

INTERPRETING BRAZILIAN INDEPENDENCE

CONFLICTS AND CONSPIRACIES: BRAZIL AND PORTUGAL, 1750–1808. By KENNETH R. MAXWELL. (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1973. Pp. 289. \$14.95.)

FROM COLONY TO NATION: ESSAYS ON THE INDEPENDENCE OF BRAZIL. By A. J. R. RUSSELL-WOOD (ed.). (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975. Pp. 267. \$12.50.)

1822: DIMENSÕES. By CARLOS GUILHERME MOTA (ed.). (São Paulo: Editôra Perspectiva, 1972.)

PARANÁ–1822. (Curitiba: Universidade Federal do Paraná, Instituto de Ciências Humanas, Departamento de História, 1972.)

Not specifically concerned with independence, Maxwell's *Conflicts and Conspiracies* describes the growing estrangement between metropolis and colony during the second half of the eighteenth century. Maxwell chronicles the efforts of the Marquis of Pombal to "nationalize" the Luso-Brazilian economy by breaking the stranglehold of foreign (mainly British) credit on Brazilian trade. Maxwell avoids the moral judgments typically visited upon Pombal; in general the author's assessment of Pombal's accomplishments is positive, although he points out that many of the changes that occurred in Portugal owed less to the Marquis' ambitious reform program than to forces beyond his control. Maxwell also demonstrates that the Pombaline era occasioned profound transformations that were not undone after the prime minister's fall from power in 1777.

For the most part, economy and government claim Maxwell's attention. He alludes to social change when he mentions the replacement of the old merchant oligarchy by a group that "took on the functions of an industrial-capitalist 'national' bourgeoisie" (p. 58), but this group remains nebulous and never takes on human dimensions. An important section of the book, however, deals with the very human drama of the Inconfidência Mineira. Relying mostly on long-available published documents, the author has carefully reconstructed the events of the Vila Rica conspiracy, divesting it of the mythical trappings conferred by past historians. According to his fascinating account, the Inconfidência was born of the fiscal demands of the Portuguese crown; the conspirators included activists who wanted to establish a republic, ideologues influenced by Enlightenment writings, and persons who hoped to evade paying their debts to the crown; the governor of Minas Gerais accidentally averted the uprising by postponing the imposition of the *derrama* or head tax; and the participation of numerous prominent citizens in the plot was concealed by the governor in a cover-up. A final chapter concerns efforts to effect a compromise between the divergent interests of Brazil and Portugal during the period 1795–1807.

Maxwell's thorough research in Portuguese, Brazilian, and British archives is reflected throughout the text and in the statistical appendix. His work provides an excellent analysis of the interplay between economy and politics and at the same time manages to maintain a felicitous, almost eloquent style. This book is not easily "gutted" for information, as numerous graduate students have discovered in preparing for qualifying exams; rather it requires, and deserves, a careful and thoughtful reading.

The three remaining works are collections of essays in commemoration of the sesquicentennial of Brazilian independence. Although a few are based on archival research, most of the essays seek to reinterpret old data. Some have progressed beyond traditional historiography in at least two significant ways: Brazilian independence is now seen within a broader context of economic and political change in the North Atlantic world, and nonelite groups are no longer presumed to have been irrelevant to the process of independence.

Perhaps the best of the lot is Emília Viotti da Costa's "Political Emancipation of Brazil," an article originally published in Brazil in 1968 and now appearing in revised form in *From Colony to Nation*. Costa provides a coherent interpretation that accounts for the many forces leading to independence, and she relates the movement to the reordering of the European commercial and political systems. Like many Brazilian historians, Costa is intrigued by "contradictions": of the "colonial pact" between colony and metropolis; of Prince João's economic policies after the transfer of the court to Rio de Janeiro in 1808; of Luso-Brazilian liberalism in the early 1820s; and of a "revolution" engineered by an elite committed to the preservation of the status quo. In discussing this last point, Costa shows that the Brazilian "upper class" embraced the idea of independence under a constitutional monarchy as a means of achieving commercial freedom and administrative autonomy without mass mobilization or significant social change. Costa offers little that is new, but she ably summarizes existing knowledge and offers subtleties of her own.

Other articles in Russell-Wood volume also deserve notice. Maria Odila Silva Dias, in an essay that appears also in *1822: Dimensões*, assesses the significance of the Portuguese crown's residence in Rio de Janeiro. Stanley E. Hilton presents a well documented and persuasive argument that early relations between Brazil and the United States were characterized by North American suspicion of the Brazilian monarchy. Stuart B. Schwartz's study, "Elite Politics and the Growth of a Peasantry in Late Colonial Brazil," focuses on the threat posed by the growth of a rural peasantry of mixed racial origin to the hegemony of the landed oligarchy; like Costa, Schwartz perceives the conservative nature of Brazilian independence as the direct result of elite fears of mass upheaval.

Two essays on cultural aspects are less successful. Writing on "The Modernization of Portugal and the Independence of Brazil," Manoel da Silveira Cardozo neglects to define "modernization" (which he apparently takes to mean secularization and egalitarianism) and uses such nebulous terms as "baroque mind" and "baroque conscience." According to Cardozo's scenario, Pombal's attacks on church and nobility left "baroque society" vulnerable to the

ideas of the Enlightenment. As a consequence, the “ancient qualities” that had made Portugal great (p. 207), “the marvelous bond that united the throne and the nation” (p. 208), disappeared. The liberals triumphed in 1820 and 1821 “because the old regime had already been weakened from within, had already been consciously transformed by zealots who worked under the cover of modernization” (p. 206). Cardozo, a twentieth-century academic, curiously laments the victory of liberalism in the early nineteenth century.

E. Bradford Burns’s article, “The Intellectuals as Agents of Change and the Independence of Brazil, 1724–1822,” is flawed by imprecise conceptualization. Acknowledging the difficulty of defining “intellectuals,” Burns uses the term “in a general sense to refer to *all the educated elite*, the teachers, doctors, lawyers, bureaucrats, some military officers, merchants, and priests, those who engaged in literary conversations, read European authors, exposed themselves to new ideas or methods emanating from Europe, and concerned themselves with the world around them” (pp. 224–25, italics added). These persons comprised a “tiny group,” as Burns says; nevertheless, the definition is so vague and all-encompassing that it loses any analytical utility. From Burns’s description emerges an almost monolithic group, the members of which criticized the Portuguese colonial system out of a shared sense of nationalism. The author does not analyze the intellectuals’ opinions in terms of their divergent economic interests, life styles, or social status. The limitations of his definition become evident when he cites the large number of university graduates among Brazilian politicians of the 1820s as proof of the intellectuals’ leadership in the transition to independent rule (p. 243). Used as a synonym for “elite,” “intellectual” lacks independent meaning and analytical value.

1822: *Dimensões* contains sixteen articles plus an extensive historiographical essay *cum* bibliography. As in any collection, the quality is uneven. The first section deliberately seeks to place Brazilian independence within “the Atlantic context,” a goal most successfully pursued by Fernando A. Novais, Jacques Godechot, and Frédéric Mauro. Emília Viotti da Costa contributes another excellent study, this one tracing the career of José Bonifácio and examining the *historiografia andradina*.

The second section focuses on the process of independence in specific regions or provinces. Many of the authors attempt to relate local events to the international scene; this proves to be a difficult task and is best accomplished by Francisco C. Falcón and Ilmar Rohloff de Mattos in an article on Rio de Janeiro, where local events had national and international importance. Nevertheless, these studies show that the transfer of loyalty from Portuguese king to Brazilian emperor had to be effected *in each province*, and that the process varied according to local circumstances.

Sérgio Paulo Moreyra’s article on Goiás highlights the theme of separatism. During the crisis of the liberal movement of 1820–21, the issues of independence vs colonial status and of republicanism vs monarchism were subordinated, in Goiás, to a purely local question. Leaders of the northern *comarca* seized the opportunity to declare their region independent of Vila Boa, capital of

both the province and the southern comarca. The resolution of this issue overshadowed more transcendental matters. (Events in Goiás, incidentally, resembled the contemporaneous rivalry between the cities of Mato Grosso and Cuiabá in the province of Mato Grosso.) A less satisfactory essay, in *Paraná-1822*, is Jayme Antônio Cardoso's treatment of sentiment in the comarca of Paraná for separation from São Paulo.

In this context, Richard Morse's essay in *From Colony to Nation* is worth noting. Writing on "Brazil's Urban Development: Colony and Empire," Morse first turns to a consideration of "three successive institutional arrangements which mediated, or effected compromise, between private and public power" (p. 158): the *câmara*, from the beginning of settlement until the mid-seventeenth century; the militia system of the late colonial era; the *coronelismo* under empire and old republic. Morse's point is that public power was confined to a few large cities while private power reigned elsewhere, more or less with official sanction. He concludes: "The meaning of Brazilian independence was not that a new nation had thrown off the shackles of colonial bondage, but that the center of colonial control was shifted from Lisbon to Rio, where the structures of domination were reelaborated in continuity with the earlier system" (p. 178).

Local studies reveal that the pattern sometimes repeated itself at the provincial level, where the hegemony of the provincial capital might be challenged by a subordinate region seeking to establish a direct link to Rio de Janeiro. The process to which Morse alludes—the achievement of control over the provinces by the national capital—required almost three decades. Only within the last forty-five years have the *municípios* of the interior succumbed to outside authority, and even now private power holds sway in some areas.

Separation from Portugal, then, scarcely affected the structure of society and the exercise of political power. Costa appropriately sums up the incomplete nature of Brazilian independence: "The facade of liberalism raised by the Europeanized elite disguised the misery and servitude of the majority of people living in Brazil. To achieve the complete emancipation of Brazil, to give meaning to the principles of the constitution—these were tasks relegated to future generations" (*From Colony to Nation*, p. 88).

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