

Progress in the European periphery: an impracticable theory in 19th century Azores?

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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.

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