CHAPTER SIX

COMPARISONS AND CONCLUSIONS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The Portuguese were close observers of both the French and British penal systems. Many Portuguese at the time were generous in their praise of the British in Australia. Andrade Corvo believed, “It is in Australia where we find the most brilliant example of the marvels of modern colonization…. the extraordinary progress…. was made possible by regular and constant work provided by degredados…. who produced more than they consumed…”1 In reality, the Portuguese system was modeled more closely on the French in Guiana than any other imperial power or locale. There were major similarities and differences among these three systems of penal exile, although it is also clear that the French were close observers of the British system in Australia.2 Outlining these allows for some comparisons and shows the Portuguese system as parallel but not identical with penal systems used by these other European powers.

6.2 THE BRITISH

After extensive use of several of their colonies in North America (chiefly Virginia and Maryland) during early modern times, British authorities would eventually turn to their Australian colony as the locale for their convict population after American independence. This change was not automatic or swift and included experimental use of the West African coastline and Central America.3 Australia is both the best-studied example and the crowning achievement of European penal transport in modern times. This is for two reasons. First, the documentation for this extended process is (relatively) massive. Second, both the number of convicts sent to all regions of Australia as well as the very low indigenous population meant that this penal labor system could provide sufficient manpower in

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2 On this subject in general, see Colin Forster, France and Botany Bay.
3 See Emma Christopher, A Merciless Place.
a colony where it was otherwise lacking. The British were also attentive to the gender imbalance and sent sufficient female convicts to ensure population stability and growth. In short, unlike the Portuguese convicts in Africa, where there was already a large population that dwarfed the small numbers of Europeans, convict labor in Australia had real value and was in demand. This was also not the case with the French in Guiana, where although there was some demand, the value of labor was very low due to massive oversupply as well as the pre-existing population. The British legal authorities sent a total of 160,000 convicts to all regions of Australia during the sixty or seventy years the system was in operation.\footnote{Hughes, \textit{Fatal Shore}, p. 2. A more recent study by Anderson and Stewart “Convict Labour and the Western Empires…” estimates 165,500 to all parts of Australia and 376,250 for the British system in its entirety from 1615–1940.} While the indigenous population at the time of contact may have been as high as 300,000, given both the huge expanse of Australia and the decimation of this native population by diseases, it is easy to see why convict labor became valuable. By 1845 Hughes argues that the two populations were nearly equal in number. That date then might be the tipping point when Europeans and their descendants began to outnumber the indigenous population.\footnote{Hughes, \textit{Fatal Shore}, p. 272.} Once a convict completed his or her sentence, he or she would be issued a ticket of leave or a conditional pardon. In either case, this granted the convict citizenship within the colony but with the stipu-