In the Shadow of Independence: Portugal, Brazil, and Their Mutual Influence after the End of Empire (late 1820s-early 1840s)

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Historians have long recognized how the formal achievement of independence meant neither that the legacies of colonialism had been extirpated nor that the newly won sovereignty was unencumbered. Legacies of colonialism in Latin America after independence were numerous and included older forms of indigenous tribute and taxation, labor regimes such as slavery, legal codes, and the position of the post-colonial polity in the world economy, the latter of which also circumscribed sovereignty as scholars working in the Dependency Theory, Informal Empire, and World Systems traditions have demonstrated.

Recently, historians have begun to recognize that many non-economic connections and relationships between Europe and Latin America survived the disintegration of the Ibero-Atlantic empires and that many new ones, both overtly coercive and less so, were formed (e.g., the circulation of political ideas; European immigration schemes) (Brown and Paquette 2013). Three phenomena—the “persistence of mutual influence,” the repair or re-thickening of frayed threads, and the spinning of new, unprecedented transatlantic webs—may be understood as combining to make plausible the notion of “Late Atlantic History” (Rothschild 2011); that is, an Atlantic History after the demise of formal empire. Traditionally, Atlantic History’s outer chronological limit was defined by the separation of the European metropolises from their American dominions, episodes normally considered

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part of the “Age of Atlantic Revolutions” (Armitage and Subrahmanyan 2010), after the recognition of “independence” was recognized and enshrined in international law. The survival of many links and connections, however, makes it plausible to think of those links within the context of an Atlantic History with enlarged temporal boundaries.

Late Atlantic History might also confront, this article suggests, the problem of absence, how the severance of links during the process of emancipation had lingering effects on individuals, institutions, and states. For the present purposes, Portugal’s situation for the two decades following formal recognition of Brazilian independence in August 1825 is an ideal case study. The problem of absence, or the whole host of dilemmas generated by the sudden deprivation of a centuries-old overseas empire, is something that few historians have investigated.

The theme might profitably be split into two, though still entwined areas of enquiry: first, the impact of these “Atlantic emancipations” on the ex-metropolises (Spain and Portugal); and, second, the degree to which newfound sovereignty in the Americas was felt to be secure from the machinations of the former metropolises; that is, to what degree and to what effect did Brazilians fear Portuguese recolonization? The argument sustained for the remainder of this article is this: first, the impact on Portugal of Brazil’s independence was tremendous, not so much in economic terms, but in its impact on domestic politics, international stature, and subsequent colonial policy; and, second, fears of a Portuguese “reconquest” or “recolonization” scheme, apart from generalized Lusophobia, especially in the 1831-34 period, had a pronounced impact on Brazilian politics in the aftermath of independence.