

ILLUSTRATED CULTURE AND CONSERVATIVE EDUCATION: BERNARDO VASCONCELOS AND HIS *LETTER TO THE GENTLEMEN VOTERS* (1828)

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BERNARDO VASCONCELOS E SUA CARTA AOS SENHORES ELEITORES (1828)

CULTURA ILUSTRADA Y EDUCACION CONSERVADORA:
BERNARDO VASCONCELOS Y SU CARTA A LOS ESTIMADOS VOTANTES (1828)

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Abstract: Based on the *Carta aos Senhores Eleitores da Província de Minas Gerais*, henceforth referred to as the *Letter to the Gentlemen Voters of Minas Gerais Province*, written in 1828 by Bernardo Vasconcelos, we present our understanding of the illustrated thinking in Brazil, from the *Inconfidência Mineira* (a conspiratory, separatist movement that took place in the state of Minas Gerais, Brazil) (1789) to the First Reign (1822-1840), and its implications for education. In this documental source, whose analysis relies on the theoretical framework of the history of concepts and their uses, by Reinhart Koselleck, we perceive the influences of the European Enlightenment on the repertoire of our political elite. We consider, in part, that the conspiratory project was carried on in Vasconcelos's discourse and actions, showing that the school designed in the Empire also meant a conservative centralization.

Keywords: Imperial Brazil; liberal education; civilization and education; discourse analysis.

Resumo: Partindo da *Carta aos Senhores Eleitores da Província de Minas Gerais* de 1828, de Bernardo Vasconcelos, apresentamos nossa compreensão sobre o pensamento ilustrado no Brasil, da *Inconfidência Mineira* (1789) ao Primeiro Reinado (1822-1840), e suas implicações com a educação. Nessa fonte documental, analisada sob o referencial teórico da história dos conceitos e de seus usos, de Reinhart Koselleck, percebemos as influências do iluminismo europeu no repertório de nossa elite política. Consideramos, parcialmente, que o projeto inconfidente manteve sua continuidade no discurso e nas ações de Vasconcelos demonstrando que a escola pensada no Império também significou uma centralização conservadora.

Palavras-chave: Brasil Império; educação liberal; civilização e educação; análise do discurso.

Resumen: A partir de la *Carta aos Senhores Eleitores da Província de Minas Gerais* de 1828, de Bernardo Vasconcelos, presentamos nuestra comprensión del pensamiento ilustrado en Brasil, desde la *Inconfidencia Minera* (1789) hasta el Primer Reinado (1822-1840), y sus implicaciones con la educación. En esta fuente documental, analizada bajo el marco teórico de la historia de los conceptos y sus usos, de Reinhart Koselleck, percibimos las influencias de la Ilustración Europea en el repertorio de nuestra élite política. Consideramos, en parte, que el proyecto inconfidente mantuvo su continuidad en el discurso y las acciones de Vasconcelos, demostrando que el pensamiento escolar en el Imperio también significaba una centralización conservadora.

Palabras clave: Imperio del Brasil; educación liberal; civilización y educación; análisis del discurso.

INTRODUCTION

During the celebrations for the bicentenary of the French Revolution (1789-1989), in Belo Horizonte, the João Pinheiro Foundation and the Federal University of Ouro Preto held the *Inconfidência Mineira* and French Revolution Seminar (Minas Gerais, 1989), under the general supervision of Professors Cristovam Paes de Oliveira and Maurício Andrés Ribeiro. The seminar showed the richness of the contributions and influences that the French Enlightenment thinking brought to the ideas of Minas Gerais's conspirers. Ideas that crossed the entire American continent justified a whole variety of paths taken throughout the 19th century: from the most revolutionary to the most conservative ones, insofar as political revolutions demand social and popular revolutions as a way of conferring rights on everyone rather than on only a few.

The internationalization of liberal economic ideas with the free-trade practice proposed by Adam Smith (1723-1790) evidenced a conflict between the new and the modern in the late 18th century. New economic structures trying to live with archaic political structures represented by the Old Regime. The ideas of a political freedom derived from the idea of a free market would require a new arrangement of power, which resulted in the need for new institutional adjustments in Europe. As well as concerning Europe's relations with the New World. The French invasion of the Iberian Peninsula caused ruptures in the colonial relations in the American subcontinent. In Brazil, in addition to the *Inconfidência Mineira* (1789-1792), the resumption of Enlightenment ideas took place with the Opening of Ports to Friendly Nations (1808), proposed by José da Silva Lisboa, the Viscount of Cairu (1756-1835), a disseminator of Adam Smith's ideas, that is, economically biased. And this, i.e., free trade, will be the final push for the Brazilian independence project. A conservative project that began in Minas Gerais with its mining elite and was consolidated at the beginning of the reign of Dom Pedro II (1840-1889), inserting Brazil into the capitalist merchant machine definitively, as an exporter of raw materials. Beyond the economic bias, the Illustration ideas arrived in Brazil to consolidate a political ideology conceived in Minas Gerais and carried on by Bernardo Pereira de Vasconcelos (1795-1850) during the First Reign (1822-1831).

By agreeing with Rouanet (1992, p. 345) that “[...] the conspiratory thinking was part of the illustrated thinking and, in this sense, despite all its social and political limitations, part of the Enlightenment [...]”, our objective with this article is to present our understanding of the influences of the French Illustration in Brazil from the First Reign (1822-1831), of the ‘abominable French ideas’ of freedom and equality in 1789, to the constitutionalist and conservative thinking of Henri-Benjamin Constant de Rebecque (1767-1830), because “[...] the influence of the revolution and of the counter-revolution, in France and in Europe, is clearly perceptible in the period we are studying, [which] reveals a great sensibility, in

Brazil, to European events and vicissitudes” (Fonseca, 1989, p. 17), whether in journals, pamphlets, or in political and parliamentary actions. For this article, we will resort only to the discourse of Bernardo Pereira de Vasconcelos (1795-1850) in his *Letter to the Gentlemen Voters of Minas Gerais Province*, written in 1828. In this way, we will show how the project of Minas Gerais’s conspirers, revolutionary at the time, adapted to the circumstances and constraints of that period and was carried on in the construction of the Imperial State led by Bernardo Vasconcelos.

From the proposal exposed by Bernardo Vasconcelos, in his *Letter to the Gentlemen Voters*, we deduce his educational side: Enlightenment-oriented, rational, liberal, utilitarian, with a moralistic and civilizational objective. The liberal-utilitarian argument that spans the 19th century – from Cairu to Rui Barbosa – is the need for a free school, whose main purpose was to civilize: good manners, well-behaved workers, reduced crime. In other words, in its liberal-utilitarian version, the civilization project stood above the humanization project. Free does not mean funded by the State, as the exhortation to philanthropy was constant.

For this article, we divided the text into this introduction, four parts and the final remarks. Along the four parts, we will briefly introduce Bernardo Vasconcelos, the author of the *Letter to the Gentlemen Voters*, object of our analysis; we will explain the continuity of the conspiratory project; and, shortly afterwards, based on readings proposed by Rouanet (1992), we will analyze said letter. Finally, we will turn our attention to education

BERNARDO, THE SON OF DIOGO DE VASCONCELOS

Diogo Pereira Ribeiro de Vasconcelos (1758-1815) was born in the city of Porto, in Portugal, and graduated in Law from the University of Coimbra. After graduation, he migrated to Brazil, settling down in Minas Gerais, where he married Maria do Carmo de Souza Barradas. From that marriage, his most illustrious children were Marshal Jerônimo, the botanist Fernando Luiz, the magistrate Bernardo and the bachelor Francisco Diogo. His best man was Dr. Tomaz Antônio Gonzaga (1744-1810), his fellow countryman and a magistrate in Vila Rica, a figure directly linked to the *Inconfidência Mineira*. This closeness raised suspicions,

[...] Dr. Diogo Ribeiro was arrested and taken to the jail of Vila Rica. Subjected, then, to interrogations, he obstinately denied having the least co-participation in the mentioned crimes and even any knowledge of the investigated occurrences. He was released, but his terrified spirit was marked by a deep realization of the very dangerous situation he had been in (Minas Gerais, 1896, p. 412).

After the conspirers' sentences were executed, his compelling speech of May 22, 1792, in the Council of Vila Rica, is a warning about the evils of sedition and the dangers of democracy, the power of the people, rich in examples worthy of his occupation as a historian. There, didactically, he reminds his listeners of our Portuguese origin and of the obedience due to Queen Dona Maria I. It is a speech of fear. Didactics of fright and, at the same time, illustrative of his strategy to prove his non-involvement – as well as of the Captaincy's – with the conspirers. He later moves, along with his family, into the house that once belonged to Cláudio Manoel da Costa (1729-1789) and does not mention him on the list of Minas Gerais's illustrious citizens of that time.

It is in this environment, after this period of suspicion and terror, that Bernardo Pereira de Vasconcelos is born in Minas Gerais, in 1795, as a child of the intellectual elite. With solid roots in Portugal, Diogo sends his sons to study in Coimbra. Thus, Bernardo travels in 1807 and, after some problems along the way, due to the Napoleonic wars, with a forced stay in England, returns to Brazil. With the expulsion of the French, and the English regency in Portugal, he comes back, is admitted to college in 1814 and graduates with a bachelor's degree in 1818. He soon feels bothered with the aristocratic and despotic ways of the Portuguese government in the hands of the English general Beresford. A lawyer from the University of Coimbra, a councilor and, then, a provincial assemblyman, an assemblyman of the nation and a journalist, despite declaring to the four winds that he had learned nothing in Coimbra, which is confirmed by his almost speechlessness during his first term at the General Assembly, he becomes, as of 1828, a great speaker, garnering praise and hatred everywhere. 'A political man', in the words of Francisco Iglésias (1950) in the centenary of his death, becoming a perpetuator of the Enlightenment ideology of the *Inconfidência Mineira*.

After the Independence of Brazil, he fought the despotic attitudes of Dom Pedro I until the fall in 1831, in the Revolution of April 7, when he started to act more vigorously organizing the Brazilian State, seeking to consolidate an English-style parliamentary model, a centralized legal system and a homogeneous educational system aimed at educating, modernizing and civilizing the country. A true citizen of Minas Gerais, he turns the General Council of the Province into a laboratory for his political experiences for the country, but also into his point of support with Minas Gerais's elite. He never lost an election!

He was a true citizen of Minas Gerais: "[...] I have provincialism, I do not deny it; my blood, my heart, I am all Minas Gerais, and there may be patriotism without provincialism!" (Vasconcelos, 1899). This mark of a Minas Gerais identity already brings the libertarian idea of the *Inconfidência Mineira*. On the trail of the country's independence, Minas Gerais's elite will be the first to demand from the still ruling Dom Pedro de Alcântara the creation of the provincial councils determined in the Courts of Lisbon. Once the General Council of Minas Gerais Province was installed,

his first action was to destroy the *Padrão da Infâmia*, a monument erected in front of the Council of Vila Rica to remember Tiradentes's seditious act. It was already a distinguishing mark of Minas Gerais's elite in the national scenario. The facts of the conspiracy were already in the past, but the myth was taking shape, and the ideas remained. And what were those ideas?

ILLUSTRATED MEN AND CONSPIRERS: MINAS GERAIS'S ELITE

A liberal project, of an Enlightenment-oriented nature, began to be drafted in Minas Gerais with the conspirers. A project imprisoned, silenced and killed in 1792 with the execution of José Joaquim da Silva Xavier (1746-1792), Tiradentes, and with the dissolution of the group. This is a time of retreat for liberal ideas in Minas Gerais. The initial project of the conspirers ended up with the remnants, the libraries and the teachers of the new *Seminário de Mariana*, a divinity school reopened in 1820. Ideas and ideologies that will find new circumstances and the right moment for their installation with the arrival of the Portuguese Court in 1808. Enlightenment and liberal ideas began to be practiced in Johannine Brazil: opening of ports, free trade and industry, printing and press – even with censorship –, and production of books and newspapers, the main vehicle of the intellectuals in the 19th century. This proves that “[...] the facts are the dead matter of the *Inconfidência Mineira*, the ideas – those of the Franco-American Enlightenment –, its living substance” (Rouanet, 1992, p. 329). In addition to those who died, due to either their sentences or age, the physical survival of the conspirers, such as José de Rezende Costa, son (1765-1841), and Father Manuel Rodrigues da Costa (1754-1844), who would participate in the Constituent Assembly of 1823. According to Sodré (2017, p. 10), “[...] both were condemned to exile; the former in Africa, the latter in Lisbon. Both, upon returning to Brazil, resumed their political activities, being elected to the Portuguese Courts”. In a rebellious attitude against the Courts, Minas Gerais did not send its assemblymen, maintaining those elected to the Constituent Assembly of 1823. This shows a resumption, by the elite of Minas Gerais, of their ideas materialized in their independence and Enlightenment project. In addition to the constituents of 1823, a large portion of the General Council and of the provincial administration in the post-independence era were composed of conspirers' children or people close to the movement.

Enlightenment ideas that Rouanet (1992) identifies in the conspiratory ideology by inferring them from the inventory of the libraries listed in the *Autos da Devassa* and directly observing “[...] in two records: at the level of the ‘language’ and of the ‘word’” (Rouanet, 1992, p. 329, author's emphasis), with all methodological limits mentioned by the author. For that, he crosses “[...] the illustrated and the conspiratory discourse” (Rouanet, 1992, p. 329), producing a linguistic pattern that allows us to see in the discourses of Minas Gerais's citizens the influences of the

French. This crossing expressed in the word is the method that we adopted to analyze the *Letter to the Gentlemen Voters*.

This linguistic pattern has, “[...] among its mandatory figures, two omnipresent entities, reason and nature” (Rouanet, 1992, p. 332). It is these two entities that will guide the discourses of Tomás Antônio Gonzaga and Cláudio Manoel da Costa, present in the literary language of Neoclassicism and in the philosophy of the Portuguese Traditionalism Eclectic School of Silvestre Pinheiro Ferreira (1769-1846) and Bahia-born Viscount of Cairu. The most common thing is the metaphor of light, of the sun, to refer to a new view on faith and on reason, in the “[...] hope of a new world [free] from colonialism, from despotism, from war, from slavery and from privilege” (Rouanet, 1992, p. 332). This linguistic pattern is composed of the following expressions: anti-colonialism, anti-despotism, anti-clericalism, anti-slavery and anti-militarism.

However, there is a contradiction in relation to the Enlightenment thinking, and it is about the attitude towards the people. If the Illustration and the French Revolution denied birth and caste privileges, with an anti-aristocratic discourse, followed by new social attitudes, the conspiratory discourse gives rise to “[...] two perspectives: one that criticizes the aristocracy, and one that criticizes the people” (Rouanet, 1992, p. 332). The criticism of the aristocracy was a criticism of the ruling nobility of the captaincy, external to and foreign in the Colony, sent from Portugal for temporal and spiritual governments, a faithful executor of the reign’s fiscalism and ideology. The criticism did not target the colonial elite, land and slave owner, possessor of the agricultural and mineral incomes of the captaincy, the ‘nobility of the land’, as they called themselves. As for the people, now, “[...] it is unacceptable for low-income individuals to aspire to social ascension” (Rouanet, 1992, p. 343)

ILLUSTRATION, ENLIGHTENMENT: IDEAS IN PLACE

It is possible to perceive in the *Letter to the Gentlemen Voters* the linguistic pattern built by Rouanet (1992) to capture the French Enlightenment thinking. Those themes listed in the analysis of the conspiratory discourse are reproduced in the speeches and writings of Bernardo Pereira de Vasconcelos. In said letter, he reports on his first term and presents himself as a candidate for reelection to the General Assembly. In that document produced by Vasconcelos, we analyze his repertoire in order to detect the influences of the European Enlightenment on his political discourse and practice.

These Enlightenment ideas were no longer news in Imperial Brazil. They were not out of place. In addition to the torrent of ideas from the United States and France, the Pombaline Reforms at the University of Coimbra brought about a new mentality in that illustrated elite of the turn of the century: “[...] the paths of the

Portuguese-Brazilian Illustration followed the steps of experience allied to action” (Meireles, 2017, p. 140). Ideas that also implied changes in the school culture and that would affect the entire American continent, as Bastos (2012) explains. It is impossible not to surrender to them.

The imperial elite follow the procedures of the conspirers and take on the Enlightenment repertoire: they abhor some ideas, accept those they judge convenient, reject those that bother them. Those abominable ones! The most important thing was to adapt. It is necessary, therefore, to understand this adaptation of ideas, insofar as “[...] language, which is an index to express mutations in progress in the social world, is also an essential weapon in the fights that generate these same changes” (Koselleck, 2006, p. 11). Changes that transformed the revolutionary project of the conspirers into a conservative project of Minas Gerais’s elite in the First Reign. In the same way that the conspirers are conservative in their relations with power and choose the words of the Illustration that interest them to construct their ideology, the elite of the First Reign promote an almost counter-revolution, were it not for the elitist and conservative character of both movements.

In this short period of 50 years, which goes from 1792 – the end of the *Inconfidência Mineira* – to 1840 – the Age of Majority Coup –, the Brazilian elite built their fundamental political concepts, insofar as “[...] without common concepts there cannot be a society and, above all, there cannot be a unity of political action” (Koselleck, 2006, p. 98). Once the concepts are consolidated, the similarity in the actions of our elite is not reason for surprise, even *a posteriori*. This is how the same ideas mentioned by Rouanet (1992) will also be present in Bernardo Vasconcelos’s repertoire. They serve to justify Vasconcelos’s action against the emperor’s despotism, but also to contain any decentralizing and popular action classified as anarchy and democracy.

Such expressions have already been announced. We will now present them in the repertoire of Bernardo Vasconcelos, in his *Letter to the Gentlemen Voters*. Namely: anti-colonialism, anti-despotism, anti-clericalism, anti-slavery and anti-militarism.

A) ANTI-COLONIALISM

Bernardo Vasconcelos’s anti-colonial criticism stemmed from our need to cause a total separation from Portugal, as we should not carry the marks of the Old Portuguese regime, including that Portuguese king and his ancestry. It was necessary to create something new, something born here and, for this reason, another king, for despotic was translated, almost automatically, as Portuguese. He argues that “[...] our independence is founded on the clear knowledge of our rights” (Vasconcelos, 1899) and not on the mere belief in a “[...] Divine promise made to the

first King of Portugal” (Vasconcelos, 1899), of a divine and absolute power. The nation is sovereign because it knows it has a power based on Reason and on the Lights, and it is from this conviction that it becomes independent before the other nations.

In the midst of the Empire’s war against Cisplatina, Bernardo Vasconcelos recognizes that the relationship of the central power with this province is a colonialist attitude. Therefore, it must be repudiated and rejected so as to not contradict the discourse addressed to Europe. Keeping coherence would mean keeping the Constitution and the Laws there, “[...] giving up on the project of preserving that Province as an achievement” (Vasconcelos, 1899). Such criticism confirms Bernardo Vasconcelos’s anti-military stance, as the war resulted from the suspension of the law, that is, of reason.

In a world of revolutions and counter-revolutions, the Enlightenment ideology will support the New World’s reasoning against the policy of the Holy Alliance. The right of rebellion against a government that prevents the exercise of natural rights is the main argument against any attempt to recolonize the American continent. The criticisms of the Holy Alliance are reinforced with praises to the English constitutional model, a nation that fights to help maintain freedom in new countries. The Holy Alliance brought in its core a return to the old Spanish and Portuguese empires as a reflection of the reconstitution of pre-Napoleonic European borders. Bernardo Vasconcelos openly declares himself an “[...] enemy of all this European politics, which is not founded on the lights of our century [going back to a time] when reason was a crime, and when only force was a right” (Vasconcelos, 1899). Colonialism is the exercise of force, while the new States were founded on reason and on the Law.

Bernardo Vasconcelos’s attitude goes hand in hand with the establishment of a diplomatic body that stands against the Europe of the restoration carried out by the Holy Alliance. His anti-colonialist criticism expects to guide the Foreigners’ ministry, and he defends that Brazil must “[...] establish relations preferably with the peoples of America over those of Europe, except for England, a nation that benefits mankind” (Vasconcelos, 1899). He repels European attitudes, reaffirming that “[...] America is America’s, Europe must be Europe’s, and everything will go as good as possible” (Vasconcelos, 1899) and repelling any treaty that would increase the vulnerability of the States newly founded in the American continent.

B) ANTI-DESPOTISM

Bernardo Vasconcelos’s criticisms of anti-despotism will be the most vehement. This is his fight, and not only to organize the State against a despotic prince, but for the latter to serve the nation the way that he should. A firm

monarchist, Bernardo Vasconcelos realized that the centralization that the country needed would only be possible with a king, but a king who renounced the Executive Branch and exercised only the Moderating Power, just as thought and described by Benjamin Constant (1767-1830). During the First Reign, the fragility of Dom Pedro I's government became more visible every day with his habit of surrounding himself more with Portuguese than Brazilian people to command the State. This made Brazilians insecure about the real value of their independence as a nation and a State. Dom Pedro I's despotic attitudes, which led him to close the Constituent Assembly in 1823, and the ferocity with which he attacked Pernambuco's citizens in 1824, some remnants of 1817, would make the elite doubt his love for the cause of Brazil. With the death of Dom João VI, in 1826, and Dom Pedro I's concerns about the succession of the Portuguese throne, this fear increased.

Vasconcelos also credits an illustrated ministry with another important characteristic of a non-tyrannical government. He makes it clear, therefore, that the ministry must have sufficient qualities to serve the nation and must contribute "[...] to spreading the lights and doctrines for the happiness of the Nation" (Vasconcelos, 1899). And, in this way, he concludes his argument explaining to Minas Gerais's people that "[...] the Nation does not serve the government, but the government serves the Nation" (Vasconcelos, 1899); therefore; the government must obey all of the laws that emanate from the parliament. Constitutional government is the government of the laws, in which the citizen, represented in the parliament, makes their wishes echo from there. Hence his fight for a constitutional and parliamentary monarchy against all forms of despotism by the king, when the will of the citizen prevails. Clarifying that Brazilian citizens are forging themselves by fighting for their political rights and rendering themselves different from the others.

For Vasconcelos, "[...] virtue is necessary in all fair Governments; if, in despotic Governments, it has no place or home, it is because they are founded on injustice and oppression, which can only be sustained by force" (Vasconcelos, 1899). It is on this triptych that Vasconcelos bases his entire speech against the ministries of Dom Pedro I and against the emperor himself. A constitutional king, as the name itself implies, is a king who respects the constitution, the highest law of a country. The same applies to his ministers, who must present proposals and report to the gathered General Assembly. The honor is in respecting and enforcing the law as the first criterion of justice. He then concludes "[...] that justice is the basis of all non-tyrannical governments" (Vasconcelos, 1899). Against despotism, he urges his colleagues in the Council not to bow to the ministers' petitions without a plausible explanation and claim, for this is the role of the Assembly. Unacceptable to Bernardo Vasconcelos is the Assembly's submission to the royal power, and he threatened:

Which of us will bow to a State Minister? Which of us will not raise their voice (mighty voice, because it is the voice of the Nation) to interrogate, refute and argue with the State Ministers? Oh! May they come as soon as possible, may they stand before the National Representation with their authoritarian view, may they come and show the public their virtues or their vices, their science or their ignorance; may they leave their palaces, a haven for their imbecility. Here, Mr. President, here before the Nation, may the Ministers come expose the public needs and propose the necessary remedies (Vasconcelos, 1899).

In this way, Vasconcelos clearly defines the roles of each one in this new partition of power. The Executive Branch, which administers the State, must submit to the Legislative Branch, which represents the Nation and must never bow to another. To submit, at this moment, presenting a proposal to lead the State that was not by force, by despotism. The Executive Branch should present itself, whenever needed, whenever requested, before the Representatives of the Nation with all their vices and virtues, not having the right to hide, to run away from the problems before them. Who would correct them? The Parliament, the mighty voice of the nation.

C) ANTI-CLERICALISM

This is how the paragraph begins: “[...] According to an old rumor, in this Court, as well as in the Provinces of the Empire, there is already a common enemy, that is, Members of the Society called Jesus” (Vasconcelos, 1899). Minas Gerais had no experience with any religious order in charge of its churches, confraternities and schools. A strategy of the reign that thus prevented the creation of a parallel power in the mine regions, just as what happened to Sete Povos de Missões, in the south of the colony. And that is the concern of Bernardo Vasconcelos: a power parallel to the rising State.

The 1824 Constitution brings an important characteristic: the non-secularization of the Imperial State, which made room for political interferences by religious orders and the Holy See. Beyond a political characteristic, it is, according to Meireles (2017), the result of one of the main paradoxes of the Portuguese Enlightenment: the maintenance of “[...] religion as the basis that sustains the monarchical absolutism” (Meireles, 2017, p. 139), followed by the lack of autonomy of the institutions. The fight against the Jesuits would still last a long time after the Pombaline Reforms and penetrates Brazilian politics after the Independence. However, it is not only a fight against a religious order, but a fight to take away the Church’s political power and start a whole debate around the Empire’s temporal sovereignty.

His anti-clerical discourse is not exactly against the church, so it does not carry that radicalism of the French towards the Clergy, but against interferences

from the spiritual power in the temporal power. Many of his friends and supporters are priests, parliament colleagues, and among them we do not highlight any fiercer opposing discourse. Vasconcelos was not in favor of ending clerical celibacy, as proposed by Regent Feijó (1784-1843). Vasconcelos supports his speech on history, recalling the calamities caused by the Jesuits in Europe, and seeks in the actions of the Marquis of Pombal the reasons for his discourse. He warns the Council about “[...] the poison of its doctrines, of these mental restrictions, regicides and a thousand other attacks against the Social Order” (Vasconcelos, 1899). He sees in the Jesuits degenerates to whom “[...] religion, morals and politics are vain names” (Vasconcelos, 1899). There is, therefore, a profound rejection of the Society of Jesus due to the incompatibility of the modes of organization of the State that sees in it a parallel power.

Although the Catholic religion was consigned in the Constitution of the Empire as the religion of the State, Vasconcelos makes it very clear that the relations between Brazil and the Holy See are relations of sovereign States, and there cannot and should not be any interference from both sides. In his proposal, he makes it clear that there is a distinction of powers – temporal and spiritual – and, in his argument, the latter is subordinate to the former, insofar as the former is grounded on the nation’s sovereignty. Mistaken are those who think that the power of the patronage could only be exercised by the Emperor, through granting by the Supreme Pontiff. The emperor will exercise patronage through the nation’s granting, not the other way around. To render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, according to Vasconcelos, is to respect the jurisdictions of each power.

Thus, his proposal is supported by four pillars: sovereignty of the Brazilian nation; unending doctrine observance, but discipline will be regulated by the nation; the nation will regulate the right of the patronage, and the dioceses must follow the civil divisions promoted by the administration (Vasconcelos, 1899). This ‘accommodation’ will not remove Vasconcelos’s criticism when the nation is disrespected in its ordinances, and any religion-related decision must be submitted to the General Assembly. This, however, did not prevent the Catholic Church from keeping dominating education in Brazil. State exclusivity for education was not financially viable due to its high cost.

D) ANTI-SLAVERY

In his *Letter to the Gentlemen Voters*, Bernardo Vasconcelos is silent about the issue of slavery. Let us not forget: the document is an electoral piece and, therefore, must please the gentlemen voter, who is not the people. In his first interventions at the General Assembly, he had already made his view on the subject clear: maintaining slave labor was necessary for very simple reasons. The first of them, for the sake of sovereignty: the treaty for the cessation of the slave trade with England

had not been ratified by the Assembly, a good enough reason for it not to be valid, since no one, not even the emperor, could sign treaties without the acquiescence of the nation; the second reason had an economic nature, insofar as that the cessation of trafficking and the abolition of slavery would take away the capitals from the elite without offering anything in return, and would paralyze Brazilian agricultural production.

Thus, in the same way that, for the conspirers, this was a discussion of no interest to them – therefore, how would they produce in the mines –, the elite of the First Reign would not benefit from it, except as a way of containing enslaved black people. Finally, in his clamorous appeal that ‘Africa civilizes Brazil’, Vasconcelos reiterates a discourse by the elite that did not want to be deprived of their pleasures derived from a prosperous crop that was beginning to establish. The law of September 7, 1831 was laid aside so that the elite could continue to enjoy their tedious idleness as first-class citizens.

E) ANTI-MILITARISM

Bernardo Vasconcelos’s anti-military criticism is a direct reaction to Dom Pedro I’s action in his policy on province containment. During the State installation processes, disputes over public spaces were quite violent. Neither the people nor the elite were clear about the State model they wanted or the one that was being installed. The doubts were followed by reactions not very similar to those of Dona Maria I. On the one hand, the government of Dona Maria I sued Minas Gerais’s elite and physically eliminated their most popular leader. In the following century, under the government of regent Dom João, the militarized treatment of issues increased disproportionately to the tensions. Exemplary was the treatment given, simultaneously, to the 1817 movements in Brazil – led by Domingos Martins – and in Portugal – led by general Gomes Freire de Andrade. Death sentences: the former was killed by harquebus shot, and the latter was hanged, in a process as artificially arranged as that of the conspirers.

In a speech at the House of Representatives, on July 18, 1827, Bernardo Vasconcelos questions the need for the government to “[...] falsify reports, condemning to death, in 1817, the greatest general that Portugal has ever had” (Vasconcelos, 1899), reminding his listeners about a doubtful practice against the conspirers. Despite the friendship that linked the convict to Bernardo Vasconcelos’s uncle, the accusation was serious against a still living king: Dom João VI. However, the habit of using violence and putting high-ranking servicemen in charge of the government still reflected the treatment given to the provinces that should no longer be governed by captain generals as in the recent past, but by General Councils and Councils of the Presidency, even if the figure of the president of the Council was

appointed by the king. The Military Commissions represented a political setback that could once again subject Brazil to the condition of Colony.

The issue with Dom Pedro I's Military Commissions is that they did not respect the tripartition of the powers established by Montesquieu, especially as to legal matters. The Military Commissions made the general councils elected by the nation disappear and concentrated accusations and the execution of sentences in only one hand. For Bernardo Vasconcelos, "[...] The military commissions are an infernal invention" (Vasconcelos, 1899), insofar as one knew beforehand the magistrate and his vices, the accuser and the judge who "[...] is not always guided by the Law and Natural Reason" (Vasconcelos, 1899). The Commission, in itself, eliminated the possibility of a fair and legal process guaranteed by the 1824 Constitution; he states: "[...] the worst of all Judges is the one chosen by the Government to sentence those it deems its enemies" (Vasconcelos, 1899), then concludes: "[...] between Judges chosen this way and murderers, I see only one difference: and it is that the former kill with judicial apparatus, and the latter, without it" (Vasconcelos, 1899). This was, therefore, one of the biggest liberal demands: due legal process, the result of an autonomous judiciary branch, which Bernardo Vasconcelos would make an effort to materialize.

ILLUSTRATED CULTURE FOR A CONSERVATIVE EDUCATION

Bernardo Vasconcelos's discourse in his *Letter to the Gentlemen Voters* divides two conceptions that Enlightenment figures held dear. The conception of nation and people. The nation is endowed with sovereignty and lights, capable of thinking and acting politically, whereas the people is something promiscuous and passive that needs the care of the State to civilize themselves or reach some degree of civilization. This, as we have seen earlier, will be the goal of education in Brazil, in combination with the utilitarian interest of our elites.

However, at what cost? Because it was not a project exclusive to our elites, the Lancaster Method would be ideal for that moment. The pedagogical modernity for a mass school came from the British colonies in the Indian subcontinent, Madras, and would be spread around the world. At a low cost, the Lancasterian school would be installed across America. By allowing "[...] a teacher to teach a large number of students in a short time, [keeping] his students disciplined, accustomed from the first class to order and rule" (Bastos, 2012, p. 80), it would meet the objectives of national projects towards the formation of American nations: schooling quickly, at low cost. Both in Brazil and in the rest of the Americas, the Church would take care of the education of the elites with the simultaneous method, while the State would take care of the instruction of the people with the mutual method.

The instruction given to the people should transform them into the nation, for the people of Bernardo Vasconcelos is an uneducated one that allows themselves to be led “[...] to the abyss of the revolution” (Vasconcelos, 1899); they are “[...] those wretched peoples” (Vasconcelos, 1899); incapable of perceiving that they are manipulated to go “[...] against the established and sworn form of government” (Vasconcelos, 1899); becoming a fertile soil to receive “[...] the seeds of fear and distrust” (Vasconcelos, 1899). The people is linked to brutality, to force, it is the “[...] individuals within the people, gathered in large numbers, [who] invaded Paço da Câmara, surrounded the assemblymen” (Vasconcelos, 1899), exercising politics in a violent and rude manner, not compatible with the decency of a civilized nation. Popular pressure is always disorderly and troublesome. People were seen as always agitated and unruly, pressuring parliamentarians in an odious and incoherent way, with “[...] horrible shouts from the tribunes of the commoners” (Vasconcelos, 1899), instead of trusting their representatives, “[...] the illustrated majority, reproaching with mute silence such an outrage” (Vasconcelos, 1899). With an electoral process in two rounds, with no compatible income even to become a parish voter (those who proved to have a minimum income of 100,000 *réis* to vote for the province voters), the people ended up with a heated and noisy participation in imperial politics. Could only the school transform this people?

The educated, illustrated people is the nation. From there derives true sovereignty, as it is full of lights. It is already civilized enough to sign a social pact, a contract: The Constitution. The people can and must move on the stage of nation, because the Constitution and the Lights operate the transformation of the people into a nation, taking them out of the ignorance of darkness and elevating them to the condition of citizens. The nation speaks and listens to its emperor through the assembly of its representatives. The nation, as a whole, is always more intelligent than any government, and it is to be assumed that “[...] the Government is always more ignorant than the general mass of the Nation” (Vasconcelos, 1899) on any matter.

This nation guarantees its freedom by means of a constitution. The constitution is its written pact and guarantee of its freedom. In this regard, the nation is virtuous, that is, it bears those virtues that reason guides. It is morally correct and, consequently, cannot “[...] support habits that oppose [to its] interests” (Vasconcelos, 1899), because to do so “[...] is to enthrone immorality, an infallible precursor to the dissolution of the States” (Vasconcelos, 1899).

According to Luiza Rauter Pereira (2009, p. 204), in the early 18th century, “[...] the people was therefore often a concept restricted to white owners and to businessmen”. In this sense, it is close to a nation, which, according to Marco Pamplona (2009), refers to those who are under the same authority, usually that of a monarch (Pamplona, 2009). Throughout the century, revolutionary movements had to seek new definitions, reconstruct concepts, which led the people to become

a degenerate concept, brought closer to the commoners or the *lumpenproletariat* (Pereira, 2009), incapable, ignorant and lacking in light (Pereira, 2009). At the other end, the concept of nation gradually increases in value and, as it moves further, starts to oppose the concept of people. Nation starts to be referred as the body of citizens (Pamplona, 2009), of those with all political rights, becoming friends with the king (Pamplona, 2009). This disparity puts the people and the nation on opposite sides by disqualifying the former.

Participants of the same Third State, it was necessary to create something that distinguished them before the nobility and the clergy, the other States. This social marker is ownership and education. Pereira (2009) clarifies that the conspiratory project in Minas Gerais, led by an urban and illustrated elite, had the support of a people that did not exist yet, made up of citizens and owners “[...] designed for the future: by means of assistance, education and repression, the commoners could, in the future, be transformed into people” (Pereira, 2009, p. 207). And, then, into nation. This was one of Bernardo Vasconcelos’s most costly tasks. His investment in education progresses vertically: from early childhood to higher education; and horizontally: from newspapers to the repressive system.

When it comes to the conspiratory project, we do not have much information about education, only the reiterated mention of the creation of a university in Minas Gerais. However, this task was necessary for a future different from the situation of Colony that was imposed to Minas Gerais’s citizens. Bernardo Vasconcelos wants an education project because he is convinced that

[...] this is how we will be able to level, more or less, the moral faculties of Brazilians and annihilate this royal dependence, which the lights of a class exerted on the blind ignorance of totality; a dependence which so much contributed to consolidating the iron scepter that oppressed us over three centuries (Vasconcelos, 1899).

Leveling means reaching an ideal and necessary minimum to transform those brutes into a people capable of participating in a nation project, and becomes the repertoire of a conservative elite that will use education to civilize and to contain. Civilizing in the sense of rendering the commoners polite and courteous, transforming them into good workers for the economic growth of the rising country. Containing in the sense of limiting this participation, selecting, on the basis of race and social condition, who should participate in that full citizenship preached by the European Enlightenment introduced in Brazil. The school is “[...] where the Brazilian Youth will learn about its institutions, and nurture the love and respect the latter are worthy” (Vasconcelos, 1899). Conservative in the sense that conferring this civil right would not mean conferring the political right.

Thus, in the Brazilian social spectrum, the population was expected (and still is expected!) to have an education that could level their moral and intellectual faculties so that they are drawn closer to the elite, while staying at a safe distance, also understanding that the initial social pact that inaugurated the Brazilian Imperial State puts “[...] aside the possibilities of an emancipatory education proposed by European liberal philosophers, from which inspiration is sought” (Paula & Nogueira, 2017, p. 184).

Therefore, a minimum curriculum: “[...] reading, writing, counting and grammar of the mother tongue must be the first study of all members of a Nation; this application is the most essential one” (Vasconcelos, 1899). Guaranteeing this minimum has always been in Bernardo Vasconcelos’s plans when building a legal framework that would ensure the dissemination of schooling, the duties of parents towards their sons and daughters, the duty of the State as to inspecting the performance of these services, both through ordinary laws and of regulations for public instruction.

In addition to the school machine, Bernardo Vasconcelos believed in a pedagogical press that was capable of not only contributing to the inspection – of parents, teachers and the State – but also to the spread of useful and varied knowledge. Moreover, the press would play the role of announcing the actions of the government, providing educated citizens everywhere with a closer look at the country. To this end, the citizens must be literate.

Another instance of public education is the justices of the peace. The justices of the peace are public educators chosen by the people; acting “[...] as good family men, they will seek to reconcile the parties [...], being an unquestionable axiom, rather preventing than punishing crimes” (Vasconcelos, 1899). The performance of the justices of the peace is pedagogical and conciliatory, making the law and the Constitution known.

Finally, in his educational project, Bernardo Vasconcelos elects the Master as the most important agent for transforming this unrefined people into a civilized one, a nation. He categorically states that the nationals must take care of the nation’s conscience, not allowing any competition between national and foreigner masters, as this “[...] is an attack on the Constitution of the Empire and a disgrace to the honor of the Brazilian Nation” (Vasconcelos, 1899). The job of the “[...] Master of the Brazilian Youth, paid and authorized by the Nation” (Vasconcelos, 1899) is a noble one, it is a “[...] Job of the City, Job of the Citizen, Job of the Brazilian Association, which virtually excludes the fellowship of any individual who does not belong to this very same Association” (Vasconcelos, 1899). Therefore, it is an occupation exclusive to the nationals who must direct their own conscience and the conscience of the youngest ones.

Thus, the Enlightenment project for liberation through reason gradually becomes a conservative project in the hands of the Brazilian elite. From the beginning, the project of a university is aborted, perhaps not so much the one that the conspirers designed, but something that could, in fact, contribute to the construction of a national thought. From the stillborn project of Minas Gerais's conspirers to the consolidation of the elite's power "[...], the conservative conscience of a liberal and humanist character prevailed, after all," (Paim, 1998, p. 203), composed of an Enlightenment repertoire that justified the constant presence of Minas Gerais's citizens ruling the State.

Bernardo Vasconcelos knew well how to lead the Enlightenment ideology, adapting the European repertoire to the needs of the country, transformed into the project of the Brazilian elites. From this Enlightenment repertoire about revolution and counter-revolution, we take from Koselleck (2006) Condorcet's explanation

[...] about how a revolution should be produced and led in the name of freedom. Une loi révolutionnaire est une loi, qui a pour objet de maintenir cette révolution, et d'en accélérer ou régler la marche (Koselleck, 2006, p. 75).¹

The Brazilian manorial class knew when to speed up and when to slow down the revolutionary process, to the point of saying: 'It is necessary to stop the train of the Revolution [of April 7]'. The 'republican experience' of the 1834 Additional Act was understood by the Brazilian elite as the great possibility of losing their project. It was necessary to take the train over and put it back on the tracks. In this conservative project for the construction of the State, the right to education and the school institution would expand in a slow and controlled manner, serving the elite more than the people. The Lancasterian method, then national and official since 1827, in the opinion of Bernardo Vasconcelos on display in the Ministerial Report of 1838, was very limited and crude, hence the government's unwillingness to install new schools of that method (Brasil, 1838).

FINAL REMARKS

The project of Minas Gerais's conspirers, seen and understood as an Enlightenment project, was carried on in the discourse and actions of Bernardo Vasconcelos, showing that, despite the constitutional modernity, the Illustration also inspired and justified the conservative and centralizing character of the Brazilian Imperial State. Bernardo Vasconcelos, son of someone very close to the

¹ "A revolutionary law is one whose goal is to maintain this revolution and speed it up or regulate its progress".

conspirers' project, would use the same Enlightenment repertoire of Minas Gerais's movement, leading it from the General Council of the Province to the General Assembly and the Senate, developing laws and regulations, codes and norms that would allow the continuity of the fight against any attempt to oppress the State against the citizen. Those 'abominable French ideas' of freedom and equality, which in 1789, in the *Inconfidência Mineira*, represented a revolutionary novelty, mainly with the ideas of a Republic, gradually conform to the constraints caused by events in Europe and Brazil. As events unfold, new repertoires of action are built, which makes our elite turn to their State projects, making a conservative-matrix choice, without denying the new influences coming from France and England.

From that repertoire managed by the conspirers, the view on people/nation is the most emblematic, as the need to build a nation that would support the rising State became clear. Then, from the 'people x nation' dichotomy, Bernardo Vasconcelos seems to perceive the need to invest in the spreading of education throughout the territory of the newly created country as a means to fight despotism. To this end, he contributed strongly to building a school legislation and a free press that would have a role that was not only political, but also pedagogical.

This influence of the French Enlightenment would go on throughout the 19th century in a more incisive and direct way with the French artistic missions that gradually changed the Brazilian sensibility. The news of the popular movement in Europe and the solutions given by the European elite echo in the Brazilian elite, which anticipate themselves, when possible, based on the same repertoire and with the same actions: hygienist, civilizing, preventive and punitive laws, with schools following the same steps. The metaphor of light is replaced by the metaphor of cleanliness, of purity. Beyond these operations in sensibility that intend to educate the people, the brutes, one can perceive that the Enlightenment motto of education, of elucidation, ceases to be a metaphor in the discourses to become a deliberate and planned action. Thus, the Brazilian sensibility is gradually changed by the school machine, by the newspapers, by the literature and by the pedagogical action of the figure of the justices of the peace, all of them conceived by Bernardo Vasconcelos and addressed in his *Letter to the Gentlemen Voters* of 1828.

Minas Gerais's project spans the entire 19th century, adapting to the Brazilian imagination – from the *Inconfidência Mineira* to the Republic – the metaphors and the European repertoire of lights. The tranquility of the Imperial State consolidated in 1850, with concepts and repertoire shared among liberals and conservatives, will take its first blows with the remembrance of the same figure of Tiradentes by the liberals of 1862, who opposed to the equestrian monument of Dom Pedro I at the site where the liberation hero was hanged. Ten years later, Joaquim Norberto de Souza e Silva publishes *História da conjuração mineira* [History of the Minas Gerais Conspiracy]. Memory begins to make Brazilians believe in the need for a Republic. In the educational field, the Couto Ferraz Reformation (1854) buries, by means of

the law, the dying Lancasterian method and the possibility of an education that would bring more people to the nation and, thus, reform the State.

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