

# **The historiographical reception of A. J. R. Russell-Wood's *A World on the Move: The Portuguese in Africa, Asia, and America, 1415–1808.***

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The book I have been asked to review was first published by Carcanet in 1992, in Manchester, under the title *A World on the Move: The Portuguese in Africa, Asia, and America, 1415–1808*. It was commissioned by the National Commission for the Commemoration of the Portuguese Discoveries (Comissão Nacional para as Comemorações dos Descobrimentos Portugueses [CNCDP]), a fact which Russell-Wood acknowledges in the opening pages of the first edition. In that same year of 1992, its importance was recognized in Portugal through the prestigious D. João de Castro International Award, given by the CNCDP, which acknowledges the best work on Portuguese overseas expansion written by a non-Portuguese author. In 1998, the book was reissued in paperback form by the Johns Hopkins University Press under the title *The Portuguese Empire, 1415–1808*. It was also translated and published in Portugal in 1998, under the same title as its first edition, *Um mundo em movimento: Os portugueses na África, Ásia e América (1415–1808)*, in a collection named “Memory and Society,” coordinated by Diogo Ramada Curto. This latter publication was sponsored both by the CNCDP and the Instituto Português do Livro e da Leitura (IPLL).

This short explanation helps to clarify some of the book’s characteristics and the different types of impact it had among both US scholars and the Brazilian and Portuguese historiographical community. *A World on the Move* was commissioned to reach large audiences and to put the Portuguese Empire on the map of international historiography, and its major flaw is simultaneously its greatest accomplishment. On the one hand, the very wide-ranging and ambitious nature of Russell-Wood’s book depicts a somewhat superficial and sometimes overrated approach to the action of the Portuguese. On the other hand, Russell-Wood’s ability to provide a comprehensive overview of the overseas action of the Portuguese (under the general theme of movement) definitively displaced (at least as far as Portuguese historiography is concerned) earlier nationalistic views of the Portuguese

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Empire, which had become too deeply entrenched. In this sense, I think the book contributed to a turning point in Portuguese historiography.

Nevertheless, despite the undeniable importance of Russell-Wood's work for Portuguese and Brazilian history, only four of his books have been translated into Portuguese, most of them with long gaps between the times of publication of the original edition and the translated version. *A World on the Move* was published with a six-year gap between language editions; *Fidalgos and Philanthropists: The Santa Casa da Misericórdia of Bahia, 1550–1755* was published in 1981 by the Brasília University Press (thirteen years after its publication in English); and *The Black Man in Slavery and Freedom in Colonial Brazil*, first published in 1982, was translated more twenty years later by Civilização Brasileira in Rio de Janeiro in 2005. Russell-Wood's fourth book, the short work *Portugal and the Sea: A World Embraced*, was only published in Portugal in 1997, amounting to nothing more than a synthesis of his ideas translated into several languages and aimed at the wider audience visiting the Portuguese Pavilion at Expo 98 in Lisbon.

The way these works by Russell-Wood were received by the international academic community can also be assessed and compared on Harzing's Publish or Perish (PoP) webpage,<sup>2</sup> which is a software program that retrieves and analyzes academic citations. The citation indicators obtained by this means are obviously not exhaustive and are very often lacking full information, as, for instance, in the case of references in academic theses or works that are unavailable on the internet. They nevertheless register quantitative tendencies which would otherwise be hard to establish.

It is interesting to point out that Russell-Wood's first book is the one that has the highest citation score. Thus *Fidalgos and Philanthropists* in its Portuguese translation heads the list, immediately followed by the original with 121 and 114 references, respectively. It is followed by *A World on the Move*, with 77 quotes from the original version and 96 from the 1998 paperback edition, whereas its translation only reached the modest figure of 33. As far as *The Black Man in Slavery* is concerned, the original edition totaled 105 quotes, well over the 71 scored by its Portuguese translation. What do these figures tell us? These revelations are perhaps not very surprising, since it is expected that Russell-Wood's work of a more monographic nature would have had greater impact in Brazil. At any rate, it is still

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.harzing.com/pop.htm>. "Publish or Perish" is a software program that retrieves and analyzes academic citations. It uses Google Scholar to obtain the raw citations, then analyzes these and presents the following statistics: total number of papers; total number of citations; average number of citations per paper; average number of citations per author; average number of papers per author; average number of citations per year; Hirsch's h-index and related parameters; Egghe's g-index; the contemporary h-index; the age-weighted citation rate; two variations of individual h-indices; and an analysis of the number of authors per paper.

meaningful that both English editions of *A World on the Move* had by far a greater impact among international academia. Language is undoubtedly an important factor, as well as the absence of similarly comprehensive works in English about the Portuguese imperial experience, but the truth is that, although Russell-Wood's previous studies on colonial society were already referential long before the publication of *A World on the Move*, this book did not enjoy an immediate reputation among the Brazilian academic community.

As a matter of fact, some time ago Iris Kantor, a Brazilian colleague from São Paulo University, pointed out to me that it was only a few years after its publication, following Russell-Wood's Preface to the collected essays of *O Antigo Regime nos Trópicos*, published in 2001, that the book began to attract attention in Brazil.

The delay in the publication of a translation of *A World on the Move* was certainly alleviated by the publication of numerous articles in Brazilian journals and collected essays. Lectures, participations in conferences, and the supervision of Brazilian and US PhD students researching into the Portuguese Empire also contributed to this situation. The three interviews conducted by Luciano de Figueiredo for three different Brazilian journals<sup>3</sup> mention these facts extensively. Review articles and works reflecting on the historiography of the Portuguese Empire always recognize Russell-Wood as a "Brazilianist" who produced a new perspective on the historiography of the Empire, besides his monographic studies.<sup>4</sup> And this was also acknowledged almost immediately after Russell-Wood's death in August 2010 through a significant number of obituaries which appeared in Brazilian and US journals.<sup>5</sup> Those articles written *in Memoriam* summarized his long scholarly career and the honors he received both in Portugal and in Brazil, as well as highlighting the merits of his "astonishingly prolific" contribution to colonial history, most especially to Afro-Brazilian and Portuguese studies.<sup>6</sup>

In this brief appreciation of Russell-Wood's work, it is worth stressing that the historian understood, read, and spoke Portuguese, which not only enabled him to make extensive use of primary sources (particularly those to be found in archives), but also

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<sup>3</sup> Russell-Wood, "Rotas entre o Brasil e o Império: uma conversa com A. J. R. Russell-Wood, Entrevista concedida a Luciano de Figueiredo"; "A sola dos pés é boa para aprendermos a história de um lugar"; "Uma visão de Minas Gerais no contexto do Império lusitano, Entrevista concedida a Luciano de Figueiredo."

<sup>4</sup> Xavier, "Tendências na historiografia da expansão portuguesa: reflexões sobre os destinos da história social"; Bethencourt, "Entrevista"; Cardim, "O governo e a administração do Brasil sob os Habsburgo e os primeiros Bragança"; Coates, "The Early Modern Portuguese Empire: A Commentary on Recent Studies"; Bicalho, "História, historiografia e pesquisa histórica. Entrevista com Maria Fernanda B. Bicalho."

<sup>5</sup> Reeves, "Johns Hopkins Historian John R. Russell-Wood dies"; Almeida, "John Russell-Wood: obituario de um membro do Conselho da RBPI"; Butler, "In Memoriam: A. J. R. Russell-Wood (1940–2010)"; Cribelli, "Obituary for Anthony John Russell-Wood"; Pijning, "A. J. R. Russell-Wood: In Memoriam."

<sup>6</sup> Cribelli, "Obituary for Anthony John Russell-Wood."

allowed him to write very perceptive assessments of the historical studies being carried out in both Portugal and Brazil.

We must acknowledge that *A World on the Move* reached large audiences, both of a scholarly and a non-scholarly nature. I would even venture to say that this book became a classic of the historiography written about the Portuguese Empire, ranking alongside the works of Charles R. Boxer and Vitorino Magalhães Godinho. The views of these three authors were not, of course, the same, and therefore these three studies offer complementary approaches, as Russell-Wood himself stated at the beginning of the bibliographical section of the book, which is also the opinion expressed by J. Thornton in his review. And here I quote from the latter text: “*A World on the Move* is an interesting complement to the more heavily political or economic focus of similar previous books by C. R. Boxer (*The Portuguese Seaborne Empire*) and Vitorino Magalhães Godinho’s corpus on the Portuguese world.”<sup>7</sup> As far as the similarities are concerned, all three works emphasize the fact that the Portuguese Empire was predominantly maritime in nature, and all three position it in a global context, thus intentionally writing a world history “avant la lettre,” with the first two texts serving as pioneering works in this area, although they were not alone in following that path. Seen from this standpoint, the name of J. Amaral Lapa must also be remembered, with his efforts to link the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean through the relations between Bahia and the *Carreira da Índia*.<sup>8</sup>

In keeping with this same approach—to reconsider the genealogy of the ideas presented in *A World on the Move*—it is important to mention that in the 1960s and early ’70s, under the influence of the *Annales* school of historiography in Europe, and the renewed interest in Brazilian studies taking place in the United States, the Portuguese colonial experience was incorporated into a broader context, which we can refer to as scholarly literature on the history of the Americas as a whole. The names of P. Chaunu and F. Mauro, in particular, must therefore be mentioned, as well as those of James Lockhart and Stuart B. Schwartz later on. There are, however, huge differences between these and the aforementioned scholars. Boxer and Godinho painted a global and quite integrated picture of all the territories under Portuguese rule, as did Russell-Wood, whereas the other scholars dissociated the Portuguese colonial experience in America from the one that took place (or at least they did not relate the two experiences). In fact, their main concern was not with explaining the colonial experience or the Portuguese Empire as a historical

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<sup>7</sup> Thornton, “Book Reviews.”

<sup>8</sup> Lapa, *A Bahia e a Carreira da Índia*.

phenomenon. This is why no attention was paid to other Portuguese conquests, and why they drew comparisons between North America and the Spanish or Portuguese Americas in their work, using them to explain either the historical paths of Northern European hegemony or the historical dynamics of America.

But let me return to the major contributions that *A World on the Move* made to our understanding of the historical experience of the colonial worlds. Browsing the Jstor, Project Muse and b.on databases, I came across eleven reviews of the book's 1992 and 1998 editions, written in English and all published either in well-established US scholarly journals or in journals aimed at the general public.<sup>9</sup>

All reviewers welcomed the publication of a book on the Portuguese Empire, since scholarly literature on colonial empires had tended to greatly undervalue the Portuguese overseas expansion. At the time, the book not only made up for “the lack of synthetic works on the Portuguese world,”<sup>10</sup> but it helped “to redress some of the Spanish-centeredness of the past Columbus Quincentennial by paying attention to the world-wide role of Portugal.”<sup>11</sup> At any rate, despite all these efforts, for a long time the subject of the Portuguese colonial experience remained absent from international conferences or international collected essays. I must, however, stress that, on the rare occasions when this was not the case, it was Russell-Wood who was one of the historians chosen to fill that important gap, as happened, for example, in *Negotiated Empires*<sup>12</sup> or in *Atlantic History: A Critical Appraisal*.<sup>13</sup>

In addition, the reviewers congratulated Russell-Wood on what we may acknowledge as his main accomplishments—the three foremost novelties contained in this book:

The first accomplishment is his decision to organize the data available about the Portuguese Empire around “connections, interactions, and movement,” as Olsen puts it.<sup>14</sup> In doing so, he “reframed Portuguese imperial history to focus on the dynamics and exchanges from which the interconnected transnational networks of the mercantile era

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<sup>9</sup> Birmingham, “Book Reviews”; Williams, “Reviews”; Alden, “Reviews of books”; Coates, “Book Reviews”; Ward, “Reviews and Short Notices: Africa, Asia and Australasia”; Thornton, “Book Reviews”; Poska, “Reviews”; Silva, *The Portuguese Colonial Empire, 1415-1808: A World on the Move* by A. J. R. Russell-Wood; Hattendorf, “Book Reviews”; Olsen, “Book Reviews”; Witek, “Book Reviews.”

<sup>10</sup> Poska, “Reviews.”, 385.

<sup>11</sup> Thornton, “Book Reviews.”, 231.

<sup>12</sup> Daniels and Kennedy, *Negotiated Empires: Centers and Peripheries in the Americas, 1500–1820*.

<sup>13</sup> Greene and Morgan, *Atlantic History: A Critical Appraisal (Reinterpreting History)*.

<sup>14</sup> Olsen, “Book Reviews.”

emerged.”<sup>15</sup> One possible explanation for this choice is the fact that “the Portuguese did not create a large colony of settlement outside Brazil, and Brazil was itself overshadowed by the larger and more dramatic story of American colonization. Instead of the big colonies, Portugal flourished by connections and by trade.”<sup>16</sup>

This idea was not entirely new among scholars, however. Works had already appeared describing the role played by the Portuguese in the circulation of certain products. There is, for instance, an essay devoted to the subject of botany, published in 1986 by a highly reputed Portuguese agriculture expert, José Mendes Ferrão: “We are still missing an all-encompassing work about the influence of the discoveries on agriculture, in the new and old worlds, as far as the borrowing and introduction of new plants is concerned, along with their circulation and the paths that they followed throughout the world. How they were transformed from unknown crops into essential ones, with a great economic and social impact in certain regions.”<sup>17</sup> And he goes on to give examples: wheat, sugar, spices, and lists of exotic plants “which the Portuguese came across and spread throughout the world during the 15th and 16th centuries.”<sup>18</sup> Ferrão’s ideas were to be disseminated later on at an exhibition at the Jardim-Museu Agrícola Tropical in 1992, followed by another exhibition of posters, entitled “The Adventure of Plants and the Portuguese Discoveries,” which was taken to different venues during the 1990s and gave rise to a small catalogue translated into several languages, including Chinese.<sup>19</sup> We can also mention the book *Plantas e o conhecimento do mundo nos séculos XV e XVI* by Isabel Castro Henriques and Alfredo Margarido, which made it possible to position matters relating to the spread of scientific knowledge within a deeper and more varied context, examining the cultural scene of that time in a careful dialogue with anthropology. In fact, these two authors based their work on the important contributions made by other historians, such as Barradas de Carvalho, Luís Albuquerque, Luís Filipe Barreto, R. Hooykaas, and J. Silva Dias.

The novelty introduced by Russell-Wood with *A World on the Move* rested on the central role played by circulation in the global study of the action of the Portuguese in the country’s overseas worlds. It must, however, be said that this approach wasn’t an entirely new one. According to José Luís Cardoso, when speaking at the Brown University

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<sup>15</sup> Butler, “In Memoriam: A. J. R. Russell-Wood (1940–2010).”

<sup>16</sup> Thornton, “Book Reviews.”

<sup>17</sup> Ferrão, *Transplantação de plantas de continentes para continentes no século XVI*, 1087.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 1105.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, *A aventura das plantas e os descobrimentos portugueses: exposição*.

conference in October 2012, Dom Rodrigo de Sousa Coutinho had already drawn attention to this fact, around the end of the eighteenth century, by criticizing the excessive importance that interconnections and interdependencies between the various Portuguese dominions had gained at the expense of the metropolis. He favored a top-down approach to the empire (with Lisbon positioned at the top) and perhaps this idea later came to affect the dominant political culture and hence the way in which history would be written from then on.

For Russell-Wood, this constant movement was determined by the ocean, and therefore the Portuguese Empire was a seaborne one. He agreed with C. R. Boxer and V. Magalhães Godinho in that regard. Seeking to temper the excessive emphasis he had placed on the maritime aspects of the Portuguese Empire, Russell-Wood was to say many years later, in the already mentioned interview with *Revista do Arquivo Público Mineiro*, that he “had also learned the importance of rejecting a view of the Portuguese Empire exclusively from a maritime angle.”<sup>20</sup> Territorial settlements were also important, even at an early stage, as he demonstrated by the interest that seventeenth-century Portuguese settlers had revealed in the western frontier of the Paraguay River. And in fact, while no one has ever questioned the importance of Portuguese policies in attaining territorial control over Brazil from the eighteenth century onward, only recently have historians returned to the topic of territorialization by paying greater attention to much earlier attempts to expand territorial occupation in various regions of the Portuguese Empire, not only in Portuguese America, as Russell-Wood stated, but in the Eastern and African conquests as well.

The second novelty of *A World on the Move* was the “thematically rather than geographically based” organization<sup>21</sup> of the data that allowed him to make a global analysis of the Portuguese Empire, covering four centuries. In doing so, he overcame a major flaw of Portuguese historiography at the time, as “Portuguese colonial history tends to be overly compartmentalized, in terms of both geography and time. The result has been a tripartite division in the literature, so that Portuguese Asia, Africa, and America all have long and distinguished historical literatures.”<sup>22</sup> And in fact, it took a while to overcome this problem of compartmentalization in Portugal. In a review article that she wrote on “Portuguese Overseas Historiography,” Ângela Barreto Xavier acknowledged that Russell-Wood’s book was still “the only study which sought to articulate and to compare the experience of the

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<sup>20</sup> Russel-Wood, “Uma visão de Minas Gerais no contexto do Império lusitano, Entrevista concedida a Luciano de Figueiredo.”

<sup>21</sup> Poska, “Reviews.”

<sup>22</sup> Coates, “Book Reviews,” 361.

Portuguese in different cultural and sociological contexts”<sup>23</sup> and regretted the traditional insistence on area studies in Portuguese historiography, which prevented deeper analysis centered on comparisons at an imperial or trans-imperial level. It is, however, true that some similar efforts had already been made or were being made at that time. For example, there is the case of the five-volume *Portuguese Overseas Expansion*, edited by F. Bethencourt and K. Chaudhuri in the late 1990s,<sup>24</sup> as well as (to mention just a few) the three books published by CNCDP: Isabel dos Guimarães Sá’s monograph on the *Misericórdias*,<sup>25</sup> T. Coates’ study on convicts and orphans,<sup>26</sup> or the one written some years later by Leonor Freire Costa on the South Atlantic trade organization of the mid-seventeenth century.<sup>27</sup> The lack of an updated single-volume synthesis was overcome almost a decade later by a comprehensive book edited by F. Bethencourt and D. R. Curto, originally published in English in 2006 and translated into Portuguese four years later.<sup>28</sup> Actually this work not only covers the early modern colonial experience of the *Portuguese Oceanic Expansion* but also examines its interregional networks and its main characteristics in a comparative and global context. Finally, in relation to this topic, I believe that nowadays, both in Portugal and Brazil, historians no longer dare to write history without taking into consideration the wider picture of what we might call the pluricontinental monarchy.

The third major contribution made by *A World on the Move* was the perception of the empire as a construction that combined unplanned individual action with structures built by the central Lisbon government. As we all know, the longest chapter of *A World on the Move* was devoted to the “flux and reflux of people,” as in the statement, and I quote, “The Portuguese seaborne empire was characterized by a constant flux and reflux of people.”<sup>29</sup> People of all sorts were on the move for very different kinds of reasons—Crown Service, religious motivations—or simply unplanned self-interest. Most of these people never stayed put; instead they circulated all over the empire. Seen from this perspective, the high level of mobility was a fundamental feature of the Portuguese Empire, creating what Olsen acknowledged as “a uniform Portuguese identity” and “strengthening the feeling of common interests and purpose.”<sup>30</sup> If I understood this correctly, Russell-Wood meant that

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<sup>23</sup> Xavier, “Tendências na historiografia da expansão portuguesa: reflexões sobre os destinos da história social,” 158.

<sup>24</sup> Bethencourt and Chaudhuri, *História da Expansão Portuguesa*.

<sup>25</sup> Sá, *Quando o rico se faz pobre: Misericórdias, caridade e poder no império português, 1500–1800*.

<sup>26</sup> Coates, *Degredados e Órfãos: colonização dirigida pela Coroa no Império Português (1550-1775)*.

<sup>27</sup> Costa, *O Transporte no Atlântico e a Companhia Geral do Comércio do Brasil (1580–1663)*.

<sup>28</sup> Bethencourt and Curto, *Portuguese Oceanic Expansion, 1400–1800*.

<sup>29</sup> Russell-Wood, *A World on the Move: The Portuguese in Africa, Asia, and America 1415–1808*, 63.

<sup>30</sup> Olsen, “Book Reviews,” 249.



this mobility generated a dynamic of common interest between the king and the people in the building of the empire. This permanent interaction suggests a less planned or authoritarian vision of the colonial process, leaving room for negotiation, hence Russell-Wood's claim in his 2010 interview that he had been tempted, and I quote, to "reduce a little the weight of the Crown's influence in order to highlight on one hand the influence of the individual, and on the other hand the influence of the settler."<sup>31</sup>

This statement brings me back to the impact of Russell-Wood's preface to *O Antigo Regime nos Trópicos* on Brazilian historiography. I believe there is no need to recall the details of the heated debate that this preface triggered among the community of Brazilian historians. What is worth recalling is the fact that Russell-Wood not only welcomed the new conceptual framework presented in the book, but also tied this to his own historiographical views, a move that was, perhaps, somewhat overstated.

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<sup>31</sup> Russell-Wood, "Uma visão de Minas Gerais no contexto do Império lusitano, Entrevista concedida a Luciano de Figueiredo," 14.

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