

**Monteiro, Rodrigo Bentes, Bruno Feitler, Daniela Calainho,
and Jorge Flores (eds.). *Raízes do Privilégio: Mobilidade
social no mundo ibérico do Antigo Regime*. Rio de Janeiro:
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Following the international colloquium held at the Fluminense Federal University, in Rio de Janeiro, in June 2009, *Raízes do Privilégio: Mobilidade social no mundo ibérico do Antigo Regime* was published in 2011 by Civilização Brasileira. It is the third book produced by *Companhia das Índias*, an academic group created in 1998 and designed to bring together researchers from this university's postgraduate program and their peers from other institutions of higher education in Brazil and abroad. As was the case with the previous two books, *Raízes* benefited from the collaboration of about twenty historians who had gathered together to discuss a common theme. Most of the researchers came from institutions in Rio de Janeiro, but there were also several participants from other Brazilian states, as well as foreign scholars who are conducting similar research into Iberian societies of the modern age in such countries as Argentina, Mexico, USA, Spain, Italy and Portugal.

So, we are not talking about a work produced by a closed group. On the contrary, this attempt to broaden the academic debate, including its internationalization beyond the group's original proposal, deserves to be applauded, even if most of the contributions are made by Brazilian researchers, and the Portuguese world is the main object of study over the book's 667 pages.

Perhaps this emphasis explains the allusion suggested by the title, namely the book *Raízes do Brasil* by Sérgio Buarque de Holanda, even though this allusion is not an obvious one. In their introduction to the book, the editors rightly acknowledge that the differences between the two works are easier to recognize than their similarities, starting with the fact that there is no correspondence between these objects of study in relation to either time or space. Not even the methodologies that are used are similar, and, however much the editors may claim that the approach followed in most of the texts was one of comparative history (just as in Holanda's book), in *Raízes do Privilégio* the approaches focus on very specific topics, and only occasionally do some authors attempt to think about spaces other

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than those normally covered by their own research. Furthermore, the interpretive vigor of the famous historian from São Paulo (who, in 1936 believed that a thorough knowledge of Brazil's origins would finally eradicate the roots that linked the country to its archaic past) is not present. Times have changed, and so have our epistemological notions, which are far less likely to inspire a passionate thesis for discussion, and which are much less essayistic in nature.

Despite so many differences, there is nonetheless a purpose behind this evocation of Holanda's work. Besides providing a well-deserved tribute to his contribution to historiography (particularly that of a social nature), this book also underlines the extent to which "current historical research" is more "aware" of the "problematics of the social hierarchies in the Iberian world of the Ancien Regime," which is its main theme. Consequently, by being less bound up with the vocabulary of the present, more focused on its subject-matter, and more conscious of the importance of documentary sources, the historical research that has lately tended to predominate gives priority to empirical rigor, although this in no way compromises the almost consensual use in *Raízes do Privilégio* of a style of writing that is remarkable for the lightness of its tone. This approach is not just simply about being skilled in the use of words—something that largely depends on each author—but rather it is about the kind of narrative that social history can provide when case studies are adopted as a methodology. This reduced scale of observation, which is found in many chapters, does not result in a groundbreaking analytical approach to Brazilian historiography, as is well known, but its explanatory potential is enhanced by its continued reference, through a process of territorial concentration, to both the general and abstract models of a social order based on privilege, a phenomenon that was already well studied by Antonio Manuel Hespanha, among many others. This way of interpreting history, which emphasizes the specific location, is firmly advocated by Guilherme Pereira das Neves who alone attempts to combine theoretical considerations with an empirical analysis of the sources, specifically those that reveal the path followed by the Cavalcante de Albuquerque family, one of the leading households in Pernambuco in the eighteenth century.

But to what extent can the singularity of each case be said to illustrate the social dynamics of the Ancien Regime (476-477)? How is it possible to form an overview of this phenomenon by gathering together a series of separate texts about the paths/careers of leading figures, who came from such different backgrounds and lived in such variable contexts? Conscious of the fact that they are offering the public a varied and plural work,

the editors immediately warn readers in the introduction that the authors' intention was to "produce a large-scale inventory (always an open-ended and incomplete one) of the social hierarchies of the Iberian world of the Ancien Regime" (23). The book does, however, lack a text that reviews what has already been written about these matters, mainly in Portuguese and Spanish historiographies.

Still, there is one particular premise that serves as a link between chapters, namely that in societies such as these, which are presumed to have been exceptionally hierarchical, upward social movement was coveted by all and achieved by many. Even in the first three chapters by Richard Kagan, Ana Paula Megiani, and Rodrigo Bentes Monteiro (co-authored by Pedro Cardim), which differ from the rest by focusing on the analysis and description of contemporary sources, rather than on the leading figures of that time, the essential question was to show the important role played by the literature (in its broadest sense) in recording past glories, whether true or false, without which it was not possible to gain social authority or maintain that which had already been acquired.

Although the editors only acknowledge this idea as representing a summary of the second part, it is possible to say that almost the whole of the book suggests that social mobility was a tangible reality, despite the "apparently static logic that ruled the social ethos of the [Iberian] Ancien Regime" (14). And this desire to move upwards in social terms remained latent, even for those already belonging to a prestigious institution. The agents of the Inquisition, for example, continued to covet more honorable roles and, as shown by Bruno Feitler, the success of this career advancement depended on different standards from those required for admission to the ranks of the Inquisition. It might seem exaggerated to associate the bureaucratic model at the state level with this process of internal ascension, but the author helps to clarify the methodology used when proposing that the criteria governing the formation of hierarchies in the Ancien Regime differed according to the institutional context, as is also suggested by Célia Tavares in her study of the native clergy in Goa. In turn, when examining the malleability of the Inquisitorial Court with regard to the requirements for admission into their ranks, Georgina dos Santos manages to explain very clearly why the criteria used for social ranking ultimately continued to be effective. The men were different, but their behavior remained unchanged.

The theme of upward mobility in an apparently rigid social world is also the underlying theme of all the chapters in the book. In Part III, men who possessed theoretically unfavorable "features" (such as mulattos, Jews, New Christians or mechanical officers) not only sought a better position, but they also obtained one, as demonstrated by

Júnia Furtado, Ronald Raminelli, Ronald Vainfas, Guilherme Neves and Daniela Calainho, respectively. All this, of course, with the compliance of those responsible for maintaining the excellence of standards, and of the current political culture at that time, such as the king himself, the main protagonist in the story of this already-mentioned social mobility, mainly because he was at the head of a service economy.

The idea of serving the crown and receiving the due income as a feature of social mobility is in fact central to this book. The strategies adopted for advancement were similar in many cases: marriage, academic background, experience or even wealth, because these were features that reinforced the importance of both individuals and households. But all of this was powered by services performed on behalf of the monarchy, whose remuneration allowed for the distribution of privileges and prerogatives to vassals, whether in return for their good performance in the offices of the Republic, or (as was mainly the case) in wars, as shown, for example, by José Javier Ruiz Ibáñez and Darío G. Barrera. There were also others who were rewarded for their financial support, an important topic investigated by Gaetano Sabatini, which may lead us to rethink the role played by wealth as a social springboard.

The analyses that have been made of the situation of Portuguese bankers in the kingdom of Naples in the first half of the seventeenth century, or of exiles and traitors in the territories of the Hispanic monarchy at the end of this same century, have undoubtedly helped to temper the idea of political loyalty that deserved to be rewarded and would consequently raise the benefactors to higher social levels. In the light of this, the sexual favors offered to noblemen, or even to the constantly lampooned Portuguese king Dom João VI, as studied by Luiz Mott (even if at first this may seem like an exaggeration) summarize with some irony one of the mechanisms by which this society of gift and counter gift operated.

However, it can be seen that until now authors have been working primarily with the hierarchies established in the civil order by the monarchy, i.e., with those that translated into legally recognized privileges. "Public" fame and "hearsay" are not highlighted here. The social authority that was conquered locally, and which did not depend directly on royal consent, is not considered important within the group studied here. It emerges only indirectly as a requirement for obtaining distinctions from the Crown.

In the first three parts of the book, the overseas territories are seen as places where the social order resulted from a more or less peaceful adaptation of the order existing in the cities, as if the social hierarchies in the conquered lands reflected only a slight adjustment of

the criteria dictated by the authorities of the Iberian kingdoms. Some chapters, however, focus on environments where “conformity” was ignored and gave way to tensions, a situation that was provoked by those who had already conquered social power and were beginning to see their privileges dwindle in favor of other factions. Except for the three chapters in this section that discuss Spanish America and also cover this same topic, the remainder are gathered together in Part IV, the last section of the book, where only the chapter by Marcia Motta differs from a geographic perspective and in terms of its subject-matter. The text challenges a preconception and questions the nineteenth-century idea that a *morgadio* (an entailed estate) was of little relevance in Brazil. But the answers provided are not sufficiently clear for us to understand which way to respond to this question.

Moreover, the remaining chapters reflect on possible mismatches in territories under Portuguese sovereignty, where there was a higher density of native populations. Here, according to the authors, we can see that the conflicts that arose amounted to more than just a simple resistance to the “colonial incorporation” of the territories (as Hal Langfur claims). What we are shown is the conflict that was generated by the adaptation of the native population to Portuguese culture, especially in terms of an economy that was based on a reward for services rendered. In their eagerness to pursue a rising local career, Hindu interpreters in Goa (Jorge Flores), local clerics in the State of India (Célia Tavares), and Indians in the Amazon region (Barbara Sommer), were rewarded by the monarchy because they were deemed useful. However, the pursuit of this same path proved difficult for other internal groups vying for royal privileges. Being clearly identified by their native culture, they were not able to rise very high, ending up in “social limbo,” the term that Flores uses to define the condition of those who, whether or not they had undergone a process of acculturation, were also encumbered by the weight of the past or even of a locally-rooted present (as in the case of the *casados* in Goa, analyzed by Andréa Doré).

But these are not the protagonists that are mentioned by the editors when they claim that, within these Iberian societies and particularly in the colonial territories, “it was possible to move upwards, gaining better positions and unimaginable privileges” (18). It seems certain that, in Spanish America, at least until the second half of the eighteenth century, local autonomies and the rise of the *criollas* elites were favored by royal guidelines, as can be inferred from the text written by Oscar Mazín. Yet, as far as the Portuguese monarchy was concerned, there was no absolute form of social mobility that enabled people to gain such high distinctions. And this was not due to any systematic opposition towards American natives. The question of identity seen under these terms rarely appears

in the documentation, even in the eighteenth century. What must be stressed is that, despite the existence of social mobility (including downward movements), the higher echelons still remained only a remote possibility for most people. Of all the cases studied by the authors, only two analyze the trajectory of people who either truly occupied or came close to occupying higher offices, or were rewarded with prestigious honors, whether at the political center or in America (Maria Fernanda Bicalho and Guilherme Neves).

Raízes do Privilégio is a book that helps us to understand the approaches that Iberian-American historiography has adopted towards the study of the Iberian societies of the Ancien Regime. Many topics are recurrently discussed by the different authors, but it is still difficult to find a clear unity in this book, despite the efforts of the editors. Nevertheless, there is a common thread that runs through its pages and constantly brings our attention back to the title. It is no longer a question of establishing an analogy with the work of Sérgio Buarque, nor is it a book about a sometimes overly intensified form of social mobility. Instead, it is about adopting the analytical paradigm of the Ancien Regime and transposing it to the tropics in order to understand the nature of societies at that time. It is this once controversial idea, backed by a number of thought-provoking partial contributions that are very well documented and narrated, that makes this book an important work of historiography dedicated to the social universe of the Ancien Regime.