the Congress itself in the Low Countries between 1713 and 1715. Utrecht constituted a moment of inflection, since it shaped new forms of diplomatic policy and also was a great school for a generation of diplomats who debuted in this congress (Bély 1990, 327). The English served as mediators between Portugal, on the one hand, and France and Spain, on the other. While an agreement with the former emerged rapidly, signed on 11 April 1713, the latter agreement was reached slowly, being concluded only on 6 February 1715, after the Congress had been formally closed. For this reason, due to the protocol, the agreement was signed in the city garden (Furtado, 2012, 253–276; ANTT. MNE. Livro 787. Cartas do Conde de Tarouca e de dom Luís da Cunha as quais se continua a negociação de Utrecht para Diogo de Mendonça Corte Real, 1713, f. 7, 6 de janeiro de 1713).

In relation to South America, the principal point to be negotiated with the French was “that the banks of the Amazon [river], on the north side, will stay free to us from the entrance to the cape” of Vicente Pinzón (BNL Reservados. Código 11209. Cartas de dom Luís da Cunha para o cardeal da Cunha—Inquisidor Geral, f. 310), since it was considered that, under the treaties already established, the Portuguese had assured their rights over both banks of the Amazon. This right, which guaranteed them the exclusive navigation of the river and its tributaries, was essential to make the commercial monopoly in the region effective. The three points discussed were about France “ceding [to Portugal] the right it wanted to have land in Cabo do Norte and that [the former] would desist from navigation on the Amazon River, where it recently had wanted to remain, also consenting not to use its entrance” to the river (BNL. Reservados. Código 11209. Cartas de dom Luís da Cunha para cardeal da Cunha—Inquisidor geral, f. 312, Utrecht, 13 de abril de 1713). In relation to France, Portugal had been totally successful: it maintained its dominion over the northern bank of the Amazon (ANTT. MNE. Livro 787. Cartas do Conde de Tarouca e de dom Luís da Cunha nas quais se continua a negociação de Utrecht para Diogo de Mendonça Corte Real, f. 75, 15 de abril de 1713), guaranteeing it the exclusive right to navigation and, despite the resistance of the former, managed to prevent it gaining access to ports located near the mouth of the river, although in the future the French Crown would make new attempts to capture them.
Image 25.1  Portuguese and Spanish diplomats sign the Treaty of Utrecht. In “Memórias da Paz de Utreque oferecidas a El-Rei Nosso Senhor por D. Luís da Cunha, 4ª e última parte”, 1715

Source: Public domain/Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal, Lisbon, Portugal, PBA 450.
The image is between page 864 and page 865
In relation to the Spanish, the negotiations in the Americas concerned Colónia do Sacramento, which was returned to the Portuguese, and the restitution of ships seized by both sides, having been accused of contraband. While Portuguese ships were held in Buenos Aires, Spanish ones suffered the same fate in Rio de Janeiro. Various difficulties stood in the way of an agreement. Behind the scenes the Portuguese negotiators complained about the imprecision of the orders received from Portugal and the lack of support of the English in forcing the Spanish to accept their demands, previously agreed with John Methuen, in 1701. Finally, with a certain liberty and without information or maps which could be used to demand the exact size of the territory of Colónia, the phrase “al presente la tiene” was removed from the text of the treaty and the expression the “Territory and Colónia do Sacramento” was inserted. This ruse aimed to ensure that the Portuguese possession was restricted neither to the old fortress nor its nearest surroundings, but instead extended to the entirety of the northern bank of the River Plate, including the region of Montevideo, situated to the West. “In 1723, the Portuguese government founded Montevideo, which served as support for Colónia. However, in 1726, the Spanish razed this settlement” (Ferreira 2001, 39). It thus favoured the expansionist project of the Portuguese in relation to the southern part of Brazil (Franzen 1992, 255–259).

The treaty also allowed for, within the period of a year, the colony to be exchanged with the Spanish, but the Portuguese were only interested in a proposal covering territories along the borders of the two nations in Europe, such as Albuquerque or Puebla. As they did not reach an agreement, Colónia was formally returned to the Portuguese in 1716. However, new difficulties emerged, since at the suggestion of the Governor of Buenos Aires, who believed that the Portuguese recovery of their territory would be a threat to Spanish interests, the latter insisted on defining the term “territory”, as inserted in the agreement, as only corresponding to the countryside, in other words to the agricultural surroundings of fortress, and would only restore a limited amount of land, with the range of one cannon shot (Possamai 2006, 84–85). This corresponded to around three miles, which forced the continuity of negotiations in the following years. This resolution was supported by the already established consensus between European countries (England and Holland were the first), in relation to the diplomatic dispute between the ideas of mare clausum and mare liberum, and the belief that the maritime dominion of a nation extended the distance of a defensive cannon shot of three maritime miles from the coast. Spain used this measure in the definition of territory around the fortress. The conflict of interest caused by Colónia, together with the contradictory terms of the Treaty of Utrecht, aided Portuguese expansion to the west, meaning that throughout the eighteenth century, and even in the nineteenth, new territorial conflicts and disputes in South America brought Portugal and Spain into conflict.

In spite of (or perhaps because of) innumerable concessions of territory to rival powers, the huge financial outlay for the defence of such vast territory, and the de facto destruction of the colonial monopoly already described, Spain’s empire in the Americas remained largely intact in the eighteenth century. Small enclaves and some entrepots had been surrendered irrevocably to rival powers, Britain first and foremost, but Spanish control over both its less developed peripheries as well as its core viceroyalties was undiminished. In order to prevent further losses, Spain
embarked on a naval reconstruction program in the 1720s (Storrs 2016). In 1722, there were a meagre 22 ships in the Spanish fleet, whereas by 1760 there were 52, the upkeep of which accounted for about a fifth of overall state expenditure (McNeill 1985, 68). Yet Spain’s revamped navy lagged behind Britain’s, which necessitated a continued reliance on fortified ports. Although Spain would implement an elaborate coast guard (guarda costas) system in the eighteenth century, it studiously avoided naval battles with its more powerful adversary. Spain fought a single major naval battle with Britain between 1713 and 1762, and that was triggered by a flagrant and potentially catastrophic attack on the silver fleet.

The first half of the eighteenth century also witnessed the gradual reorganisation of the garrisons of the fortified ports into fixed (fijo) battalions: the first was established at Havana (1719), followed by Cartagena (1736), Santo Domingo (1738), Vera Cruz (1740), Panama (1741), and San Juan (1741) (Kuethe 1986, 4–5). But maintaining effective fortifications, troops, and coast guard patrols entailed a massive outlay of resources. By the War of Jenkins’ Ear (1739–1742) with Britain, more than half of Lima’s treasury revenue was earmarked for defence. Havana offers another example of the high costs necessitated by military preparedness. Besides a garrison of 1,500 peninsular soldiers, whose upkeep in the Americas was three times as great as it would have been in Europe, a supplemental militia raised the total force to just over 6,000 troops (McNeill 1985, 101–102). What is remarkable is that so few men in a mere handful of scattered fortresses managed to stave off Britain’s superior forces for so long. Part of the explanation lies in differential immunity to Yellow Fever, which was endemic to the Caribbean from the late seventeenth century. As the historian John McNeill has observed, “Spain’s hold on the region was inexpensively buttressed by mosquitos and microbes”. The toll of disease on invaders was ghastly. When Admiral Vernon led 29,000 soldiers and sailors in amphibious invasions of Santiago de Cuba and Cartagena (1741), 22,000 of his men were dead within a year, with a mere 1,000 of those battlefield casualties. Yellow Fever therefore proved a crucial, and reliable, ally in maintaining Spanish dominance in the Americas against encroachments from Britain (McNeill 2010, 136, 166).

THE DISCOVERY OF GOLD AND DIAMONDS IN PORTUGUESE AMERICA

Portuguese expansion westward in South America, from the end of the seventeenth century onwards, resulted in the creation of extensive new zones of territorial disputes on the Luso-Spanish frontiers of Brazil. This demanded from the Portuguese a significant effort to redefine these frontiers, still roughly governed by the Treaty of Tordesillas. This advance was the result of the discovery of gold and diamonds, which also provoked a redefinition of the economy of Portugal.

Starting in the third quarter of the seventeenth century, successive expeditions – known as Bandeiras while those responsible for them were called bandeirantes – left the vila of São Paulo heading towards the interior. The chronology of the discovery of gold in what came to be known as the captaincies of Minas Gerais, Mato Grosso, and Goiás is uncertain and doubtful. What is known is that between 1695 and 1698 the first discoveries in Minas Gerais began to be made public and attracted
a multitude of outsiders. The discoveries in the mines of Cuiabá, in Mato Grosso, occurred around 1718, and those of Goiás, between 1725 and 1735, the latter along the Tocantins River. Although the official notification of the discovery of diamonds in the northeastern region of Minas Gerais, around the **arraiâl** of Tejuco (now the city of Diamantina), dates from 1729, since the beginning of that decade they had been found there (Furtado 2007, 303–320). Diamonds were also found during the century in Mato Grosso; in the region of the Claro and Pilões rivers in Goiás; and in the Abaeté River, in the southwest of Minas Gerais. It is calculated that in Minas Gerais alone, during the eighteenth century the official production of gold amounted to 650 tons, while diamonds reached the astonishing figure of a little over three million carats. The occupation of these territories was, thus, decisive and the wealth in gold and diamonds so great that it triggered the expansion of Portuguese colonisation to the centre-west of Brazil (Cortesão 2012) and the reorientation of the dynamics of the Portuguese Empire in the eighteenth century, with the progressive movement of its economic centre from Asia to Brazil (Furtado 2014, 61–110). This meant that Portugal had to make efforts to maintain at any cost the territories under its effective dominion, since Goiás and Mato Grosso lay beyond the boundaries set in the 1494 Luso-Spanish Treaty of Tordesillas.

Although treaties covering borders in specific regions of South America had been signed by Portugal, Spain, and France during the first half of the century, generally speaking the terms of Tordesillas remained in force. This constituted an impediment to the expansionist yearnings of the Portuguese Crown, since it left Spain with control over the centre-west of South America, which was being systematically explored and colonised by Luso-Brazilians. This expansionist dynamic required new territorial configurations for the frontier, expressed, after Utrecht, in successive armed conflicts, which were followed by diplomatic pacts.

At the end of 1735, Colônia do Sacramento returned to the centre of the dispute, when, after a diplomatic incident, Spain imposed a new blockade. This episode was called the “Great Siege”, and “for almost two years, it left the inhabitants of Colônia close to starvation” (Prado 2002, 119). It was provoked by the Portuguese ambassador in Madrid, the Lord of Belmonte, Pedro Álvares Cabral, when his servants broke diplomatic rules and freed (and housed in the embassy) an individual who had been arrested by the local justice authorities (Silva 2001, 112–115). While the diplomatic problem provoked the siege of Colônia, this in turn led to a broader bellic conflict, known as the Luso-Spanish War (1735–1737), which extended over the entire northern region of the River Plate. One of its consequences was to precipitate a more aggressive, systematic occupation of the southern region of Brazil by Luso-Brazilians, with the construction of forts (the principal being that of Jesus Maria José, in 1737) and the arrival of immigrants from the Azores to settle the region, especially the Island of Santa Catarina (1740) (Kuhn 2007, 103–121).

The war ended with the signing in September 1737, in the Low Countries, of a new treaty, intermediated by France and England, but which, once again, did not definitively put an end to the differences between the two nations. On the contrary, alongside Portugal, there grew the perception that neither Tordesillas nor the other agreements already signed accounted for the actual colonisation or their true territorial interests in South America. In this way, in the eighteenth century,
which witnessed a “succession of congresses” (Bély 1990, 12), the pending questions between the two Iberian nations related to South America were again raised in the treaties of Breda (1747) and Aix-la-Chapelle (1748), which resulted in the agreements of Madrid (1750), El Pardo (1761), and San Ildefonso (1777).

THE TREATIES OF MADRID AND EL PARDO AND THE IMPACTS OF THE SEVEN YEARS WAR

What became the Treaty of Madrid could be glimpsed from 1746 when, following the death of Philip V (on 9 July)—who had been pro-French and openly averse to reaching an understanding with Portugal—Ferdinand VI ascended the Spanish throne, having been married since 1728 to Maria Bárbara de Bragança, daughter of João V. In the episode known as the exchange of princesses, the future king of Portugal, Dom José, in turn, married the Spanish princess, Mariana Vitória de Bourbon. In September 1746, the Portuguese ambassador, Tomas da Silva Teles, Viscount of Vila Nova de Cerveira, left for Spain to assume his position (AUC. CDLC. Doc.894, Carta de Tomás da Silva Teles para dom Luís de 3 de setembro de 1746, f. 1), and the negotiations with the Marquis de la Ensenada soon began. An epitome of an enlightened reformer, Ensenada had been one of Philip V’s advisors, and continued to enjoy great prestige in the reign of Ferdinand VI. He was, successively, Secretary of Finance, the Navy, War and the Indies, and Secretary of State. Supported by Maria da Bárbara, he was appointed her secretary in 1747. In the first conference between the Portuguese diplomat and the Spanish minister, on 12 November 1746, they discussed the “possibility of resolving the dependencies of Colónia do Sacramento and the commercial relations between the two countries”, beginning lengthy negotiations, which dragged on until 1750 (Cortesão 1953, 23–26).

In the following year, 1747, there was a new gesture favourable to approximation with Portugal, with the appointment of Don José de Carvajal to the position of Secretary of Foreign Affairs. He was another who counted on the support of the queen, in addition to be a friend of Vila Nova de Cerveira, who was expected to facilitate the agreement over the South American frontiers. However, in the following years, Spanish foreign policy was quite ambiguous, oscillating between an approximation with France and England, with the latter hindered by the obstinacy of the English in maintaining dominion over the peninsula of Gibraltar.

Despite these fluctuations, on 13 January 1750, the Treaty of Madrid was signed (Almeida 1990; Cortesão 2001). As the Portuguese desired, it was a wide-ranging agreement over the Luso-Spanish frontiers and its terms were not restricted to the Colónia do Sacramento, nor indeed to South America, but also included the Moluccas, located in the South Sea (the Pacific Ocean). This is because this archipelago, purchased by the Portuguese from the Spanish in the 1529 Treaty of Zaragoza, was located, according to recent measures of the Tordesillas meridian (Furtado 2013, 105–106), in Portuguese territory, which meant that the purchase was contrary to the terms of the treaty. Colónia do Sacramento was, according to these measures, actually Spanish, but was in the possession of Portugal. These two territories were the great bargaining chips offered by the Portuguese for Spanish possessions in the South, the case of Sete Povos das Missões; in the centre-west,
guaranteeing the gold and diamond deposits in Goiás and Mato Grosso; and in the Amazon region, which ensured its dominion over contiguous territory on both banks along the length of the river. Although they were discussed, no equivalent exchanges of territory in Europe were made (Furtado 2012, 517–527).

The adjustment of frontiers was based on the *uti possidetis*, in other words to each one what they effectively occupied, guided whenever possible by the natural landmarks and what had been stipulated in previous agreements (Furtado 2012, 276–285). This resulted in the consolidation of the territory of Portuguese America in continental terms, with a triangular format, very close to that of present-day Brazil. It ran, in a north-south direction, from the Amazon region to Rio Grande do Sul, and in an east-west direction had extreme points such as Lagoa Mirim and the former Spanish and hereafter Portuguese missions in the South; Mato Grosso and Goiás in the Centre-West, guaranteeing dominion over the large rivers in the region (Tocantins, Araguaia, and large part of Madeira); and in the north, covered the entire channel of the Amazon River, the culmination of a slow process of the construction of Portuguese hegemony over the river. Portugal, in turn, gave Colônia do Sacramento to the Spanish and renounced the entire northern strip of the River Plate.

In 1751, Colônia do Sacramento was formally handed over and the organisation of the demarcation parties began, also stipulated in the clauses of the treaty. There were a total of three of these (to the south and centre-west), with the final one starting in 1753 (Pereira and Cruz 2016, 207–2017). However, not even this ended the disputes, and intense opposition to the terms of the treaty emerged in both countries. The handing over of Sete Povos das Missões encountered great resistance among the indigenous peoples and Spanish Jesuits, resulting in the Guarani Wars (1750 and 1756), from which the Luso-Brazilians suffered severe losses. In turn, the Spanish complained of the excess of land conceded to the Portuguese, while the latter rebelled against what they considered the “surrender of Colônia do Sacramento”. The death of João V in 1750 and the coronation of José I, the deaths of Carvajal in 1754, Maria Bárbara de Bragança in 1758, and Ferdinand VI in 1759, and the accession of Carlos III created the climate for the treaty to be finally abolished with the agreement of both parties.

At the same time, Spain’s bungled entry into the Seven Years War (1756–1763) severely jeopardised its dominance in the Americas and had an important impact on later territorial negotiations with Portugal in America. The British capture of Havana and Manila in 1762 underscored not only British naval supremacy, something long established, but also the inadequacy of existing fortifications and the shortcomings of manpower. It also provided Spanish critics of the Family Compact with ample ammunition. After peace was made in 1763, accompanied by the return of Havana and Manila, Spain sought to form a genuine colonial army for the first time. Though the scope and timing were specific to each viceroyalty, the number of regular forces in the two most important Viceroyalties of New Spain and Peru tripled in the last four decades of the eighteenth century. Given its geographical expanse, the number of regulars remained paltry, a mere 6,100 in New Spain and 3,000 in Peru. Regular forces were supplemented by the colonial militia, which was reorganised and expanded after 1763.

The reliance on the militia made virtue out of necessity for Spain did not possess unlimited resources to lavish on America. As the Minister of the Indies,
José de Gálvez, noted in 1779, to supply all the troops, military supplies, and fortifications that Spain’s colonies required “would be an impossible enterprise, even if the King of Spain might have at his disposal all the treasure, the armies and the storehouses of Europe” (Weber 2006, 162). The growth of the militia was prodigious: by 1800, there were approximately 24,000 militiamen in New Spain and over 18,000 in Peru. Maintaining this post-1763 army and militia proved expensive. In late eighteenth-century New Spain, for example, over 60% of the treasury’s expenditures went on defence and the total outlay doubled between the early 1760s and 1780s. The economic expansion and efflorescence in late colonial Spanish America, however, meant that revenue continued to pour into Spain’s treasury. In 1770, for example, revenue from the Indies accounted for almost one-quarter of the treasury’s overall receipts (Elliott 2006, 355). In other words, Spain could keep up with and contain Britain’s ascendency with difficulty, but in general it could not outflank Britain, with the one notable exception of the (British North) American Revolution, addressed below.

But the developments of the 1770s were barely foreseen during the Seven Years War, when Spain continued to pursue its policy of limiting the number of rivals with which it was simultaneously at war. Thus, on 12 February 1761 the Treaty of El Pardo was signed, which revoked the former treaty, annulling all its clauses. It was determined that all boundary marks placed had to be destroyed and that what had been stipulated in Tordesillas would return to effect. However, between the treaties of Madrid and El Pardo, and after the latter, Portuguese policy for South America sought to construct real foundations to ensure in the future, under the concept of *uti possidetis*, Spanish recognition of its sovereignty in the disputed border areas.

Alongside great power politics and manoeuvring, Spain sought to make clear its title to those territories coveted by other powers but not yet openly disputed. One approach to consolidating control and blocking territorial expansion of other European powers was to reduce the turbulence of the frontier where Spain had established no permanent settlements. Strenuous efforts were made to encourage emigration and found new towns in the rustic peripheries of Patagonia, the Mosquito Coast, and Florida, all three of which were strategic locations. New garrisons were established at San Diego and Monterey in 1770, followed by San Francisco in 1776. Perhaps most notable were the state-led and financed naval expeditions of the 1780s and 1790s, entrusted with the task of mapping and surveying the economic resources of these frontier zones (Weber 2006; De Vos 2006). Spain was especially concerned about Russian penetration of the northern coast of North America, westward expansion of British subjects, and British interest in what is today British Columbia. While the scientific expeditions produced a great deal of “useful knowledge”, Spanish schemes for a full-fledged Pacific empire, in one historian’s judgement, “collapsed as a result of insufficient funding, inertia or instability in their settled colonies … there were no fur traders, whalers, private investors or merchants to follow in the wake of the scientific expeditions” (Archer 1986, 36). Spain could not assert its claims on the distant periphery with its treasury stretched so thin. In spite of sabre-rattling, Spain acquiesced to British claims in the Pacific Northwest after the Nootka Sound dispute (1789–1793). The limits of a self-financing empire could not be pushed too far.
POMBALINE POLICY IN PORTUGUESE AMERICA AND THE TREATY OF SAN ILDEFONSO

The reign of José I coincided with the gradual ascension, as Minister of State, of Sebastião José de Carvalho, future Earl of Oeiras and afterwards Marquis of Pombal. His administrative actions, known as the “Pombaline Reforms”, had important reverberations in South America (Monteiro 2006; Maxwell 1995) and the critiqued previous policy reached its most strident peak during his long ministry (1755–1777). Already during his diplomatic stint in London in the 1740s, Pombal had heaped opprobrium on the 1703 Methuen Treaty, blaming it for the “notorious decline in our marine and in our foreign and domestic commerce”, adding that this disadvantageous treaty had been further “abused and violated” by English merchants in Portugal (Carvalho e Melo 1986, 76). Yet Pombal was faced with a conundrum that had bedevilled his predecessors: how to balance Portugal’s reliance on Britain’s indispensable military-diplomatic guarantees while simultaneously circumventing (or surreptitiously diminishing) Britain’s commercial advantages in Portugal’s continental and ultramarine markets (Maxwell 1995).

Unsubtly lifting a page from England’s seventeenth-century geopolitical playbook, Pombal’s proposed solution to the conundrum was to establish monopoly trading companies for the north and northeast of Brazil to foment new export commodities, such as cotton and rice, which went unmentioned in previous commercial treaties. It must be conceded that not all of these developments can be attributed directly to commercial rivalry with Britain; some were a direct response to new requirements provoked by declining mineral yields in Brazil, plunging gold prices on the world market, and the escalating costs of securing the southern frontier with Spanish America (Alden 1968, 353). Pombal would describe such companies as the “only way to reclaim the commerce of all Portuguese America from the hands of foreigners”, by which he meant the British (Maxwell 1973, 19). Overseas companies formed part of a broader strategy to break the chain of credit established by British merchants, depriving them of the sums they were owed from the long-term credit they had extended to Portuguese merchants and intermediaries. While in the short term, these trading companies did not bring about the changes which Pombal foresaw, which ultimately led to their dismantlement, certain commodities and tropical products encouraged by Pombal produced a huge, abundant economic impact, including cotton. The planters of the northern regions of Maranhão, for example, exploited the unmet demand in Britain precipitated by the American Revolution (1775–1783) and used windfall profits to finance their purchase of African slaves. By 1790, Brazilian cotton comprised 30% of British imports of that product (MacLachlan 1997, 110).

Pombaline policies helped to reinforce Portuguese presence in the border areas of Brazil aimed at future negotiations with Spain. In 1748, in the context of the demarcations of borders, the regions of Mato Grosso and Goiás were dismembered from São Paulo and two autonomous captaincies created: Mato Grosso, with its capital in Vila Bela da Santíssima Trindade, and Goiás, with its capital in Vila Boa de Goiás, locations which were specifically constructed to house the two administrations (Ferreira 2010, 267–297). The captaincy of Rio Grande do Sul was established in 1760. With these measures the Portuguese Crown reinforced its predominance over
the centre-west and southern extremes of Brazil, seeking to consolidate its presence in these two regions. Not by chance, Francisco Xavier de Mendonça Furtado, Pombal’s brother, was chosen as governor for the captaincy of Grão-Pará and Maranhão, where he served from 1751 until 1759. He was responsible for the creation of the Grão-Pará Company (1755), the beginning of the secularisation of indigenous missions, and the creation of various urban settlements. Pombaline policy for the Americas culminated with the expulsion of the Jesuits (1759), the creation of the Directorate of the Indians (1761), and the creation of the Royal Diamond Extraction Company (1771), measures with great impact. With these, control was assured over important economic resources from the interior, such as the so-called drugs of the Sertão (plants and spices grown in the Sertão region such as cocoa, guarana, and Brazil nuts) and diamonds; the integration of Indians as subjects was encouraged; Indian villages and Indian education were completely secularised under state control; and the settlement of the Amazon and Center-West regions was strengthened, with the creation of numerous settlements and planned vilas were created.

These measures ensured the effective presence of Portugal in Western frontier regions, from the north to south of Brazil, allowing it to demand new negotiations concerning the frontiers, now enjoying a significant advantage. In the same year as José I’s death (1777), the Treaty of San Ildefonso was signed. In a general manner, this returned to the borders defined in the Madrid Treaty, with the exception of the southern region, where the Portuguese handed over to the Spanish not only Colônia do Sacramento and the land up the Northern bank of the River Platte, but also Missões, and São Gabriel Island. In exchange, they were guaranteed possession of Santa Catarina, Rio Grande do Sul, Mato Grosso, Cuiabá, Goiás, Grão-Pará, and the Amazon region.

SURVEYING THE AMERICAS

The negotiations over borders demanded from the Portuguese a greater dominion over the geography of the regions which penetrated the interior, with the aim of negotiating their South American borders. Starting in 1722, during the reign of João V, various efforts were made to undertake a cartographic survey of Brazil, specifically of the frontier regions disputed with the Spanish. The first and most significant decision was to send Jesuits Diogo Soares and Domingos Capacci, known as mathematician-priests, to Brazil in 1729. The following year they established the measurement of the meridian of Rio de Janeiro, which they use to orientate their cartography of Brazil. However, due to the immensity of the task, they only managed to map parts of Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, Minas Gerais, Colônia do Sacramento and the River Platte, Rio Grande (do Sul), and Santa Catarina (Almeida 1991, 112), priority regions in the negotiations with the Spanish Crown. The geographic survey removed any doubts about whether or not Minas Gerais was situated in extra-Tordesillas territory. At the same time, the restructuring of the education of military engineers gave them recent knowledge and prepared them to be able to assume during the following century the tasks related to the geographic survey of Brazil (Bueno 2011).

In the second half of the eighteenth century, added to the cartographic enterprise was the need to survey the potentials of a local nature from a renewed enlightenment
and utilitarian perspective. Portuguese and Spanish demarcation efforts after the Treaty of Madrid in the 1750s, and of San Ildefonso in the 1780s, produced a broad scientific survey of the spaces covered (Raminelli 2008, 74–79; Pereira and Cruz 2016, 207–2017), and were able to count on, in addition to military engineers from both crowns, various foreign specialists, including Jesuits skilled in mathematics and cartography. In order to better prepare the human resources necessary for the scientific survey of the empire, in 1772 the Marquis of Pombal commenced a series of reforms in the University of Coimbra. The study of Natural Sciences, Law, and Mathematics were introduced, while even the course of Canon Law, the most traditional, included the study of nature in its first two years. A Botanical Garden and Science Laboratory were also set up. The wide-ranging inventory of the colonial natural world was to be carried out jointly by the Luso-Brazilians, under the control and direction of the state.

Another institution which assisted this task, after its creation in 1779, was the Royal Academy of Science in Lisbon, which became a core space for the linking of those who had been trained to work with the Natural Sciences for the advantage of the empire: the naturalists. Philosophical or natural voyages, organised by the University of Coimbra and the Secretary of Overseas Affairs, became important instruments for the formulation of an internal policy in harmony with the natural resource potential of each area (Cardozo 1971, 153–167). In the case of Brazil, it was sought to study in detail its wealth— principally in relation to agriculture, mining, fishing, vegetation extraction, etc. —favouring the large size of the territory and its natural diversity, seeking to encourage better rationalisation and development in its exploitation. Among the numerous voyages to survey Brazil was the scientific mission undertaken by Alexandre Rodrigues Ferreira between 1783 and 1794 in the Amazon region and Mato Grosso.

As in Portugal, the reformers in Spain in the second half of the eighteenth century endeavoured to assert the crown’s rejuvenated sovereignty over its far-flung empire against rival imperial states. They took practical steps—though sometimes tentatively, erratically, and with few tangible results— in both the Old World and the New to further this aim, especially in the aftermath of the debacle of the Seven Years War (Paquette 2015, 149). The scope of reform was widened. What was once a term that described a narrow range of government actions—for example, modifications to fiscal policy, trade regulation, and the penal code—now encompassed many additional areas, including the creation of learned academies, societies, and libraries; the revamping of universities; the quest for agricultural improvement; investment in infrastructural projects (the construction of canals, roads, and bridges, along with the modernisation of existing ports); and the outfitting of scientific expeditions. The Royal Academy of History became an important institution leading these reforms. Count Pedro Rodríguez de Campana (1723–1802) combined his duties on the Council of Castile with the post of director of the Royal Academy of History, not to mention the important tracts on industry and education he penned in his spare time (Paquette 2009, 11). Campana was also instrumental in catalysing efforts to “improve” agriculture and sponsored Economic Societies throughout the Spanish Atlantic World that aimed to produce and disseminate “useful knowledge”. Sites of experimentation and the exchange of ideas, Economic Societies incubated notable
texts in the history of political economy, including Gaspar de Melchor de Jovellanos’ Report on the Agrarian Law (1795) (Paquette and Caso Bello 2016).


Nevertheless, emphasis on the limits of Spanish military power in the Americas should not diminish its considerable achievements in the late eighteenth century. If Spain (together with France) could not deal a death blow to Britain in the Americas or in Europe by itself, and largely found itself on the defensive, making incremental concessions and seeking to neutralise or otherwise diminish the significance of those concessions, it helped to reduce the British threat to Spanish America by aiding the rebellious colonists who rose up against Britain in mainland North America in the 1770s. An enlarged army and revivified navy permitted Spain to join France in aiding the revolutionaries of British America from 1779, in spite of fervent British efforts to dissuade Spain from honouring the Family Compact with which it was disillusioned (Scott 1990). The triumph of the rebels could not have been possible without the Bourbon navy, and men, materiel, and money from the French and Spanish colonies. Spain seized advantage of Britain’s vulnerability to reconquer West Florida and the Gulf Coast (which had been surrendered after the Seven Years War) (Ferreiro 2016). The Caribbean was as close to a Spanish “lake” as it had been at any time since the early seventeenth century. As a leading historian has concluded, “Spain had gained from its involvement in the American war of independence, in military victory, territorial gain, confidence and prestige” (McFarlane 2006, 36). The British were also forced to abandon the Mosquito Coast in 1786 (though in exchange for a clear title in Belize). Giddy Spanish officials viewed these successes as a prelude to the repossession of the Malvinas/Falklands and Gibraltar, which after all had been the chief objective of its involvement in the American war.

But these more grandiose fantasies were soon dashed by the outbreak of the French Revolution. Spain’s involvement in the French Revolutionary Wars, however, proved an unmitigated disaster, attenuating the links between Europe and America. In particular, Spain’s ill-fated alliance with France incurred the wrath of the British navy. The defeat of the Spanish fleet off Cape St Vincent in 1797 foreshadowed Britain’s three-year blockade of Cádiz, which disrupted irreparably the supply chain between peninsular merchants and Spanish American markets. The British Navy wrought further havoc by seizing the island of Trinidad in 1797. The centuries-old link between Spain and its Americas had thus been severed well before the coup de grâce delivered at Trafalgar in 1805, the naval battle in which most of Spain’s warships were lost.

Through careful manoeuvring, then, Portugal managed to derive benefits from the British alliance without being asphyxiated by it. The alliance was a protective cloak against geopolitical tempests, permitting the Luso-Angolan complex to develop relatively unperturbed. From time to time, Portugal managed fleetingly to get the better of its more powerful ally, as when the balance of payments briefly shifted in Portugal’s favour in the 1790s. But, by and large, the alliance was an expensive,
mandatory form of insurance. Nor was it, beyond Britain’s siphoning off wealth that Portugal preferred to retain in its own colonial system, an especially onerous alliance. Portugal managed to avoid the worst of the Seven Years War and remained above of the fray during the American Revolution. Later in the century, during the French Revolutionary Wars, it managed to cling consistently to a precarious neutrality, continuing to nurture its own imperial economy and distribute its tropical commodities indiscriminately to the markets of Europe’s belligerent and pacific states. To have reaped the advantages of the British alliance while extricating itself from costly military engagements must be considered among the great achievements of eighteenth-century Portuguese diplomacy.

In 1795, with the rise of Dom Luís Pinto de Sousa Coutinho to the position of Secretary of Trade in Portugal, enlightened reform accelerated. Rewarded by the context of instability which characterised the final quarter of the century, both in Europe, with the French Revolution, and in the Americas, with the threat of the impact on the independence of the United States to be followed in Brazil—as aspiration which emerged in the Mineira (1789) and Baiana (1798) *Inconfidências*; Coutinho prepared an audacious plan for political and economic reforms, based on the co-option of local colonial elites.

Imperial competition was not only a phenomenon involving European states. As in Portuguese America with the late century rebellions, threats to Spain’s dominance in the Americas did not come solely from rival European powers. There were internal challenges as well, primarily responses to territorial aggrandisement and economic exploitation. Beyond the frontier were Amerindians whose continued autonomy was deemed a threat to Spanish rule. An obsession with both policing and expanding the frontier animated colonial administration. Even in the late eighteenth century, however, Spanish presence remained non-existent in many territories claimed by the crown. At the close of the colonial period, independent Indians controlled over half of the landmass of modern Latin America, from Tierra del Fuego to Mexico, and it has been estimated that 2.7 million independent Indians lived within the boundaries of the Spanish empire. As late as 1780, two-thirds of Chile’s Indians did not recognise Spanish sovereignty. Moreover, Comanche country, the *Comanchería*, exceeded the size of Central America and served as a barrier to Spanish expansion. The lack of soldiers and funds, combined with the geographical size of the territories involved, forced Spain to abandon plans for further offensive wars of conquest and instead recognise containment and accommodation as strategies better suited to reality (Weber 2006, 12, 61, 72, 164–165).

With the aim of neutralising the independence aspirations which were beginning to explode in Portuguese America and also of modernising the economy of the empire, Luís Pinto de Sousa Coutinho subdivided the portfolio and, in 1796, invited Dom Rodrigo de Sousa Coutinho to direct colonial trade policy. Open to Enlightenment and aware of the fragility of the ties which at this moment linked Brazil and Portugal, Dom Rodrigo listened to the demands and frustrations of the colonists, in order to counteract any stirrings of insurgent nationalism. He consulted the Municipal Councils about their needs, put Brazilians in positions of command and designated various Luso-Brazilian naturalists to carry out in-depth studies in various areas and about diverse economic activities in the empire. He sought in this way to reduce the tensions which were building up and to encourage the colonist to
forsake the path to independence, signalling the possibility of the division of colonial profits and the promotion of the political rise of this local elite. Bahia, Rio de Janeiro, and, especially, Minas Gerais captaincies were the principal objects of Dom Rodrigo’s interest.

It was in the context of the economic modernisation carried out by these two ministers that the Napoleonic War broke out and the Portuguese posture of neutrality between England and France became untenable in the first years of the nineteenth century. As Napoleon sought to implement his Continental System to isolate Britain diplomatically and debilitate it economically, Portugal was the leak that had to be plugged. Yet to acquiesce to Napoleon’s demands, renounce its neutrality, and effectively become a satellite of France, which would have seen its ships engulfed into the French Navy and, most likely, having Brazil put at the disposal of the French state and its merchants, was too much for the Luso-British alliance to bear. Britain demanded that Portugal comport itself as a reliable ally and rebuff Napoleon’s entreaties, threatening to burn its fleet if it failed to comply. In exchange for the protection of Britain’s navy, which escorted the Braganzas across the Atlantic to escape the invading Napoleonic armies, Portugal was compelled to make concessions so massive that the Methuen Treaty looked by comparison like a pact between equals. Portugal’s legal monopoly over colonial trade was shattered by the opening of Brazil’s ports to foreign ships in 1808, permanently sanctioned by the 1810 commercial treaty with Britain (Cardoso 2008). Unlike the Methuen Treaty, which retained the trappings of reciprocity, the 1810 treaty denied entrance to British markets of Brazilian products, including sugar and coffee, similar to those produced by Britain’s own colonies (Manchester 1972, 69, 72, 89). The immediate and dramatic impact of the treaties is notorious. In 1814, Viscount Strangford, chief negotiator, boasted that “the entire annihilation of the Old Colonial System of Brazil has been effected by the late treaty” (Webster 1938, I, 173). By 1818, the value of English exports to Brazil exceeded those of the Portuguese; of these British exports, almost 90% were wool and cotton manufactures (Manchester 1972, 97).

The British presence in Brazil’s markets, however, must not be overstated. Jorge M. Pedreira has shown that between 1812 and 1821 Brazilian imports from Britain remained fairly stagnant; only in 1818 did they match the value of imports from Portugal (Pedreira 2000, 858–859). Yet this story of dispossession and exploitation must not be taken too far. For it was only with British military might that the French were dislodged from continental Portugal. The Braganzas managed to keep their transatlantic empire intact only because an English army of occupation, based at Lisbon under Lord Beresford’s command, ensured that the two branches of the monarchy remained bound to the same trunk. In this context, on 29 November 1807, with the invasion of Portugal by Franco-Spanish troops, the Portuguese Court left for Brazil, which they reached at the beginning of the following year. With a significant delay the advice of Ambassador Luís da Cunha was followed, who in the first half of the eighteenth century had warned that “the prince, to keep Portugal, needs all the wealth of Brazil, and in no way that of Portugal … and it thus follows that it is more comfortable, and safer, to be where one has more, than to wait where it is lacking” (Cunha 2001, 371).

The French invaded Spain the following year, as Napoleon deceived his erstwhile Spanish allies. The forced abdication of Charles IV and his son Ferdinand VII paved
the way for Napoleon’s brother, Joseph, to be placed on the throne of Spain. This act further inflamed the resistance to the French occupation in the peninsula, where the opposition consolidated itself into a Junta Central based in Atlantic port city of Cádiz. The effects of the Napoleonic occupation of the Iberian peninsula reverberated across the Atlantic. The transfer of the Portuguese Court to Brazil required the political, administrative, and infrastructural restructuring of the old Portuguese colony, which was made concrete through numerous modernising reforms. In Spanish America, various juntas sprang up to contest Napoleon’s actions, claiming that in its acephalous state that the sovereignty formerly exercised by the legitimate sovereign now reverted to the people, in whose name they claimed to govern. The vacuum of power in the Iberian metropoles, provoked by the flight of the Portuguese monarchy and the abdications in Spain opened a new chapter in the relationship between the Iberian empires and their old American conquests.

NOTE

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