Introduction to the English Edition

From the very beginning of the colonization of Brazil, in the sixteenth century, the Portuguese went to great lengths to find precious metals and stones on their American territory, following the example of the Spanish, who had located mines of silver and gold in their part situated west of the Tordesilhas[1] Meridian. This Portuguese quest was anchored in a firm conviction that such riches truly existed – a certainty that largely stemmed from the manner in which the Europeans understood universal cosmology and terrestrial geography. It was believed that the world was ordered according to the principles of sympathy and antipathy, setting in motion a chain of analogies and oppositions by which all living creatures and inanimate objects on earth either attracted or repelled each other.[2] Seen in this light, American geography, like that of the rest of the world, was expected to follow certain patterns, with similarities among regions on the same latitude or meridian, even if in different hemispheres. It was this belief that made the Portuguese so sure that there were enormous deposits of silver and gold to be found in the Brazilian midsouth. After all, this part of America was on the same latitude as the Potosi

[1] The Treaty of Tordesilhas, agreed between the Portuguese and the Spanish in 1494, divided the new world between the two empires via an imaginary meridian line 370 leagues west of an unspecified island in the Cape Verde archipelago.

[2] "Up to the end of the 16th Century, similarity played a constructive role in occidental cultural knowledge . . . as it was [similarity] that organized the set of symbols, enabled the knowledge of visible and invisible things [and] guided the art of representing them." Michel Foucault. "A prosa do mundo." In *As palavras e as coisas*. 1985, p. 33.

mines, so the deposits would most likely be situated at roughly the same distance from the coast, near the captaincies of São Vicente, Santo Amaro, or Espírito Santo.[3]

The fact that the expanse and relief of the American interior were relatively unknown served to reinforce this certainty. Up to the mid-eighteenth century, it was believed that "this land [southeastern Brazil] and Peru is all one," as declared Tomé de Sousa, the first governor-general of Brazil, in 1550.[4] This view brought the auriferous riches of America into closer proximity and provided the premise for the intense search for mineral treasures that began to work its way inland from the Brazilian coast in the sixteenth century.

One of the first expeditions to set off toward the Andes from the coast of the captaincy of São Vicente was mounted by Martim Afonso de Sousa in 1531.[5] The expedition, led by Pero Lobo, never returned, as it was entirely decimated by Indians. This in no way cooled the Portuguese impetus to discover the coveted mines, as can be seen from the later expeditions, most of which left from Porto Seguro on the coast of Bahia or followed the Doce River inland from its estuary in the captaincy of Espírito Santo. Of these subsequent expeditions, the most important were those commanded by Francisco Bruza Espinosa (1553), Martim de Carvalho (1567), Sebastião Fernandes Tourinho (1572), Antônio Dias (1572), and Marcos de Azeredo (1596 and 1611). As many of these expeditions returned with the first mineral finds, they bolstered belief in the existence of untapped riches in the midlands and helped propagate various legends, such as those of a fabled golden lake or a mountain awash with emeralds, which further encouraged a continued search for the dreamt-of wealth deeper and deeper into the heartlands of Brazil.

The union of the two Iberian crowns between 1580 and 1640 removed, at least temporarily, the obstacles the Treaty of Tordesilhas

[3] The captaincy of São Vicente gave rise to the captaincy of São Paulo, while that of Santo Amaro became Rio de Janeiro.

[4] Cf. Sérgio Buarque de Holanda. *Visão do paraíso*, 1994, p. 41.

[5] Martim Afonso de Sousa commanded the first full-scale expedition along the Brazilian coast, launched in 1530.

presented to further penetration into Portuguese America.[6] One of the most active pursuers of this goal was the twelfth governor-general, Francisco de Sousa, whose ambition was to earn the title of Marquis of the Mines, which the Spanish monarch Felipe II promised to whomever discovered gold in Brazil. After various attempts to find mineral deposits on expeditions leaving from Porto Seguro and Espírito Santo, Francisco de Sousa reached the conclusion that the legendary golden lake and resplendent mountain should be sought further south.

At this time, residents of the captaincy of São Vicente were making more frequent incursions inland from the town of São Paulo in search of indigenous manpower to work the fields and of pastureland for their cattle, but also in the hope of finding the fabled mineral treasures. The first gold deposits were finally discovered in São Vicente, and Francisco de Sousa set off for the captaincy in 1598. The following year he personally inspected the gold from the Jaraguá, Bitiruna, Monserrate, and Biroçoiaba (Araçoiaba) mines in the environs of São Paulo. While these discoveries were ephemeral and the production not particularly significant, they served to stimulate still further the search for gold in the region of São Vicente.

In 1602 Francisco de Sousa was replaced as governor-general. He not only managed to convince King Felipe II of the existence of the famous mines, but also to divide the governorship of Brazil in two, creating a Southern Partition that encompassed the promising lands around São Vicente. Francisco de Sousa was appointed governor of the new Southern Repartition and channeled most of his efforts into encouraging new expeditions in search of the mines of precious metals. Though his ambition remained frustrated upon his death and his

[6] The death of King Sebastião in 1578, who disappeared during the campaigns against the Moors in Africa, sparked a dynastic crisis in Portugal that resulted in the union of the two crowns under the Spanish scepter (Felipe II), thus beginning the so-called Iberian Union. It was only in 1640, with the Portuguese Restoration movement and ascension of the Bragança Dynasty, that Portugal reclaimed its autonomy.

task unfulfilled, his incentive proved fundamental to the discoveries that followed.[7]

In the second half of the seventeenth century, a new wave of expeditions ventured inland from the town of São Paulo. These expeditions came to be known as the *bandeiras* (flags) and their members as *Bandeirantes*. Central to the success of these expeditions was the command and participation of the *Paulistas*, the name given to people born in São Paulo, many of whom were of mixed Portuguese and Indian blood. Through their contact with the indians, the Paulistas not only learned the age-old routes through the heartlands, but also the knowledge they needed to survive in a harsh wilderness so often hostile to human passage.[8] The most important *Bandeiras* were those led by Agostinho Barbalho (1671), Matias Cardoso (1673), Fernão Dias Paes Leme (1674), Borba Gato (1681), and Antônio Rodrigues Arzão (1693).

The chronology in which these expeditions discovered gold in the region later known as Minas Gerais is uncertain and riddled with doubts. What is known is that they were made public between 1695 and 1698, attracting an influx of imigrants. The first considerable finds occurred in the beds of the rivers and streams that crisscrossed the area in large numbers, forming sedimentary alluvial deposits. Some years later, in or around 1720, diamonds were also discovered in the northeastern region of Minas Gerais. Tradition tells that, with the cessation of the armed conflict with Spain and the vast quantities of gold and diamonds that passed through the port of Lisbon each year offloaded from ships from Brazil, João V exclaimed: "My grandfather owed and feared, my father owed but feared no-one and I neither owe nor fear." Whether this sentence was actually spoken

[7] It would be no exaggeration to suggest that the first mining law, issued by Felipe II of Portugal (Felipe III of Spain) in 1603, to encourage the prospecting and mining of mineral assets in Brazil, and which remained in vigor throughout the entire seventeenth century, was the result of the obstinate efforts of Francisco de Sousa. This law permitted any individual to search for and discover mines, even on lands owned by third parties, with the sole condition that a fifth of all proceeds be paid to the Crown as tax.

[8] Sérgio Buarque de Holanda. *Caminhos e fronteiras*, 1994.

by the Portuguese monarch is of no real account, but it certainly symbolizes the jubilation of the Crown and the kingdom at the arrival of the mineral riches from the backwoods of America.

Such was the wealth proportioned by the gold and diamonds of Minas Gerais that it reconfigured the dynamic of the eighteenth-century Portuguese Empire, whose economic center shifted progressively toward Brazil. It is estimated that official gold production during the 1700s amounted to 650 tons, while diamond production reached a staggering sum of a little more than 3 million carats. Perfectly aware of this, in a letter of instruction to the new secretary of Portugal's Overseas Business, Marco Antônio de Azevedo Coutinho, Luís da Cunha, a Portuguese diplomat at various European courts in the first half of the 1700s and one of the greatest exponents of Portuguese politics in his day, predicted the future need to transfer the Portuguese Court to Brazil (which finally occurred in 1808 against the backdrop of the Napoleonic wars). Da Cunha argued that "in order to preserve Portugal, the prince has total need of the riches of Brazil and none whatsoever of those of Portugal . . . as it is cozier and safer to be where you have in abundance than to be where you must wait for what you lack."[9]

The first settlement in the area was established around the Tripuí stream and later gave rise to Vila Rica. Settlers branched out in all directions from this central base, and, by the beginning of the eighteenth century, there were already mining operations at Cataguazes, Sabará, Serro do Frio, Caeté, and Vila Rica, among other sites, which together constituted what came to be known as "Minas Gerais" (literally meaning "General Mines"). Word of the discoveries spread quickly and contingents began to flood into the region from Bahia, São Paulo, Pernambuco, and Portugal.

Colonial penetration into Minas Gerais was made possible by the interconnection of different routes opened almost simultaneously from São Paulo, Bahia and, from 1725 on, Rio de Janeiro.

[9] Luís da Cunha. Carta de Instrução a Marco Antônio de Azevedo Coutinho. Cf. Abílio Diniz Silva. (org.). *Instruções Políticas de Dom Luís da Cunha*. 2001, p. 371.

Throughout the eighteenth century, this triangle of routes was the main link between the coast and the Minas countryside. The first route was opened from São Paulo and became known as the *Caminho Paulista* (Paulista Road) or *Caminho Velho* (Old Road). Travelers coming into Minas from Bahia took the *Caminho da Bahia* (Bahia Road) or the *Currais do Sertão* (Corrals of the Hinterland), while those coming up from Rio de Janeiro took the *Caminho Novo* (New Road) or *Caminho do Garcia* (Garcia Road). Once they reached the captaincy, these roads spliced into countless trails interconnecting the older and more recent settlements.

In the early days, the mining communities were hit by two serious crises of supply and starvation, aggravated still further by the growing populations flooding the urban centers that sprang up around the riverside mines. In a bid to resolve this problem, the Crown adopted a policy of offering land concessions, known as *sesmarias*, to the free, slave-owning class, which began to produce some of the staple crops needed to sustain the population. Cassava, normally consumed as flour, and corn were the staple pillars of the foodstuffs locally produced. Trade between the coast and the central region was also vital to supply, as the diet was based around the meat that came from the hinterland cattle ranches between Minas and Bahia. Luxury goods and slave manpower were brought in from Salvador, in Bahia, from Rio de Janeiro, and by the Pernambucan horsemen.

Unlike in other regions, religious orders like the Company of Jesus, which had previously been fundamental in spreading the Catholic faith overseas, were prohibited from setting up in Minas Gerais. It therefore fell to the residents themselves, in partnership with the state, to organize their own religious practice by establishing brotherhoods, which built and maintained churches and chapels, ran church services, and took care of funerals and religious festivals.

The settlement of populations in the area did not occur without conflict or instability. During the *bandeirante* conquest, the Paulistas, as the discoverers of the precious metals, negotiated special privileges with the Crown, but as the outsiders began to arrive in droves, especially the Portuguese, they were forced to share the spoils and local administration.

The differences between the Paulistas and the Portugueses divided the population, and the mounting tensions resulted in a series of armed clashes between 1707 and 1709 for control of mines that came to be known as the War of the Emboabas. The war opposed the Paulistas on the one hand and the newly arrived immigrants on the other, who were generically dubbed *Emboabas*. The meaning of the term *Emboaba* is unclear and documents from the time reveal that its application was somewhat flexible. At times it was used exclusively in reference to the Portuguese, at others to designate all non-Paulistas, be they Portuguese or from the northeastern captaincies of Bahia and Pernambuco. It was also employed to differentiate those who had opened the mines, identified as Paulistas, from the new arrivals they accused of having contributed nothing to the exploration of the region and of merely exploiting its riches. On other occasions the term was used to refer to all travelers who arrived in Minas via the Bahia Road as opposed to those coming up from São Paulo. There were also distinct groups among the people from São Paulo who could be Paulistas, Taubateanos, or Santistas depending on the town from which they hailed (São Paulo, Taubaté, or Santos).[10]

The War of the Emboabas revealed the fragility of the Crown's control over the region and the need to install an administrative and fiscal apparatus closer to the mining area. Prior to the war, the governor of the Southern Repartition, who was therefore also responsible for the mines, resided some distance away in Rio de Janeiro. More direct control over Minas fell to a superintendent who handled the distribution of the mines and the collection of taxes. In 1709, as a result of the War of the Emboabas, the former Southern Repartition was dissolved with the creation of the captaincy of São Paulo e Minas do Ouro, entirely separate from the captaincy of Rio de Janeiro.

[10] Luciano Raposo de Almeida Figueiredo and Maria Verônica Campos. *Códice Costa Matoso*. 1999, pp. 198, 193, 230. Also see A. J. R. Russell-Wood. "Identidade, etnia e autoridade nas Minas Gerais do século XVIII: leituras do Códice Costa Matoso," 1999, pp. 100–18.

The first governor of the new captaincy of São Paulo e Minas do Ouro, Antônio de Albuquerque, the man responsible for brokering the peace, strove to impose some administrative order upon the region. His first step in this direction was to make towns of the largest existing urban settlements: Vila Rica, Vila de Nossa Senhora do Carmo, and Vila de Nossa Senhora do Sabará. The creation of these towns was essential to Portuguese institutional law and order, and pillories, normally of stone, were erected there as symbols of submission to the Portuguese Crown. Each town also received its own municipal chamber, an organ that was fundamental in maintaining control, ensuring the participation of the elite in the local government,[11] and regulating the urban supply chain. The administrative posts, including those responsible for tax collection, were also based in the towns.

With time, it became necessary to create new territorial divisions, and Minas was subdivided into three counties, namely Ouro Preto (run from Vila Rica), Rio das Velhas (run from Sabará), and Rio das Mortes (run from Vila de São João del Rei). By 1720, the population of Minas de Ouro had reached 250,000 inhabitants, including whites, slaves, and freed slaves. Gold production was growing at extraordinary rates at this time, and the Crown perceived that the amount of taxes collected always seemed to be well out of proportion with levels of production. In order to avoid such discrepancies, a law was passed prohibiting the circulation of gold dust and stipulating that all of the metal produced had to be smelted into bars, the only form in which it would be allowed to circulate from that time on. To enforce the law, it was decided that smelting houses would be set up in each county to smelt the metal and collect taxes. This measure was met by public opposition and stirred an uprising in Vila Rica, known as the Vila Rica Revolt.

If the revolt delayed the installation of the melting houses, as the measure required a more favorable climate in order to be implemented, it also accelerated the decision to give Minas administrative

[11] A. J. R. Russell-Wood. "O governo local na América portuguesa: um estudo de divergência cultural." 1977, pp. 25–80.

autonomy in a bid to bridge the distance between the seat of government and the population of the region. To this end, in late 1720, João V created the captaincy of Minas Gerais, wholly distinct from the captaincy of São Paulo. It also led to the creation of another county, Serro do Frio (run from Vila do Príncipe), designed to bring greater administrative control to the northeast of the captaincy, which was fast becoming more densely populated as newcomers were enticed by the gold and diamond finds. The first governor of the new captaincy of Minas Gerais, Lourenço de Almeida, was sworn in on August 18, 1721, at Vila do Carmo. One of his first administrative actions was to install the government headquarters in Vila Rica, where he could keep a closer watch over his subjects.

Throughout the eighteenth century the Crown grappled with the thorny issue of raising taxes in Minas. The contributions charged included the traditional royal tributes, like the *dizimo* (tithe) – 10 percent on all productive activity, especially agriculture; the *entrada* (entrance) – tax on incoming merchandise for resale inside the captaincy, including slaves; and the ferry tax – payable upon the crossing of any of the region's swollen rivers. There were also temporary charges, such as the Voluntary Subsidy – a tax originally established for a ten-year period to help finance the reconstruction of Lisbon, devastated by an earthquake in 1755; and the Literary Subsidy – to help fund schooling, laicized in the second half of the eighteenth century with the expulsion of the Jesuits from the Portuguese Empire, who had previously practically monopolized the teaching institutions. Most important of all, however, was the *quinto*, a special royal tax on metals, in this case gold, equivalent to one-fifth of production, though it was not always so precise.

The charging of the *quinto* was marked by various particularities and the sums and means of deduction varied throughout the eighteenth century. There were two main issues to be faced. First, there were the difficulties inherent in controlling or even estimating total production, upon which the *quinto* was supposed to be paid. The second was that the subjects were not always willing to pay what the Crown desired. The result was that the authorities often had to negotiate the contributions and the county councils had a fundamental

role in these talks. The *quinto*, therefore, oscillated until a final value of 20 percent on official production was established in 1750, though even then the tax could not always be collected in full. Diamond taxation was even more complicated and generally took the form of a manpower tax for as long as production was in the hands of private individuals. The manpower tax was an annual charge (whose value varied throughout the century) on the slave manpower employed at the mines. In 1772, the Crown assumed total control over diamond production, with the creation of a state-run company, the Royal Diamond Extractor, for precisely this end.

Minas saw a form of occupation altogether different to that on the coast where the economy was based on crop production – mainly sugarcane – and gave rise to a rural society with large monocultural farms producing for export and run on slave labor.[12] In its own diverse manner, the mining economy created an urbanized, highly miscegenated society with a more robust urban middle class, which was nonetheless firmly rooted in slave labor just like the sugarcane region.[13] In an emblematic phrase from the beginning of the eighteenth century, Father Antonil foretold the symbiosis between the cane-based economy and slave labor when he said, "Slaves are the hands and feet of the sugar miller."[14] The same could just as easily have been said of the miner, as a popular saying from the time went: "Without them [slaves] in Brazil it is impossible to make, conserve or increase revenues."[15]

One of the most striking characteristics of Minas Gerais in the eighteenth century was the emergence of a significant class of freed slaves who gained their liberty through letters of manumission. This class, which congregated in the mining towns, did not enjoy the

[12] Stuart Schwartz. *Slaves, peasants, and rebels: Reconsidering Brazilian slavery*. 1992; Kátia Queirós Mattoso. *To be a slave in Brazil, 1550–1888*. 1986.
[13] Laird W. Bergad. *Slavery and demographic and economic history of Minas Gerais, Brazil, 1720–1888*. 1999.
[14] André João Antonil. *Cultura e opulência no Brasil, por suas drogas e minas*. 1982, p. 89.
[15] Ibidem.