INTRODUCTION

When Spanish colonisers, soldiers, and churchmen landed in the Caribbean in 1492, the Hispanic monarchy already had many years of experience in colonial conquest and dominion. For a long time, these prior acts were lost in the shadows of two great adventures that coincided chronologically and later would help revive an unfinished national project after the loss of Spain’s last colonies in America and the Pacific in 1898. Castilian territorial expansion in the New World followed quickly behind indigenous demographic collapse, the latter being the result of epidemics and the subsequent destruction of the great Amerindian political systems in Mesoamerica and the Andes. Castile’s imperial beginnings thus were not auspicious in terms of easy stabilisation of that vast and remote territory, so far and so different from the European and Mediterranean worlds. Until well into the sixteenth century, the conquest was driven by destruction and slaving.

Imperial destruction and stabilisation took place at the same time as the Hispanic monarchy was acquiring hegemony in Europe, which lasted until the Peace of Westphalia in 1648. During the previous century, the monarchy had had to accept sharing the Mediterranean with the Ottoman Turks after the Battle of Lepanto (1571) and absorb the enormous impact of the Protestant Reformation. In the early seventeenth century the rise of France and England turned Europe and its Atlantic area of influence into the scene of a prolonged struggle for hegemony, a nearly endless war that drained the Spanish Habsburgs’ resources. This is the context for understanding the stabilisation of the Spanish-American world, notably Mesoamerica and the Andes. From that process of creative destruction would emerge a new silver empire that survived until the late eighteenth century.

Portugal’s empire hardly resembled that of Spain. Its centre of gravity was the Indian Ocean world before 1600, where its hybrid military-commercial beachheads, feitorias, dotted the littorals of South Asia, the Persian Gulf, and East Africa. North Africa remained a target for those who conceived of territorial expansion as a means to extend the sway of Christianity at the expense of Islam, a persuasion that resulted in the rout at Alcazar al-Keber and the death of King Sebastian in 1578. Even before
this debacle, there has been a slow yet perceptible reorientation toward the Atlantic, discernible in territorial footholds in Angola and robust involvement in the kingdom of Kongo, as well as the rising importance of Brazil in Portugal’s imperial portfolio. There an economy dominated by the extraction of Brazilwood was giving way to a plantation society worked, first, by Amerindian slaves and then by African slaves. Coastal cities became populous and government transitioned from the decentralised donatary captaincy system to one which had royal authority superimposed though still leaving local elites with ample autonomy and a modicum of self-government through their town councils (camaras).

This context is crucial to understanding the purpose of the present chapter, which concentrates on the reform policies undertaken by the respective Iberian monarchies in the long eighteenth century. The chapter begins by examining the Portuguese and Spanish monarchies in the late seventeenth century, in the aftermath of the “restoration” of Portugal’s independence and the crisis of the Spanish empire that accompanied it. It treats both the obstacles as well as the shortcomings of crown policies in the Americas. The focus then shifts to the first stirrings of more systematic reform undertaken by the newly esconced Bourbon dynasty in the first half of the eighteenth century. Ultramarine reform for Portugal came later, as mineral strikes in Brazil ushered in a period of unprecedented prosperity, and made structural reform appear, for the moment, less urgent. The bulk of the chapter centres on the reforms undertaken in the second half of the eighteenth century, when both Iberian monarchies moved to expand and consolidate crown authority, with equivocal effects. Such centripetal strivings coincided with (though perhaps did not cause) periods of economic revival with important geopolitical effects, temporarily elevating both monarchies standing within Europe. The chapter concludes with consideration of the impact of the reforms, particularly the resistance that they provoked, and how reform and the revolutions that would tear the Iberian empires asunder, were linked.

THE IBERIAN EMPIRES BEFORE 1750

Commercial empires were never simply commercial, nor was the silver empire based only on mining. Above all, an empire is a societal construction that is both a response to the metropolitan aims of expansion and a scheme that should be economically viable. If it is true that entrepôts among various worlds were vital for commercial empires, then Spain was not a merchant empire along the lines of the emerging empires of Portugal, Holland, and Great Britain even before everything got far more complex with vast territories and thousands upon thousands of slaves treated like beasts of burden. In the case of Spain, there was never a conspicuously mercantile moment, not even in the farthest corner of the empire, sixteenth-century Manila, the bridge to imperial China. There, friars and soldiers sent from New Spain did not take long before entering the interior of Luzón and the Visayas to try to reproduce, mostly unsuccessfully, the American model. Jesuits and the crown even had notions also of conquering China along the lines of the conquest of America (Ollé 2002). The empire, then, was a great producer of precious metals. Only on a lesser scale did it export tropical foods and vegetable dyes. Its strength and survival were not the result of aggression toward European rivals beset with dynastic contingencies and military setbacks in the Old World and who fought like Prometheus unbound.
Rather, they came about through Spain’s capacity to defend its Indies fleet and the galleons along their long journey to and from Acapulco and the Philippines. Piracy, corsairing, naval manoeuvres, and merchant fleets thus were mixed up in such a fashion that the protoliberal economists of the eighteenth century had to throw up their hands in despair.

The Spanish empire, the great white whale, was something else entirely, with the great mines of Potosí and Zacatecas lying in the middle. The links that held everything together were the royal mints, taxation (the famous *quinto real*), and the subsequent transport of wealth through Callao, Veracruz, and then Seville and Cádiz, along with the galleon route between Acapulco and Manila. The routes would never change, despite warfare and piracy. In addition, financial assets (*situados*) were transferred for political reasons throughout the empire to bolster areas with insufficient resources that served as military or administrative headquarters; the distribution system has been called the “secret” of the Spanish empire as Marichal and Souto Mantecón cleverly named, given its longevity and efficiency. And, finally, profits and balances were deposited in royal treasuries and from there often moved straight to the treasuries of the crown’s creditors, bankers who loaned money to a monarchy deeply in debt as it defended its reputation and Tridentine Catholicism in Europe and around the world.

But the heart of the matter was not competition among empires, between mercantilist and Catholic, on the one side, and commerce, freedom, and Calvinism, on the other. The empire, that vast construction that was consolidated throughout the sixteenth century, rested on four axes: the first was the mining economy. Second, long-distance agriculture and commerce (fleets, fairs, consulates) grew thanks to the extraordinary dynamism of the silver extraction and minting; technology and labour solutions were also key factors, along with credit and raw materials (gunpowder and mercury) at discounted prices. Third, the social structure (re)constructed around this economic complex was entirely different from the pre-Hispanic world (Mumford 2012). The essence of the new social order was the *encomienda* and then, once that disappeared, the *pueblos de indios*, which were subject to forced labour and/or tribute requirements, of which the Andean *mita* was the epitome. For centuries, colonial cities hosted abandoned and marginal peoples along with African slaves and their descendants. These people of mixed blood were called *castas*, a new reality from a legal and fiscal perspective that would end up defining the development of colonial society, an immense ocean of conditions explored in depth by María Elena Martínez. (Martínez 2008) And fourth, labour and society evolved within the context of a Catholic and monarchical project that was ideologically homogeneous but highly decentralised in terms of viceroyal, jurisdictional, lay, and ecclesiastical power.

The reform of the Portuguese empire in the mid-eighteenth century was preceded by the empire’s reorientation in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth. By the 1650s, a “swing to the west” in the Portuguese empire had been completed. Brazil was now the focus of Portuguese Crown’s interest and its most lucrative, productive colony. The *Estado da Índia* became a backwater. By the 1680s, revenue from the Portuguese empire in the Indian Ocean accounted for fewer than 3% of the crown’s total receipts. But all was not well in Brazil. A search was on for new tropical commodities due to the decline of sugar’s profitability. From 1650 until 1715, revenues from sugar declined by two-thirds of their previous level. The decline was attributable...
to competition from the French, British, and Dutch Caribbean colonies, chiefly. Brazil’s share of world market suffered further as a number of Europe states began privileging domestic beet sugar. Demand for Brazil’s expensive and inferior grade sugar proved disastrous for what previously had been the centre of the colony’s economic and demographic gravity, the Northeast (Nordeste). The situation was dire until disaster was averted by the discovery of huge gold (and diamond) deposits in the interior Brazilian region of Minas Gerais after 1695. With this mineral windfall, the Portuguese Crown succeeded in meeting some of its modernising objectives, including the scientific mapping of Brazil, the creation of libraries, including that of the University of Coimbra, and the construction of palaces, including the magnificent one at Mafra, outside of Lisbon. Public works projects in Portugal itself were also undertaken, including an aqueduct in 1730s and 1740s which brought drinking water to the residents of Lisbon.

If deposits of Brazilian gold breathed new life into the colonial economy and the metropolitan treasury, it also improved Portugal’s geopolitical position, at least temporarily. The Portuguese Crown was literally obsessed with the preservation of its sovereignty, and with good reason. Beginning in 1654, a series of alliances were signed with England, as this seemed to be the best ally to check Spanish expansionist and revanchist ambitions. The Anglo-Portuguese alliances culminated in the 1703 Methuen Treaty. This agreement allowed for the unrestricted entry of British textiles into Portugal while granting reciprocal privileges to Portuguese wines and other agricultural products (including colonial re-exports from Brazil) on the British market. Wine, especially fortified wine (Porto and Madeira), and cork were among the few Portuguese products coveted on the world market. The Methuen Treaty also reaffirmed and expanded Britain’s commitment to Portugal’s independence from Spain and the place of the Braganza dynasty on the throne. This security was purchased at a steep price. Portuguese markets, both in Iberian peninsula and in Brazil, were inundated with British textiles. Portugal’s “national” manufacturing was smothered as the demand for British manufactures outstripped demand for inferior Portuguese and Brazilian products. The balance of trade accrued in Britain’s favour. To cover the deficit, Portugal paid in gold, of which it had a seemingly inexhaustible supply, at least before 1760. Some estimates, and it is hard to be exact, suggest that Brazil supplied about 80% of the gold hitting the world market in the eighteenth century. The influx of gold thinly disguised a semi-colonial relationship with Britain. Portugal relied on Britain for its defence, for the maintenance of its sovereignty, which meant its political means of manoeuvre was limited (severely).

Thus, if a snapshot of Portugal and its empire were taken in ca. 1750, one would observe an unsustainable reliance on Brazilian gold to compensate for Portuguese economic decline and the steady infiltration of the Portuguese peninsular and overseas interests by English merchants and their manufactures. But gold and precious gems had one important effect beyond the national defence and construction of palaces and public works. It helped the crown consolidate power within the peninsula as well as expand the colonial bureaucracy. It no longer needed the Cortes (essentially, the Portuguese Parliament) for funds, and with its usefulness obviated that representative body no longer was convened. The crown could do without it; the balance of power definitively shifted in its favour. In this way, the influx of gold
served the interests of royal absolutism and bolstered sovereignty in the short term while imperilling both in the long term.

THE SUCCESS AND LIMITS OF IMPERIAL REFORMS, 1750–1800

The transformation of international commerce with the Antilles slave plantations and rising consumption of tropical agricultural products in the metropolis placed the Hispanic monarchy in a difficult spot. While rival nations engaged in production learned to use tariffs to finance their military expenses, Spain proved notably rigid in this regard. Partly this was the result of the need to protect state control over such key sectors of the economy as mining and profitable monopolies such as tobacco and slaves’ imports from Africa through contracts with the British (until 1789). The stability of the fleets and galleons required steep taxation on the re-export of Northern European textiles to America, a business that was in the hands of large Cádiz exporters and their partners in Mexico City, Portobello, and Lima. The succession of wars that led to the formation of the military fiscal state along the general lines drawn by John Brewer would end up strengthening the role of commercial empires (Holland, the United Kingdom, to some extent Portugal, and the “amphibious” France, with the largest plantation complex in the world in Saint-Domingue) while the Spanish empire hesitated to join the plantation rush (Brewer 1989; Torres Sánchez 2015). This can be seen in two outstanding examples: Spain’s sugar plantations in the Caribbean took off only after the collapse of the French islands in the 1790s, and Spain continued using free labour on its sugar plantations in New Spain, something that very much struck Alexander von Humboldt when he visited, as reported by Sánchez Santiró in a collective book on the Prussian geographer (Sánchez Santiró 2012). It was clear that with naval power, slave traders, and major distribution and consumption centres it was possible to expand influence in international commerce regardless of social consensus in the metropolis. But the societies of the Spanish empire, including Amerindian communities and free blacks, formed part of that consensus going a long way back, the outcome of negotiations and agreements based on varying amounts of authority and flexibility. For that reason it was impossible to reform the Spanish empire on a large scale without stirring up social tensions that the monarchy was unsure it could handle.

This dichotomy between types of empires was not good news for Spain. Its empire rose from the genocidal ashes, from societies destroyed by bacteria, physical and psychological exhaustion, and the elimination of pre-conquest rulers. The notion of Two Republics, the brainchild of Philip II’s imperial Catholicism with which to separate Europeans and Indians into two distinct worlds, was not viable. Much later, when imperial reform was initiated in the period between the War of Jenkins’ Ear (1739–1742) and the Seven Years War (1757–1763), it was understood that reform was impossible without undermining the very interests and consensus that had ensured imperial stability for nearly two centuries (Stein and Stein 2000, 2003, 2014).

With Spain unable to go down the same road as its imperial rivals, the reform program put into effect after the Seven Years War (with the traumatic captures
Image 26.1  Announcement of graduation theses for the Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala, 1794
Source: Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library at Brown University, Providence, USA
of Havana and Manila, the front and back doors of the imperial system) focused on taxation, administration, and the military, which clearly were all related. New jurisdictions and treasury administration in the empire, that is, the intendancies, were the key element of these fiscal and military reforms. A new bureaucracy took form with the intendent system as the core of the imperial government, but it was done without totally dismantling the viceroys’ power (Burkholder and Chandler 1977). Effective modifications began taking shape with a major reorganisation of commerce from 1765 to 1778, when the traditional fleet system was ended and individual shipping (registros sueltos) were permitted. Therefore, the flota system finally ended and private merchant ships and several ports could participate in the Indies trade. But these measure did not mean the imposition of a totally deregulated free trade. Instead, the state’s fiscal interests prevailed as the growth of new mercantile opportunities occurred simultaneously with new tariffs and old and new monopolies. Not to mention some of those monopolies and excises were placed or remained in royal hands in the most promising areas of production and commerce, not to say minting the highly valued peso fuerte. Cuban tobacco production is an excellent example, as it would be in the Philippines, starting when the tobacco monopoly was established in Luzón in 1817, the beginning of a new colonial stage in the far-off colony.

And that was not the only problem. It was no easy job, and not cheap, to break the old imperial structure. For one thing, American markets were not in a position to absorb the growing supply of textiles and agrarian products from Europe. This rigidity became obvious with the price collapse of 1786–1787. This first market saturation crisis led to the imposition of a distribution system by which Amerindians were forced to purchase goods, causing unhappiness among consumers who were increasingly unable to pay their constantly rising tax burden with coin. There were efforts to compensate for the rigidity of the American market through slave labour, which was certainly never marginal but not of prime importance until well into the eighteenth century when continental America was lost for Spain (Fradera 2005). This is a good example of the nature and the slow pace of change; though the measure was aimed at more closely connecting America with the international market, the crown also wanted to profit from growing demand for slave labour in America through subcontracts with other countries and continuation of the agreement with Britain for slaves until 1750. Liberalisation for Spanish merchants in 1789 enabled private individuals to enter the slave traffic, which was highly profitable despite the risks and costs of protection. The traffic did not disappear even after Spain and Great Britain signed an agreement in 1817 to abolish the trade.

The growing burden of tariffs in the so-called Bourbon Reforms and the simultaneous burden of rising taxes on commerce can be explained only if we see the situation in holistic terms. The key can be found in the increase of re-export of European products and peninsular exports (either of Spanish products or products finished there such as flour made from US wheat or printed cottons originally from India or England) (Delgado 2007). Regions on the peninsular and American periphery were especially active in this commerce, which skipped the leading ports on both ends. Spain’s nineteenth-century development after losing its empire can help us to better understand the successes and failures of the eighteenth-century reforms and the nexus between the metropolis and the empire. Briefly, nineteenth-century
capitalist development was defined by the integration of food markets, especially wheat and other grains; by regional industrialisation, especially textiles; and the colonial nexus with the Antilles and the slave plantations. None of this would have been possible without prior disarticulation of the imperial structure as a result of neutral trade during the wars at the turn of the century and legislation by the Cortes in 1820–1823.

The American side of things is also crucial. As in Europe, Bourbon institutional reorganisation concentrated on military and fiscal aspects. An empire of magistrates
and judges engaged in flexible and constant negotiations with varied segments of colonial society gave way to the authority of administrators and the military. Though such negotiations cannot be mistaken for powerlessness, it is also true that the isolated intendants often had feet of clay. With that in mind, the new institutional framework, including a viceroyalty in Río de la Plata in 1776 and intendancies for collecting tribute throughout the empire (including the Philippines), cannot entirely explain the success or failure of the reforms. Other variables would depend less on the changes we have described than on dynamics within American societies. Historical research has shown how demographic growth in America and the contribution of export agriculture and mining led to increased tax collection (TePaske and Klein 1982). If that is so, then the systematic implementation of ordinary and extraordinary taxes, plus tax increases on existing impositions (often to pay off debt), put enormous pressure on many sectors of colonial society as well as offering business opportunities for the privileged few. Colonial elites, Indians, free blacks, and mixed bloods struggled to maintain their positions (or to make gains), rowing upstream or downstream with the reinforced Bourbon bureaucracy. And here we see a series of breaks that would lead to imperial collapse when the international situation became increasingly challenging.

Natural disaster was a major impetus to reform in the Portuguese case. On 1 November 1755, a gigantic earthquake devastated Lisbon. The loss of life was staggering and the destruction of buildings was equally so. It seemed the end of the world not only to bereft surviving inhabitants of Lisbon, but the image of a city wiped off the face of the earth also exercised a deep impact in European consciousness, appearing prominently in Voltaire’s Candide, for example. It was this disaster that set the stage for a far-reaching program of reform, both in Europe and in Brazil. In the aftermath of the Lisbon earthquake, one of King Dom José I’s ministers, Sebastião José de Carvalho e Melo, known to posterity as the Marquis of Pombal, came to wield almost limitless, and certainly unimpeded, power. He rebuilt the city quickly and assumed almost unchallenged authority for the following two decades (Monteiro 2006a).

Pombal was not content with merely meeting the short-term crisis following the earthquake. He went further, seeking a diagnosis of the Portuguese empire’s structural ills. Pombal was both an enlightened despot and an economic patriot, his policy attributable to his quest to revitalise the empire in order to reduce Portugal’s dependence on other states, especially Britain. As historian Kenneth Maxwell elucidated, under Pombal the “vital props of the Luso-Brazilian commercial system, sugar, tobacco and gold were protected by regulation”, numerous reforms to “rationalise and fortify” metropolitan power in the colonial sphere were enacted, and new revenue-generating institutions were established. Brazilian gold, sugar, and tobacco formed the basis of the South Atlantic commercial complex. Sugar and tobacco provided profitable re-exports while gold balanced the unfavourable trade with northern Europe and paid for the import of basic products in short supply in Portugal, namely grain and wood. Maxwell called Pombal an “enlightened Iberian economic nationalist” who “devised measures to retain capital within his own economic system … and to diminish the negative economic impact of being [a] producer of precious metals”. Pombal’s imperial reforms were part of a wider program, in Maxwell’s view, which was “a hybrid, part absolutist, part despotic”, a
regime which established “monopolies” of Portuguese royal power over “coercion, taxation, administration and law-making”, which had formerly been diffuse and overlapping (Maxwell 1973, 1995).

Pombal clung to, and benefited from, the reinvigoration of what Adam Smith would deride as the mercantile system. Pombal sought a reinvigorated mercantilism, one which would allow Portugal to reduce its dependence on foreign merchants, markets, and rival states. Pombal was seduced by the idea of privileged trading companies, their capacity to “fertilise” and “sprout” colonial commerce. Pombal described the situation as: “companies are the only way to regain the commerce of Portuguese America from foreigners” (Carvalho e Melo 1986). Trading companies thus became the basic building block in his grand design and were realised most fully in Brazil. In creating the companies of Grão Pará and Maranhão, and also one for Pernambuco and Paraíba, Pombal sought to develop new export commodities (such as cotton, rice, and coffee) and, remarkably, encourage the growth of colonial manufactures, which other imperial states forbade their colonies to develop. The export commodities encouraged were not those affected by existing treaties, notably the Methuen Treaty. Trading companies were at the heart of Pombal’s grand design to make the empire profitable for Portugal. The Company of Grão Pará and Maranhão enjoyed a 20-year commercial monopoly over those regions, which were less developed than other parts of Brazil. The advent of these privileged companies signalled the demise of the itinerant traders who previously had dominated trade and had been all too willing to engage generously in contraband trade, especially with English and French merchants, which had led to “leakages”, via contraband, of precious metals.

Where he did not establish companies, Pombal took some steps in the direction of less regulated trade. The fleet, frotas, system was eliminated in 1765, as this system had been inconvenient: extensive contraband had flourished and perishable commodities often perished from irregular shipping schedules. In the place of the fleet system, licensed vessels were free to sail to and from the ports of Bahia, Rio, and other ports where companies do not hold exclusive rights. Partly, it must be conceded, these encouragements were not the result of “enlightened” economic doctrine, an embrace of “free trade”, but rather the exigencies of locating new sources of wealth amidst declining mineral yields and plunging prices of agricultural goods precisely when there were escalating costs of war with Spain in Southern Brazil.

In addition to his commercial decrees, Pombal also engaged in two forms of administrative reorganisation in Brazil: first, he carved new captaincies-general out of territories which were too vast to administer directly; second, the crown repossessed the last remaining small captaincies which remained in private hands and frequently had been neglected. He relocated the capital of the Estado do Brasil, as Portuguese America was then called, from the north of Brazil, in Salvador da Bahia, to Rio de Janeiro in the early 1760s. This move reflected the growing economic prominence of Southern Brazil. He also tried to gain further benefit from taxing and monitoring the gold and diamond mines, but these extractivist strategies were only so efficacious since the mines were already in decline. Pombal’s intrusive actions vexed local society as much as anything else.

Other aspects of Pombal’s program deserve mention and brief consideration: a unique aspect of Pombaline imperial policy was its attitude towards population
increase. Pombal encouraged European-indigenous intermarriage as a means of increasing population especially in Brazil. Among other important reforms affecting the empire were: Pombal’s abolition of African slavery in Portugal itself (1761 and 1773), the elimination of distinctions between “Old” and “New” Christians (1768 and 1773), and the granting of certain freedoms, to use a somewhat anachronistic term, to indigenous peoples in Brazil (1755 and 1759). Though one might be inclined to attribute these measures to liberal attitudes, it is more accurate to see them as predicated on reason of state. The abolition of slavery in Portugal was a clear example: Pombal sought to increase supplies of slaves for Brazil, but due to market pressures, many were disembarked in Lisbon instead. To discourage the bilateral traffic between Portugal’s Angolan ports of Luanda and Benguela, and not out of any humanitarian impulse, Pombal abolished peninsular slavery.

Just as he had in matters of commerce, both domestic and international, Pombal sought to expand the power of the crown and its agents in other spheres as well. Here his elaborate campaign against the Jesuits in the late 1750s proved the crucial contest. Pombal expelled the Jesuits from Portuguese territory, across world, an action that would be emulated, sometimes in coordination with Pombal, by Spain, France, and other Italian states in the following decade. Both in Amazonia, but also in the South of Brazil, Pombal resented Jesuit control over Indian labour (concentrated in the aldeias, which Pombal soon would transform into towns with civilian administrators). He considered the Jesuits as rulers of a “state within a state”. They were exempt from most forms of taxation and were able to reject direct oversight by the Portuguese Crown. This was because the Jesuits answered directly to the Pope, not to the secular ruler (i.e., the Portuguese monarch) in whose dominions they operated. Their control over vast tracts of land and huge numbers of Amerindians made the society suspect in the eyes of an absolutist state.

Not only did they control land, labour, and resources at the expense of the civil government, but Pombal targeted the Jesuits because of their control over education. He wrested the education of the nobility out of the hands of the Jesuits, setting up a special high school for them in Portugal. But what Pombal did regarding university education was even more ambitious. He increased the number of Brazilians who studied at the principal university of Portugal, in Coimbra. Legal education at Coimbra became the common experience linking civilian administrators to one another. Coimbra was the training ground for imperial service, where the “bureaucratic socialization which readied a man for the robe of office” occurred (Schwartz 1973). The sheer number of Brazilian students passing through Coimbra indicates the extent of this policy and suggests its impact. In 1766–1770 alone, 196 Brazilians matriculated whereas in 1791–1795, 80 matriculated. Overall, 866 Brazilian-born subjects studied at Coimbra between 1772 and 1822 (Fonseca 1999; Maxwell 2003). Many of these joined the transatlantic colonial bureaucracy after finishing their studies.

Fittingly, Pombal’s overhaul of Coimbra’s curriculum in 1772 was entrusted to a Brazilian, Francisco de Lemos. Lemos aimed to extirpate scholasticism, infuse the curriculum with new doctrines, and establish new faculties of mathematics and the sciences (Araújo 2000). As anticipated, the Coimbra curricular reform strengthened the connection between higher education and state service, symbolised by the preference for natural and civil law over Roman and canon law. The number of graduates
in the final decades of the eighteenth century in medicine, mathematics, and natural science likewise increased at the expense of canon lawyers and theologians. The advancement of “useful knowledge” was prized above all else. By the early nineteenth century, such an instrumental approach to education helped to conjure a vision of a genuinely Luso-Brazilian empire, one which brought individuals from across the empire together for common training. Intentionally or not, such a tendency favoured a pan-territorial approach to reform which somewhat defused metropolitan-colonial tensions (Maxwell 2003). Pombal and his successors repeatedly turned down requests to found universities in Brazil and there were no printing presses until 1808, a situation which could not be more different than Spanish America, with its more than a dozen universities from the sixteenth century and its printing presses in every major city! By centralising university training at Coimbra, Pombal sought to undermine the attachment to locality which proved so pervasive in Spanish as well as British America.

The death of Dom José I in 1777 and the accession of his daughter Maria (who became Queen Maria I) augured ill for Pombal. He was relieved of his duties in the first moments of Maria’s reign and many were glad to see him depart office in ignominy. But his fall did not mean that the entire Pombaline reform program was dismantled. True, the privileged companies were abolished, or at least the scope of their activities was severely reduced. But many of the other reforms remained on the books. After Pombal, there were no ministers of same stature, prestige, or authority, but many of the reforms Pombal introduced to education (reforming university curricula to encourage study of natural science over canon law) would bear fruit several decades later.

Even those who despised Pombal took their cues from him. The Portuguese state tried to encourage the study of political economy and natural history in Portugal. In 1779, the Academy of Sciences, in Lisbon, patronised by an inveterate enemy of Pombal, the Duke of Lafões, Queen Maria I’s uncle, was founded (Monteiro 2006b). Among its responsibilities was the task of amassing, analysing, and diffusing information concerning Portuguese colonial products, commodities, minerals, and geography to better harness them. Historian José Luís Cardoso has shown convincingly that one of the Academy’s chief functions was to disseminate manuals and memórias on best practices in agriculture and to encourage the adoption of these techniques (Cardoso 1989). The Academy of Sciences patronised and disseminated numerous tracts that advocated and described the best means of transporting plants from one part of the empire and planting them elsewhere, particularly Asian plants in Brazil. This built on earlier initiatives, of course. Exchanges of medicinal plants had been taking place for centuries. Tobacco from Virginia had been introduced in Bahia in 1757, whereas Carolina Rice was grown in Pará and Maranhão by 1765 (Silva Dias 1968). These experiments gathered steam in the early 1780s under the tutelage of the Academy of Science.

While the Academy was at work in Lisbon, there were other efforts outside of the capital to diffuse political economy doctrines, part of a broader effort to foment agricultural production and local craft industries. These efforts were spear-headed by the crown-chartered Economic Societies which sprang up across peninsular Portugal and the Eastern Atlantic archipelagos: the Minho (1779), Elvas (1781), Douro (1783), Évora (1784), Valença (1789), and Madeira (1790). Very few of these
societies, in contrast to their Spanish counterparts, survived for more than a few years. However, some of the publication and translation projects which these societies would have undertaken made their way into the publication program of the Casa Literaria do Arco do Cego, in Lisbon, which operated between 1799 and 1801. In this way, texts of political economy were fundamental to the creation of a public sphere in the Luso-Brazilian world, one which straddled its empire as well as Europe.

The Academy of Sciences and the Economic Societies were supplemented by additional institutions founded by the Portuguese Crown with important implications for its overseas empire: a Royal Naval Academy was created in 1779; a Royal Academy of Fortification, Artillery, and Design in 1790; a Royal Public Library in 1796; a Royal Maritime, Military, and Geographic Society in 1798; and a Royal Coast Guard Academy opened in 1796. The Maritime Society attempted to improve maritime cartography, develop new navigational techniques and charts, study ocean currents, compile detailed tidal charts, and draw topographical maps for the military’s use. All of these institutions were highly cosmopolitan and represented spaces in which books and ideas were exchanged. As an aside, it is instructive to point out that very few of these initiatives would have their counterpart in the colonies before the transfer of the monarchy to Brazil in 1808 (when coast guard and military academies would be set up in Rio de Janeiro in 1810). This is not to say that the ground was not fertile. A scientific academy had been founded in the 1770s, while a literary academy was formed in 1786. Both initiatives were short-lived. However, one important institution was created in the colonies: the botanical garden. The botanical garden founded in Belém do Pará in 1796 was supposed to serve as a model for others, though the second botanical garden, in Rio de Janeiro, would not be founded until 1810 while that of Olinda (in Pernambuco) would wait until 1811 (Sanjad 2006). Suggestions to create additional botanical gardens in Goa and Mozambique came to nought.

Broadly speaking, crown ministers endeavoured to tap civil society’s epistemic resources to bolster policy initiatives across the empire. They encouraged leading scientists, ethnographers, travellers, and philosophically inclined bureaucrats to write reports (memorias) which offered descriptive, and sometimes analytical, accounts of various natural, economic, and agricultural phenomena. Natural scientists, mathematicians, engineers, and men of letters became dependent on the generosity and sponsorship of the crown, as the creation and dissemination of knowledge became a means of social and professional advancement. Such dependence turned men of learning into the collaborators of a state intent on expanding the scope and efficacy of its power (Raminelli 2008). The aim was to put their erudition at the service of power, to use their knowledge of the periphery to bring it under the control of the imperial centre. This relationship suggests that the circulation of ideas, particularly of ideas of political economy, was never truly autonomous from the state, which often incubated initiatives through its extensive tentacles of patronage. Even where a modicum of independence from state institutions was enjoyed, the insights produced were easily encountered, appropriated, and utilised by these institutions.

Among the individuals holding the reins of power after Pombal, one stood out: from 1796–1801, Dom Rodrigo de Sousa Coutinho, a minister in a pronounced Pombaline mould, and in fact the godson of the Marquis. While an admirer of Pombal’s overall aims, he disagreed on tactics. Sousa Coutinho was greatly affected,
unsurprisingly, by the collapse of the French monarchy in 1789, which he attributed to its fiscal situation. His opposition to monopolies and the contracting (farming) of tax revenues, as well as his fervent commitment to efficient, solvent financial administration, grew from his conviction that intelligent reform was necessary for the Portuguese empire to avoid a similar collapse (Maxwell 1973).

Though mineral yields continued to decline, Brazil grew wealthier in the 1790s due to geopolitical realignment. With the collapse of Saint Domingue (which became Haiti in 1804), France’s sugar-producing colony in the Caribbean (and largest supplier at the time), into revolutionary tumult, the demand for, and prices fetched by Brazilian sugar on the world market soared. By 1805, Brazilian sugar accounted for 15% of world output. Rising demand for sugar felicitously coincided with the massive increase in exports of cotton, another slave-dependent commodity, in the North and Northeast of Brazil. It was sent to Liverpool from whence it proceeded to the early mills of an industrialising Britain. An average of 23,500 Africans were brought as slaves to Brazil per year between 1790 and 1810. Overall, exports from Portugal and its colonial possessions (chiefly Brazil) quadrupled between 1789 and 1807. By the middle of the 1790s, the Portuguese balance of payments had moved decisively into surplus. The curse of the Methuen Treaty seemed to have been lifted, or at least circumvented. Pombal’s reforms, and those of his successors, had not born fruit immediately, but privileged trading companies had encouraged the cultivation of new export commodities (Paquette 2013).

CONCLUSION

No Atlantic empire in the second half of the eighteenth century was able to undertake profound social change to respond to the demands of the emerging fiscal-military state. The old explanation for the collapse of empire that rested on a Creole elite in opposition to the alliance between the Bourbon administration and Spanish business interests must be set aside, except possibly in places such as Buenos Aires, where British invasions situated the privileged groups in a different set of relations with the foreign Atlantic networks. But in the rest of the empire, the merchant elite who for centuries had found refuge in commercial consulates would, in general, remain loyal to viceroyal authorities. Their disagreements with the extraordinary taxation imposed, starting in the 1780s, in any case reflected multiple social tensions that would end up leading to civil wars and the final disarticulation of the empire in the 1820s. But we cannot understand the breakup of the Spanish empire without taking into account the general political landscape: maritime wars, the Napoleonic invasion, the division of the dynasty between those who supported Charles IV and those who supported his son, constitutional experimentation, and the restoration of absolutism until 1820.

Loyalty by colonial elites should not blind us to waves of discontent from Americans. One such phenomenon was the response by Indians who repeatedly protested increased tributes, limits on circulation of merchandise, and other obligations that amounted to monetary transfers to the crown. These burdens affected standards of living for Amerindians, eroded old loyalties, and inspired a series of revolts. The first large one was in the Andes, led by José Gabriel Condorcanqui, known as Túpac Amaru II, in 1780–1782. The last was the Bajío, in New Spain.
in 1810–1812, the starting point of a process of ruptures with the metropolis by colonial elites there. In the case of Túpac Amaru, the uprising led to the reinvention of an Inca dynasty, a move to fill the gap left behind by royal authority that was echoed in Venezuela by Francisco de Miranda and by the Tucumán Congress of 1816 when the provinces of La Plata were wavering between Buenos Aires and their secular link to the Andes. A second phenomenon of discontent can be found among the rising African population in the second half of the eighteenth century. Though
by then black slaves, free blacks, and mixed bloods (castas pardas) were no novelty in certain imperial contexts, their greater local or regional density along with the appearance of plantations served to increase their relative weight. Spanish authorities were worried about their loyalty, increasingly so after the uprising in Saint-Domingue in 1791, given that they were both ubiquitous and socially undefined. But the concern was neither generic nor equal in all places and contexts. Attitudes toward the tension and violence stirring in the plantation world was quite different from those regarding the important presence of free blacks in artisanal guilds and in the hubs of the large American ports and cities. They were also distinct from the attitude toward the massive and formalised presence of free blacks in one of the grand gestures of the Bourbon reforms: the militias of free blacks and mulattos (Ben Vinson III 2001). In the 1790s there was noticeable discontent among slaves and urban guilds and even in the militias; this would spark fear of “pardocracy”, the evocative word coined by Simón Bolívar, that spread through Spanish America from Buenos Aires to Havana (Helg 2004).

The effort to refound the empire in the terms set forth in the Cortes of Cádiz emerged out of the crisis of the old equilibrium among American social groups. It was both a national and an imperial project that benefited from British finance and military protection on the battlefield and at sea; the Cortes offered Americans a consensus based on political equality (Portillo 2000). But this theoretical equality was quickly put in doubt by Spaniards, both the old Bourbon administration and the rising bourgeoisie who understood the political moment to be an opportunity to increase their power and correct the economic politics of the monarchical state. Two things, however, indicate the continuity of the old imperial model: first, political and military authorities continued on as ever in the key spots of the empire with their own anti-Creole program, sometimes opposed to the changes the metropolitan Cortes wanted to introduce. And second, the American representatives to the Cortes would continually be subject to attacks. The number and quality of the substitutes, or acting delegates, for titular deputies was called into question before the latter had even arrived from their faraway territories in the New World and the Philippines, and the castas pardas (except those with special merit) were excluded from citizenship, which would be the cause of the most tortuous debates in the Cortes (Twinam 2016; Feros 2017).

The refoundation of the nation and the empire thus dissolved, either out of fear of reform or due to the limits imposed by the age-old consensus that had lent stability to the empire. The dissolution sent colonial societies spinning into a spiral of violence, revolution, and war, which would end up destroying the monarchical empire once and for all. At last the white whale succumbed, not just to the battering handed out by all the rising capitalists named Ahab, but also to the impossibility of self-transformation.

The late (and largely accidental) efficacy of the reforms in the Portuguese empire, however, could not disguise the fact that Brazil, a colony, had far outstripped Portugal, the metropole, according to almost every demographic and economic measure. This imbalance preoccupied the Portuguese ministers. Even before the Pombaline reforms, and the prosperity with which they coincided, some crown advisors urged that the king should transfer the court to the New World and take the title emperor of the west. Portugal, they claimed, could not survive without the riches of Brazil, whereas
Brazil could survive without Portugal. The lack of proportion between Portugal’s relative poverty and Brazil’s teeming, indeed burgeoning, wealth was astounding, and this made such a discussion of a possible transfer rather plausible. Brazil had, unlike Spanish America, never been a part of a composite monarchy, even in theory, a kingdom in and of itself. It was clearly a colony, a subordinate appendage of a much larger, legally superior political entity. What the Luso-Brazilian reformers of the 1790s began to consider was the possibility of a transatlantic federation.

This discussion took place against the backdrop of the Age of Revolutions, but was to a degree insulated from it. There was not much concern, in Lisbon, that Brazil would break away from Portugal, as Britain’s Atlantic seaboard colonies had done in the 1770s. With notable exceptions, before the royal family’s arrival in 1808, there was a relative paucity of vocalised discontent with Brazil’s colonial status and resistance to Portugal’s rule. This fact is perhaps chiefly attributable to the notable cohesiveness of the ruling elite, conscious of the perils of living in a slave society and fearful of a Haitian-style insurrection in their midst. In 1800, Brazil’s population was 37% slave, 30% free persons of African ancestry or those of mixed racial background (termed at the time “mulatto”), 30% white, and 3% Amerindian. But there was a second reason for this as well: though Pombal had expelled the Jesuits and cut down on contraband and sought to extract more revenue, his centralisation efforts still left local elites with ample autonomy, considerable leeway to conduct their own affairs, and few reasons to resent metropolitan meddling. The Brazilian Viceroy, for example, wielded much less power than his Spanish counterpart. Furthermore, the vast physical distances between population centres, uncooperative topography and prevailing winds, and sparse infrastructure made local autonomy inevitable.

To be sure, the political ideas that inflamed the rest of the Atlantic world eventually reached Brazil’s shores and permeated its political culture. The most famous conspiracy, which was nipped in the bud, took place in the province of Minas Gerais in the late 1780s. This Inconfidência Mineira was animated by republican ideas. More alarming was the 1798 Tailors’ Revolt in Bahia. There mulatto soldiers and artisans plotted based on the principles of the Haitian and French revolutions. They called for independence, the declaration of a republic based on electoral democracy, the abolition of slavery, and full equality between blacks and whites. In a dangerously revolutionary world, the presence of the royal family in the New World after 1808, far from a burden, came to be viewed as a powerful buttress to the existing social, economic and political order, a prophylactic against the chaos enveloping their Spanish American neighbours. Political stability was the indispensable precondition of economic prosperity.

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