

*Slavery, Science, and the end of the Old Regime in the Luso-Brazilian Empire*

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Recent scholarship on the end of the Luso-Brazilian old regime has sought to go beyond what for some time was characterized in historical writing as a contradictory and indeed fatal encounter between liberalism and slavery during and in the aftermath of the achievement of Brazilian independence in the 1820s.<sup>1</sup> Rather than pointing to how the Brazilian elite misunderstood or set aside the ideas and ideals of liberalism as they preserved the institution that appeared to guarantee individual and national prosperity, historians have begun to examine how liberalism could be reconciled with and indeed sustained the maintenance of the institution of slavery; how, as some scholars have also described the process, slavery was made modern.<sup>2</sup> Here I provide a preliminary examination of some of the late eighteenth-century bases for the reception of liberalism and debates on slavery, specifically the Luso-Brazilian engagement with natural science and the work of the Lisbon Royal Academy of Sciences. Within an agenda dedicated to imperial renovation and commercial prosperity, the Academy's work most directly concerned with the question of slavery and the slave trade appealed to economic principles of utility, efficiency and productivity to identify ways to reform the practice of enslaving Africans in the interest of increasing the wealth generated within the colonial and imperial economies where slaves supplied most of the labor. Thus, even as slavery was being assailed internationally on both philosophical and religious grounds, Luso-Brazilian Academic writing insisted it was an economic rather than moral problem. At

the same time, however, Academic inquiries into the question of human difference often undercut claims about Africans that were invoked elsewhere in the Atlantic world to justify the perpetuation of slavery and the slave trade. As Academic reformism thus grappled with the humanity of Africans, civilization and barbarism emerged as privileged categories of analysis for discerning the future of slavery, reasserting the moral dimensions of the institution. The results included both an exposé of slavery's inherent inhumanity and a defense of the slave trade as a civilizing process that depended on a denial of its own efficacy.

### **Science, Empire and the Limits of Reform**

Founded in 1779 in the wake of Prime Minister Pombal's institutional and educational reform, the Lisbon Academy of Sciences embraced both the principle of utility and its service to nation and to empire. As José Corrêa da Serra explained the Academy's mission in the prologue to the first volume of its *Memorias*: "Em hum século, em que a Natureza tem pago melhor que nunca ao laborioso observador com riquezas até ahi escondidas [...] como ficaria em ocio a Nação Portugueza?"<sup>3</sup> Natural science, in particular, as an inquiry into the laws of nature, was perceived by Academy members to be a crucial matter of state and the basis for the further reasoned reform of agriculture and the economy in Portugal and, above all, in Brazil, beheld as a repository of vast, but virtually unknown, natural resources.<sup>4</sup> As the largest sector of the Brazilian economy was based on plantation agriculture, the Academy's members also examined its predominant form of labor, African slaves. Indeed, as the center of an evolving reception of political economy, or "a new economic discourse," as Brazilian historian Rafael de

Bivar Marquese describes it, the Academy's work encompassed critical and reform-minded scrutiny of the ramifications of slave labor for the production of wealth.<sup>5</sup>

Among the most extensive Academic reflections on the institution of slavery was that offered by the Brazilian-born lawyer, poet, and inventor Luiz Antônio de Oliveira Mendes (1750-1814). Mendes had obtained a degree from the University of Coimbra, where he also studied medicine and philosophy. Among his works that evince an Academic concern with both natural science and political economy is *Discurso preliminar, histórico, introductivo com natureza de descrição econômica da comarca, e cidade do Salvador* (1790), a survey of his native Bahia that examined how to make its sugar-producing economy more productive and efficient in the wake of a period of decadence followed by resurgence during the reign of José I (1750-1777). Although the *Discurso* does not include an analysis of the role of slavery in the region's economy, the institution's impact is acknowledged implicitly and explicitly. Indeed, as Marquese has noted, as the *Discurso* above all sought to provide a framework for increasing the generation of wealth through more efficiency, austerity, and local self-sufficiency, in it Mendes sought to extend the ideal of discipline to the relationship between owners and slaves. “[P]or um princípio irrefragável da felicidade da Agricultura,” he argued, owners should “tratar muito melhor da escravatura [...] sendo bem considerado e entrando-se em cálculo, muito mais se prejudicam do que por êste meio e modo desumano economizam.”<sup>6</sup>

This injunction to improve the treatment of enslaved Africans then became the focus of a later work that Mendes read before the members of the Academy in 1793: *Memória a respeito dos escravos e tráfico da escravatura entre a costa d'África e o*

*Brasil*. The *Memoria*, published in the Academy's *Memórias Economicas* in 1812 and republished the following year in the London-based *O Investigador Portuguez*, consisted of a broad inquiry into the causes of mortality for recently enslaved Africans that appealed to the "humanidade" of the slaves yet, as Marquese has argued, was founded upon the principle of "interesse" above all.<sup>7</sup> Although "os Pretos recém-tirados dos Reinos Africanos" had "interesses," because slaves in effect constituted the capital of their owners it was their owners' together with the state's interests that prevailed. In other words, rather than a moral problem, slavery was an economic question; or at least, as Mendes noted in his conclusion, "considerações morais" had not been his concern in the *Memoria*. Thus, he explained, high slave mortality was a drain on the economy because it meant the destruction of capital, while the growth of the slave population increased the wealth of owners and the state.<sup>8</sup>

Having established the economic motive for lowering slave mortality, Mendes, drawing on his medical studies, then provided an extensive survey of tropical diseases and of the effects of the inadequate nutrition, clothing and shelter that enslaved Africans typically endured that led him to two conclusions. First, enslavement and the transatlantic crossing were experiences that required extraordinary fortitude to survive; Africans who arrived in Brazil were in effect "homens de pedra, ou de ferro." Second, "que a causa de toda a sua grande mortandade, e estrago, além das outras causas que menos concorrem, é o modo por que são tratados."<sup>9</sup> While this second conclusion could have served as well as the premise for the entire *Memoria*, presenting it as the culmination of empirical and scientific analysis allowed Mendes to underscore not only the need for but also the possibility of reform. Mortality, in other words, was not the product of enslavement per

se but rather of the ways in which the Portuguese enslaved, of “absurd” deprivation and violence.<sup>10</sup> As Marquese has concluded, such a critique of the slave trade and slavery as a process that could be objectively analyzed and reformed amounted to a defense of slave labor and of its imperative in the colonial economy.

However, in the *Memoria* Mendes also went beyond a defense of slavery as economic necessity to one seemingly based on African society itself. If prior to enslavement, Mendes explained, African lives were defined by “toda a liberdade no seu viver,”<sup>11</sup> it was also the case that Africans used slavery as a punishment. While African slaving had been invoked by others to justify the transatlantic slave trade, in Mendes’ *Memória* the most salient feature of African slavery was that its legal framework bore a striking resemblance to that of Rome. “Eis aqui,” Mendes observed, “em um país inculto postos em prática os Capítulos da Lei Aquilla, que eles desconhecem inteiramente.” Thus, slavery in Africa both justified enslaving Africans and served as a point of assimilation between Africa and Europe; whether or not Africans knew of the Roman precedents, they had a similar sense of what was just. “No centro da Africa parece que é ouvida a interrogação de Juvenal, [...],” Mendes marveled, ““Onde agora estás Lei Júlia de adulteriis? Dormes?” Respondem os Africanos, que não; porque provado o crime, o réu é castigado.” Indeed, in the *Memoria* even as African freedom at times appeared to signify an absence of morality (Africans seek vengeance, “andam quase nus”), the practice of punitive enslavement, and its particularly strict application in the case of adultery, provided evidence of not only civilized conceptions of crime and punishment, but also of “outro costume dos Romanos, e deles transferidos a nós, que as mulheres são

principio, e fim da familia.”<sup>12</sup> Thus, the Roman past, the European and African present, and the legitimacy of slavery converged in a defense of domestic hierarchy.

Not surprisingly, however, given the history of European imagery of sub-Saharan Africans,<sup>13</sup> in the *Memória* the same concern with ethnographic detail that allowed Mendes to identify a certain fundamental common ground between Africa and Rome also laid the ground for affirmations of African difference, from the practice of polygamy, to diet and domestic architecture.<sup>14</sup> Yet if Mendes found that African societies encompassed the incomprehensible (such as sitting around a hearth in the tropics), he was convinced nevertheless that they were worthy of sustained inquiry. As historian Alberto da Costa e Silva has explained, although Mendes never traveled to Africa he claimed to have collected the oral testimony of slaves from the Kingdom of Dahomey and from members of a Dahomeian embassy sent to Salvador and Lisbon in 1795, as well the accounts of Portuguese who had served at the Portuguese factory there.<sup>15</sup> The results were presented before the Academy in 1806 in the *Memória Histórica sobre os costumes particulares dos povos Africanos com relação privativa ao Reino de Guine*. Although, according to scholars of the region, Mendes’ account contains a number of historical and ethnographic errors, it remains a unique source on African religion, cuisine and medicine, on diaspora, and, of course, on European intellectual perceptions of Africa and Africans at the end of the eighteenth-century.

Although, like the *Memoria* on the slave trade, the *Memória Histórica* identified the possibility of a correspondence between European and African societies, the conclusions it offered on Africa as a whole were pessimistic. “[O]s povos de Guiné na África, com restrição ao reino de Daomé, são mais civilizados no seu tanto do que os

outros,” Mendes explained, but they were surrounded by a barbarism that reached the extremes of cannibalism. If their fetishes (*feitiços*) at least bore some resemblance to the “deuses penantes entre os romanos,” there were other aspects of African religious practice, especially animal worship, that seemed to contradict even their own primitive cosmology. Indeed, he concluded, Africa was “a mais desgraçada do que as outras [continents], porque desde sua origem até hoje, medindo séculos da sua existencia, sem melhoração alguma, se tem conservado na sua mesma incultura e impolidez.”<sup>16</sup>

And yet, Mendes affirmed, “esses povos rudes” were “nossos semelhantes.”<sup>17</sup> Like his fellow Academy member João de Loureiro, who had challenged Linneaus’ claim that the African Hottentots descended from another species of men besides *Homo Sapiens*,<sup>18</sup> Mendes rejected recourse to salient physical and innate difference to explain Africa and Africans. Rather, within eighteenth-century debates about the causes of human diversity, Mendes’ work appealed to theories of climate and environment;<sup>19</sup> it was the poor quality of the African air, he argued, that produced an “inércia” and, consequently, only a very limited agricultural production.<sup>20</sup> Thus, what he described in the *Memoria Historica* as Africa’s “manifesto e comprovado atrasamento” arose not out of an inherent inferiority of its inhabitants but rather was the result of a landscape that had arrested economic and social development.<sup>21</sup>

In the *Memória* on the slave trade the affirmation of the fundamental humanity of Africans then served as the basis for its primary objective: a methodical exposition of the horror and tragedy of the experience of enslavement, “um dos mais vivos testemunhos sobre a brutalidade do tráfico negreiro,” as Alberto Costa e Silva has described it, similar to contemporary abolitionist tracts.<sup>22</sup> From capture in the African hinterland to the

transatlantic crossing and arrival in Brazil, Mendes described enslavement as “um continuo martírio” that produced both suicidal and homicidal impulses in the enslaved.<sup>23</sup> Even more pointedly, however, the *Memória* asserted that recently enslaved Africans became a “porção mais desgraçada da espécie humana” not only because of physical violence and deprivation, but also, and perhaps above all, because of the effects of the loss of the freedom into which they were born, the end of “tudo quanto lhe era bom, e aprazível.”<sup>24</sup> “[Q]ue os Pretos perdendo a sua liberdade,” Mendes observed, “ficam desde logo apaixonados, e entregues a um indizível ressentimento, que é justo, e inseparável, e extensivo ao mesmo bárbaro; que também sente.” This “resentment” associated, according to Mendes, with barbarism was also referred to as *o banzo*, “a saudade dos seus, e da sua pátria; o amor devido a alguém; a ingratidão, e aleivozia, que outra lhe fizera; a cogitação profunda sobre a perda da liberdade.” *O banzo*, in other words, connoted both a sense of loss and an awareness of the larger causes and consequences of such loss.

Although Mendes addressed the problem of *o banzo* by counseling owners of new slaves to treat them with “brandura,” the condition nevertheless appeared as an aspect of the experience of enslavement that was the least subject to reform.<sup>25</sup> While disease and malnutrition could be targeted with improvements in hygiene and care outlined in the *Memória*, Mendes conceded that *o banzo* did not arise out of circumstances of enslavement but rather from enslavement itself, from the human response to being deprived of liberty. Thus, notwithstanding its ultimately fantastic vision of nonviolent and hygienic slavery, the *Memória* did not account for how someone could be enslaved without taking away his or her liberty and possibly his or her will to live. Even as Mendes



argued that the slave trade and slavery were both wasteful and horrific because of the way the Portuguese conducted them and that utility should guide improvements, ultimately the *Memoria* also laid bare the limits of such reform. A decade later, writing the *Memória Histórica* Mendes assumed these limits. “[Q]ue todas as nações de comum acordo, como se envergonham meter em comércio a espécie humana,” he judged, “enganando-se a si mesmas, e não a todas, se despacham, afirmando que vão tratar do resgate dos homens pretos, quando aliás, de longe promovendo e autorizando a tirana escravidão [...]”<sup>26</sup>

### **The Imperative of Civilization**

The boundaries of reform were also assumed in a text contemporary to the *Memoria*, the *Analyse sobre a justiça do commercio e resgate dos escravos da Costa da Africa* by Mendes’ fellow Academy member José Joaquim da Cunha de Azeredo Coutinho.<sup>27</sup> However, if for Mendes the principle of utility demanded reform that would lower slave mortality (and the destruction of capital), for Azeredo Coutinho utility elucidated why reform not only could be, but indeed should be, limited. Concluding a brief “Projecto de huma Lei para obrigar o Senhor a que não abuse da condição de seu Escravo” included at the end of the *Analyse*’s first Portuguese-language edition, Azeredo Coutinho explained that giving slaves some legal recourse to contest claims of abuse would not preclude “totalmente o mal.” Rather, it was “o mais util no estado das cousas, e o menos prejudicial ao socego, á quietação, e á tranquillidade do Estado.” Violence and abuse were both “hum daquelles males da Sociedade, que he necessario tolerar para que não hajão maiores males [...], namely disorder and disrespect for authority.”<sup>28</sup>

Accordingly, in the *Analyse* reform was secondary to a clarification of the bases for slavery's legitimacy. Indeed, rather than the quest to mitigate violence or African suffering found in the *Memoria* or Mendes' later disavowal of the trade and its hypocrisy, the *Analyze* invested in a staunch defense of slavery as a right defined by Portuguese national law. As such, it became one of the most famous, and infamous, tracts on slavery written in Portuguese.

Born in 1742 in Campos de Goicatazes in the capitancy of Rio de Janeiro to a wealthy and distinguished family, Azeredo Coutinho briefly administered his family's estate after his father's death, but later left Brazil for the University of Coimbra where he studied law. His distinguished career included appointments as an officer of the Inquisition (1785), to the Bishoprics of Pernambuco (1794/98) and Elvas (1806) and, finally in 1816, as Inquisidor-Mor.<sup>29</sup> Within this ecclesiastical career, Azeredo demonstrated a keen interest in both political economy and natural science, consistent with the Lisbon Academy's agenda of reform. As Bishop of Pernambuco he founded the distinguished Seminário de Olinda, which featured natural science in its curriculum, and as a member of the Academy he published "Memória sobre o preço do açúcar" and *Ensaio económico sobre o comércio de Portugal e suas colónias* (1794).<sup>30</sup>

Within the history of the Academy of Sciences and its culture the *Analyse*, in turn, had a different trajectory. While Azeredo Coutinho's work on both political economy and slavery was more widely read and debated than that of Mendes, the initial and official reception of the *Analyse* was critical. The Academy declined to sponsor its publication and Azeredo Coutinho resorted to having it translated into French and printed in London in 1798. Then in 1806, in response to a renewed request for publication in Portugal, he

was rebuked by fellow Academic António Ribeiro dos Santos on behalf of the Real Mesa da Comissão Geral sôbre o Exame e Censura dos Livros who argued that it was “espantoso” for a priest to defend “a venda de seus irmãos.” Expressing what historian João Pedro Marques has characterized as a para-abolitionist tolerance of slavery, Santos further asserted that even as “o uso e costume inveterado, e a consideração das conseqüências, que podem resultar da extinção absoluta ou ainda gradual dêste comércio, podem talvez obrigar um Príncipe no estado atual das coisas a tolerá-lo e a consentí-lo,” the “honra da humanidade” demanded that one at least refrained from publicly defending it.<sup>31</sup> In spite of the censure, a Portuguese edition was published in Lisbon two years later. That same year, however, criticism of the *Analyse* widened with publication of the French Henri Grégoire’s (1750-1831) *De la littérature des nègres*, in which Azeredo’s work was both excoriated as an attack on humanity and dismissed as destined for “the river of oblivion.”<sup>32</sup>

As a number of scholars have argued, Azeredo Coutinho’s writing displays an eclectic, or perhaps at times inchoate, yet always passionate reception and application of eighteenth-century philosophy and economic and political theory. As Jorge Pedreira explains, accepting the prohibition on colonial manufacturing, but criticizing monopolies within the empire, Azeredo argued throughout his work that economic policy should be based on the idea that there was “a harmonia de interesses” between the metropolis and the colonies. This meant, above all, that Portugal could and indeed should withstand a trade deficit with its colonies as long as it had a trade surplus with foreign nations.<sup>33</sup> Elaborated in the *Ensaio*, this vision of imperial trade as national imperative was featured as well in the *Analyse*. Responding to claims that the slave trade should be abolished,

Azeredo asserted that considering Portuguese dependence on colonial agriculture, the end of the slave trade could have only dire consequences for the imperial economy.

Defending slavery was thus a matter of defending Portuguese national interest.

Furthermore, he argued, as a form of labor, slavery needed to be regarded not as a moral or political problem, but rather respected as the result of geo-social circumstances that were unrelated to the absence or presence of “as luzes”: where there was low population density, he observed, slavery prevailed, while a high population density yielded free labor.<sup>34</sup> Thus, like Mendes in the *Memoria*, Azeredo argued that abuses occurring within the trade, rather than the trade itself, should be the focus of concern and reform, although, as noted above, such reform was of only limited concern in the *Analyse* itself.<sup>35</sup>

The *Analyse*'s defense of the slave trade did not stop with the pragmatic appeal to national interest, however. Within an expansive contextualization of the question of slavery, Azeredo also offered criticism of both contemporary cultural politics and European and Portuguese history. As Brazilian historian Guilherme Pereira das Neves has noted, Azeredo enjoyed polemic and indeed much of the later Portuguese edition of the *Analyse* is an attack on those who had challenged the slave trade, the “nova seita Filosofica,” whose hypocritical use of “a máscara da humanidade” was intended to do nothing less than overturn morality and all legitimate social and political order in the name of the “quimera” of popular sovereignty. The novelty of philosophy was thus also juxtaposed to the weight and presumed legitimacy of history. If slavery was against natural law, Azeredo asked, why had this law been obscured for thousands of years? Indeed, if natural law was the axis around which most of the misguided attacks on the

slave trade turned, it was, he explained, because natural law itself was a problematic and, within eighteenth-century philosophy, poorly defined concept.<sup>36</sup>

Slavery, Azeredo conceded, may not be consistent with an absolute natural law but absolute natural law itself was elusive and indeed irrelevant to life on earth. Rather, what mattered was “a Lei Natural...relativa as circunstancias.”<sup>37</sup> Rejecting the idea of a primitive state outside of society, Azeredo also asserted that man is naturally social; he does not depend on a social pact to be so. Man’s natural sociability and natural law’s relativity thus meant that the rights of man were to be regarded not as absolute but rather as embedded within society and defined by custom. In other words, a right as fundamental as the right to self-preservation was intelligible only in the context of society and its laws. “[A] necessidade da existencia,” he wrote, “he a suprema Lei das Nações,” and “a justiça das Leis humanas não he, nem pode ser absoluta, mas sim relativa as circunstancias” defined by the “Soberanos legisladores, que estão autorizados para dar Leis ás Nações.”<sup>38</sup>

Azeredo’s relativism implied as well a rejection of the idea of natural or absolute liberty as well as of natural equality. “A Natureza, que creou os homens para a Sociedade,” he explained, “foi tambem a mesma, que os creou, quer elles queirão, quer não, com diferentes, e desiguaes dotes, huns com mais força, juizo e viveza, e penetração do que outros [...]” These differences and the potential for disorder that they created then yielded to “a lei geral” which was the only framework within which rights could be understood.<sup>39</sup> More specifically, this general law encompassed both the “lei do vencedor” and “a divisão do Meu, e Teu, e por consequencia o Direito da propriedade.” If force and property constituted violations of natural law, Azeredo argued, they were

necessary because they secured “o maior bem dos homens em Sociedade.” And from the supremacy of the reality of the greater good of society over the ideal of natural law, there emerged as well the legitimacy of slavery, if not “justa” then “obrigatoria” in that it was the basis for the generation of wealth within the colonial and imperial economies. “O Comercio da venda dos escravos,” he explained, “he huma Lei dictada pelas circunstancias às Nações Barbaras para o seu maior bem, ou para o seu menor mal.” Thus, within the framework of Azeredo’s critique of eighteenth-century philosophy, the question of slavery became a matter of defending national law and a national right to self-preservation in both pragmatic and philosophical terms.<sup>40</sup>

However, Azeredo’s conceptualization of a “maior bem” and a perhaps especially of “a menor mal” also had historical resonance. Indeed, the *Analyse*’s most ambitious defense of slavery rested upon its reference to *resgate*, featured in its title; a term used by the Portuguese at least since the late fifteenth-century to assert the legitimacy of enslaving Africans because it “rescued” them from execution, slavery and, more generally, the violent paganism of Africa. Christian, in contrast to pagan, slaving was thus at worst a “menor mal” and at best charitable.<sup>41</sup> As Azeredo explained with reference to a comparison of Portuguese slaving and English indentured servitude, the servitude of white Christians could not be considered more “conforme á Humanidade” than the purchase of “homens pretos, nascidos no meio das Nações barbaras, e Idolatras, condenados pelas Leis do seu Paiz á escravidão perpetua [...]”<sup>42</sup>

In the *Analyse*, however, *resgate* was also reconceptualized in terms of the ideal of commerce and commercial exchange privileged within eighteenth-century humanism.<sup>43</sup> Because nature did not provide everything for everyone everywhere,

Azeredo argued, there arose dependencies and “a necessidade do Commercio dos homens entre si, sem differença de barbaros, ou civilizados.” Slavery then, as a form of commerce, involved an exchange of commodities that included not only the slave’s body, and his or her potential labor, but also civilization itself, recognized both as a social, especially urban, order and as a process and final state of maturity and refinement brought about by reason. “A comunicação dos homens huns com os outros, e das Nações, entre si chamadas pelo seu mesmo interesse,” Azeredo explained in an apparent gloss on Montesquieu, “he a que os vai polindo, e civilizando; he a que fórma a grande massa dos conhecimentos humanos; a que instrue nas sciencias, e nas artes, e tira pouco a pouco as Nações da sua infancia, e do seu primeiro estado da barbaridade até levallas ao seu maior estado de civilização, e de Entes verdadeiramente racionaes [...]. Indeed, African encounters with foreign merchants made them “mais humanos,” while in their absence Africans would continue to languish. “[Q]ue ideias pode ter de civilização, e liberdade,” he asked, with reference to the Enlightened claim that “todas as ideias são adquiridas,” “huma Nação, ou bandos de homens, que elles, e seus vizinhos se-estão continuadamente matando [...]”<sup>44</sup>

That it was commerce and civilization rather than redemption that was at stake signaled Azeredo’s own commitment, shared by his fellow Academic Mendes, to a defense of slavery that was not dependent on a Christian relationship between slave owner and slave defended by Jesuits in the early part of the century.<sup>45</sup> However if, as Jorge Pedreira has argued, Azeredo’s pragmatism asserted that the economy functioned independently of morality, his understanding of the relationship between slavery as a potentially civilizing force also undermined this independence, redefining rather than

marginalizing or suppressing morality entirely. In the *Analyse* the spread of civilization is both “natural” and good, the outcome of humankind’s superiority and capacity for improvement.<sup>46</sup> Consequently slavery could be defended as basis for a “greater good” (the production of wealth) and a beneficent process that spread civilization or civilized. Civilization, in this sense, both assumed and displaced Christianization as a justification for slavery; Africans were to be *resgatados* from paganism and a savagery or barbarism that was not just about the worship of false gods, polygamy, excessive sexuality, bondage, and human sacrifice.<sup>47</sup> Indeed, Azeredo asserted, the real basis for savagery and barbarism was a primitive indolence. “Os Povos barbaros,” he observed, “não tendo, nem artes, nem sciencia, nem industria; ou não tem algum Commercio regulado, ou he tão pequeno, e tão restricto, que não merece o nome de Commercio.” The lack of commerce then became a more specific justification for slavery: primeval African economies yielded no other surplus than human beings who would either be killed or sold. In turn, replacing indolence with industriousness was revealed as the imperative of the civilization process itself. “Saber tirar vantagem do trabalho dos homens, e aproveitellos,” Azeredo explained, “he hum dos primeiros objectos da grande arte de governar.” Accordingly, the idea to be “adquirida” in the context of contact with Europeans, and that could not be acquired among Africans, was that the generation of wealth was synonymous with virtuousness. Thus, the *Analyse* represented both an embrace of eighteenth-century transatlantic understandings of commercial exchange as “the context for our common humanity” and a rejection of a sentimentalization of it: in sharp contrast to early abolitionists, for Azeredo there was no such thing as “barbaric commerce.”<sup>48</sup>



As Azeredo both appealed to and modernized the historically Christian *resgate* to justify the slave trade, his conception of the encounter between Christian civilization and pagan barbarism also dispensed with older appeals to Biblical authority to justify slavery (i.e. the curse of Ham) as well as with more recent claims about the meaning of anatomical variation. Rather, like Mendes, evincing an Enlightened reception of the science of man, Azeredo asserted the universality of humanity and criticized the claim that Africans' bondage was linked to their physical difference.<sup>49</sup> As he wrote in his capacity as Bishop of Pernambuco in *Estatutos para o Recolhimento de N.S. da Gloria*, those who "olham para os criados e escravos como para gentes de outra espécie, supondo talvez que eles foram feitos para a comodidade de seus amos e dos seus senhores" were victims of a "falsa idéia." Rather differences and inequalities were "accidental."<sup>50</sup> Indeed, Africans were both fundamentally like Europeans, and like Europeans used to be before "the march of Nature," in the guise of the Roman Empire, had run its course in the continent.<sup>51</sup> Azeredo thus shared Mendes' understanding of a universal humanity, of a diversity that arose out of human interaction with the environment rather than from within the human body, and even recognition of Africa's present as Europe's past. In contrast to Mendes, however, who ultimately arrived at pessimistic conclusions about both Africa and the ramifications of slavery, Azeredo optimistically insisted that the slave trade, African capacity, and "accidents" of nature, all laid the ground for an inevitable triumph of civilization over barbarism.<sup>52</sup>

If, however, *resgate* was thus a productive intervention into a dynamic process of civilization, would it then some day achieve its goal, civilize Africa, and so render itself unnecessary and unjustified? Azeredo's answer to this question exposed both his

understanding of the pace at which transformation would occur and the limits of his optimism. The civilization of Africa and Africans, “Povos [...] ainda muito longe desta perfeição,” Azeredo contended, was a process that would extend far beyond his own lifetime, “por muitos Seculos.” Indeed, the error, the “loucura,” of philosophes and abolitionists was to think that they could accelerate “a marcha lenta, e progressiva” of nature and “reduzir os homens a igualdade, civilizar o mundo inteiro, e fazer em dous dias” what had taken centuries to achieve in Europe.<sup>53</sup> In other words, if the slave trade “rescued” Africans from barbarism in their lifetimes, the scale that measured its efficacy was nevertheless millennial.

## **Conclusion**

Entrusted with the task of sponsoring scientific inquiry and disseminating scientific knowledge about nature, society and the economy, the Lisbon Academy of Sciences provided a forum for a reformism that encompassed efforts to make the slave trade and slave labor more efficient and therefore more lucrative. As Marquese has shown, conceiving of slave labor as the subject of “administration” meant that justifications for slavery based on religious ideals and appeals to absolute paternal authority were displaced by invocations of the principles of utility and productivity.<sup>54</sup> Yet neither Mendes nor Azeredo, the authors of the principal Academic inquiries into slavery in the Portuguese empire, could confine their analyses to the institution’s economic imperatives. In going beyond the claim that slavery was justified because the prosperity of the Portuguese empire depended on it, however, they did not appeal to African physical difference to justify the slave trade and slavery. Mendes’ and Azeredo Coutinho’s

recognition of the fundamental humanity of Africans then allowed questions concerning the morality of slavery to reemerge. While Mendes appears to have abandoned the idea of making the slave trade less wasteful and despaired at how the slave trade and slavery ravaged already barbaric African societies, Azeredo Coutinho insisted that slavery would help usher in the triumph of civilization over barbarism. In the latter case, the appeal to difference based on historical development both justified the slave trade and disclosed the trade's theoretical end.<sup>55</sup> If African barbarism justified the trade, its own civilizing dimensions would eventually mean that the supply for the trade would be exhausted.

As the old regime in Portugal and its colonies was dismantled, the legacies of late eighteenth-century inquiries into slavery in the Luso-Brazilian Empire included an ambivalent understanding of the slave trade and of Africans and Africa. While even the most vocal defender of the trade, Azeredo Coutinho, admitted that it should be reformed, critics like Mendes, who insisted that the trade exacerbated African barbarism rather than ushered in civilization, did not translate their critique into any political or social movement for abolition. Rather, as historian João Pedro Marques has explained, in contrast to critics in Great Britain, France, and the United States, the Luso-Brazilian intelligentsia forged a particularly resilient "tolerationist" position toward slavery and its abolition, accepting and even calling for the end of the institution but also postponing abolition "into a distant and indeterminate future."<sup>56</sup> Such gradualism, and its joining of pragmatism with "uncompromising moral judgment," David Brion Davis has argued, resonated within enlightened and liberal thought in which liberty was understood to be based on a legitimate legal and social order that a radical break with slavery was presumed to jeopardize.<sup>57</sup> In the case of the Lisbon Academy of Sciences, if Mendes'

moral judgment would eventually overwhelm his pragmatism, Azeredo Coutinho's moral judgment led to a defense of slavery as a pragmatic means to an end.

The Academic engagement with the moral dimensions of slavery, the rejection of appeals to physical difference to justify slavery, and, in the case of Azeredo Coutinho, the insistence that civilization was a process in the context of slavery, would also resonate within turn-of-the-century debates about society, economy and politics as new regimes replaced old ones. Azeredo's claim that slavery and the slave trade could and would civilize Africa and Africans raised the question of what place civilized Africans would have in European and New World societies, even as Portuguese and Brazilians on both sides of the Atlantic embarked on the task of defining the scope of constitutional politics and citizenship and faced increasing international efforts to abolish the slave trade. Should slaves continue to be enslaved even if the moral motive for their enslavement had been surpassed (once they had become civilized)? A similar question had arisen in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in the context of pagan and Muslim African slaves' conversion to Christianity. Then manumission had been limited by law and, as the Jesuit António Vieira preached, appeals to the virtues of earthly resignation and martyrdom and the promise of deliverance after death.<sup>58</sup> Unlike salvation, however, civilization was to be manifest during, rather than after, life on earth. And by the turn of the nineteenth century, as legal frameworks for the nation were being redefined along constitutionalist lines, it connoted a potential for prosperity and autonomy that was increasingly recognized as a standard for assuming political agency.<sup>59</sup> Thus, the ideal of *resgate* as a civilizing process acknowledged that slavery had transformed Africans from outsiders into insiders within the societies that they served,<sup>60</sup> just as the scope of insiders' rights were expanding.

Would freed Africans then, along with others formerly excluded from political life, be citizens?

In the following decades, civilization (rather than physical difference and race) and the religious and cultural conditions it was understood to encompass, would continue to provide a standard as statesmen offered answers to this question that they argued could be reconciled with a liberal embrace of national sovereignty.<sup>61</sup> Yet the legacy of the Academy's late eighteenth-century debates on slavery was also a crisis of authority.<sup>62</sup> The economic benefits of slavery had appeared neither compelling enough to alone justify the slave trade, nor dubious enough to justify its abolition. Moral arguments, in turn, contradicted either the enlightened understanding of humanity or the understanding of slavery as a civilizing process. In the short term, any resolution to the crisis was deferred. On both sides of the Atlantic science and slavery had served empire. The end of the Luso-Brazilian old regime meant the dismantling of an absolute monarchy, but both slavery in Brazil and the slave trade, vestiges of colonialism and imperial commerce, remained in tact.

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Roberto Schwarz, "As idéias fora do lugar," in Roberto Schwarz, *Ao Vencedor as batatas: Forma literária e processo social nos incios do romance brasileiro* (São Paulo: Livraria Duas Cidades, 1977), 13-28; Maria Emilia Prado "Ordem Liberal, Escravidão e Patriarcalismo: as Ambigüidades do Império do Brasil" in Maria Emilia Prado, ed. *O Liberalismo no Brasil Imperial: Origens, Conceitos e Prática* (Rio de Janeiro: Revan/UERJ, 2001); Emilia Viotti da Costa, *The Brazilian Empire: Myths and Histories* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 56, 127.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Rafael de Bivar Marquese, *Feitores do corpo, missionários da mente. Senhores, letrados eo controle dos escravos nas Américas, 1660-1860* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2004); and Jefferson Cano, "Liberdade, Cidadania e Política de Emancipação Escrava," *Revista de História* (São Paulo) v.136 n.1 (1997), 107-120.

<sup>3</sup> "Prologo," in Academia Real das Sciencias de Lisboa. *Memorias*. T. 1 (1780-1788). (Lisbon: Typografia da Academia, 1797), n.p. On the foundation of the Academy see Luís Cardoso, *O Pensamento Económico em Portugal nos Finais do Século XVIII, 1780-1808* (Lisboa: Editora Estampa, 1989), 44-51; Oswaldo Munteal Filho, "A Academia e o

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Império: racionalismo e sociabilidade intelectual no mundo luso-brasileiro,” in Gilda Santos, org. *Brasil e Portugal: 500 anos de enlacs e desenlacs*, special issue, *Revista Convergência Lusíada* (Real Gabinete Português de Leitura, Rio de Janeiro), n.17 (2000): 322-333.

<sup>4</sup> William Joel Simon, *Scientific Expeditions in the Portuguese Overseas Territories (1783-1808), and the role of Lisbon in the Intellectual-Scientific Community of the late Eighteenth Century* (Lisbon: Instituto de Investigação Científica Tropical/Centro de Estudos de Cartografia Antiga, 1983), 2-21. On the Portuguese crown’s sponsorship of scientific inquiry as well natural science inquiries at the local level in Brazil see Ângela Domingues, “Para um melhor conhecimento dos domínios coloniais: a constituição de redes de informação no Império português em finais do setecentos,” in *História, Ciências, Saúde – Manguinhos*, v.8 (2001) (suplemento): 823-38. On both recent historiography and the comparative example of Spain and the Spanish empire see Paula de Vos, “Natural History and the Pursuit of Empire in Eighteenth-Century Spain,” in *Eighteenth-Century Studies* v.40, n.2 (2007): 209-239; and *ibid.*, “Research, Development, and Empire: State Support of Science in the Later Spanish Empire,” in *Colonial Latin American Review* v.15, n.1 (June 2006): 55-79.

<sup>5</sup> Marquese, *Feitores*, 176. See also Rafael de Bivar Marquese, *Administração e Escravidão: Idéias sobre a gestão da agricultura escravista brasileira* (São Paulo: Editora Hucitec, 1999). On the “effective use of the ideas of utility, social equilibrium, and the moral economy of nature” in the reform and defense of slavery in the North Atlantic see David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1720-1823* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 258.

<sup>6</sup> Marquese, *Feitores*, 182; [Luiz António de Oliveira Mendes], *Discurso preliminar, histórico, introductivo com natureza de descrição econômica da comarca, e cidade do Salvador* (1790) in Pinto de Aguiar, ed. *Aspectos da Economia Colonial* (Salvador: Livraria Progresso Editora, 1957), 92-93.

<sup>7</sup> Marquese, *Feitores*, 184; Luiz António de Oliveira Mendes, *Memória a respeito dos escravos e tráfico da escravatura entre as costa d’Africa e o Brazil*, Prefácio de José Capela (Porto: Publicações Escorpão, 1977), 89.

<sup>8</sup> Marquese, *Feitores*, 182; Mendes, *Memória a respeito dos escravos*, 22.

<sup>9</sup> Mendes, *Memória a respeito dos escravos*, 23.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 25, 26, 28, 39.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 36, 39-41. The *Lex Aquila* (3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C.) established liability for damaging another’s property.

<sup>13</sup> On the early modern history of the stereotyping of sub-Saharan Africans see Part 1 of T.F. Earle and K.J.P. Lowe, *Black Africans in Renaissance Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

<sup>14</sup> Mendes, *Memória a respeito dos escravos*, 33. As Outram observes, in the eighteenth-century “exotic societies were often viewed by Europeans as both the ultimate opposite or other to themselves, and also a replication of Europe’s own origins.” See Dorinda Outram, *The Enlightenment*. Second edition. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 55.

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<sup>15</sup> Alberto da Costa e Silva, “A memória histórica sobre os costumes particulares dos povos africanos, com relação privativa ao reino de Guiné, e nele com respeito ao Rei de Daomé, de Luís Antônio de Oliveira Mendes,” in *Afro-Ásia* v.28 (2002), 253.

<sup>16</sup> Mendes, “A memória histórica,” 257-258, 261, 261n.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 257.

<sup>18</sup> João de Loureiro, “Exame Phisico, e Historico. Se ha, ou tem havido no mundo diversas especies de homens?” in Academia Real das Sciencias, *Memorias de Mathematica e Phisica* T.II (Lisbon: Na Typografia da Academia, 1799).

<sup>19</sup> On eighteenth-century climate theories of human variety see David Bindman, *Ape to Apollo: Aesthetics and the Idea of Race in the 18th century* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), 58-70; Anthony Pagden, “The ‘defense of civilization’ in eighteenth-century social theory” in Pagden, *The Uncertainties of Empire* (Norfolk, Great Britain: Variorum, 1994). In contrast to Mendes, Azeredo Coutinho, discussed below, was critical of climate theory.

<sup>20</sup> Mendes, *Memória a respeito dos escravos*, 26, 29.

<sup>21</sup> Mendes, “A memória histórica sobre os costumes particulares dos povos africanos,” 257.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 251.

<sup>23</sup> Mendes, *Memória a respeito dos escravos*, 52-53.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 21, 43.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 61, 68.

<sup>26</sup> Mendes, “A memória histórica sobre os costumes particulares dos povos africanos,” 259.

<sup>27</sup> José Joaquim da Cunha de Azeredo Coutinho, *Analyse sobre a justiça do commercio e resgate dos escravos da Costa da Africa* (Lisboa: Na Nova Officina de Joao Rodrigues Neves, 1808). The *Analyse* was first published in French in London in 1798 and subsequently in English in 1807.

<sup>28</sup> Azeredo Coutinho, *Analyse*, 112.

<sup>29</sup> Sônia Siqueira, “A escravidão negra no pensamento do Bispo Azeredo Coutinho. Contribuição ao estudo da mentalidade do último inquisidor geral” in *Revista de História* (São Paulo) v. 27 ano 15 n.56 (1963), 359. Azeredo Coutinho served as Inquisidor-Mor after the Papacy had denied a request by the Portuguese Prince Regent to abolish the institution and until the abolition of the Inquisition in 1820.

<sup>30</sup> “Memória sobre o preço do açúcar” in Academia Real das Sciencias de Lisboa, *Memorias Economicas [...]*, T. III (Lisboa: Na Officina da Academia Real das Sciencias, 1791); *Ensaio económico sobre o comércio de Portugal e suas colónias*, Introdução e direcção da edição de Jorge Miguel Pedreira (Lisbon: Banco de Portugal, 1992). The *Ensaio* was first published in 1794 by the Academy. As Pedreira notes, it was widely disseminated and debated in the early nineteenth century and translated into English, German and French. See Pedreira, “Introdução” in *Ensaio*, XIII.

<sup>31</sup> António Ribeiro dos Santos cited in Sônia Siqueira, “A escravidão negra no pensamento do Bispo Azeredo Coutinho. Contribuição ao estudo da mentalidade do último inquisidor geral (II)” in *Revista de História* (São Paulo) v. 28 ano 15 n.57 (1964), 143-44; João Pedro Marques, *The Sounds of Silence. Nineteenth-Century Portugal and*

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*the abolition of the slave trade*. Translated by Richard Wall. (New York/ Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2006), 26-37.

<sup>32</sup> Marco Morel, “O abade Grégoire, o Haiti e o Brasil: repercussões no raiar do século XIX,” in *Almanack Brasiliense* n. 2 (November 2005): 76-90.

<sup>33</sup> Pedreira, XVII-XVIII, XXII-III.

<sup>34</sup> Azeredo Coutinho, *Analyse*, 26, 74.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 79, 92.

<sup>36</sup> Guilherme Pereira das Neves, “Palíadas e Oblíquas Luzes: J.J. da C. de Azeredo Coutinho e a *Análise sobre a justiça do comércio do resgate dos escravos*,” in Maria Beatriz Nizza da Silva, org., *Brazil. Colonização e escravidão* (Rio de Janeiro: Nova Fronteira, 1999) 349; Azeredo Coutinho, *Analyse*, viii, 38-39.

<sup>37</sup> Azeredo Coutinho, *Analyse*, 3, 15.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, xii-xiii, 8. On eighteenth century theory of innate sociability see Pagden, 38-39.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 10-11; “logo os direitos do Homem na Sociedade são posteriores á Lei da Sociedade.”

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, v, xiv, 22.

<sup>41</sup> Pereira das Neves, 351. On “just war” see A.J.R. Russell-Wood, “Iberian Expansion and the Issue of Black Slavery: Changing Portuguese Attitudes, 1440-1770,” in *American Historical Review* v. 83, n. 1 (February 1978): 16-42.

<sup>42</sup> Azeredo Coutinho, *Analyse*, 56.

<sup>43</sup> On political economy and “a commercial humanism” as “a more complex, and more ideological, enterprise aimed at establishing the moral, political, cultural, and economic conditions of life in advancing commercial societies,” see J.G.A. Pocock, “The political economy of Burke’s analysis of the French Revolution” in J.G.A. Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce and History: Essays on political thought and history, chiefly in the eighteenth century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 194. As Lynn Festa has observed, “The transformation of slavery from the consequence of a just war to an act of purchase necessarily converts the enslaved person from a spoil of war into an item to be bought. Vindications of slavery can no longer depend exclusively on the right of war, but must somehow justify ownership rights over another through the language of commerce.” See Lynn Festa, “Tropes and chains: figures of exchange in eighteenth-century depictions of the slave trade,” in Byron Wells and Philip Stewart, eds. *Interpreting Colonialism*, *SVEC* 9 (2004), 332.

<sup>44</sup> Azeredo Coutinho, *Analyse*, 32, 64, 68-69. Montesquieu’s claim that commerce “polishes and softens barbarous mores” is elaborated in Charles de Secondat, baron de Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws* (1748) (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), Book 20, especially chapters 1-2. On the eighteenth-century conception of civilization see Pagden, “The ‘defense of civilization’.” Within the context of political economy, Pagden explains, the defense of civilization encompassed the claim that “contemporary commercial society was the highest condition to which man could aspire and that such a society was a possible outcome – possible for all peoples everywhere – of a determinate, intelligible, and, to some degree controllable, historical process.” (pp.33-35)

<sup>45</sup> Ronaldo Vainfas, *Ideologia e Escravidão: os letrados e a sociedade escravista no Brasil colonial* (Petrópolis: Vozes, 1986).



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<sup>46</sup> Pedreira, XXI. On the Enlightenment view of “society and history as morality,” see Outram, 55. Azeredo Coutinho’s conception of nature, man’s natural sociability and his challenge to the idea of a state of nature resonate with other eighteenth-century writing. As Padgen observes, for political economists such as Ferguson, Millar and Smith, who argued that the state of nature was a fiction, the continuity of the historical past rendered meaningless the distinction between nature and culture. “Men, real men, had always been distinct, superior, and endowed with the capacity for natural improvement.” (Padgen, 39). Guilherme Pereira das Neves, in contrast, argues that Azeredo Coutinho conceived of nature as “uma entidade transcendente [...] equivalente de Deus.” See Pereira das Neves, 360.

<sup>47</sup> Azeredo Coutinho, *Analyse*, 25n, 33, 46. In contrast to Mendes, Azeredo Coutinho, citing La Harpe, claimed that “Entre as Nações Barbaras dos Pretos d’Africa não ha homens livres” See *Analyse*, 46-47n1.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 57-58, 63, 70; Pedreira, XXI; Philip Gould, *Barbaric Traffic: Commerce and antislavery in the eighteenth century Atlantic world* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 24, 42.

<sup>49</sup> Noting Azeredo Coutinho’s appeal to civilize Brazilian Indians in the *Ensaio*, Pedreira observes “O princípio da unidade do genero humano, da ‘raça dos homens,’ é acolhido sem hesitações.” See Pedreira, XIX.

<sup>50</sup> Cited in Pereira das Neves, 357.

<sup>51</sup> Azeredo Coutinho, *Analyse*, 67.

<sup>52</sup> Pedreira, XIX; Azeredo Coutinho, *Ensaio*, 59. On Azeredo’s optimism see Pereira das Neves, 359.

<sup>53</sup> Azeredo Coutinho, *Analyse*, 57 63, 67.

<sup>54</sup> Marquese, *Feitores*, 57, 58; 177-178; *Idem*, *Administração*, 97, 99-103.

<sup>55</sup> Mendes’ claim that that slavery barbarized Africa resonated in Anglophone antislavery discourse. See Gould, 23, 27, 56.

<sup>56</sup> Marques, 24.

<sup>57</sup> Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution*, 257-58.

<sup>58</sup> Pereira das Neves, 351; Kate Lowe, “The black African presence in Renaissance Europe,” and Didier Lahon, “Black African slaves and freedmen in Portugal during the Renaissance: creating a new pattern of reality” in Earle and Lowe, eds., *Black Africans in Renaissance Europe*. 13. Azeredo Coutinho made reference to Vieira in a note (*Analyse*, 88): “Assim como se omite o que neste Discurso poderia dizer-se de considerações morais: mas deve ler-se o P. Vieira nos Sermões 14, 20, e 27 do Rosário.”

<sup>59</sup> Padgen, “The ‘defense of civilization’”; Outram, 55.

<sup>60</sup> Outram, 72.

<sup>61</sup> Márcia Regina Berbel and Rafael de Bivar Marquese, “The absence of race: slavery, citizenship, and pro-slavery ideology in the Cortes of Lisbon and the Rio de Janeiro Constituent Assembly (1821-1824),” *Social History* v.32, n.4 (November 2007): 415-433; Kirsten Schultz, “La independencia de Brasil, la ciudadanía y el problema de la esclavitud: A Assembléa Constituinte de 1823” in Jaime E. Rodriguez O., coord. *Revolución, independencia y las nuevas naciones de America* (Madrid: Fundacion MAPFRE TAVERA, 2005), 425-449.

<sup>62</sup> Outram, 72.