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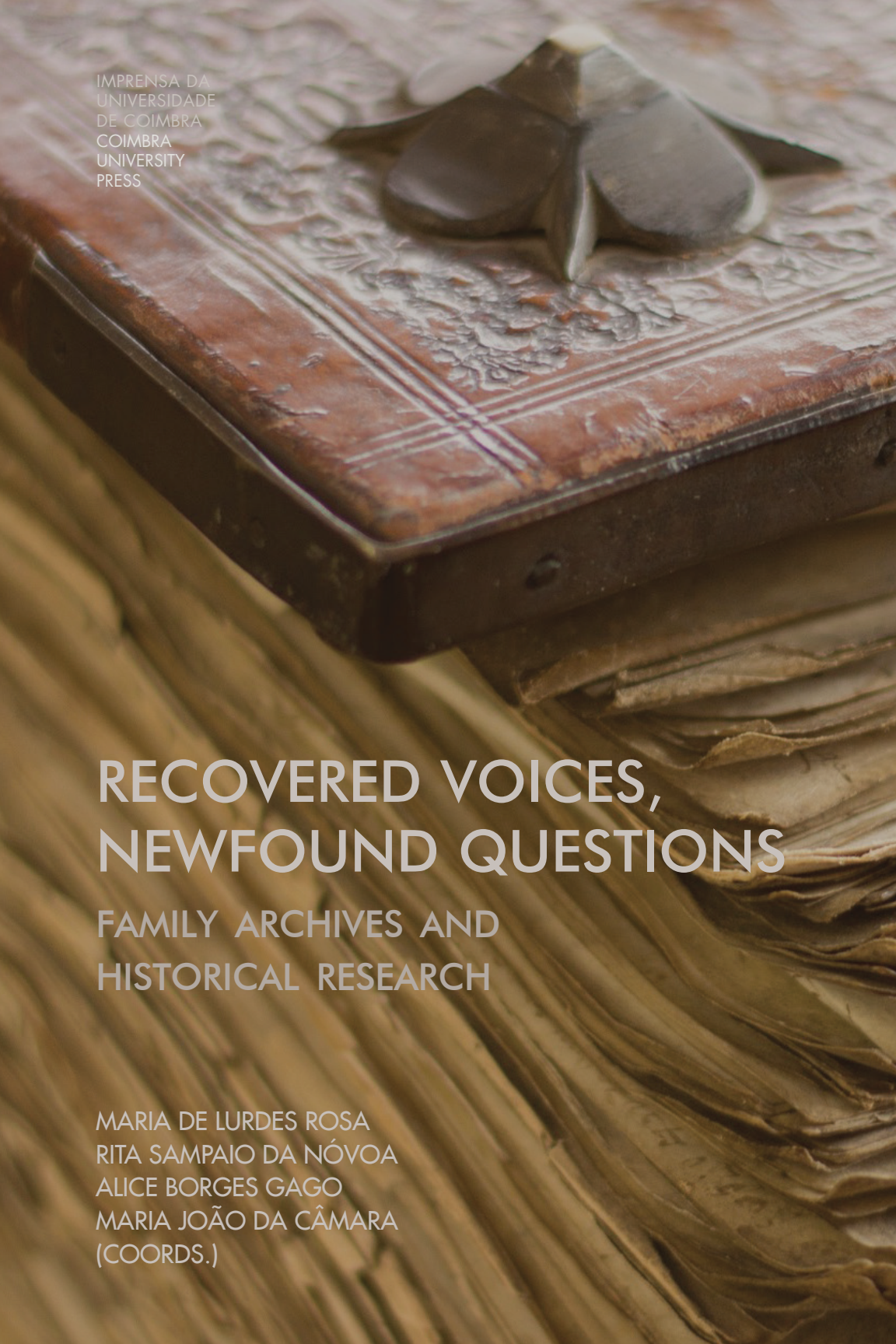

RECOVERED VOICES, NEWFOUND QUESTIONS

FAMILY ARCHIVES AND HISTORICAL RESEARCH

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RESEARCH ON NINETEENTH-CENTURY *CACIQUISMO* AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF FAMILY ARCHIVES

ABSTRACT: Family archives, either privately owned or preserved by public institutions, are a vital source of material for researchers working on topics such as contemporary social and political relations, elections, the power exerted by certain political agents and their clienteles. This short article aims at presenting the remarkable value of such documentation for these topics, as well as addressing their sporadic use in Portugal — unlike Spain, for instance — when conducting research on political elites. Firstly, a comparison will be drawn between research work carried out in Spain and Portugal based on such sources. Secondly, the difficulties faced will be highlighted, as well as the methodological issues at stake and the types of information available.

Keywords: private archives; family archives; *caciquismo*; boss rule; notables; political influence

RESUMO: Os arquivos de família, depositados em arquivos públicos ou em posse de privados, são uma das fontes fundamentais para o investigador que estuda as relações sociais, políticas, as eleições, o poder de determinados atores políticos e as suas redes clientelares, para o período contemporâneo. Este pequeno artigo procura mostrar como o uso desta valiosa documentação é preciosa para estudar os aspetos já referidos e que em Portugal tem sido pouco usada nos estudos já efetuados sobre as elites políticas, ao contrário do que sucede em Espanha. Desta forma, em primeiro lugar faremos a comparação entre os trabalhos desenvolvidos em Espanha e em Portugal com este tipo de fontes e, em segundo lugar, tentaremos evidenciar os vários obstáculos que se colocam a quem trabalha com estes espólios, os problemas metodológicos que se apresentam e que tipo de informação a que se pode aceder.

Palavras-chave: arquivos privados; arquivos de família; caciquismo; notáveis; influência política

Over the past few years, my research has focused on *caciquismo* (a concept close to boss rule), partisanship and the electoral system in Portugal.

https://doi.org/10.14195/978-989-26-1794-7_16

This work culminated in my PhD thesis, *Pretos e Brancos. Liberalismo e Caciquismo no distrito de Castelo Branco (1852-1910)* (Blacks and Whites. Liberalism and *Caciquismo* in the District of Castelo Branco), defended on the 16th December 2016 at the NOVA School of Social Sciences and Humanities, Universidade Nova de Lisboa. Such studies depend on the cross-referencing of information from several sources, both manuscript and printed: various types of official documents, such as election data, prefectorial reports and parliamentary debates; contemporary books and brochures; and local and national newspapers. Private correspondence is of special importance for research of this kind. Although letters are easily accessible in public archives, the same cannot be said for private collections. Portuguese families do not usually authorise access to private letters, and many collections have been destroyed. In Spain, however, letter collections have been employed extensively for several research projects.

Some exceptions notwithstanding, *caciquismo* has been little studied in Portugal. Research on local political elites has been restricted to municipalities, mainly on the social background of councillors. Almost nothing is known of these elites' extended role in the construction of the liberal state and the development of the political/party system in Portugal during the nineteenth century. This is partly due to insufficient research on the private correspondence, which would provide evidence of the acts of the *caciques*, their intense political negotiations and the power relationships between groups and individuals.

The word *cacique* (meaning a local boss) was widely used in Spain, having been imported from the Spanish colonies in America where it was employed to describe the indigenous chiefs. In nineteenth-century politics, it became a synonym for a local political leader. It became widespread during the Spanish Restoration. In Portugal, words used to describe local leaders included: *influentes* (influential), *mandões* (bosses), *sobas* (African tribal leaders), *régulos* (small kings) or *capitães-mores* (captains-general). The last three terms have their origins in Portuguese history.

Local *caciques* or *influentes* were, by definition, notables who occupied a position of power in a given community. Their political influence functioned as a natural extension of their acquired social status, which in turn might

be based on economic power, family traditions, or personal prestige. They exerted effective control over municipal government, appointing regional prefects, manipulating elections, selecting members of parliament, and restricting the government's activities in the areas under their influence. They would often assemble into political factions within parliament. Their actions sometimes led to the downfall of governments.

Caciquismo is tied to the liberal regimes of southern Europe, and it was quite unlike for notables in northern Europe. Throughout the nineteenth century, electoral fabrication and corruption, fraud, the preponderance of local notables in mobilising the electorate and controlling voting were widespread throughout all of liberal Europe. Still, in some countries these activities gradually became less conspicuous. In England, for instance, before the 1880s electoral fraud was very common. France and the German Empire were no different[1]. This started to change in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, mostly due to the growth of the middle class.

The situation in northern Europe contrasted deeply with that of the South. In the North, industrialisation, urbanisation and increasing literacy rates all contributed to the rise of a strong middle class and vast numbers of labourers, giving rise to social divide and the rejection of any form of dependence from the local notables. In fact, notable politics (the so-called *política dos notáveis*) would originate mass politics. This change first took place in France in the 1870s, then in England and the German Empire by the end of the century. From a political system led by local elites — including the nobility, businessmen, clergymen and school teachers — these countries evolved to a model where political parties mobilised a large number of voters: "The old ad hoc electoral committees suitable to notable politics were replaced by permanent local party organizations"[2]. Alan Kahan described the 1880s as a turning point. As the aristocracy lost prominence, the values of an industrial, urban society took hold, and a renewed middle class began to surface, its values and attitudes influencing the sphere of politics.

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[1] ALMEIDA, 1991: 23-25.

[2] KAHAN, 2003: 175.

As for southern Europe, the politics and practice of *caciquismo* remained in place beyond the nineteenth century, since the region did not see the same developments we find in northern Europe. In the South, industrialisation, city growth and literacy were slower to happen, remaining the norm for decades and delaying development of mass parties, which needed an informed community behind them.

This topic has been the object of much research in Spain, where some have considered it an academic "industry"[3]. The focus of scholarship has been mostly on the Bourbon Restoration before the Primo de Rivera (1874-1923) coup, since it was during this political cycle that rotativism came to be established in Spain. Much historical work has been developed around this political context, including several studies of a regional scope. Such projects share common subjects such as the political elites, parties, partisan clienteles and general political behaviour. These have been synthesised in José Varela Ortega's book *El poder de la influencia. Geografia del caciquismo en España (1875-1923)*, published in 2001.

The existing studies on Spanish *caciquismo* provide a very clear picture of this phenomenon and important conclusions, among which the following five. Firstly, the local notables' power could be grounded on family, estate, occupation, and links to political parties and public office. Secondly, the State accepted and endorsed the local elites' power, on which it relied for the routine functioning of institutions. Thirdly, the widespread establishment of clientele networks — horizontal and vertical — to handle local institutions and control voters more effectively. Fourthly, the struggle between parties in peripheral centres, which (rather than polarising liberals against conservatives) was grounded on individual strategies, personal trust, family traditions and even private feuds. Finally, fraud and manipulation in electoral contexts was widespread. Newer scholarship, however, claims that reactions against traditional *caciquismo* existed.

Family archives play a major role in much of this research, since they contain information that neither the press nor official sources can provide, such as negotiations held privately among individuals. Examples include research

[3] MORENO LÚZON, 2006.

by Maria Sierra, Maria Antonia Peña Guerrero, Sonsoles Gómez Cabornero and Javier Moreno Luzón[4]. They demonstrate how crucial private archives in Spain are for research on the period and the topics at hand. The sources in question are widely preserved and safeguarded in national and provincial archives, foundations and private collections available to the researcher.

Research for Portugal has concentrated on the biographies of individuals with a national standing as well as on local notables as actors in the municipal structures. However, little attention has been paid to the latter's political intervention and their role as *caciques* (in handling local clienteles and manipulating elections), to their contribution to the development of the liberal State, to the relationship between centre and periphery, and to their activities in face of the existent political parties. Indeed, studies on *caciquismo* have been almost inexistent, with approaches focusing on the electoral system, the importance of the *caciques* at a general level, and the publishing of primary sources, namely correspondence exchanged between notables (however not as widely and intensely used as in Spain).

As already mentioned, private or family archives and published sources prove essential to researching nineteenth-century *caciquismo*. Access to these sources is difficult, however, and researchers will face obstacles during the process. Therefore, it is important to provide an insight on some of the archives, as well as on the problems raised on consulting them, including the methodological challenges.

Several nationally prominent nineteenth-century politicians bequeathed documents to national archives. Due to their roles in an intense political network, correspondence was exchanged among political agents all over the country. This resulted in a phenomenal wealth of information of the utmost interest for those studying elections, the relationships between parties and factions, political schemes, personal relationships, negotiations, bargaining, disillusionment — in essence, the features of national, regional and local political life. Such collections include those of Rodrigo da Fonseca Magalhães, Ávila e Bolama, José Luciano de Castro, Rio Maior and Afonso Costa. All are kept in public archives, the Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal (the National Library of

[4] SIERRA, 1996; PEÑA GUERRERO, 1998; GÓMEZ CABORNERO, 1999; MORENO LÚZON, 1998.

Portugal) and the Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo (the National Archive of Torre do Tombo). Sections have already been published. Rodrigo da Fonseca Magalhães' archive, preserved in the Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal, features letters from several individuals, which help understand the agency of several political players from the 1840s. This was an eventful era in Portugal, as it was then that many notable and influential characters would rise to prominence in regional and national politics. The following years are covered by the Ávila e Bolama collection in the Torre do Tombo, including correspondence from the 1860s and the following decades. The documentation of Luciano de Castro, in the same archive, has partially been published and proves essential to understanding the later century[5]. It features letters exchanged between several individuals and has resulted in publications on specific topics, such as the 1881 and 1901 elections[6].

Gleaning information from any of these archives is not always straightforward. First of all, collections are generally not fully charted, making it necessary to request the archivist's assistance. Information is also frequently scattered within the archive itself. As an example, José Luciano de Castro's archive, organised in folders named after the sender, has several entries for a single individual, whenever alternative name spellings exist. No uniform rule is in place. A particular search for letters by Manuel Vaz Preto Geraldes[7], throws up four different entries: Vaz, Vaz Preto, Preto and Geraldes. The two most frequent entries correspond to the most usual variations of the name: Preto and Vaz Preto. As for published archives, it is the editor's prerogative to decide on structure. Archives may be sorted in chronological order, according to the historical period or according to topic. The choice of letters to be published is also a personal decision, which does not always cater for the needs

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5 MOREIRA, 1998.

6 ALMEIDA, 2001.

7 Manuel Vaz Preto Geraldes (1828-1902). Member of parliament and peer of the realm, he exerted considerable influence on electoral processes within the Castelo Branco district. His contemporaries perceived him as the typical *cacique*. He was one of the most regular and vocal members of parliament in the chamber of peers. Indeed, the group of notables he led was known as "the blacks" ("preto" being Portuguese for "black") or "friends of Vaz Preto". It was also dubbed the "black party".

of the researcher, who is then left with no choice but to delve into the original collection for added information.

Vast amounts of correspondence were originally published in regional and national newspapers, and are thus also available to the researcher. These sources, however, have been somewhat neglected. Still, my own studies have covered countless such published letters between political agents. They were originally published with various purposes in mind: to establish a political stance on various issues; to justify opinions; to announce a change in political ideology; or to engage in a public offensive against an opponent who would usually reply in the same paper or another closer to his political ideology. Such research is slow and demanding at times, hampered by the archives themselves. Yet, it is arresting in what it says about the practices of the time and the need for public affirmation. Newspapers functioned as the nineteenth-century equivalent of Facebook or Twitter.

In addition to all these sources, family archives are the crown jewel, enriching research immensely. In my case, this was the Tavares Proença archive, a family archive whose contents have been largely published since the 1960s over several issues of the *Revista de Estudos de Castelo Branco*, under José Lopes Dias. We are before an archive of unfathomable value for nineteenth-century politics, one which has been used by several scholars. It is well arranged and organised, with several letters, among these are included individuals of national importance (José Luciano de Castro, Hintze Ribeiro, Mariano de Carvalho and several ministers); local *caciques*, election manipulators ranging from the most renowned to the petty; relations with local authorities (civil governments and municipalities); relations with the local and the national press; and even a number of letters featuring other characters (João Franco, for instance), which provide an outline of the personal and political relationships with individuals outside the Tavares Proença family.

To conclude, given the importance of private archives, they should be preserved and even bequeathed for safeguarding in public institutions. This would allow cataloguing and providing researchers with the documents. This documentation is invaluable, as it feeds several research avenues: election studies; local party structure analysis; studies on the organisation of national

parties; in-depth research on the political relationships between notables; otherwise indiscernible personal feuds grounded on political influence; the relationship between the State and peripheral areas; the relationship between the *caciques* and local authorities; and the negotiations conducted on planned infrastructures, such as railways, roads, bridges, schools, as well as employment-related personal favours. After all, they are the country's fabric.