



Vol. 7, No. 1, Fall 2009, 257-262

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Review/Reseña

Jeffrey Mosher, *Political Struggle, Ideology, and State Building: Pernambuco and the Construction of Brazil, 1817-1850*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008.

Independence, Liberal Progress, and Moral Order: Pernambucan Political Ideology and the Brazilian Nation- State

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For nearly four decades historians have been undermining the teleology implicit in the notion that, prior to Brazil's independence in 1822, its inhabitants shared a national consciousness. Jeffrey Mosher's *Political Struggle, Ideology, and State Building: Pernambuco and the Construction of Brazil, 1817-1850* is a product of, and a worthy addition to, this revisionist scholarship. This work problematizes the motivations and political ideologies of Brazil's inhabitants during the state's formative national period. Rather than focusing exclusively on the struggles faced by

the imperial court following its 1807 arrival in Rio de Janeiro, Mosher analyzes the development of a localized, *pátria*-based political identity among Pernambucans. He asserts that this identity—a liberalism expressed via diverse means—bound Pernambucans from various classes and races together while providing them with a means to express their aspirations. Facilitating the ability of marginalized groups to assert themselves in the public sphere, the ideas espoused and disseminated by the liberal, urban elite in Pernambuco engendered “the active political participation of middling and lower-class groups” (249). Thus, setting himself apart from other scholars of this period, the author utilizes Pernambucan politics to argue that Brazilian political parties were impelled by ideology. Political parties were therefore much more than their common historiographic characterization as oligarchic façades driven primarily by the interests of patronage. To Mosher, Pernambucan liberalism is best understood as a systematic schema of political ideas that impelled liberal elites to mobilize the lower classes in the interests of enlightened ideals, thereby conflicting with, rather than adhering to, traditionally conservative notions concerning order.

Political Struggle, Ideology, and State Building is organized into eight chapters, each of which elucidates a particularly important development in Pernambucan liberalism. Chapter one describes how during the North Atlantic “Age of Revolution” urban Pernambucans, via Masonic lodges, were exposed to and interpreted enlightened ideas, foremost among them popular sovereignty. Chapter two elaborates the manner in which devotion to these liberal ideas engendered both Brazilian independence in 1822 and the multitude of problems that initially plagued the empire, including Pedro I’s abdication in 1831. The decentralizing, liberal reforms that occurred during the provisional regency that followed (1831-1835) are the focus of chapter three, while the conservative reaction, distilled in the centralizing *Regresso* (1836-1843), is the subject of chapter four. In chapter five Mosher illustrates the ideological polarization of political organizations within Pernambuco during the *Regresso*. Chapter six details how a similar polarization, a process catalyzed by the increasingly radical liberal Pernambucan *Praieiro* party, took place at the

national level from 1844 to 1847. In chapter seven Mosher argues that the virulent Lusophobia espoused by the *Praieiros* attracted classes/races that would have otherwise been politically neutral to the liberal cause, whereby the ideological boundary separating liberals from conservatives was ossified. Finally, in chapter eight Mosher describes the *Praieira* Revolution in Pernambuco (1848-1850). He concludes that the radicalism which sparked the conflict ultimately led to the defeat of Pernambucan/Brazilian liberalism—in ideological as well as concrete, military terms—thus generating the lasting hegemony of the centralized institutions formed during the *Regresso*.

Mosher utilizes a variety of primary sources to support his argument. Lacking records written by liberals in Pernambuco prior to the establishment of a printing press there in 1817, he turns to the diary of Frenchman Louis-François de Tollenare and the journal of English traveler Maria Graham to elucidate nascent Pernambucan liberal ideology. As his narrative moves past 1817, Mosher employs evidence drawn from urban, litoral-based newspapers to elaborate the political ideology of liberal and centralist groups. In tandem, he relies heavily upon archival records: personal letters and juridical proceedings of eyewitness testimonies, the latter usually functioning as the only existing source concerning a given revolt. The framework within which Mosher plots this evidence is an extension of Roderick Barman's work concerning political identity in Brazil prior to and during the first decades of independence.¹ This enables him to construct the Pernambucan *pátria*, whether captaincy or province, as the locus of a collective political identity shared by its inhabitants. Mosher's argument concerning the role of patronage (or the lack thereof) in the development and actions of this identity causes him to directly engage with the works of Richard Graham and Emília Viotta da Costa at various points throughout the text. Jeffrey Needell's body of work concerning the Brazilian monarchy and conservative political ideology is cited extensively, as are a host of secondary sources published in Portuguese.

Political Struggle, Ideology, and State Building is not a history of

¹ See esp. Roderick Barman, *Brazil: The Forging of a Nation, 1798-1852* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988).

ideas, nor is it an elucidation of the formation of collective political identity, Pernambucan or otherwise. Although it has the potential to be either, or possibly an intermixture of the two, it is hindered from doing so by Mosher's ahistorical usage of terms that remain undefined throughout the text. Chapter one, "The Portuguese Empire in the Age of Revolution," establishes the ideological fundament of *Political Struggle*, a vocabulary referred to by Mosher as the "language of liberalism" (6-7). This vocabulary, however, is problematic. At no point does Mosher define terms including, but certainly not limited to, "constitutional government," "French republicanism," "popular sovereignty," "absolutism," "despotism," and "liberal." All of these terms are treated as self-evidently architectonic: metaphysically static and ahistorical. Accordingly, Mosher engages in what Foucault refers to as "the metahistorical deployment of ideal significations," whereby the ahistorical nature of his terminology liberates it from the need to historicize it, thus rendering it applicable to any historical context.² The discourse Mosher identifies as the "language of liberalism" therefore functions as an amorphous yet static teleology, creating a binary discourse of liberal/non-liberal, by means of which all other terms, actors, and ideologies are defined.

As events unfold in *Political Struggle*, the historical actors within them are categorized according to this binary: the identification of a person or group as liberal/anti-absolutist/ patriotic/republican (etc.) or loyalist/absolutist/despotic/centralist (etc.) supersedes the need for historicity. Hence, Mosher's treatment of race adheres to this binary; people of color are either slaves or they are relegated to the undefined "middling and lower classes." Both categories, by means of their non-elite status, are tautologically radicalized via their fundamental inability to be elite. The best example of this is Mosher's analysis of the *Pedrosada*, a revolt in Pernambuco led February, 1823 by Military Governor Capt. Pedro da Silva Pedroso, a mulatto. Pedroso's career is not discussed, nor is his own political ideology, yet the revolt—instigated via Pedroso's anger, not at royal authority, but at members of the Afogados-based *junta* in

² Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. D. F. Bouchard (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 139-164, here 140.

Pernambuco—is portrayed as a radically-liberal “mobilization of the black and mulatto lower classes” (57-61). Pedroso’s ostensible desire to overturn the racial hierarchy and his anti-imperialism are substantiated only by the testimony of his enemies, principally Second Lieutenant Manuel Alexandre Taveira, the arrest of whom (and the resulting resistance of the *junta* to turn him over) initially triggers Pedroso’s wrath.

Characterizing the *Pedrosada* as the embodiment of elite (i.e., white) fears concerning the potential for a quasi-Haitian “social revolution,” Mosher thereafter locates political power in the party most able to maintain order. This capacity to maintain order, and the ability to internalize political ideology—whether liberal or centralist—is, according to Mosher, limited to a static class of a white and more or less urban-based elite. Patronage functions as a conservative mechanism of ambition and control, a mechanism antithetical to liberal ideology. Hence Pernambucan liberals in the Chamber of Deputies who appear to be engaging in patronage, offering their “support for the centralizing laws in exchange for advantages in Pernambuco,” do so only in the interests of “federalism” (154-155, 156). Contradictorily, the progress that undergirds liberal order is defined by the extent to which popular sovereignty is idealized or realized, yet the majority of Brazilians are portrayed as unable to participate in politics without an elite intermediary. This entails that urban “common people” are able to comprehend liberal ideology only when it is removed from the moorings of “the proprieties of the established representative institution” and portrayed to them as equivalent to Lusophobic violence (185, 187-188, 204). While the participation of the urban common people, however their engagement with liberalism is portrayed, is a vital component of Mosher’s overarching argument, such is not the case for the marginalized “rural poor.” These “peasants” and Indians reside in the interior, still mired in semi-feudal religiosity, whereby they are easily mobilized by conservative *baronistas* via both archaic ties of patronage and a ubiquitous inability to progress (118, 181-182).

Above all, Mosher’s work is a political history: the linear history of liberalism in Pernambuco, from its inception ca. 1817 to its (apparent) defeat in 1850. The discursive liberal/non-liberal binary produces a telos

that is neither revolution per se, nor the *Praieiro* Revolution with which the work concludes, but rather the struggle against despotism, absolutism, tyranny, etc., that adhering to this architectonically structured liberalism implacably generates among its ideologues. Nevertheless, this binary of antithetical ideologies ultimately gives way to the Brazilian elite's concern with maintaining a morally legitimate order. This ideology of order is predicated upon the cultural inferiority felt by Brazilians who compared their own progress to that of western European nations, a sentiment exacerbated by the urban-dwelling elite's inability to fully comprehend the moral economy of its largely non-white, rural population. For Mosher, 1850 represents the end of this liberal/non-liberal binary, as the ontological boundary separating the two ideologies is blurred by the localized chaos of the *Praieiro* Revolution and the unequivocal conservative victory it produces. Thus, discursive problems aside, Mosher's work proves to be a valuable history of Brazilian politics in the early- to mid-nineteenth century. *Political Struggle, Ideology, and State Building* clearly shows that liberal ideology played an important role in shaping the political identity of Brazil—at both national and provincial levels—during the first decades of independence from Portugal; a role that, in the end, engendered the victory of its ideological antithesis.