

“Progress in the European periphery: an impracticable theory in 19th century Azores? Progress(es), Theories and Practices” in *Proceedings of the 3rd International Multidisciplinary Congress on Proportion Harmonies Identities* (PHI 2017), October 4-7, 2017, Bari, Italy

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Abstract

During the second half of the 19th century, the Azores experienced a progress bustle, similar to what was happening in Continental Portugal. Located in the European periphery, the project was based on European paradigms that Azorean elite absorbed while travelling to France, England, and Germany. Literary, philosophical, and political books bought in major foreign urban centres, including North American cities, also played a major role. The project covered in several areas: in the economic area, privileging an agriculture of exoticism, with the experimentation of what was considered, at the time, exotic botanical species: tea, hydrangeas, camellias, etc. In the social field, developing numerous systems to favour the underprivileged. In education by encouraging the teaching of children and adults. In the technical and industrial areas by designing the construction of several factories, and investing in maritime and land transport systems.

However, tension quickly triggered between the dream of progress and the political, social, and cultural network that supported it. In the burgeoning periodical press, criticism sustained that, due to the power centred in the country's capital, Lisbon, the Azores islands did not receive enough means to promote progress. The latent tension between the projects of popular "happiness" and the effective opposition

ended up mirrored on the hard and limited conquest of administrative autonomy that the archipelago achieved in 1895.

The theories of progress became impracticable and 19th-century changes were only attained in the following century.

Keywords: The Azores, 19th century, Progress, Autonomy

1. Introduction

The liberal movement in Portugal had in the Azorean archipelago one of its main stages. The war between Absolutists and Liberals divided the country during the 1820s.

The conflict riches one of its most important moments from 1830 to 1832, when King Pedro IV settled in Terceira Island, where he organised the liberal movement, its army and planned to conquer mainland Portugal, dominated by the absolutists supporting Prince Miguel.

The liberal victory, in 1834, became crucial to the history of the archipelago and led to the extension of the General Captaincy, an administrative structure of absolutist nature established in 1766.

The Islands were divided into three administrative districts: Ponta Delgada that included the Islands of São Miguel and Santa Maria; Angra, governing The Islands of Terceira, São Jorge and

Graciosa; and Horta that included the Islands of Faial, Pico, Flores, and Corvo. This new political organisation, established in 1835, lasted more than 100 years.

2. Liberal progress in the Azores: a theory to put to practice

The liberal movement, based on the principles equality, freedom and fraternity, proclaimed by the French Revolution in 1789, underlined dynamically the life in the Azores archipelago from the 1830s on. A holistic development was dreamt, which should encompass the various social groups and trigger the economy in the primary, secondary, and tertiary sectors.

Insular elite coordinated the leadership of this development. With broad political and social power, supported by an agricultural economy, the main Azorean landowners of the liberal generation sought to develop the islands according to European standards.

Travelling to France, England, and Germany and educating their offspring according to "European fashion", the insular elite conceived a plan for progress with two concrete areas in mind: the economical and the socio-cultural **Barreira, Cecília (1997) *Onde está a Felicidade. O conceito de Progresso Técnico no Século XIX*, Lisboa, Universitária Editora.**

2.1. The economic focus

In economy, the main objective was aimed at the development of the agricultural sector. In this context, the founding of Sociedade Promotora da Agricultura Micaelense (The Micaelense Farmer Promotion Association), in 1843, set the paradigm for innovating agrarian economy, which would give positive signs as early as 1848, with the opening of the First Agricultural-Industrial

Exhibition, in São Miguel.

The agricultural focus reflected the principle of an articulated relationship between material and spiritual progress. António Feliciano de Castilho's book *Happiness by Agriculture* (1849), published in Ponta Delgada, is an interesting example of this philosophy that proclaimed the social welfare of the people was dependent on the investment in agriculture (**Castilho, António Feliciano de (1849) *Felicidade pela Agricultura*, Ponta Delgada, Tipografia da Rua das Artes).**

However, obviously, the investment in the production of cereals was continued, for this was the base of the insular food system, the so-called Mediterranean diet, introduced from the beginning of Portuguese settlement, in the 15th century.

On the other hand, mainly since the early 30s, there started the plantation of orange trees. The investment was justified in view of the interest that the British market showed regarding the importation of oranges. The export of these fruits became crucial to the economic dynamics in the archipelago, especially to São Miguel and Terceira Islands. Due to the external pressure, local authorities have implemented a network of services adjusted to the designated "orange economy". Jobs were created for the plantation and work in the orange gardens, the harvesting, and the construction of proper containers for gathering, in the construction of containers, inland transport of crates and, finally, the transfer of oranges from small boats to large ships with British flags sailing to Bristol.

The commercial dynamics based on oranges production and exportation assumed such proportions that, at the end of the 50s, the main beneficiaries pressured for the construction of an artificial port in Ponta Delgada (São Miguel Island). The aim was to provide the city with an efficient infrastructure, able to respond to the growing

mercantile needs of the island. The construction of the artificial port of Ponta Delgada began in 1861, fully subsidised by private funds belonging to the Island oligarchy.

The focus on orange production was influential to the primary sector mainly in São Miguel and Terceira: between 1861 and 1870, Ponta Delgada District shipped 2,098,540 boxes, Angra 298,793 and Horta 85,041 boxes (Dias Fátima Sequeira (1995), “A importância da economia da laranja no arquipélago dos Açores durante o século XIX” in *Arquipélago-História*, 2ª série, I, nº 2:196).

All this dynamism, perceptible from the 1820s to 1860, placed the Azores on the map of non-European economic interests. The Sephardic Jewish communities based both in Morocco and in London took charge in controlling the export business.

Regarding Jewish presence in the Azores, there is evidence of their activity since 1819. Groups of Jews previously settled in Morocco arrive at San Miguel, drawn in by the island's economic development.

From the 1830s, the number of Sephardic Jews living in the archipelago increased, centring their economic and financial activities mainly in San Miguel, but also in Terceira and Faial Islands. Traders *par excellence* and with a renowned ability to sustain efficient economic networks throughout the world, their presence was very important for the transformation of consumption the paradigms. They were fluent in the English language and moved skilfully in British mercantile routes. Therefore, they seized the advantage of Azorean growing development to implement a business structure that greatly worried local shopkeepers.

Regarding the American presence, there is the example of the Dabney in Faial Island. In 1806, the American President Thomas Jefferson appointed John Bass

Dabney, a Boston native, to the position of General Consul of the United States to the Azores. In Faial, John Dabney spurred the maritime trade, not only through orange exportation but also mainly from the sale of wine. This was produced in Pico, Island which featured (and still does) excellent characteristics for the wine production. However, given the profile of the Pico coastline, very irregular and rugged, it was impossible to berth vessels of large or medium tonnage. However, Horta port, in Faial Island, had good natural conditions and guaranteed security to American ships that berthed there. This relationship between Pico and Faial proved crucial for the economic survival of the two islands, supported by the trade of wine.

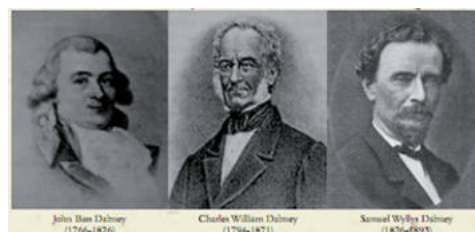


Fig. 1: The Dabney's Family in Faial (http://blogorigens3.blogspot.pt/2015_01_01_archive.html)

John Dabney founded the “Dabney Empire”, concentrating in Horta a diverse range of maritime services. Among these, there was the supply and repair of American whaling ships that crossed the seas in the Azores; the commercial links between the USA and the Azorean Islands, allowing the entry of American goods in European ports; and the supply of coal, essential to fuel the ships that crossed the ocean (Costa, Ricardo Manuel Madruga da (1996-1997), “O Século Dabney no Fayal. Subsídios para a compreensão de uma estratégia” in *Boletim do Núcleo Cultural da Horta*, Vol. XII: 143-150).

The cosmopolitanism of the archipelago was determinant for the amendment of

part of the harsh island landscape that during the second half of the 19th century was oriented to the agricultural experimentation. This way, the Islands became a natural laboratory, as they had been in the early period of settlement. One of the most interesting features that mirror this purpose is the construction of botanical gardens, clearly of English influence, where the cultivation of exotic flowers, trees, and shrubs was experienced. The first experimentations with hydrangeas, camellias or cater started in this period, with the importation of plants from Australia, New Zealand, Brazil, Japan, etc.

2.2. The socio-cultural aspect

Central to liberal views of progress was the understanding of an essential development transversal to society. It was understood that welfare, substitute to progress, required material and cultural prosperity.

In the Azores, similarly to what was happening in other places, the pulsing elite assumed the promotion of Arts and Sciences. The beneficiaries of this elitist benevolence would be the other social groups. The emphasis was focused on education, a crucial tool for a harmonious growth of the Islands rural society. The aim was to promote theoretical and traditional education but also with an emphasis on practical knowledge, fitting the effective needs of the archipelago. Schools were built for children and young adults, but they opened their doors to the adult population through the sponsorship of evening classes, trying to tackle the high rates of illiteracy in the Azores, then reaching 80% of the population.

The whole project was founded by the Sociedade dos Amigos das Letras e Arte [Society of Friends of Arts and letters] founded in Ponta Delgada in 1848 (*Estatutos da Sociedade dos Amigos das Letras e das Artes em São Miguel* (1849), Ponta Delgada, Tipografia do Castilho.

Ferreira).

This partnership not only invested in the promotion of the arts, especially theatre and music, as devoted itself to the creation of primary schools, rehearsing a peculiar teaching method of reading, which would be the forerunner of the "Portuguese Method of Castilho" (Dias, José Teixeira, (2000), "Castilho - *Leitura Repentina. Método original?*" In *Arquipélago-História*, IV (2):465-480).

This Society mirrors the consistent importance of the 19th-century associative structure that exceeded the enlightenment individualism. Consequently, in the second half of the 19th century, there is an increase of associations of diverse nature (Silva, Susana Serpa (2000), "Aspetos da vida social e cultural na segunda metade do século XIX" in *Arquipélago-História*, 2ª série, IV, nº 2: 299-358).

One of the consequences of this associative movement may be seen in the proliferation of music bands that grew up in many parishes. In 1831-1832, two bands landed in Angra do Heroísmo and Ponta Delgada, as part of the liberal army that came from France and England. They stayed for a short period, accompanying the military expedition of Mindelo, but their influence in military groupings remained strong. An 1831 law determined that all the regiments had to have a musical band. Shortly after civilian groups formed their own band so developing a strong musical culture still present in Azorean society (Cabral, J. M. (1985), *Filarmónicas da ilha de São Miguel*, Angra do Heroísmo, Instituto Açoriano de Cultura).



Fig. 2: Church of Our Lady of Victory (Furnas, S. Miguel). It was built by José do Canto (1820-1898), an Azorean intellectual and garden builder.

<https://www.facebook.com/HistoriaDosAcores/photos/a.228753753896151.41228.197544470350413/560108087427381/?type=3&theater>

3. Was the Liberal Progress in the Azores an impractical theory?

The liberal optimism of the first half of the 19th century began to suffer severe setbacks from the 1860s onward. Indeed, the second half of the 19th century brought many problems to Azores social and economic improvement and general progress.

The main difficulties were felt in the primary sector. On the one hand, the orange trees began to show signs of disease. The production decay was a fact since the 1870s, and with it came a sharp decrease in revenue to local islanders. On the other hand, the strength of the Dabney economic empire in central islands began to dwindling too. The causes were mainly two: the vineyards were infested by oidium, and by the 50s, a plague of phylloxera contributed to a severe decrease in wine production (Sousa, Paulo S. e. (2004), "Para uma História da vinha e do vinho nos Açores (1750 - 1950)", *Boletim do Instituto Histórico da Ilha Terceira*, nº 62: 57 - 159).

Concerned with this reality, the insular cultural and economic elite continued to draw on European models, trying to

apply in the Islands a draft agricultural conversion, inspired by English Industrial Revolution. Thus, the introduction and promotion of agro-industrial plants, namely tea, tobacco, bulrush, and sweet potato, was meant to replace the orange groves.

These new products became the pivots of the primary sector restructuration in the Azores, in an attempt to continue to ensure the "Happiness for Agriculture".

However, Portugal was living a difficult political period, disoriented due to the alternation system between Progressives and Regenerators. In the international context, the country was plunged into a deep international crisis, facing the constraints caused by decisions taken at the Berlin Conference. The economic and financial crisis of the Kingdom was increasingly serious and, in order to control it, the Government increased taxes and protected the metropolitan productions.

It is in this critical context that the Portuguese Government determines a set of measures that was received with dissatisfaction by the Azoreans. The standardisation of currency value affected the Islands economy where the coin had a lower value than in mainland Portugal. Taxes increased, including those focused on the production of alcohol extracted from sweet potato that had become the key production to replace the decrease of orange groves. The extinction of judicial entities in the Azores, forcing an increasing expense in solving legal disputes, was a further blow that increased islanders' dissatisfaction

Leite, José Guilherme Reis (1995), *Política e administração nos Açores de 1890 a 1910: o 1º movimento autonomista*, Ponta Delgada, Jornal de Cultura).

The growing difficulties of the primary sector, especially in agriculture, which employed most of the workforce, led to increased emigration. Most emigrated to Brazil, strengthening the industrial entrepreneurs' difficulties in obtaining cheap labour workforce.

To the process of deterioration of

economic conditions, the Islanders felt increased dissatisfaction with the political decisions applied to the archipelago. Recognising the international strategic relevance of the Azores, attested by the establishment of submarine cables on the island of Faial by England, Germany, and United States, and the growing interest of foreign naturalists in the Islands, the Azoreans rose their dissenting (TELO, António José (1993), *Os Açores e o controlo do Atlântico*, Lisboa, Asa).

This political hubbub is mirrored in the increase of political parties that could control the regional periodical press known at that time. In the newspapers, there was a call for civic intervention, encouraging citizens to act to force change the way the Islands were governed. For the regional oligarchy, there was a need for a new political scenario was. It seemed the only way to defend the economic development of the archipelago, consolidating the diversity of agricultural experiments, reinforcing the structures of land and sea access and decreasing the State taxation, in order to experience a situation of economic and social comfort (Santos, João Marinho dos (1996), "Para a história da autonomia dos Açores: a introdução forçada da fisiocracia no Arquipélago", In *Revista Portuguesa de História*, Coimbra: Faculdade de Letras da Universidade de Coimbra, Vol. 1, t. 31: 575-593).

They asked for administrative autonomy. In late 19th century, the idea that the Azoreans should manage the archipelago was consensual. The local elite echoed the autonomist voices. Aristides Moreira da Mota, the main leader, wrote the first autonomist project, dating from 1892, which would be enacted, albeit mitigated, on March 2, 1895. This way, each of the Azorean

districts could apply, by a majority of two-thirds of eligible citizens, the "free administration of the Azores by Azoreans" (João, Maria Isabel (1991) *Os Açores no século XIX: economia, sociedade e movimentos autonomistas*, Lisboa, Edições Cosmos).

4. Conclusion

Azores administrative arrangement regulated by the 1895 Decree reflects the decline of the progressive paradigm that characterised most of the 19th century. Despite considerable efforts to invigorate the Islands' economy in their various sectors, trying to introduce European models, the archipelago was engulfed in numerous difficulties Ferreira, José Medeiros (1996) "A autonomia dos Açores e os regimes políticos em Portugal" in *Ler história*, vol. 31: 157-167). This tension between the needs of the Azorean periphery and political centrality constraints limited the reach of Portuguese benefits and investments that were effectively achieved in the archipelago. (Cordeiro, C. (1992), *Autonomia e Identidade Nacional: Os Açores na 2.ª Metade do Século XIX*, Coimbra, Faculdade de Letras: 263-279).

In fact, progress was a utopia that a minority elite tried to put to practice. Realistically, the development has benefited few landowners' families, leaving few crumbs for the majority of the population, forced to resort to emigration to survive or contenting themselves with a harsh everyday frugality. Similarly, the raised wealth by commercial dynamics from 1830 to 1870 was only effective in the island of São Miguel, extending very slightly to Terceira and Faial.

All the other islands were on the fringes of the optimistic investment and found themselves with economic and social problems that would last until the 20th century.

The 1895 administrative autonomy, only effectively applied in the districts of Ponta Delgada and Angra do Heroísmo,

eventually became unable to resolve the underlying problems of the Azores. Although they could solve administration problems, district revenues were incorporated in the country's financial core. Consequently, local authorities identified the problems, had the respective solutions, but they did not have the funds required for achieving them (AAVV, *Atas do Congresso do I Centenário da Autonomia dos Açores* (1995), Ponta Delgada, Jornal da Cultura).

Therefore, by the end of the 19th century, progress in this Azorean periphery seemed but an impractical theory.

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