The Patterns of Portuguese Politics in the 18th Century or the Shadow of Pombal. A Reply to António Manuel Hespanha

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The practice of book reviews unfortunately has very few roots as yet in Portuguese academic circles. There have been many important works that have had no critical reviews at all. The realization that my recent book on Dom José was afforded a critical analysis less than a year after its publication, and what is more in a review written by António Hespanha, to whom I am connected by so many ties, is something that therefore gives me cause for celebration. The fact that his commentary is centered on only one of the book's dimensions, that it is made in parallel with a commentary on another work, written by José Subtil, and that it has as its fundamental axis the criticism of some of the theses that I put forward, discussed in opposition to those of the other work being reviewed, in no way diminishes my satisfaction.

In his preamble, Hespanha notes that, whereas Subtil is influenced by Foucault and Bourdieu and "leans more towards a symbolic-oriented narrative", I myself am "more given to an (enriched) "social history" approach". Without forsaking my right to be included in the social history tradition, I cannot fail to be surprised by this commentary. In fact, the influence of Pierre Bourdieu's work (or a part of it) and even the obstacles resulting therefrom have been accurately underlined in a review that was made of my past work[1]. Furthermore, it does not seem to me that Hespanha gave due importance to some essays by this author written precisely about modern state building[2], a theme that, after all, partly conditions what is under discussion here.

But, let us cut to the chase. And the essential point here is that the whole of the initial phase of António Hespanha's work, produced more than two and a half decades ago, was dominated by the criticism of the state-centered view of the Modern Age. Fighting against established ideas and the generally accepted thesis of an early centralization of the monarchy, he repeatedly insisted on stressing the plural nature of the mechanisms of power in the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries. In the second half of the 18th century, which marked the beginning in Portugal of the period of the Marquis of Pombal, it was no longer the eve, but the actual time of Leviathan, that had finally begun to rise up. In his own words, the "contradictory developments of a political structure that had arisen in order to preserve the feudal system were also to be found in Portugal from the second half of the 18th century onwards (...) The State became autonomous and its own

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[1] Although I am talking, above all, about the Bourdieu who wrote about "house societies" (cf. the studies collected in Bourdieu, 2002); on this subject, cf. Santos, 2000.

[2] Cf. Bourdieu, 1993, and 1997.

policy was set as the objective, at least provisionally"[3]. Seen from this point of view, the so-called Pombaline period could not help being regarded as an essential moment of rupture. Basically, his vision of the period has not therefore changed.

Naturally, this is not the appropriate place for a detailed discussion of the dichotomous views of the Modern Age. In fact, characterizing the political system that existed before 1750 as essentially not being state-centered has great pedagogical virtues in that it helps us to distinguish the Ancien Régime from the Contemporary Age. But, as it seems certain that something changed between the 15th and the 18th century, it must be admitted that this is of little help in explaining the changes actually occurring in the medium term. What changed with the Restoration, what was gradually altered in the central administration over the following hundred years - none of this is given much room for expression when the period is seen from a perspective that gives special emphasis to explaining precisely what remained unchanged between the 15th and the 18th century.

But, while this remains the basic question, the diversity of views about the period gains a concrete expression in other areas. Hespanha stresses that "insisting on his thesis about the singular lack of corporations in Portugal that could mediate between the royal and the "(micro-)local" levels, the author (I myself) also reasserts his claim that Portugal was not a "composite monarchy". This is true only if we choose to take a narrow view of the formally institutionalized (and mostly territorial) corporations." The question is very clear: unlike me, Hespanha thinks that Portugal, in its European dimension[4], can be conceived of as a composite monarchy. This is an idea that I consider unsustainable, for the concept is essentially related not to monarchies in which there existed corporative institutions, but rather to those monarchies in which there continued to exist territories with differentiated institutions, inherited through their autonomous existence prior to their incorporation and subject to the authority of one and the same crowned head. The concept therefore presupposes a territorial dimension[5]. I have no idea where Hespanha is able to discover these characteristics in the kingdom of Portugal and the Algarves.

In talking about this subject, it is important to highlight the type of tensions that did not exist in Portugal, but which were frequently found in other monarchies. In line with many other previous studies about 17th-century France, it is worth quoting Sharon Kettering: "two fundamental obstacles stood in the way of strengthening the Paris government and extending its authority over the French countryside (...): the great nobles and their provincial clienteles (...) and the provincial Estates, sovereign courts, and municipal governments, independent regional institutions that staunchly resisted the expansion of the central government" (Kettering, 1986, p. 232). Would it be possible to say the same thing about Portugal? Besides the remote inheritance of an absence of provincial institutions, the very political process itself subsequent to the Restoration of 1640 favored the transfer of the high nobility to the court of Lisbon, a reduction in the powers of the feudal landlords[6] and even, as has recently been pointed out[7], a significant renewal of the political and social elite at the center. In conclusion, in Europe, at the end of the 17th century, the Portuguese crown did not have to fight against corporate or feudal powers of a regional nature, contrary to what was happening in neighboring monarchies, and this fact had enormous implications for the political process.

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[3] Hespanha, 1981, p. 68.

[4] The institutional nature of the empire, mainly in Brazil, is a different question that I will not go into here.

[5] Cf. Elliot, 1992.

[6] Cf. Monteiro, 2003, pp. 107 and ff.

[7] Cf. Costa e Cunha, 2006.

Although, in the end, Hespanha questions the relevance of my extensive discussion of the reign of Dom João V in a biography devoted to the king Dom José I, the synthesis that he presents of what I have stated about the same subject is, by and large, a correct one. The treatment that I give to the matter is justified, not only by the fact that some of the changes introduced by the Marquis of Pombal had their roots in the previous reign, but also because Dom José lived most of his days with his father as the reigning sovereign. Contrary to what the critic suggests, however, I never actually speak of "centralization", but rather of a reduction in the number of political actors and the erosion of such important political institutions as the Council of State. The institutional centers of potential resistance were therefore restricted in their number. And, although they did not yet function as the center of government, it was in 1736 that the three Secretariats of State were created, so that it seems to me rather excessive to speak of a "regression".

But, having reached this point, the reviewer then goes completely off the rails, attributing to me ideas that I did not write, and do not even have. He says, for example, that I establish a theoretical opposition between "government by *validos*", on the one hand, and "*cabinet government*", on the other hand, the first being defined as "personal rule" and the second being defined as "Enlightened rule", led by projects and being characteristic of Central and Northern Europe. I do not recognize myself at all in this division and I do not know where on earth the reviewer discovered this. On the contrary (Monteiro, 2006, pp. 230 and ff.), I seek to underline the links of continuity between the 17th-century reformers and the so-called "Enlightened despots" of the 18th century. A (variable) part of what these reformers had as projects already came from the past, but the contexts of the mid-18th century were different and, partly because of this, so were the results. Furthermore, as has been persistently stressed[8], unlike the case of the 17th century, most of the 18th-century reformers were kings and not ministers. The most notable European exception was, precisely, Pombal himself, a fact that is generally recognized anyway in the European bibliography on this theme.

But the most powerful point of divergence is when Hespanha identifies an ideal type of "a form of rule with a 17th-century orientation". This would be characterized, amongst other things, by: a) "the existence of a *valido* or prime minister"; b) "the absence of any intellectual and political links between intellectuals and the ruler(s)"; c) "the absence of a ministerial government"; d) "the absence of a coherent political program, with all efforts being directed towards gaining personal possession of the royal will". And, finally, he questions whether Pombal would be akin to that ideal type or was closer to "the typical pattern of the most conspicuous Enlightened monarchies, such as that of Walpole's England, Fleury's[9] or Turgot's France, Friedrich's Prussia or von Caunitz's or von Haugwitz's Austria".

I don't know where Hespanha unearthed his ideal type of "government by *validos*, in keeping with an accepted 17th-century style (Sully, Richelieu, Olivares)". In any case, I don't find my way of thinking reflected in this at all, except naturally for the existence of the *valido*, but with all the ambivalences that I highlight later on. In my opinion, Pombal resembled and even saw himself reflected in the great reforming *validos* of the 17th century, but the characteristics that he in some ways shared with them in no way correspond to those that Hespanha points out. With greater or lesser efficacy, all the above-mentioned 17th-century *validos* created a circle of intellectuals in their service, the same thing happening with Pombal, as I underline quite clearly (Monteiro, 2006,

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[8] Scott, 1996; Swann, 2000, p. 18: Beales, 2005, p. 42.

[9] The inclusion in this list of the name of Cardinal Fleury, the former tutor and de facto prime minister of Louis XV (although he was never formally appointed as such) between 1726 and 1743, is very strange and I do not know what basis Hespanha has for invoking him; cf. Chaussinad-Nogaret, 2002 and Antoine, 1989.

pp. 202-205, 235). On the other hand, it was Hespanha himself who some years ago stressed the "programmatic" dimension of Olivares' performance[10], which is also undeniably to be found in Richelieu[11]. In my book, I seek to establish the limits of what was known about any kind of "political project" developed by Pombal before he was called to be Secretary of State, and to distinguish this from what he began to outline afterwards, according to the different sets of circumstances that he was exposed to and the influences that he underwent. Finally, the idea that a *valido* meant the absence of a "ministerial government" is totally absurd. Right from the outset, the expression "ministeriat" came into widespread use precisely to designate Richelieu's government. And, in my book, I insist on seeing this as one of the decisive dimensions of Pombalism. In order not to write at too much length on this subject, I shall point to just two quotations: "The main characteristic of the central administration in the Pombaline period was the new centrality acquired by the Secretariats of State, which tended to strip the councils of their powers or to control them politically by decapitating them and appointing magistrates who were in tune with the cabinet" (Monteiro, 2006, p. 193); and "institutionally, the government of the Marquis of Pombal represented the formation of the "government" – the Secretariats of State, now Ministries – and the supremacy of the government and the respective ministers over the other institutions of the central administration, namely over the councils, although these continued to remain in existence until 1833, as well as over the Grandees of the Realm, who previously, through the Council of State, had formed a central core in the process of political decision-making. At the legal level, it also expressed the affirmation of the principle that the royalty could change the order of things. It was in the reign of Dom José that the reforming and authoritarian intervention of the State and government in many areas of society can be truly said to have begun. This legacy would never again be forgotten. All this remained after Pombal, just as a part of the political elite that accompanied him or found themselves to be represented by him continued to exist, even though they were subsequently to introduce, as they did in fact do at the end of the century, a set of reforms based upon another kind of doctrine, or, in other words, one that was clearly Enlightened and economically liberal" (Monteiro, 2006, pp. 261-262).

What seems to me to be perfectly fair to reject here is the almost "Leninist" view and the idea of a complete break with the past that Hespanha lends to Pombal's performance, attributing to him a "planned policy", indissociable from his "planned despotism". In fact, I sought to demonstrate that before he rose to lead the government, what was to be found in Carvalho's ideas were essentially economic mercantilist conceptions and precepts about strengthening royal power that were drawn from the practices of "reasons of State", almost all of them having their roots in the 17th century. Only very belatedly, as is known, did he adopt concepts from modern natural law. It was for his anti-Jesuitism that Beccaria praised him, and not for his penal humanitarianism, for in these matters the penal ferocity of the Pombaline period had other models, which came unequivocally from the past. Now, as I have tried to suggest, this Pombaline anti-Jesuitism was a result of his first years of experience in government and did not derive from any of his previous experiences: when he rose to become Secretary of State, Pombal was seen by many as the man of the Jesuits in opposition to Alexandre Gusmão – likewise the authority of the Secretariats of State, which only really began to be effective in Pombaline times, even though it is true that these were a creation of the previous reign. It therefore seems to me that the actual political history of that time does not fit in with the schematic views of the Pombaline period of which Hespanha seems to be so fond.

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[10] Cf. Hespanha, 1989.

[11] Cf. the respective political testament, which formed part of Pombal's library; cf. Hildesheimer, 1995.

Finally, I should like to stress that there is still a great deal to be discovered and researched. In this particular regard, I believe that Hespanha is completely unaware of one of the topics which, I dare to presume, affords some originality to my reading of Pombal, or at least of the relationship between the king Dom José and the future Marquis of Pombal. I am referring to the "drama" of the "prime minister". After Louis XIV had cast an anathema on that institutional figure, "prime ministers" were almost always badly regarded in continental monarchies, for it was claimed that they usurped functions that were the responsibility of the king alone[12]. That is why, even if there were in fact various prime ministers, the office did not formally exist in any of the great continental monarchies (Spain, France, Empire) in what can be said to be a stable and consolidated fashion. Even in the case of Portugal, such disparate figures as Dom Luís da Cunha, the Duke Teles da Silva and the queen Dona Mariana Vitória expressly condemned the possibility of its creation. Both because there always hung over prime ministers the stigma of illegitimacy and usurpation and because such an office did not formally exist, Pombal, the most prominent prime minister in 18th-century continental Europe, was insistently compared by his contemporaries to Olivares, Richelieu and Mazarino. And, according to his own words, he himself adopted Sully, Richelieu and Mazarino as his predecessors. I did not discover this. It was, in fact, Pombal himself who stated that the 17th-century "*validos*/prime ministers" were his political models: "not seeking to compare himself (the supplicant, Pombal) with the Duke of Sully in worthiness, it was, however, certain that he considered himself equal to him in disgrace"; "His Majesty considered that it would not befit his royal character were the house of a Prime Minister to whom he had entrusted the greatest affairs of the realm to be confused amongst the lesser figures of Portugal; against the Examples that the kings Henri IV, Louis XIII and Louis XIV had practiced with the above-mentioned Duque de Sully; with Cardinal Richelieu; with Cardinal Mazarino; and against what the other Great Monarchs had also practiced in similar cases" (Monteiro, 2006, pp. 242-243). Later, because such an office did not formally exist and because this incriminated him, he contradicted himself and gave another sense to the use of the expression "prime minister": "as the respondent, he only understood himself to be and was in reality the first of the Ministers and the Secretaries of State as their senior figure (...) the same custom established that he should be called prime minister and the most senior secretary of state or the secretary of state of the Affairs of the Realm". And, to conclude, he maintained that "after all that had been said, it seemed to him appropriate to conclude that if such an abstract title as Prime Minister were to be found on some dispatch issued under his name, it could only be because of the crass ignorance of the official who had drawn up the document, or because of those errors and slips of the pen, into which similar clerks were frequently induced" (Monteiro, 2006, p. 243).

Two and a half centuries later, the figure of the minister of Dom José I continues to merit fully justified attention, both inside and outside Portugal, and to enjoy a prominent position in 18th-century European history. But this does not mean that those diverse and contradictory opinions that were formulated about him even while he was still alive or the interpretation his figure has continued to arouse have disappeared. The important thing is that the debates about him should help to clarify the grounds for the adoption of opposing points of view, and, at the same time, should stimulate further investigation into a personality and a period that are still very far from being suitably researched.

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[12] On this theme, see, amongst others: Berenger, 1974; Scott, 1996; Brookliss, 1999; Escudero (ed.), 2004.

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