From Conciliation to Threat: Silva Lisboa, Viscount of Cairu, and the Luso-Brazilian Empire in 1821

GUilhaRMe CELESTINO
King’s College London, UK

In the year before Brazil’s independence, the press played an essential role in influencing the events that resulted in the rupture with Portugal. With his ideas shaped by the Portuguese Enlightenment and economic liberalism, Silva Lisboa initially supported the Cortes of Lisbon and the Luso-Brazilian empire, but, when the Congress decided to legislate against Brazilian autonomy, he became one of the main critics of the legislation that would change the balance of power between the two kingdoms and, eventually, in his opinion, could lead to the ‘recolonisation’ of Brazil.

Keywords: Brazil, enlightenment, independence, Jose da Silva Lisboa, Portugal, press.

José da Silva Lisboa (1756–1835), first Baron and Viscount of Cairu, economist, historian, jurist, politician and journalist, was a key figure in the process leading to and following Brazil’s Independence, from the arrival of the Portuguese royal family in Rio de Janeiro (1808) to the abdication of Pedro I (1831). His work as a journalist in 1821 is central to understanding the context of this time of change, but also continuity in the ex-colony, a rupture without a revolution that kept the power under the Braganza monarchy. His publications could serve as a paradigm of the change of mood in the Brazilian press, from early and enthusiastic support of the constitution, to mounting criticism of the Cortes of Lisbon. The decisions that began to be taken in Lisbon regarding Brazil’s future in the Reino Unido de Portugal, Brasil e Algarves (United Kingdom of Portugal, Brazil and Algarve) included the return of trade taxes and were seen by Brazilians as an attempt of recolonisation.

At a moment of intense debate in the new-born Brazilian press, Silva Lisboa was one of the most important commentators during that period. However, his publications were later deemed sycophantic and ‘conservative’ by his peers and in the subsequent historiography, due to his attachment to the dynasty of Braganza and his support for the monarchy. A deeper reading of his pamphlets and periodicals reveals a more complex picture that combines a commitment to Brazilian autonomy with a defence of the Enlightenment ideas. His simultaneous criticism of despotism and Jacobinism insert him among those who will be later labelled as ‘conservatives’. According to Christian Lynch, the main difference between the rationalist liberals and those like Silva Lisboa is that the latter abhorred the idea of rupture which could lead to the collapse of social and
economic life (Lynch, 2008). By combining a literature review that focuses on the history of the press and the history of ideas during early nineteenth century with the study of two pamphlets and one newspaper, this article assesses how Silva Lisboa’s early publications influenced the unfolding of events in the Reino Unido. Despite his intentions, they helped to create the perfect conditions for independence in a matter of months. This analysis also brings to light the difficult position in which the conservative Brazilian elite, to which he belonged and known as ‘coimbrões’, found itself. While advocating for an autonomous American kingdom within the Portuguese empire, they avoided supporting a total break with Lisbon.

Becoming a Journalist on the Eve of Rupture

Silva Lisboa published two periodicals and three pamphlets between Dom João VI’s return to Portugal until the ‘Fico’, when Dom Pedro decided to stay in Brazil. His first periodical was O Conciliador do Reino Unido, published between March and April 1821, defending the union between Portugal and Brazil. It was followed by the pamphlet Diálogo entre Philosopho e Pastor, published in early May 1821, still on the same subject; the pamphlet Notas ao Despacho Circular do Congresso de Laibach, comprising three issues published in August and September 1821, on the foreign policies of the Holy Alliance; and the pamphlet Despertador Brasiliense, published in December 1821, which included a clarion call to Brazilians and a threat to the Reino Unido. The fifth publication, the periodical Sabatina familiar de amigos do bem-commum, published between December 1821 and January 1822, adopted an essayistic style with an exclusively pedagogical intent bearing no direct relation to current events. All these publications were anonymous.

Although Silva Lisboa came to journalism late in life after a successful career as an author of books, his newspapers and pamphlets ended up defining his importance in the history of Brazil and in the outcome of independence. Before becoming an editor, he was a respected but somewhat discreet civil servant, having published numerous books on political economy, and he was acknowledged as one of those responsible for the 1808 Decreto de Abertura dos Portos às Nações Amigas, the decree which opened Brazilian ports to friendly nations and so ended the Colonial Pact. His previous experience in the administration as a member of the ‘Mesa de Inspeção’ (Board of Trade) in Bahia, and his knowledge of the new science of ‘Political Economy’, as author of the two-volume Princípios de direito mercantil and of Princípios da economia política, prepared him, according to Wanderley Pinho, for his role as intermediary between the local elite, willing to resume the exports halted by the French invasion, and the Regency of Dom João, as represented by José Luís de Vasconcelos e Sousa, Marquis de Belas (Pinho, 1961: 23–25).

After publishing his first periodical, at the age of 64, he became one of the main influences on public opinion during independence. In this period, he attracted a growing number of enemies and became subject to open criticism from other journalists, although even his opponents recognised his erudition. Nevertheless, he also managed to disseminate important concepts such as recolonisation and was pivotal in the decision of the prince regent Dom Pedro to stay in Brazil, something considered to have been crucial not only for independence, but also for the integrity of the Brazilian territory.

The context in which the Independence of Brazil took place was unique and differs from Spanish American countries, although it was also influenced by the Napoleonic Wars in Europe and the crisis of 1807–1808 that affected both Iberian monarchies,
leading to the dissolution of their empires in America (Sebastián, 2009). In Spanish America, the Creole discontent with the Bourbon administrative reforms generated resentment of these elites of European origin, which took advantage of the arrest of the Spanish Bourbon monarchs by Napoleon in 1808, on the one hand, and the lack of representation in the Cortes of Cádiz in 1810, on the other, to fight for independence. However, as Cañizares-Esguerra argues, these independences were not inevitable and contingencies like ‘poor political and military choices of an incompetent monarch, Ferdinand VII’ also had a role in the crumbling of the Spanish empire (Cañizares-Esguerra, 2009: 53).

Events played out differently in the Portuguese Empire. In 1808, with the support of the British Navy, the Braganza dynasty fled the invasion of Portugal and settled in Rio de Janeiro, which became the capital of the empire. In 1815 Brazil was elevated to the status of kingdom within the Reino Unido. These two events were crucial in realigning the relationship between Portugal and Brazil the ex-colony, which became more important than the metropolis. Brazil, and especially Rio, benefited enormously from this change of status, with the latter enjoying a boom in urban reforms, artistic activity and economic development. This all transformed the withered, provincial capital of colonial Brazil into a tropical Versailles, postponing independence and affecting the political character of the American nation while keeping its absolutist structures. Schultz argues that the settling of this court in Rio de Janeiro was decisive ‘in making independence a foregone conclusion’ (Schultz, 2001: 5) and led to a conservative non-republican outcome that was ‘the creation of an empire and a nation under the aegis of the Portuguese monarchy itself’ differing from the other states in the Americas (Schultz, 2001: 5). However, the maintenance of this empire for almost a century was also the result of the decisions made in both Lisbon and Rio between 1821 and 1822 and the popular support gathered around Dom Pedro influenced by publications like the ones from Silva Lisboa.

The end of the Peninsular War, the court in Rio and the losses caused in Portugal by the opening of Brazil’s ports started to foster resentment across the Atlantic, especially among the merchant bourgeoisie. This resentment became one of the causes of the Porto Revolution of 1820, which put an end to absolutism in Portugal and established a Provisional Junta, which called for the election of a Constituent Assembly. The assembly of the Cortes in Lisbon from January 1821 brought together representatives from both Brazil and Portugal, receiving widespread support in both kingdoms to create a Constitution for the Reino Unido. Beginning his career as a journalist in 1821, Silva Lisboa was supportive of Dom João’s oath of loyalty in March the same year to the Bases of the Constitution, which led to the return of the king to Portugal in the following month. Before his departure, however, Dom João left his son Pedro as prince regent of Brazil, in a move to preserve some control over the American kingdom.

Nevertheless, the Cortes’ goals concerning Brazil were different from those imagined by its supporters in America. The Portuguese deputies soon broke their promise not to legislate on any issue regarding Brazil before the arrival of all its representatives and started to threaten Brazil’s status as a kingdom, exerting pressure to change institutional and commercial relations (Alexandre, 1993: 575–579). As a result, the support for the Cortes, and consequently for the union with Portugal, waned among Brazilians (da Silva, 2003: 322–325). Silva Lisboa’s stance shifted along similar lines, from fierce support for the Reino Unido and constitutionalism in early 1821, to challenging the decisions of the Cortes of Lisbon later the same year.

Among the decisions being taken in Portugal was the proposal of a federation between Portugal and Brazil which started to be discussed at the Cortes after the arrival
of the deputies for São Paulo. It proposed a federative solution against the prevailing unionist thesis, which assumed the merging of the kingdoms of Brazil and Portugal into one sole kingdom represented by the Cortes (Ferreira, 2009). The main relevance of the proposal from the deputy Antônio Carlos de Andrada e Silva was that it would guarantee equality between the peoples of Brazil and Portugal and autonomy to the government in Rio (Coser, 2009). The proposal was elaborated by Antônio’s brother, José Bonifácio de Andrada e Silva, and considered Brazil and Portugal as ‘heterogeneous bodies’ since the first demanded specific legislation for its diverse population formed of free people and slaves. That is why in every province there should be an Executive, Legislative and Judiciary power that would recognise the authority of the prince regent in Rio (Villalta, 2016: 217–218).

The proposal did not prosper and the Cortes voted two provisional decrees on 29 September 1821 –requiring the return of Dom Pedro to Europe, and consequently abolishing his regency; and creating in the Brazilian provinces the ‘juntas provisórias’, a government body autonomous from each other and subordinated to Lisbon; the provinces would be ruled by a ‘Governador das Armas’, a military governor controlled directly by the crown – which were considered a victory for the unionist faction who prevailed in the Congress during the following months (Alexandre, 1993: 589). These decisions only worsened the crisis between the two kingdoms, and when the Portuguese military in Brazil tried a coup to take Dom Pedro back to Portugal, he was backed by the Brazilians and decided to stay in Rio on 9 January 1822, ‘Fico’, initiating a movement that would reinforce his power in the southern provinces and keep Brazil united under the Braganza dynasty. This led to the calling of a Brazilian assembly in June 1822 and subsequent independence in September 1822, only accomplished after the war that expelled the Portuguese armies from the remaining provinces in 1823.

Although Silva Lisboa always positioned himself against the rupture until it became inevitable, he was critical of the decisions taken by the Cortes against Brazil from late 1821 onwards, using threatening arguments against the Portuguese administration, while always avoiding attacking the monarchy. By analysing his writings during this period, it is possible to relate his views to the many interpretations of liberalism and to the extension of reformist enlightenment ideas among the Luso-Brazilian elite who proclaimed independence. In his early publications he discusses concepts such as press freedom, absolutism versus constitutionalism, and recolonisation. If, before the ‘Fico’, ideas of independence could not be openly discussed in the press, especially by those who were part of the administration and held allegiance to the king, this did not prevent the publication of criticisms of Portugal by the Brazilian elite, indicating the forthcoming rupture.

A Divided Elite: Coimbrões and Brasilienses

Villalta divides this Brazilian elite into two: the coimbrões (Coimbra University students) and the brasilienses (born in Brazil). The coimbrões studied in Coimbra after the reforms made by the Marquis of Pombal and were part of the Portuguese administration that defended the Reino Unido without a return to its pre-1815 status, and they included José da Silva Lisboa and other central figures during Brazil’s independence such as José Bonifácio, Manuel Ferreira da Câmara and Hipólito da Costa. They were supporters of a Portuguese-Brazilian empire and defended a moderate liberalism, according to which the king was the representative of the nation and the sovereignty would reside on him...
not the people (Villalta, 2016: 209). The other group, the *brasilienses*, were not generally educated in Coimbra, or if they did attend the university, they did not complete their studies, and their education took place in religious seminars in the colony. They supported separatism, being more receptive to radical ideas and identified as their *patria* the place where they were born and to which they should be loyal (Villalta, 2016: 210).

As part of the first group, in 1808 Silva Lisboa was appointed by his fellow Coimbra alumnus and secretary of foreign affairs and war, Rodrigo de Souza Coutinho, as one of the three directors and censors of the Impressão Régia, the official printing press. According to Kirschner, by being recognised as a loyal subject and good catholic, he was well suited for this important royal office. With his vast erudition, he shared ‘probity, prudence and zeal for religion and the public good’ (Kirschner, 2009: 154). In fact, according to Lynch, his ideas were compatible with the reforms made by Souza Coutinho and a result of the purpose of reconciling ‘social and economic reform through economic liberalism, without questioning absolutism’ (Lynch, 2020). In addition, Silva Lisboa managed to combine his enthusiasm for political economy, through the rigorous analysis of Adam Smith to whom he dedicated the work *Princípios da economia política* (1804), with the fight against radical ideas represented by the moderate liberal Edmund Burke and his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790). A compilation of Burke’s work was translated by Silva Lisboa in 1812 on request of Souza Coutinho in *Extratos das obras políticas de Edmund Burke* (Lynch, 2020).

While working as royal censor, in 1821 Silva Lisboa published his first newspaper, *Conciliador do Reino Unido*, in which he retained his allegiance to a union with Portugal under Dom João, supported constitutionalism and criticised the dangers of Jacobinism among the radical liberal factions in the Cortes. His first pamphlet *Diálogo entre Philosopho e Pastor* continued to present a favourable view of the constitution. These points of view changed in the pamphlet *Despertador Brasiliense*, which adopted a more radical tone against the Cortes with threats of independence, while not openly supporting it. This publication influenced the decision of Dom Pedro to stay in Brazil, a decision that changed the history of what would be the Brazilian empire.

**Compromise between Constitution and Sovereignty**

In his early publications Silva Lisboa’s main goal was to reach a compromise between Portuguese and Brazilian interests after the Porto Revolution, at a moment when Dom João was returning to Portugal, in April 1821, while still wanting to keep Brazil as part of the Reino Unido. Tensions regarding the status of the ex-colony were growing on both sides of the Atlantic, especially when Portuguese traders lost their exclusive rights with the opening of the Brazilian ports, and with the loss of Portugal’s political monopoly through the institution of a new administrative structure in Rio de Janeiro by duplicating the bodies still existing in Lisbon like the Conselho Supremo Militar (Supreme Military Council), Arquivo Militar (the Military Archives), Desembargo do Paço (Tribunal of the Palace) and the Junta do Comércio, Agricultura e Indústria do Brasil (Board of Trade, Agriculture, and Industry of Brazil); while also reorganising the Casa da Suplicação do Brasil (Supreme Court of Appeals of Brazil) from an already existent body, the Rio’s Court of Appeals (Barman, 1988: 46).

Silva Lisboa’s first periodical publication, *Conciliador do Reino Unido*, began to circulate anonymously on the eve of the 2nd March 1821 decree abolishing pre-publication censorship, according to Hélio Vianna (Vianna, 1945: 368). As the
epigraph for his newspaper he choose two cantos from Luis de Camões’s epic poem Os Lusíadas: the fifth, which describes the encounter with the King of Melinda, and the sixth, which is a depiction of the history of the ‘The Twelve of England’, a chivalric medieval legend known for displaying the heroic aspect of the Portuguese character (Álvarez-Cifuentes, 2016). According to Flores, the choice of epigraph was a way of showing obedience to the king and to the union with Portugal, reinforcing his position as a subject of the crown, and valuing the maintenance of the ties with Portugal (Flores, 2012).

Conciliador was the third newspaper published in Brazil and appeared at a critical moment when decisions were being made leading to the king’s return to Portugal and the continuing residence of Dom Pedro in Brazil, as prince regent. Vianna argues that Silva Lisboa supported the possibility of Dom João staying in Brazil, according to the idea that the king inwardly preferred this solution to the Luso-Brazilian constitutional crisis of early 1821 (Vianna, 1945: 369–370).

In the first issue, published on 1 March 1821, Silva Lisboa calls for union between the Portuguese of all territories, for the support of the monarchy of Braganza as personified by Dom João, and for the maintenance of stability through the signing of the draft Constitution from the Cortes of Lisbon, the only way he considers it possible to achieve freedom. He appeals to his compatriots from Portugal, reminding them that Brazil was also part of the Reino Unido according to the decrees of 16 December 1815 and 13 May 1816 in which Dom João declared the union between both kingdoms. He argues that by acting like Jesus the king removed the jealousy and distrust from his children and ‘made two one, to reconcile both in one Body’ (Conciliador do Reino Unido, 1821: 2–3).

At this point, Silva Lisboa is still sympathetic to the Cortes and he congratulates Dom João on his oath to the future Constitution in a public square in Rio de Janeiro on 26 February 1821. The oath was a response to the spread of Constitutional support in Brazil through revolutionary outbreaks in Bahia and Pará and was followed by the decision taken on 24 February 1821 to send Dom Pedro to Portugal, something that ultimately did not take place. Silva Lisboa extols the people of Rio de Janeiro who witnessed the swearing of the future constitution, calling them ‘a Primeira Corte d’America’ in which a constitutional monarchy was hailed, and he appeals to the ‘Fraternal and Political’ union of the Portuguese from both hemispheres, highlighting the conciliatory aspect of a constituent assembly in achieving ‘true freedom’ without a revolution, thus attempting to reframe the Porto Revolution without its disruptive elements (Conciliador do Reino Unido, 1821: 5–6).

In the second issue, from 12 March 1821, Silva Lisboa praises the discovery of Brazil, not only as a unilateral action of the Portuguese people, but as a divine gift ‘shown by the finger of God to the Portuguese’ (Conciliador do Reino Unido, 1821: 10), appealing to the notion that Brazil should not be considered a conquest, but rather as a gift that should be treated with care in order to remain an ‘entire piece’, as created by God. However, to show his commitment to what he calls the ‘national character’ of Portugal and its union with Brazil, he praises the pioneering achievements of the Portuguese navigations, using foreign sources such as the Scottish historian William Robertson.

In the third issue, published three days later, Silva Lisboa praises the importance of Brazil through the writings of non-Portuguese European authors, which was considered by Vianna to be a piece of propaganda in favour of Brazil (Vianna, 1945: 371). There is no direct reference to any actual event, as in the first two editions. It is an attempt to convince the European Portuguese of the importance of Brazil and contains an implied threat regarding the consequences of any attempt to recreate the colonial pact, such as
the section in which he quotes the French thinker and politician Abbé Dominique de Pradt who celebrated the benefits of moving the royal family to Brazil, which changed its status (Conciliador do Reino Unido, 1821: 22–23). In addition, instead of praising the Reino Unido, he is now more interested in highlighting the importance of Brazil. He criticises those who only complain of past grievances and the set of administrative laws that Dom João VI implemented when he arrived in Brazil, known as the Código Brasiliense (Conciliador do Reino Unido, 1821: 22). This is followed by a eulogy to Dom João and his decision to relocate to Brazil: ‘His move from Portugal to Brazil is a success that will have the greatest influence on the destiny of the world’. Also, he recalls Brazil’s new status: ‘Portugal no longer has a colony in America; now it has everything to gain and nothing to lose’ (Conciliador do Reino Unido, 1821: 23).

To support his argument, he mentions other foreign authors who praised Brazil, such as the consul of Russia, Georg Heinrich von Langsdorff, who supported immigrants wanting to settle in the American kingdom (Conciliador do Reino Unido, 1821: 27). He finishes the issue by appealing to both Brazil and Portugal, which he says are bonded by reciprocal interests, not to follow Spain and its colonies in their path to ‘contention, civil war and an eternal separation’ (Conciliador do Reino Unido, 1821: 28).

The fourth issue, published on 31 March 1821, presents some of the contradictions in Silva Lisboa’s thinking. He explains again that the main goal of his newspaper was to ‘reconcile, and never disunite, the spirits and interests of the natives and inhabitants of the Lusitanian Monarchy; […] to guide well the Public Opinion’ (Conciliador do Reino Unido, 1821: 29–30). He follows by highlighting the importance of curbing what he calls ‘popular mistakes’ and criticising those who make use of the space they have in the public opinion to foster unrest among the people (Conciliador do Reino Unido, 1821: 30). It is possible to see the importance he gives to the concept of public opinion and how he is already aware of the relevance of the use of publications to direct and influence political thinking. He considers the public opinion, as the reign of wisdom, prudence and reason against political exaltation, revolution and the brutal transformations of the socio-political order. It is a symbolic and abstract product with moral and legal force (Morel and de Barros, 2003: 28).

The understanding of public opinion as a general opinion imposed from above by intellectuals on other individuals was shared by almost all journalists of the Luso-Brazilian constitutional period and adjusted to the practices of liberalism. These journalists highlighted the role played by education and by newspapers in the formation of that general opinion by setting themselves up as its spokespeople (das Neves, 2009). When they claim to act on behalf of public opinion, they are trying to manipulate it, because in this era of transition from an oral culture to a reading one, public opinion was not limited to the literate. Pamphlets, both manuscripts and printed, began to extend their reach thanks to the practice of reading aloud in public. However, in places like Portuguese America, which was deeply marked by oral culture, practices of the Old Regime still prevailed in communities where the reproduction of traditions and common sense was adapted according to the situation, in opposition to literate Enlightened knowledge based on rational arguments (de Carvalho, das Neves, and Basile, 2012: 8–9).

Still in issue number four of Conciliador, Silva Lisboa evokes the events of 26 February 1821 (rioting among the Portuguese troops in Rio de Janeiro) and praises the Portuguese army for halting their mutiny and continuing to protect the king and the political union between Brazil and Portugal. At the same time, he criticises those soldiers who were influenced by radical liberals and freemasons. He also praises the clergy for fostering a religious spirit among the people, and loyalty and order in Porto, criticising
commerce and competition among traders in the port area for leading to sins and vices such as greed, ignorance and inequity, which can be only overcome by religion and the presence of preachers (Conciliador do Reino Unido, 1821: 33–34).

Meanwhile, Silva Lisboa addresses the same subject in *Diálogo entre Philosopho e Pastor*, an anonymous pamphlet published around 5 May 1821 and attributed to him by Vianna (Vianna, 1945: 403–404). In this seven-page publication, he expresses his sympathy for the signing of the first draft of the empire’s constitution by Dom João VI – who had just returned to Portugal from Brazil – and criticises the ‘anarchy’ of Porto’s Liberal Revolution of 1820.

The dialogue form in alexandrine verses that Silva Lisboa emulates in this pamphlet derives from the Renaissance tradition. According to Sheila Hue it was first used by humanists to discuss subjects such as ethics, philosophy, autonomy, politics, religion, rhetoric, botany, music, love, everyday life, morals and even marital doctrine, before the advent of newspapers. It had the format of a conversation between two or several individuals, allowing the author to oppose antagonistic ideas and to stage a process of persuasion (Hue, 2007: 17–18). In the early nineteenth century, this genre was used in pamphlets as a way of propagating the political culture through explaining certain aspects of its vocabulary, according to Lucia Neves. Other examples from the same period are *Diálogo entre o corcunda abatido e o constitucional exaltado; Alfaiate Constitucional, conversa entre um alfaiate e seus fregueses*; and *Diálogo entre a Constituição e o Despotismo* (das Neves, 1999).

Silva Lisboa adheres to this genre to discuss the political news regarding the signing of the Bases of the Constitution by Dom João VI. The main concern of the pamphlet was Silva Lisboa’s assumption that the reader, through understanding the political culture, should be educated about the dangers of the excesses of revolution. In order to do so he sets up a fake dichotomy between two voices: that of the cosmopolitan philosopher, whose academic knowledge derives from his studies in England and Germany, having read Plato, Cicero and Homer; and that of the Brazilian shepherd, whose practical wisdom is a result of his observation of and contact with nature.

We learn that the philosopher is from *A cidade*, Rio de Janeiro, and the shepherd, who lives in the countryside of Brazil, asks for news, for he is worried about the consequences of the Porto Revolution in Brazil and the dangers of anarchy – ‘Does anarchy destroy the Luso-Empire?’ – and despotism – ‘Does the bad rascal exert despotism?’ (Diálogo entre Philosopho e Pastor, 1821: 5). The philosopher reassures him that nothing dreadful is happening, that he also supports constitutionalism and celebrates the signing of the future constitution by Dom João, with the decision of Dom Pedro to remain in Brazil. He believes it will bring freedom through the law to the whole empire and harmony between the Braganza dynasty and the Portuguese people from both hemispheres through liberal reforms that would still respect the crown. In the end, he presents a favourable view of a future reformist constitution, provided that it keeps to its liberal path of abolishing taxes and improving economic reforms, following the British model (Diálogo entre Philosopho e Pastor, 1821: 6–7).

The events Silva Lisboa mentions in the pamphlet, also discussed in the *Conciliador*, took place on two dates: on 26 February 1821 when Dom Pedro managed to avert a mobilisation by Portuguese units in the Rio de Janeiro garrison by signing, in his father’s name, a ‘formal oath to obey the forthcoming constitution’; and on 13 March 1821, when Dom João VI published a decree with his decision to return to Lisbon, ‘leaving
From Conciliation to Threat

Dom Pedro to serve as regent in Rio until the constitution was enacted’ (Barman, 1988:70).

Returning to the seventh and last issue of Conciliador, from 25 April 1821, Silva Lisboa introduces at the end a discussion that will be crucial later the same year at the moment of the discussion of the ‘Fico’. He quotes a speech by the bishop of Bahia (Vicente da Soledade e Castro) in the Cortes session of 1 February 1821 in which he states that the ‘liberal system’ of the treaty of 1808 (the opening of the ports) should be preserved, since Portugal and Brazil are the same nation, and those who argue the contrary should be silenced (Conciliador do Reino Unido, 1821: 63–64).

Supporting the ‘Fico’

The growing discontent in both sides of the empire by the end of the same year led to the publishing of the anonymous pamphlet Despertador Brasiliense in December 1821, consisting of three pages and printed in the Tipografia Nacional. Although it was also attributed to Silva Lisboa by Vianna, he recalls there was a debate regarding its authorship. Antônio Vasconcelos de Drummond claimed that the author of the pamphlet was the judge Francisco de França Miranda. The question of authorship was finally settled when a copy of the pamphlet was found among the periodical and pamphlets donate by Cairu’s heirs to the Instituto Histórico e Geográfico Brasileiro (Vianna, 1945: 406). The pompous language and style of the text, with its excessive use of capital letters, also corroborate Silva Lisboa’s authorship. Its release date, according to Vianna, taking Melo Morais as a reference, is either 12 or 14 December 1821, less than a month before the ‘Fico’ (Vianna, 1945: 407).

To Carlos Rizzini, although following Vasconcelos de Drummond’s attribution of authorship to França Miranda, this pamphlet directly influenced the decision taken by Dom Pedro to remain in Brazil. If until then the prince hesitated to resist the demand for his return to Europe, the pamphlet’s criticism of the Cortes influenced Brazilian support for Dom Pedro’s decision to disobey the decrees (Rizzini, 1946: 366–367). For Isabel Lustosa, the content of the pamphlet radicalises the previous discussion on the dangers of recolonisation which began to be debated in the last issues of Conciliador. She also acknowledges the fundamental role it had in the decision taken by Dom Pedro to remain in Brazil (Lustosa, 2000: 25). To justify the importance given to this publication and its repercussions it suffices to say that it was contradicted by two pamphlets in Portugal at the beginning of the following year: A todos os periodistas de Lisboa um Amigo da União do Brasil sobre a ‘Malagueta’, ‘Despertador Brasiliense’ e ‘Representação dos Paulistas’, signed Amigo da União, and O Despertador Braziliense refutado em favor dos Povos, from José Pinto da Costa e Macedo (Vianna, 1945: 408). They both reflect the opinion of those in favour of the continuity of the Reino Unido and are against any criticism towards Portugal (Vianna, 1945: 508–509).

Kirschner also acknowledges the importance of the pamphlet and its significant impact on public opinion in Rio de Janeiro, where it gathered support among the elites, leading to a strategic shift among radical liberals regarding their view of the monarchy and therefore marking an important step towards the independence of Brazil. It contributed to bring together not only the diverse influential groups in Rio – merchants, civil servants and Portuguese aristocrats who settled in Brazil – but also to gather the support from the elites of Minas Gerais and São Paulo in defence of keeping Dom Pedro as prince regent. Only the group of liberals and freemasons associated with the
journalist Joaquim Gonçalves Ledo was unsure about supporting the ‘Fico’. The group controlled the Rio de Janeiro City Council through its president, José Clemente Pereira, and although they were in favour of an independent government that would support a Brazilian Constitutional Assembly, with the success of the ‘Fico’ campaign among the population they decided to present a petition supporting Dom Pedro’s stay in Brazil (Kirschner, 2009: 212).

The ‘Fico’ movement is a consequence of the growing distrust in Brazil regarding the Cortes in Lisbon. At first the Constitutional Revolution was welcomed in Brazil, and publications were mostly supportive of the decisions of the Cortes such as the one asking for the return of the king to Portugal. However, this changed with the decision taken by the Portuguese deputies to legislate for Brazil before the arrival of its deputies. The decrees voted by the Portuguese demanded the return of Dom Pedro and subordinated all Brazilian provinces directly to Lisbon through a local government chosen by the Cortes and supported by detachments of the Portuguese army. To Viotti da Costa it was the result of pressure from the Portuguese merchants and industrialists who wanted to abolish the trade treaties with England (da Costa, 1975). The arrival of the news, at the end of 1821, of the decisions of the Cortes from September and October regarding Brazil provoked strong opposition, mainly in the centre-south. Influenced by print publications, demonstrations began to take place in Rio de Janeiro in support of Dom Pedro, although some leaders suspected the prince’s constitutional purposes (Villalta, 2016: 223).

A Warning Against Recolonisation

Despertador Brasiliense was one of these print publications and at the outset of the pamphlet, Silva Lisboa directly mentions Bahia and Pará, aware as he was of the support of the northern and north-eastern provinces for the Cortes. In the two provinces, after the decrees from September and October, the population became divided in its support for Brazil’s southern leadership. Bahia, for example, was governed by a Junta, which did not recognise the regency of Dom Pedro and was submissive to Lisbon and to the officers who commanded the Legião Constitucional Lusitana (Portuguese Constitutional Legion), who had recently arrived in the province (Villalta, 2016: 225). This Portuguese control led to a demonstration on 3 November 1821 against the local government, organised with pro-independence Brazilians from Rio de Janeiro. It erupted into a conflict between Brazilian and Portuguese soldiers resulting in many deaths and failing to overthrow the Junta (Villalta, 2016: 225).

With this context in mind, Silva Lisboa claims repeatedly throughout the pamphlet that the representatives of all the provinces should unite in their support for the maintenance of the rights acquired after the transfer of the crown. In tune with other intellectual leaders such as José Bonifácio, he also argues that they should refuse to allow Dom Pedro to return to Portugal. Silva Lisboa complains about what Brazilians considered a betrayal, since they supported the Cortes and were now being mistreated by the Portuguese Deputies. This for Silva Lisboa would drain all local power from Rio de Janeiro and bring upon Brazil the shadow of its colonial past (Despertador Brasiliense, 1821: 1–2).

The pamphlet reports that the news from Portugal had created a stir among the inhabitants of Rio de Janeiro and could lead to popular unrest, since the Brazilians at first believed that if they embraced the Portuguese constitutional cause it would help them to
maintain political representation and autonomy. More than that, he continues, Brazilians were convinced that they would benefit from the demise of the inherent evil of despotic and absolutist government and would also enjoy new civic and political rights, through laws made by their representatives; such hopes were rooted in the procedures adopted by the ‘Sovereign National Congress’ (Despertador Brasiliense, 1821: 1).

This early optimism, Silva Lisboa goes on, could be demonstrated by the rejection of a Portuguese deputy’s proposal which suggested that, before the arrival of the Brazilian representatives, they could elect interim deputies from among the Brazilians living in Portugal. This was followed by other proposals regarding Brazil which were also postponed until the arrival of the Brazilian delegates. The early impartiality of the Cortes, he says, led to a renewal of the mobilisations in support of Brazil’s freedom following the Porto Revolution, first in Pará and Bahia and later in other provinces. Since these provinces did not know whether Rio de Janeiro would follow the constitutional path or even feared the government in the Brazilian capital, which they considered despotic, local authorities from these provinces began to communicate directly with Portugal (Despertador Brasiliense, 1821: 1).

Silva Lisboa suggests that the Cortes was pleased by the continuous support for the liberal revolution in some parts of Brazil as a way of broadening the schism in this ‘vast Continent’ between Rio and the provinces, something that worsened after Dom João returned to Lisbon. He claims that while the Congress was until then only concerned with Portugal, it decided to legislate for Brazil before the arrival of the delegates. As an example, he mentions the Project of the Constitution that brought about a change of status from ‘provinces of the Kingdom of Brazil’ to ‘provinces of Portugal’, which was followed by the dispatch of troops to Brazil without the consent of the Brazilian deputies. The Cortes also decided that in each province there would be imposed an administrative board, a single court of justice, and a military chief who would respond exclusively to the Cortes, the arbitrary arm of the executive power (Despertador Brasiliense, 1821: 1).

Silva Lisboa also complains that the Cortes are now disregarding the Law of 16 December 1815 (which elevated Brazil to the status of kingdom) in recalling Dom Pedro, Brazil’s only hope of retaining its status as the centre of executive power in Portuguese America, ‘the only shadow of what we once were’ (Despertador Brasiliense, 1821: 1). To make things worse, he says, soon all the Brazilian courts would be extinct, and they would see their employees ‘begging for bread’. Appealing to his fellow countrymen, he asks the Cortes to be more cautious when dealing with the Brazilians, whom he calls a ‘big and proud people who had the fortune to leave captivity for the state of emancipation’ (Despertador Brasiliense, 1821: 1). This is followed by the threat that the Brazilians, already having benefited from emancipation, would never consent to a retreat in their political careers. He claims that if this was the case, they might follow in their neighbours’ footsteps in what he calls the ‘frightening example from Spanish America’ (Despertador Brasiliense, 1821: 1). What he is trying to say is that the decisions made by the Cortes might lead to the unwanted finale, the secession of the Reino Unido.

Nevertheless, after all these threats of independence from the Reino Unido directed at the Cortes, Silva Lisboa again adopts a conciliatory tone and claims that his only intention is to foster a lasting peace and union. He fears the outbreak of a civil war between the Portuguese of America and Europe, and he urges the Brazilian deputies to be careful in their negotiations to regain their autonomy while keeping Brazil subject to the same dynasty and laws. In this way Brazil could be able to return to the status
it enjoyed on 26 February 1821, when supporters of constitutionalism in Rio made Dom João VI swear the future constitution, marking the end of absolutism (Despertador Brasiliense, 1821: 1–2).

He goes on to address Dom Pedro, arguing that when the people of Rio declared themselves in favour of the future constitution proclaimed by the Cortes, this was in the hope that Brazil would never lose the advantages and representations it had been enjoying. Now, he continues, the Cortes want to use the disorder from this period to reduce the Brazilian provinces to the state of colonies, and the people from these regions therefore need to regain control over their rights. Brazilians will not accept the measures from the Cortes, especially those which aimed to separate them from Dom Pedro (Despertador Brasiliense, 1821: 2).

Silva Lisboa, again addressing the prince regent, claims that it is in the interest of the inhabitants of this province, Rio de Janeiro, and probably of the others as well, to recognise the authority of Dom Pedro. This was especially the case in the province of São Paulo, which declared it to be so in the aforementioned proposal sent to the Cortes, but this subordination could vanish if Dom Pedro decided to leave (Despertador Brasiliense, 1821: 2). Following the same principle, he begs the prince to stay; otherwise, without a branch of the House of Braganza, Brazil might leave the Reino Unido. Although the Cortes are against the existence of two executive powers under one nation, he believes that they could perfectly coexist within the union if one of them were adapted and subordinated to the supreme other. This, he remembers, was the Cortes’ original plan when it asked for the return of one member of the royal family, if not the king, the prince. Ironically, he asks: ‘Did that country intend to break away from ours and become independent?’ To sum up he argues that both countries are equally kingdoms and should have the same rights (Despertador Brasiliense, 1821: 2).

He appeals to the other provinces of Brazil to help Rio in its struggle to maintain its rights as part of the same kingdom, making use of their common elements (production, climate, values, family links, friendship and commerce) in a brotherly union. The sacrifices made by Brazilians should be compatible with their current pre-eminence and future happiness since ‘Portugal has not yet lost the idea of superiority and preponderance over you’; all of the Portuguese actions, rather than being in accordance with liberal principles, ‘on the contrary, they tend to reduce us to their old yoke, and to the odious state of Colony’ (Despertador Brasiliense, 1821: 3), that is to say, recolonisation.

Silva Lisboa’s idea of a sovereign congress is that it should conceive of Brazil and Portugal as being organised in two administrative centres, a government of Dom Pedro as prince regent subordinated to Dom João, and with the Brazilian provinces subject to Rio – ‘the only centre to which internal relations should refer’. He ends the Despertador Brasiliense by arguing that this is the only possible solution to be advocated in the Cortes by the deputies from Brazil, and that Dom Pedro should remain in Brazil while this proposal is discussed; otherwise, only through war Brazil would be able to restore its autonomy (Despertador Brasiliense, 1821: 3).

This pamphlet presents a new and more radical discourse, but it will not lead to a rupture. Even with independence becoming inevitable in 1822, Silva Lisboa will continue to support the Reino Unido, advocating an autonomous Brazil but still connected to the Portuguese patria. While presenting in this pamphlet many reasons for a shift in discourse, such as the suspicion of the northern provinces, the support for a centralised government in Rio and the defence of Brazil against the Cortes and the criticism of radical liberal views, he was worried about the absence of a ‘civic spirit’ among a
good proportion of Brazil’s political elite. Particularly the group led by Gonçalves Ledo, he believed, lacked the public virtue that ‘would imply “a renouncement of citizens to themselves” for the benefit of the public good’ (Kirschner, 2009: 216).

Conclusion

These publications are all evidence of a public intellectual who is well informed about the latest events taking place on both sides of the Reino Unido. His vision of the world is framed not only by his experience in Coimbra after the enlightened reforms enacted by Pombal, but also by a very strong commitment to a sovereign Brazil, going back to 1821. However, he also demonstrates his allegiance to a Kingdom of Brazil that is an extension of the local patria or, as Barman would say, ‘the creation of the Kingdom of Brazil gave concrete reality to a spatial concept broader than the local patria’ (Barman, 1988: 44).

When addressing the prince regent, Silva Lisboa is subtly saying that the Braganzas, especially Dom Pedro, need to decide whether they want an autonomous Brazil under his regency, or different provinces becoming independent under local republican governments. From this moment on, the further decisions taken by the Cortes against Brazilian autonomy, as a kingdom on equal terms with Portugal, accelerated the pressure from public opinion in Rio de Janeiro towards a rupture and reinforced the role of journalists in guiding public opinion, leading to the ‘Fico’ one month later and, involuntarily in the case of Silva Lisboa, independence by the end of 1822.

References

Alexandre, V. (1993) Os sentidos do império: questão nacional e questão colonial na crise do antigo regime português. Afrontamento: Porto.
Álvarez-Cifuentes, P. (2016) ‘El episodio de Los Doce de Inglaterra en la literatura barroca ibérica: textos e intertextos’. Atalanta 4(2): 25–59.
Barman, R. J. (1988) Brazil: The Forging of a Nation 1798–1852. Stanford University Press: Stanford.
Cañizares-Esguerra, J. (2009) “Enlightened Reform” in the Spanish Empire: An Overview’ in G. Paquette (ed.) Enlightened Reform in Southern Europe and its Atlantic Colonies, c. 1750–1830, Ashgate: Farnham, 33–36.
de Carvalho, J. M., das Neves, L. M. B. P. and Basile, M. (2012) Às armas cidadãos! Companhia das Letras; Editora UFMG: Belo Horizonte.
Coser, I. (2009) ‘Federalismo – Brasil’ in C. A. de Losada et al. (eds.) Diccionario político y social del mundo iberoamericano: la era de las revoluciones, 1750–1850. Fundación Carolina: Madrid, 462–472.
da Costa, E. V. (1975) ‘The Political Emancipation of Brazil’ in A. J. R. Russel-Wood (ed.) From Colony to Nation: Essays on the Independence of Brazil. The John Hopkins University Press: Baltimore, 43–88.
Ferreira, F. S. e. M. (2009) ‘Federalismo – Portugal’ in C. A. de Losada et al. (eds.) Diccionario político y social del mundo iberoamericano: la era de las revoluciones, 1750–1850. Fundación Carolina: Madrid, 525–535.
Flores, G. B. (2012) ‘O Conciliador do Reino Unido e a liberdade de imprensa (1821)’ in SBPJor – Associação Brasileira de Pesquisadores em Jornalismo 10º Encontro Nacional de Pesquisadores em Jornalismo, Curitiba: Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Paraná. https://conferencias.unb.br/index.php/ENPjor/XENPjor/paper/view/1991/167 [accessed 27 April 2021].
Guilherme Celestino

Hue, S. M. (2007) *Diálogos em defesa e louvor da língua portuguesa*. 7Letras: Rio de Janeiro.

Kirschner, T. C. (2009) *José da Silva Lisboa, Visconde de Cairu: itinerários de um ilustrado luso-brasileiro*. Alameda Casa Editorial: São Paulo.

Lustosa, I. (2000) *Insultos impressos: a guerra dos jornalistas na independência, 1821–1823*. Companhia das Letras: São Paulo.

Lynch, C. E. C. (2008) ‘O pensamento conservador ibero-americano na era das independências (1808–1850)’. *Lua Nova* 74: 59–92.

Lynch, C. E. C. (2020) ‘Absolutismo político e liberalismo econômico: o reformismo ilustrado de José da Silva Lisboa (1800–1821)’. *Revista do Instituto Histórico e Geográfico Brasileiro* 181(483): 47–74.

Morel, M. and de Barros, M. M. (2003) *Palavra, imagem e poder: o surgimento da imprensa no Brasil do século XIX*. DP and A Editora: Rio de Janeiro.

das Neves, L. M. B. P. (1999) ‘A “guerra de penas”: os impressos políticos e a independência do Brasil’. *Tempo* 8: 41–68.

das Neves, L. M. B. P. (2009) ‘Opinión pública – Brasil’ in C. A. de Losada et al. (eds.) *Diccionario político y social del mundo iberoamericano: la era de las revoluciones, 1750–1850*. Fundación Carolina: Madrid, 1011–1023.

Pinho, W. (1961) *A abertura dos portos: Cairu, os ingleses, a independência*. Universidade da Bahia: Salvador.

Rizzini, C. (1946) *O livro, o jornal e a tipografia no Brasil*. Livraria Kosmos: Rio de Janeiro.

Schultz, K. (2001) *Tropical Versailles: Empire, Monarchy, and the Portuguese Royal Court in Rio de Janeiro, 1808–1821*. Routledge: New York.

Sebastián, J. F. (2009) ‘Introducción’ in C. A. de Losada et al. (eds.) *Diccionario político y social del mundo iberoamericano: la era de las revoluciones, 1750–1850*. Fundación Carolina: Madrid, 25–48.

da Silva, A. R. C. (2003) *Inventando a nação: intelectuais ilustrados e estadistas luso-brasileiros na crise do Antigo Regime português (1750–1822)*. Hucitec: São Paulo.

Vianna, H. (1945) *Contribuição à história da imprensa brasileira*. Imprensa Nacional: Rio de Janeiro.

Villalta, L. C. (2016) *O Brasil e a crise do Antigo Regime português (1788–1822)*. Editora FGV: Rio de Janeiro.

Newspapers

Conciliador do Reino Unido, 1821, Rio de Janeiro: Impressão Régia.

Despertador Brasiliense, 1821. Rio de Janeiro: Tipografia Nacional.

Diálogo entre Philosopho e Pastor, 1821. Rio de Janeiro: Impressão Régia.