

Book Reviews

Cátia Antunes (ed.), *Pursuing Empire. Brazilians, the Dutch and the Portuguese in Brazil and the South Atlantic, c. 1620-1660* (Leiden / Boston: Brill, 2023). 213 pp. ISBN 9789004528468.

DOI: 10.52024/tseg.18810

In recent years, a dual scholarly interest, cultivated by historians devoted to the study of early modern empires, has yielded insights into the intricate functioning of these entities spanning the Atlantic Ocean from Europe to the Americas. On the one hand, many books have focused on the complex dynamics between colonizers and the colonized, highlighting the latter who negotiated and performed as central agents in historical processes. On the other, several studies have actively explored the intricate interplay among states, individuals, and self-organizing networks in the construction of colonial empires, stressing their patterns of competition and collaboration as catalysts for change in the outlook and composition of imperial structures. Amid these enriching inquiries, the book under review, titled *Pursuing Empire. Brazilians, the Dutch, and the Portuguese in Brazil and the South Atlantic, c. 1620-1660*, emerges as a noteworthy contribution to the field. In general terms, this book not only critically re-examines two often considered unrelated empires in the Americas – the Dutch and the Portuguese – but also accomplishes this task by uniting these two historiographical lines that until now progressed in parallel. By situating the Atlantic Ocean as the stage and focusing on the encounters it allowed, *Pursuing Empire* addresses cooperation and competition, connexions and strategies of coping, formalities and informalities, thereby bringing to light the manifold human experiences that wove together the complex tapestry of policies, peoples, goods, and ideas for this swath of European expansion.

Edited by Cátia Antunes, this volume presents a collection of nine essays and an epilogue, collectively providing a comprehensive exploration of an Atlantic region teeming with Portuguese and Dutch sailors, travellers, and settlers. Each contribution within this scholarly

ensemble offers a distinct perspective. As the reader peruses these pages, they will encounter dense historiographical essays, such as the opening piece authored by C. Antunes, titled “Before, During, and After Conquest”, and the subsequent work by F. Bethencourt, exploring “Dutch and Portuguese Rivalry in the South Atlantic”. Complementing these contributions are case studies, including A. B. McGinness’s “Martyrdom after Tolerance” and M. A. Nunes da Silva’s “Daily Life in Dutch Brazil”. Yet what sets this volume apart is the meticulous unfolding of diverse perspectives. The historiographical studies mentioned earlier challenge conventional ideas of Portuguese-Dutch “rivalry” and the oversimplified contrast between the former’s feudal system and the latter’s capitalist character. In the third contribution, titled “Dutch and Portuguese Encounters in the South Atlantic”, F. Ribeiro da Silva provides substantial examples of Portuguese-Dutch trade cooperation. This analysis sheds light on the fact that, despite being state-sponsored, overseas expansion in the Atlantic significantly depended on private initiative. Shifting our attention to Brazil in the fourth contribution, J. M. Santos Pérez investigates the pivotal role this territory played within the Hispanic Monarchy. He delves into Philip III’s reforms aimed at financing the conquest of Maranhão, an area eagerly sought after by other Atlantic empires. Following this article, A. B. McGinness reimagines the conventional concept of ‘tolerance’ applied to Dutch Brazil, portraying it as a nuanced coexistence driven by collaborative commercial efforts and sustained through ongoing negotiations aimed at aligning the clergy’s goals with governmental obligations. In the sixth contribution, B. Romero Miranda explores the daily lives of soldiers serving the West India Company (WIC) in Brazil. He examines their interactions with various segments of society and emphasizes the allure of opportunities beyond military service, which influenced their decisions to either leave the WIC or return to Europe. This perspective extends into the seventh contribution by M. A. Nunes da Silva, who examines the experiences of Catholics, Jews, and Protestants who remained in Brazil after the Dutch departure in 1654, in his work titled “Daily Life in Dutch Brazil”. In a similar vein, Cátia Antunes offers an intriguing study in “Trading to Brazil, 1621-1668”, highlighting that Dutch colonial revenues relied less on chartered companies and more on the vibrant cross-cultural business communities that thrived in Brazil. Finally, in closing, C. Ebert and T. Krause discuss the period of 1660 as a transitional phase in Luso-Dutch relationships in Brazil. This era marked a shift of Portuguese interest

towards Caribbean, African, and Rio de la Plata ports, while the Dutch became increasingly dependent on British support and the Amsterdam merchant community.

As A. Polónia highlights in the epilogue – a particularly commendable feature, along with the onomastic index – the book contributes to our understanding of early modern interplays in Brazil. Thanks to its innovative topic of Luso-Dutch relationships and the contributors' skillful use of analytical tools applied to historical sources, the book underscores a pioneering approach, shedding fresh light on the dynamics of the Atlantic within the broader global context. However, just to mention a few butts, two things stand out: the lack of studies on Africa and the overwhelming majority of studies with an economic approach. Angola, Guinea, or Mina could play a more explicit role in some of the chapters, not just as suppliers of slaves or as a fringe of Dutch Brazil. There, too, were Dutch soldiers, religious coexistence, and private trade initiatives that would be worth shedding light on, as much of what transpired there directly impacted Brazil as a whole. This absence is surprising, considering that the links established between Africa and the Southern Cone were primarily economic, and this volume dedicates six of its nine contributions to commercial pursuits and other money-related activities. Given the book's narrow focus in terms of chronology and geography, this economic emphasis sometimes results in overlap between contributions and a repetition of theoretical frameworks, such as mercantilism vs. feudalism, employed by some of the authors. More balanced contributions, including greater exploration of social and cultural history, might have prevented this issue, offering a more comprehensive perspective on the entirety of Portuguese-Dutch realities in Brazil. Admittedly, this balanced approach would of course come at the expense of the valuable insights into the economy that this book currently provides.

In sum, *Pursuing Empire* stands as an exceptional contribution to the scholarly discourse on early modern Atlantic history. This collection of essays masterfully weaves together diverse perspectives, shedding new light on the Dutch and Portuguese empires in the Atlantic by shifting the focus to their intricate interplays and moving away from traditional, state-centered visions. As it stands, this book is an indispensable addition to the scholarship on colonial history, offering valuable insights into the interactions of empires and their enduring legacies in Brazil and beyond.

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