



Revering Spain's Colonial Past and Colonial Propaganda in the Prologue to Volume II of Antonio Ponz's *Viaje fuera de España*

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ABSTRACT

In recent years there has been no shortage of critics exploring the controversy that arose in Spain following the publication of Masson de Morvillier's contentious entry on Spain in the *Encyclopédie méthodique* in 1782. Largely overlooked in these discussions, however, is the eighteenth-century travel writer Antonio Ponz (1725–92), whose prologue to the second volume of his *Viaje fuera de España* (1785) is a direct rebuttal of Masson de Morvillier's text. It is the aim of this article to shed light on Ponz's second prologue and to reveal its contribution to eighteenth-century debates over Spanish colonialism. It analyses the overt colonial propaganda contained in Ponz's prologue, which depicts Spanish imperialism as paternalistic, righteous, and benevolent, especially in comparison to the rapacious commercial imperialism of France, Britain, and Holland, and examines how the prologue in its vigorous endorsement of Spanish colonial rule conceals and misrepresents the reality of the Spanish empire in the late eighteenth century.

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Critics of Antonio Ponz (1725–92), the renowned Spanish travel writer whose *Viaje fuera de España* (1785) became one of the most successful travel books of late eighteenth-century Spain, have frequently drawn attention to the apologetic intent of Ponz's two-volume travelogue, which merges throughout an objectivity and reformist zeal characteristic of Enlightenment travel writing.¹ Ronald Hilton, describing Ponz as a “progresista iluminado”, claimed that the motivation behind his *Viaje fuera de España* was to defend “lo bueno de la tradición española contra la crítica de los extranjeros” (116).² More recently, Mónica Bolufer Peruga has described Ponz's text as “profundamente polémico y vindicativo” (174), highlighting its “contrastados propósitos, apologético y crítico” (177).

Given the apparent willingness amongst scholars to acknowledge the defensive discourse that underpins Ponz's travelogue, it is curious to note that so few have commented on Ponz's prologue to the second volume of his *Viaje fuera de España*, which was written in direct response to Masson de Morvilliers's hugely controversial entry “Espagne” in the *Encyclopédie méthodique* (1782).³ As Ana Isabel Frank asserts: “Sorprende, sin embargo, comprobar que en las obras clásicas sobre el XVIII español no se tome en consideración la participación de Ponz en la polémica, a pesar de que el prólogo del segundo tomo del *Viaje fuera de España* está dedicado al comentario del artículo de Masson” (67). An equally neglected aspect of Ponz's prologue is its overt endorsement of Spanish colonialism.⁴ Although Mónica Bolufer Peruga has acknowledged its “encarnizada defensa de la colonización española en América contra las críticas de los extranjeros” (173), no scholar has yet examined it from a colonial perspective, and Ponz remains one of the few eighteenth-century writers to have been completely overlooked in this regard.⁵ It is in response to these lacunae that this article will analyse Ponz's response to Masson Morvilliers through a close reading of the prologue's defence of the moral superiority of Spanish colonialism, especially in comparison to the colonial conduct of other European empires. It will consider the limitations of the apologia form and reveal the sense of conflict experienced by Enlightenment writers such as Ponz who felt compelled to sacrifice their Enlightenment principles in order to defend Spain against European criticism.

Admittedly, Masson de Morvilliers makes little explicit reference to Spanish colonialism in his entry on Spain in the *Encyclopédie méthodique*, save for the role American wealth played in Spain's decline and his remark that Spain resembles her “weak and unfortunate colonies” (Donato and López 51, 77).⁶ Nevertheless, it is clear that Ponz uses his rebuttal of Masson as a pretext to counter French criticism of Spain's colonial legacy during the eighteenth century.⁷ In the opening paragraph, Ponz refers in general terms to the “improperios que de nosotros y de nuestras cosas se han publicado en algunos libros franceses” (245).⁸ Later on, the abbé Raynal (1713–96) is mentioned twice by name (261). This is significant since Raynal's widely read *Histoire philosophique et politique des établissements et du commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes*, described by Clorinda Donato and Ricardo López as “the ultimate colonial-

1 Ponz's account chronicles in detail his six-month tour of France, Holland, Flanders, and England in 1783. It was first published in 1785 and later reprinted in 1791–2. For a complete discussion of Ponz's *Viaje fuera de España*, see Bolufer Peruga.

2 Hilton also identified this as the reason for his earlier *Viaje de España*, an eighteen-volume work of his travels throughout Spain (1772–94).

3 Bolufer Peruga (172–3), Lope (“Los Países” 48), and Cañas Murillo (24) have all drawn attention to Ponz's second prologue as an explicit response to Masson de Morvillier's criticism of Spain, but none examines Ponz's response in any detail. Scholarly attention has typically focused on the responses of Antonio José Cavanilles (1745–1804), Carlo Denina (1731–1813), and Juan Pablo Forner (1756–99).

4 It is important to note that the second prologue focuses disproportionately on Spanish colonialism (Ponz 259–66). Only Ponz's second prologue is considered here as the prologue to Volume I references Masson only in passing (I: 45). For an analysis of Ponz's first prologue, see Frank (61–7).

5 For a complete discussion of the role of America in eighteenth-century Spanish literature, see [Ezquerro Revilla](#); [Yagüe Bosch](#).

6 All references to Masson's entry “Espagne” in the *Encyclopédie méthodique* are from Clorinda Donato and Ricardo López's 2015 parallel translation of Masson's article.

7 For a general survey of the criticism of Enlightenment thinkers, see [Marías](#) (23–9); [Alonso](#); [Tietz](#) (“La visión de América”); [Yagüe Bosch](#) (654); [Mestre Sanchis](#) (*Apología* 61–3); [Donato and López](#) (7); [Villaverde Rico and Castilla Urbano](#).

8 All citations are from Casto María del Rivero's 1998 edition of Ponz's *Viaje fuera de España* and are given in parenthesis within the text. Unless otherwise specified, all quotations refer to Volume II.

empire destroyer” (12), contains a scathing indictment of Spanish colonialism and indeed of European colonialism in general.⁹ Casting the Spanish as “destroyers of the New World” (II: 397), Raynal denounces their violence and exploitation, and laments the ruin visited upon the Native American population: “innumerable nations disappeared from the face of the earth at the arrival of these barbarians; and these horrid scenes of cruelty have been hitherto ascribed to a thirst of gold, and to a spirit of fanaticism” (III: 90). For Raynal the Spanish are “rapacious and cruel Christians” whose “avaricious hands” are “drenched in blood” (II: 341, 367). Attacks on Spanish imperialism, its violence, rapacity, and exploitation, were commonplace amongst the French *philosophes* including Montesquieu, Voltaire, and Diderot. Antonio Mestre Sanchis notes that criticism of Spain’s colonial record intensified in the second half of the eighteenth century, but points out that this criticism was “una acusación antigua” (“Historiografía” 874) whose origins lay in the anti-Hispanicism of the late sixteenth century. Likewise Javier Yagüe Bosch places the anti-Spanish invective of Enlightenment writers within the tradition of the Black Legend, describing it as “esta revitalización de la llamada ‘Leyenda Negra’ que se produjo en la Europa de las Luces” (654).¹⁰

For the Spanish, the publication in 1782 of Masson de Morvillier’s entry “Espagne” in the *Encyclopédie méthodique* represented a violent eruption of anti-Spanish invective of French Enlightenment thinkers.¹¹ Masson’s tendentious account scathingly denounced Spain as “perhaps the most ignorant nation in Europe” (Donato and López 75). He claimed that “in everything, this nation has yet to make achievements” (77), and provocatively questioned Spain’s contribution to Europe: “But what do we owe Spain? After two centuries, after four, after ten, what has she done for Europe?” (77).¹² Hardly surprisingly, Masson’s disparaging portrait aroused a heated and vigorous controversy in Spain and provoked a “violentísima reacción” (Gies 307) among Spanish writers and intellectuals of the period who vigorously disputed the validity of his claims. Their attempts to defend Spain against the negative assessments of Masson resulted in a proliferation of apologetic discourse: “el predominio de los apologistas fue aplastante” (Mestre Sanchis, *Apología* 68). Differences of opinion quickly emerged as to how best to defend Spain, resulting in what Julián Marías termed the “concierto—o mejor, desconcierto—de críticos y apologistas” (128). Moderates like Antonio de Capmany (1742–1813) pointed to the “peligro de un exacerbado nacionalismo” (qtd. in Mestre Sanchis, “Historiografía” 876), while in the prologue to his *Ensayo de una biblioteca española de los mejores escritores del reinado de Carlos III* (1785–9), Sempere y Guarinos urged caution in the use of propagandistic apologies, viewing them as ineffective and potentially counterproductive:

Una apología no es suficiente para esto. Las discusiones precisas en este género de escritos, los argumentos, la erudición con que se procura amenizarlos, ocupan mucha parte, y por muy bien trabajados que estén, nunca son tenidos mas que por unas buenas defensas, en las que siempre se cree que tiene mucho influxo el patriotismo, espíritu de partido ... Por lo qual lo mas que se consigue con ellos es el hacer problemáticos y probables los asuntos que los ocasionan. (41)

From the outset, Ponz’s prologue reveals his awareness of contemporary debates over the merits of eighteenth-century Spanish apologies: it consists of two parts, the first of which takes

9 First published in French in 1770 and banned by the Inquisition in 1779, Raynal’s text went through countless editions over the next fifty years. According to Guillaume Ansart, “it went through thirty to fifty editions between 1770 and 1820, depending on whether only official editions are considered or pirated ones as well” (400).

10 Other scholars who have placed the anti-Spanish bias of eighteenth-century thinkers within the tradition of the Black Legend include Gies (307); Lope (“¿Qué se debe” 402); Pons (234–5). For a complete discussion of the Spanish Black Legend, see García Cárcel. More recent interventions include Greer et al. and Pérez.

11 See the following representative sample of literature on the Spanish response to Masson’s article: Marías (47–57); Alonso (89); Gies (307); Donato and López (6); Mestre Sanchis (*Apología* 66).

12 The original passage in French reads: “Mais que doit-on à l’Espagne? Et depuis deux siècles, depuis quatre, depuis dix, qu’a-t-elle fait pour l’Europe? Elle ressemble aujourd’hui à ces colonies foibles et malheureuses, qui ont besoin sans cesse du bras protecteur de la métropole” (Donato and López 76). Although Masson finds much to criticise in his entry on Spain, he does champion Spanish painting (89) and literature (83), and even acknowledges that Enlightenment thought has finally taken root in Spain: “The beautiful days of this kingdom may not be very far from flowering. Philosophy, which had always been repudiated, has finally penetrated this kingdom and has already destroyed numerous prejudices” (83).

the form of a letter written by Ponz from Paris to an unnamed recipient in Madrid (II: 245–53).¹³ Ponz's eagerness to distance himself from the narrow nationalism of Spain's "apologistas" is visible in his efforts to style himself as an "hombre de razón" (253), a "buen filósofo" who "escribe, reprende, aconseja, enseña sin invectivas, detraiciones ni insolencias" (245). Ponz's adherence to Enlightenment principles of empirical observation and rational argument is immediately evident in his sober documentation of the countless "errores", "contradicciones", and "desatinos" (246) which he claims plague Masson's account. He takes particular umbrage at Masson's contemptuous portrayal of Spanish sovereigns and vigorously disputes his judgements of Ferdinand the Catholic, Charles V, and Philips II, III, and IV:

Quien ha tenido el valor de publicar al mundo entero especies tan falsas contra el buen nombre y gloriosa memoria de nuestros soberanos, ¿qué no intentará hablando de los vasallos y del conjunto de la nación, cuya crisis toma por su cuenta? ¿Podrá esperarse, digo, de esta pluma insultante sino una narrativa infamatoria y tramada de imposturas? (249–50)

While Ponz may succumb briefly to national pride in his defence of Spain's monarchs, he is careful to avoid the intense vitriol characteristic of impassioned apologists like Juan Pablo Forner (1756–99). He rebukes Masson throughout his letter as an "escritor desenfronado" (253), whose "pluma insultante" (250) is responsible for "despropósitos" (250) and "falsas e injuriosas expresiones" (252). Yet Ponz never allows his indignation to morph into dogged defensiveness and ultimately adheres to the "línea de comedimiento y moderación" (62) described by Frank. In concluding his letter, Ponz insists that he will not resort to calumny and ridicule as Masson had done, believing such vilification to be unbecoming of an "hombre de bien". Nonetheless, it is important to note that although Ponz is reluctant to adopt a patriotic position akin to that of Spain's apologists, he does not condemn those who do, and even suggests that such a defence is "una cosa laudable" (252).

The second part of Ponz's prologue (253–72), twice the length of the first, is comprised of a series of "observaciones" on "el artículo 'España' de la nueva *Enciclopedia*", which Ponz had received from an anonymous "amigo ... residente en Madrid" shortly before publishing his *Viaje fuera de España* (253). Frank suggests that these comments, which Ponz incorporates wholesale into the prologue as a means of augmenting his own defence of Spain, could well be those of "Jovellanos o Campomanes, o cualquiera de los ilustrados en el poder" (69).¹⁴ Equally plausible, however, is the suggestion that the "observaciones" are in fact apocryphal, and that Ponz uses the device of an anonymous friend as a means of distancing himself from the blatantly partisan attitudes expressed in the second half of the prologue.¹⁵

Ponz's "amigo" begins his commentary by displacing his criticism of Masson onto the renowned Valencian botanist Antonio José Cavanilles (1745–1804), whose *Observations sur l'article "Espagne" de la nouvelle Encyclopédie (1784)* was one of the first works published in response to Masson's entry in the *Encyclopédie méthodique*.¹⁶ Exonerating Masson of all blame, Ponz's

¹³ According to Frank, "se considera a Campomanes como destinatario de las cartas de Ponz" (136). Pedro Rodríguez de Campomanes (1723–1802) was one of the most enlightened and inspired minds in Spain at the time. A prominent economist and political reformer, Ezquerro Revilla describes him as "una de las personalidades más destacadas del Despotismo ilustrado, tanto desde el punto de vista ideológico como por su actuación gubernamental, como defensor o promotor de muchas de las reformas del reinado de Carlos III" (217).

¹⁴ Campomanes initially seems a likely author of the interpolated "observaciones" given his insistence on the benign and equitable rule of Spain in the New World in Part 4 of his *Apéndice a la Educación popular (1777)*: "Es lástima, que hombres sábios escriban con tanta ligereza; y persuadan, que los españoles carecen de humanidad, y de toda instrucción. Si leyeran nuestras leyes de indias, verían que el gobierno civil de los países de la nación mas sensata, y moderada" (lx). Indeed, this, coupled with his exposure of European hypocrisy in the same work (lix), is consonant with the views expressed by Ponz's "amigo" later in the prologue. Nevertheless, it remains extremely difficult to reconcile the prologue's strident criticism of colonial trade and commerce with Campomanes' indefatigable efforts to reform and promote it during the eighteenth century. See, for instance, Campomanes' *Reflexiones sobre el comercio español a Indias (1762)* and his 1775 essay *Discurso sobre la educación sobre la educación popular de los artesanos y su fomento*.

¹⁵ It will be remembered that Ponz opened the prologue by establishing his Enlightenment credentials and his commitment to impartiality. Nevertheless, there is no denying that the underlying style and sentiment of the second part of the prologue, which is comprised of the "observaciones" of Ponz's anonymous friend, is remarkably similar to the style of Ponz's defence of Spain in the first part.

¹⁶ Cavanilles' *Observations sur l'article "Espagne" de la nouvelle Encyclopédie* was published in Paris in 1784 and translated into Spanish the same year by Mariano Rivera.

Madrid friend claims: “Quien menos parte tiene en el artículo de que se trata es, según mi dictamen, el buen Masson, que sólo puso de la suya su ignorancia o una triste y miserable malicia, y así, yo no exclamo contra él tanto como nuestro amigo Cavanilles” (254). Although Ponz’s “amigo” openly acknowledges the merits of Cavanilles’ defence, he criticises him for being excessively judicious, and suggests that those writers based in Madrid who wish to defend Spain (Cavanilles was resident in France when he wrote his defence) should “deponer un poco la excesiva moderación debida en el señor Cavanilles” (254).¹⁷

Like Ponz earlier, his “amigo” is candid about the erroneous and calumnious nature of Masson’s article, and while he admits there is no shortage of biases and inaccuracies for him to take issue with, he says he will concentrate only on those which other countries are also shown to be guilty of: “Tendría yo que decir mucho contra todo; pero me contentaré con tocar solo aquellas cosas que son notorias a toda Europa” (254).¹⁸ It is in this context that Ponz’s commentator introduces the question of Spanish colonialism, ardently defending the Spanish empire as a morally superior imperial force and heralding Spain’s discovery and conquest of the New World as the nation’s chief contribution to Europe.

Ponz’s commentator initially presents Spain’s conquest of America in terms of discovery and exploration. He celebrates Columbus, Magallanes, Elcano, Cortés, and Pizarro as intrepid and indomitable adventurers whose expeditions led to the discovery of vast swathes of the American interior as well as its seaboard:

[O]tros navegaban el golfo de California, verificando ser una punta del continente la que se juzgaba isla; descubrían otros el nuevo Méjico, y los del Perú seguían sus descubrimientos por toda la inmensa extensión de la América meridional, adelantando sus viajes a lo más interior de las tierras: Paraguay, Uruguay, Tucumán, Chile, Quito y todas las demás regiones que componen aquel vastísimo continente y las más de/estas provincias no estaban a las orillas del mar, como suponen los autores que nos honran. (259–60)

Not surprisingly, Ponz’s “amigo” is conspicuously silent on the violence that marred the conquests of Mexico and Peru and instead projects a sublime vision of the Spanish conquest as heroic and glorious. He emphasises the benefits that New World riches and resources have brought to Europe, and underscores the mutually beneficial trade that has arisen between the two continents as a result:

Cortés, en Méjico, y Pizarro, en Lima, descubrían, conquistaban, poblaban y aseguraban a Europa los preciosos frutos de ambas Américas; los españoles llevaban a aquel hemisferio los animales domésticos, el uso del hierro y la industria de que se aprovechan hoy las naciones que han logrado la dicha de adquirir y conservar algunas colonias en aquellas climas; analizaban las producciones de los diversos países; establecían el cultivo del azúcar, que tanto ha producido y produce al comercio de Francia e Inglaterra; extendían el del cacao, añil, cochinilla, tabaco, algodón, etc. (259)

Through his appeal to religion, Ponz’s commentator presents Spain’s American conquest as an evangelical mission to Christianise the native population: “los misioneros españoles formaban catecúmenos a millares en ambas Américas y los disponían a ser vasallos útiles” (260). He stresses the altruism and paternalism of Spanish colonialism, which views overseas territories as extensions of the mother country and the natives as free and equal subjects who enjoy the protection of the Spanish Crown. In fact, so confident is Ponz’s “amigo” of the virtues of Spanish imperialism that he asks, “¿Quién sabe ... a qué grado llegará la felicidad y prosperidad de las Américas?” (260).

¹⁷ By explicitly calling for writers to be less dispassionate, Ponz prepares the reader for the explicitly propagandistic nature of the comments that follow.

¹⁸ As well as defending Spanish colonialism, Ponz’s commentator also takes umbrage at Masson’s charge that “it is almost impossible to find generals comparable to those of other nations. One cannot find even a single artilleryman!” (35). He responds by listing Spain’s military achievements during the eighteenth century and by favourably contrasting Spanish military prowess with that of France (255–7). Later Ponz’s “amigo” defends the Spanish system of censorship (266), which Masson had also attacked in the *Encyclopédie méthodique*.

It is against this morally just portrait of benevolent Spanish colonialism that Ponz's "amigo" considers the imperial intentions of other colonial powers, notably Britain, France, and Holland. He castigates all three for failing to protect and civilise the natives, accusingly asking: "¿qué indios han civilizado?" (260). He characterises their imperialism as exploitative and corrupt and denounces them for their rapacious economic self-interest. In contrast to the Spanish, who settled the territories they conquered, the empires of Britain, France, and Holland displayed little interest in settlement: "Las colonias de aquellas naciones son otras tantas factorías de europeos transeúntes e indiferentes a la suerte de su metrópoli, sin otro espíritu que el de enriquecerse" (261). According to Ponz's commentator, the only thing the natives have learnt from such colonisers is "el funesto arte del uso del fusil" (260). He fulminates against the total failure of the English to civilise and Christianise their North American territories. Indeed, rather than rescue the natives from barbarism as the Spanish had done, English indifference ensures that they continue to languish in it: "la política inglesa los ha dejado en su barbarie, perjudicialísima a indios y europeos" (262). He is unequivocal in his assertion that Spanish colonialism, with its efforts to civilise and Christianise, is morally superior to the imperialism of England, France, and Holland: "las atenciones de nuestra sola nación son superiores a las de las tres" (263). Moreover, though he acknowledges that Spanish colonialism may not have produced the same economic benefits as British- and Dutch-style colonialism, he is adamant that the prestige and pre-eminence of the Spanish empire, whose vast overseas territories have been successfully united under a common sovereign for over three hundred years, outstrip those of all other imperial powers, including the ancient empires of Greece and Rome: "Digan: ¿qué nación, desde los fenicios, has conservado trescientos años colonias tan vastas y tan distantes? Ninguna, incluyendo romanos y cartagineses, que no tuvieron rivales de la clase que los ha tenido España. ¿Ha podido la nación sabia, guerrera, ilustrada, los ingleses, mantener las suyas, teniéndolas más inmediatas y unidas?" (265). Throughout his interpolated comments Ponz's friend insists not only on the benevolence of Spanish colonialism but also on its righteousness. By contrast, his repeated references to the purely mercenary motives of the English and the Dutch, whose "objeto único fue adquirir riquezas" (264), undermines the legitimacy of their imperial endeavours.

In the course of his defence, Ponz's commentator also takes issue with the disparaging remarks made by French Enlightenment thinkers on the decline of the Spanish colonies (261). Once again, rather than respond directly to the criticisms made, Ponz's "amigo" deflects attention onto French colonies and pointedly cites French sources, notably Masson and Raynal, as a means of exposing the lamentable state of French overseas possessions. Referring to French Guiana, he quotes directly from Masson's entry in the *Encyclopédie méthodique* (Ponz 261–2). Although the decline of the Spanish colonies is never expressly denied, Ponz's "amigo" downplays their mismanagement and inefficiency by claiming that the colonies of other imperial powers are in a far greater state of neglect: "se hallarán la holgazanería, la despoblación, la miseria y el abandono en grado mucho más alto del que atribuyen a los dominios españoles" (262). Moreover, in his attempts to ensure that a "justa comparación" (264) is made when assessing the Spanish empire, Ponz's commentator repeatedly draws attention to the sheer scale of Spain's overseas possessions and asserts that the colonies of England, France, and Holland combined "no componen un tercio de las de España" (263). The vast extent of the Spanish empire, he asserts, is an important mitigating factor when considering the productiveness of Spain's colonies. Further, he is confident that if the population of Spain's overseas territories were concentrated in just one or two colonies, then they would become more profitable and efficient, and possibly "la más floreciente colonia del Universo" (263).

Ponz's commentator makes it clear that what he finds particularly objectionable about French Enlightenment criticism is not only the credence given to reports of Spanish colonial violence, but also the insinuation that the Spanish conquest was somehow illegal: "No es creíble el grado de que prestan nuestros vecinos a sus autores sobre las crueldades que los primeros españoles cometieron en América, sobre el ningún derecho para apropiarse aquellos dominios y sobre otros puntos buscados para dar la idea más horrible de nuestra indole" (264).¹⁹ Ponz's "amigo" counters such attacks by questioning the legality of French, British, and Dutch colonial rule: "¿con qué derecho poseen ellos sus conquistas en aquellos climas?" (264). He also insists that

19 "Sus autores" is likely a reference to the abbé Raynal, Diderot, Montesquieu, and Voltaire.

the colonial violence used by England, Holland, and France in Asia far exceeds that of Spain in the New World, and claims that it continues into the present despite the apparent adherence of these nations to Enlightenment ideals of humanitarianism and justice:

Si fuera posible enumerar las muertes y destrozos que los holandeses, ingleses y franceses han ocasionado desde sus primeros viajes en aquella parte/del mundo hasta este día en que vivimos, se vería si estos estragos cedían en nada a los que la pluma más enconada achaca a los españoles; y lo más particular es que continúan estas desdichas en este siglo de la filosofía, de la humanidad, de la justicia y de las demás virtudes que tanto cacarean sus escritores. (264–5)

In his efforts to expose European hypocrisy, Ponz's "amigo", like countless other Spanish apologists, draws attention to the European system of slavery, primarily on account of Spain's reduced participation in the practice, especially when compared to other colonial empires such as Britain.²⁰ He focuses on the prosperous French slave-holding colony of San Domingo and attempts to downplay Spanish violence by employing a lurid and grotesque description of the brutality and depravity of the slavery practised by France:

¿A qué viene tanto hablar de humanidad, exagerar tanto las crueldades que los españoles han cometido en sus colonias, cuando la de Santo Domingo está presentando los más crueles espectáculos? No se ven por sus calles y plazas sino míseros esclavos cargados de prisiones y atormentados con modos desconocidos: collares de hierro con largas puntas; calzones o piernas de la misma materia desde la cadera hasta el tobillo; máscaras asimismo de hierro, que sólo dejan libre la vista y un corto uso de la boca, cuyos castigos, además de los grilletes, cepos, cormas, etc., son desconocidos. (271)

Having vigorously defended Spain's New World record in the manner of Benito Jerónimo Feijoo (1676–1764), the Benedictine theologian who initiated "una línea apologética—seguida después por Campomanes y Cadalso—de hacer recaer los abusos colonizadores en toda la Europa culta y no solo sobre los españoles" (*Mestre Sanchis, Apología* 62),²¹ Ponz's commentator concludes his "observaciones" on a conciliatory note, insisting that it is not his intention to offend the French, nor would he ever have resorted to exposing French shortcomings in the way that he does had it not been for Masson's searing indictment of Spain: "Nada de lo dicho se diría, y menos lo de la isla de Santo Domingo, si nos provocase el señor Masson y su *Enciclopedia*, tratándonos de verdugos y de todo lo demás que queda insinuado" (271). Nonetheless, Ponz's friend is confident (as Ponz was earlier) that all right-thinking people in France will be as appalled as the Spanish when they realise the full extent of Masson's scurrilous falsehoods:

Las personas de buena razón en Francia que conocen todas estas cosas, abominarán, como los mismos españoles, de que semejantes dicterios, injurias y falsedades se publiquen, se consientan y se extiendan en la *Enciclopedia metódica* para presentarnos en ella todas las naciones como los más crueles, los más bárbaros e ignorantes que hay sobre la Tierra. (272)

Whether by Ponz's own hand or that of another, there can little argument that the portrayal offered of Spanish colonialism in the prologue to the second volume of his *Viaje fuera de España* is heavily polemical and intensely partisan. Despite Ponz's initial claims to impartiality and

²⁰ Despite repeated claims to the contrary, Spain did have slaves in its American colonies and relied on the Portuguese to import them. As Edwin Williamson observes: "The eighteenth century ... saw a surge in the slave traffic when Cuba and other Spanish islands set up a sugar-plantation economy relying exclusively on black slave labour" (142). It is notable that Campomanes, who it will be remembered critics have suggested was likely behind the façade of Ponz's "amigo", defends the practice of slavery as vital to the prosperity of Spain's colonies: "Este comercio es de mucha importancia al Estado ... sin hacer gran surtimiento de negros, especialmente para minas, las islas y corta del palo en Campeche, Honduras, no podríamos hacer florecer nuestras Colonias a imitación de los ingleses, que por su abundante introducción de negros han puesto sus Islas en mucho valor, y lo mismo han hecho los franceses" (*Reflexiones* 336).

²¹ Feijoo's defence of Spain's New World conquest is included in the essay titled "Glorias de España", published in Volume IV of his *Teatro crítico universal* (1730). What is particularly notable in the case of Feijoo, whom Anthony Pagden notably describes as "perhaps the most obviously 'enlightened' Spaniard of the period (Enlightenment xi)", is that elsewhere in the same volume of his *Teatro crítico universal*, Feijoo delivers an emphatic indictment of Spain's American conquest in the essay "*Fábula de las Batuecas y países imaginarios*".

truth, it is clear that the prologue's primary aim is to promote Spain as an exemplary empire whose civilising achievements underscore the legitimacy of the Spanish empire and its higher moral intent. Pitted against this portrait of benevolent Spanish imperialism is the exploitative commercial colonialism of France, England, and Holland, the legality of which the prologue calls into question. Ponz's shining example of Spanish benevolence is intended to discredit European criticism of Spain's colonial record by claiming the imperial high ground for Spain.

It is crucial to the prologue's portrayal of guiltless Spanish colonialism that the true face of Spanish conquest be concealed.²² There is no condemnation anywhere in the prologue of the exploitation and plunder committed by Spanish settlers, nor is there any meaningful attempt to engage with the substance of the criticisms levelled against Spanish colonialism by Enlightenment thinkers, even if the tendentious nature of much of their criticism is now widely accepted.²³ As a result, the prologue's explicit nationalism, at least in its treatment of the Spanish American conquest, confirms the fears of Spanish Enlightenment writers that the apologia form which proliferated throughout Spain during the eighteenth century would serve only to "hacer creer que la ignorancia y la barbarie es general" (*El Censor* 251). Although there is some truth in the prologue's claim that Spain was a territorial as opposed to a trading empire,²⁴ it must be acknowledged that by the second half of the eighteenth century, Spain's Bourbon reformers were intent on revamping the Spanish empire by pursuing a policy of significant colonial economic reform.²⁵ As Gabriel Paquette asserts: "the older emphasis on Spain's providential mission was replaced by a new gospel of economic prosperity" ("Reform" 165). Similarly, Pagden notes that "[b]y the second half of the eighteenth century all three empires, even that of Castile, came to be seen by their respective mother countries as predominantly commercial enterprises" (*Lords* 37).²⁶ It is ironic, therefore, that Ponz's commentator should offer sharp criticism of the commercial empires of other European nations when it was precisely this commercial impulse, illustrative of Enlightenment ideas and capable of countering charges of Spain's backwardness, that had underpinned Bourbon reforms in the late eighteenth century. Moreover, the Bourbon emphasis on overhauling colonial trade, as well as Spain's increased intervention in Spanish America, was met with significant resistance by both Creole and indigenous populations. Paquette notes that "[t]here were more than a hundred significant uprisings by indigenous peoples in Spanish America between 1720 and 1790" ("Reform" 165). Ponz's prologue, by contrast, is completely silent on this new acrimony in colonial relations and instead presents an idealised image of the natives as loyal and dutiful subjects living peacefully under benevolent Spanish rule. Once again, the prologue's imperial propaganda impedes critical scrutiny and stands in the way of a more exact understanding of the Spanish empire in the second half of the eighteenth century.

Like many Spanish *ilustrados* who attempted to defend Spain against European criticism, Ponz's undiluted panegyric on Spanish colonialism, which clashes with the more enlightened attitudes he expresses elsewhere in his *Viaje fuera de España*, most notably his championing of British commerce and trade in the first volume of his *Viaje* (I: 197), reveals the extent to which he was torn between Enlightenment zeal and a deep-seated national pride.²⁷ Critics

²² This is not to deny that many in Spain took seriously their responsibility to protect and evangelise the Native Americans. Williamson draws attention to what he describes as "a very powerful countervailing tendency within the Spanish state itself to protect and preserve Indian cultures" (85). For the Spanish, their right to rule the Indies was rooted in the papal Bulls of Donation issued by Pope Alexander VI in 1493, which granted Spain responsibility for the evangelisation of the New World.

²³ Even amongst Spain's most fervent apologists, notably Juan Nuix (1740–83) and Juan Pablo Forner (1756–99), attempts were made to grapple with European criticism of Spain's colonial excesses. Not infrequently, however, apologists concentrated their efforts on discrediting Bartolomé de Las Casas's *Brevísima relación de la destrucción de las Indias* (1542), which was widely acknowledged to be the source of much of Europe's criticism of Spanish colonialism.

²⁴ Comparing the competing objectives of European empires, Anthony Pagden notes: "The empires of the largely Protestant and increasingly capitalist north ... would all be, nominally at least, trading empires, largely eschewing colonization and conquest except as a means of last resort. They were to be built upon wealth, not military might" (*Peoples* 92).

²⁵ For a complete discussion of the Bourbon centralising reforms, see Paquette (*Enlightenment*); Pérez Herrero; García Regueiro.

²⁶ Pagden is referring in this instance to the empires of Britain, France, and Spain.

²⁷ It is noteworthy that Frank refers to Ponz's "pertenencia inequívoca ... al grupo más representativo de ilustrados españoles" (149).

of the Spanish Enlightenment have frequently drawn attention to Spain's divided national consciousness during the period. According to Hans-Joachim Lope, Spanish intellectuals "tenían que comprometerse con frecuencia en dos frentes al mismo tiempo. Si por una parte trataban de consolidar y desarrollar las conquistas de la Ilustración, por otra se veían cada vez más en la situación de tener que rechazar acusaciones falsas y prejuicios injustos del extranjero" (401). It is clear therefore that Ponz's prologue to the second volume of his *Viaje fuera de España* serves as yet further evidence of the entrenched nationalism that moved beneath the surface of many Spanish Enlightenment minds as well as the torturous struggle they faced in their efforts to come to terms with Spain's colonial past and present.²⁸

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²⁸ Other critics who have commented on the predicament facing Spanish Enlightenment writers include Dominguez (236); Gies (313); Marias (93); Santos (61–2).

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