

FREEDOM FROM THE STATE IN RIO: THE CLASSICAL  
LIBERAL IDEALS OF FREI CANECA, LEADER OF THE  
1824 CONFEDERATION OF THE EQUATOR MOVEMENT  
IN NORTHEASTERN BRAZIL

PLÍNIO DE GÓES JR.\*

**Introduction**

AFTER DECLARING INDEPENDENCE from European powers, states in the Americas struggled to find suitable forms of national organization. Groups supporting a confederated structure with a virtually powerless central authority clashed with movements calling for a stronger central authority. These clashes occurred in many nations, including the United States, Gran Colombia, Argentina, and Brazil. In the United States, the Anti-Federalists opposed a strong central authority and the Federalists supported a stronger federal government. In Latin America, the *federalistas*, or *federales* (federalists), struggled for greater regional autonomy while the *unitarios* (unitarians) believed in a stronger central authority. Classical liberalism as preached by Montesquieu, one of the most influential eighteenth-century thinkers, opposed the centralization of political power to such an extent that

---

\* Plínio de Góes Jr. is an instructor with the Saab-Pedroso Center for Portuguese Culture at the University of Massachusetts, Lowell. He received his doctorate in Romance Languages and Literatures from Harvard University.

CITATION INFORMATION FOR THIS ARTICLE:

Plínio de Góes Jr. 2016. "Freedom from the State in Rio: The Classical Liberal Ideals of Frei Caneca, Leader of the 1824 Confederation of the Equator Movement in Northeastern Brazil." *Libertarian Papers*. 8 (2): 194-211. ONLINE AT: [libertarianpapers.org](http://libertarianpapers.org). THIS ARTICLE IS subject to a Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 License ([creativecommons.org/licenses](http://creativecommons.org/licenses)).

movements in support of strict federalism were viewed as radical classical liberal movements.

Brazil faced a unique situation when compared to other nations that gained their independence during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. When armies allied with Napoleon invaded Portugal, the Portuguese royal family, the Braganzas, fled to Brazil and remained there from 1807 to 1821 in a royal palace in the city of Rio de Janeiro. Despite the fact that Napoleon's armies were largely defeated in 1815, the British exercised influence over Portugal until a revolution allowed the Braganzas to return to Lisbon. In 1822, the Portuguese prince-regent and heir to the throne, Pedro I (Peter I) of the House of Braganza, declared Brazil an independent kingdom from Portugal. The precise reasons for Peter's decision to form a country separate from his father's nation have never been determined decisively, but many Brazilians suspected at the time that Peter was attempting to slow a growing anti-monarchist, federalist national movement.

Brazil became an independent monarchy through Peter's action. Peter and then his son ruled as emperors in Rio de Janeiro, creating a South American monarchy lasting from 1822 until the declaration of a republic in 1889. Throughout the nineteenth century, movements for federalism in Brazil waged wars against the Rio monarchy for more regional autonomy, demanding the right to elect provincial governors in a country where governors were appointed by the government in Rio. The Cabanagem (shack dweller) revolt occurred in the northeastern province of Pará from 1835 to 1840. The Sabinada revolt (named after its leader, Francisco Sabino) lasted from 1837 to 1838 and occurred in the northeastern state of Bahia. The Farroupilha (ragamuffin, a term frequently applied to radical liberals) revolt took place in the southern province of Rio Grande do Sul from 1835 to 1845. Finally, the Praieira (beach) revolt (named after the street where rebel periodicals were published) took place in Pernambuco and lasted from 1848 to 1850. Participants in each of these revolts published short ideological newspapers arguing for a political structure with more regional autonomy and a smaller government in Rio.

As I discuss below, rebel newspapers in these revolts frequently credited another rebellion as an inspiration: the 1824 Confederação do Equador (Confederation of the Equator) movement. The Confederation of the Equator movement was led by figures dedicated to federalism, including a Carmelite friar named Frei Caneca (Brother Mug) who elaborated a political philosophy these journalists termed the *fé da liberdade* (liberty faith). Brother Mug was part of a group of classical liberal thinkers attempting to spread this message. It was only in the 1820s, as Brazil moved toward independence, that

journalists were freed from prior restraints, giving rise to political debates involving small farmers as well as wealthier plantation owners.

Here my objective is to introduce the reader to Brother Mug's philosophy. Scholars in Brazil have labeled Brother Mug's philosophy a classical liberal ideology but have failed to present his specific beliefs. Latin American political thought is not limited to colonial-era treatises, support for authoritarian regimes, or liberation theology. Understanding Brother Mug's liberty faith helps us grasp the diversity in political philosophy in Latin America, particularly classical liberal philosophies.

I begin by summarizing the history of the Confederation of the Equator movement and Brother Mug's involvement in this movement as well as scholarship about Brother Mug. I then present a systematic outline of Brother Mug's political thought. I conclude that Brother Mug merged the concerns found in the writings of anti-centralists, such as the North American Anti-Federalists and the Latin American *federalistas*, with a sense of a spiritual mission. He thus generated his own liberty faith.

### The 1824 Confederation of the Equator and Brother Mug

After the Lisbon-born prince-regent of Brazil, Peter I, decided in 1822 to create a branch of the Braganzas independent from the European monarchy, he agreed to call for a constitutional convention in Rio. But censorship and arrests kept some representatives from being seated at it, and Peter soon acted on his belief in his right to appoint the heads of each province.<sup>1</sup> A junta comprised of powerful unitarian landlords led by the wealthy Francisco Paes Barreto in the northeastern state of Pernambuco attempted to limit the influence of advocates of federalism, but news reached the state in December 1823 that the monarch had tempestuously dismissed the constitutional assembly in November after discovering that limits would be placed on his authority. Outrage in Pernambuco led to revolt and the installation of Manoel de Carvalho Paes de Andrade, leader of the *federalistas*, as governor.<sup>2</sup>

Brother Mug was a Carmelite friar associated with the *federalistas*. He came from humble origins, his father Domingos da Silva Rebelo having been a cooper—hence the name Caneca, or Mug, chosen by Mug himself as a tribute. He grew up in the poor Fora de Portas neighborhood in the city of Recife in the province of Pernambuco, where he was originally known as

---

<sup>1</sup> Mello, *A outra independência*, 147, 151.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 157–159, 161.

Joaquim do Amor Divino Rabelo. His family had some roots in the city of Elvas, in the Alentejo region of Portugal, and the city of Porto in northern Portugal, but he also acknowledged the possibility of possessing indigenous and African blood. He became a Carmelite on October 8, 1796.<sup>3</sup> In December 1823, after the dismissal of the constitutional assembly, Brother Mug began publishing a newspaper titled *Typhis Pernambucano* (*Tiphys of Pernambuco*), named after the helmsman of Jason's ship, the *Argos*, which carried the Argonauts. Historical studies do not indicate who subscribed to the newspaper, but educated smallholders with slaves in their homes, connected to poor tailors and laborers, may have read the *Typhis* to others, while wealthier landholders of unremarkable lineage who felt snubbed by more powerful types may also have made a point of obtaining copies.

Brother Mug, a graduate of the Seminary of Olinda, was recognized by his religious order in 1803 as capable of teaching rhetoric and geometry and eventually began preaching. Aside from the political writings he published in his own newspaper, he wrote works intended for writing instructors and students. He authored a grammar book focusing on etymology, orthography, prosody, and syntax; a guide to writing eloquently; and a rhetorical guide focusing on style.<sup>4</sup> When ships led by British mercenary John Taylor came to Recife in March 1824 to forcibly install Paes Barreto (Emperor Peter's appointee) as president of the province, the state council of Pernambuco, led by Father Venâncio Henrique de Rezende, voted to uphold the state's right to appoint Paes de Andrade (the local candidate). The council's decision forced Taylor to impose a blockade. The tension was so palpable that the council rejected a decision by the emperor to substitute another appointee.<sup>5</sup> Brother Mug, a member of the council, refused to consider an alternative constitutional project proposed by the emperor and persuaded others of the need to do likewise; so the *federalistas*, declaring Pernambuco an independent rebel government, issued a call to arms for the whole northeastern region on July 2, 1824.<sup>6</sup> Paes de Andrade's call to arms announced the formation of the Confederation of the Equator, which would be composed of northeastern states; but the rebel government only lasted until September 17, and no confederate government was ever formed.

The *confederados* (confederates) in the rebel government of Pernambuco banned the importation of slaves into the state and repeatedly called for the

---

<sup>3</sup> Montenegro, *O liberalismo radical*, 25–27; Morel, *Frei Caneca*, 20, 22–23, 30.

<sup>4</sup> Brito, *A gloriosa sotaina*, 30, 46–47, 49–51, 52, 68–69.

<sup>5</sup> Leite, *Pernambuco 1824*, 99–100.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 101, 108–109.

northern provinces to form a confederation.<sup>7</sup> The rebel government of Pernambuco sent issues of Frei Caneca's newspaper to other provinces, and, in the state of Ceará, the president, who had been nominated by the emperor, was replaced by Tristão Gonçalves de Alencar Araripe, who allied himself with the Confederation.<sup>8</sup> Although a confederation of the northeastern region was not ultimately formed, as the rebellion centered mostly on Pernambuco and portions of surrounding states, a war did ensue. The rebels mobilized local artisans in the northeastern states to help build defenses, recruited soldiers and pardoned deserters, and formed a makeshift navy from the commercial ships it could obtain. The rebels were prepared to go to war over the dissolution of the constitutional assembly and the threat to their less centralized model of nationhood, and they hoped their actions would inspire revolts elsewhere, including the southern states.<sup>9</sup> The revolt did not spread to states outside the northeast, however.

British mercenary Lord Cochrane was then sent to embargo Pernambuco, bringing troops for a ground invasion, but the rebels did not give up easily. Even when decisively beaten, they tried to regroup, only surrendering on November 29, 1824, after it became clear they could not muster a large enough force to retake Pernambuco.<sup>10</sup> Brother Mug was executed on January 13, 1825, after being found guilty of disseminating revolutionary-newspaper articles on December 23, 1824. He had attempted to defend himself by apologizing for some of his more indecent comments and insults in his writings.<sup>11</sup> The British suppressed the revolt after just a few months.

The majority of studies about Brother Mug and the Confederation of the Equator focus on his person and the events surrounding him, and do not pay much attention to the ideas behind the revolt. Eurico Jorge Campelo Cabral's 2008 dissertation "O liberalismo em Pernambuco: as metamorfoses políticas de uma época (1800–1825)" ("Liberalism in Pernambuco: Political Metamorphoses of an Era [1800–1825]") argues that classical liberal ideas were originally defended by rural elites prior to independence from Portugal but became the ideology of the middle classes after independence. Campelo Cabral sees the ideology of the Confederation as a populist form of classical liberalism opposed to two ideologies favored by the wealthy: conservatism

---

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 109–110.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 112, 114.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 115–118.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 122, 125–127.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 129, 131, 134.

and a moderate liberalism. Cabral does not go into the structure of these ideologies in depth, but he ties classical liberalism to local autonomy, in that the radical classical liberals were the most anti-centralist while the moderate liberals were less so and the conservatives actively supported centralism in Brazil. Implicit in Cabral's work is the notion that each of these ideologies was tied to a particular class. Radical classical liberals represented the middle class and the poor, who opposed the high taxes imposed by the court in Rio as well as the political appointments for governor and other offices that the court meant to use to favor its wealthiest supporters in Pernambuco. Moderate liberals organized around the Partido Liberal (Liberal Party) tended to come from wealthy families but were poorer and from less illustrious families than the richest elements in the province. The wealthiest residents supported the centralist Partido Conservador (Conservative Party), which supported the monarchy, political appointment of governors and other local officials, and high taxes favoring the farms capable of absorbing them.

Janine Pereira de Sousa Alarcão, in her 2006 dissertation, "O saber e o fazer: república, federalismo, e separatismo na Confederação do Equador" ("The Know-How and the Do-It-Yourself: Republic, Federalism, and Separatism in the Confederation of the Equator"), sees the declaration of the Confederation of the Equator on July 2, 1824, as the result of a desire for autonomy arising in turn from an escalation of local conflicts between leaders allied to or opposing particular state governors. The rebels had refused to allow a governor appointed by Rio to take office, preferring a governor they had elected. Loyalty to a particular official, therefore, created opposing factions. Alarcão also identifies excessive taxation and economic dissatisfaction—caused by international competition in sugar and coffee production—as economic causes. Aside from economic and factional causes, she identifies a budding Brazilian nationalism standing in opposition to Portuguese institutions as contributing to the 1824 revolt. The rebels believed separation from Portugal could not be realized until the Portuguese-born prince-regent Peter, ruling as monarch of his own branch of the Portuguese Braganza dynasty from his seat in Rio, was no longer all-powerful. Independence from Rio was, to Alarcão, a continuation of the struggle for independence from Portugal.

Alarcão sees signs that Brother Mug was a believer in republicanism from his earliest writings onward.<sup>12</sup> Liliane Gonçalves de Souza Carrijo does not seem quite so certain in her 2013 dissertation, "Frei Caneca, um republicano?" ("Brother Mug, a Republican?"). Carrijo focuses more

---

<sup>12</sup> Alarcão, "O saber e o fazer," 44.

explicitly on the ideology behind the Confederation of the Equator and ties it to the circumstances of the northeast. She does not explain what republicanism means. When independence came, via the prince-regent's decision to create his own independent monarchy based in Rio, advocates of federalism hoped that he would allow the creation of a constitutional monarchy protecting regional autonomy, a possibility defended by Brother Mug initially.<sup>13</sup> However, Peter dismissed the constitutional assembly. Carrijo sees a change in Caneca's positions, as she indicates that until the assembly of elected representatives was dismissed on November 12, 1823, Brother Mug had been content with a constitutional monarchy. Yet after that date, as the new South American monarchy authored a constitution in 1824 and commanded the states to swear allegiance to it, Caneca morphed and opposed the constitution, resisting its centralist and aristocratic tendencies, and supported the declaration of the Confederation of the Equator, becoming an anti-monarchist.<sup>14</sup>

Carrijo states that Caneca supported a fairly extreme form of decentralization. Each state would have its own army and navy, and citizens of a state would not be subject to direct taxation by the federal government—rather, to obtain revenue, the federal government would have to request funds from state governments. Furthermore, states would be able to elect governors and legislate on most subjects. Carrijo identifies the desire for regional autonomy as one of the major tenets of the ideology of the Confederation of the Equator and goes on to argue that its members shifted away from believing autonomy was compatible with monarchy.

Some scholars have focused on the sources of the ideology of the 1824 movement. Professor Kelly Cristina Azevedo de Lima has argued that there was, in Pernambuco, a conservative, monarchical strain of liberalism inspired by the Portuguese minister Marquis of Pombal, who had instituted liberalizing reforms in Portugal with the purpose of preserving the Lisbon-

---

<sup>13</sup> Carrijo, "Frei Caneca, um republicano?" 27–28, 30–31.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 32–33, 36, 38, 104. Carrijo writes: "Em suma, até a outorga da constituição, em 1824, o projeto político do Carmelita centrou-se em dois eixos: a monarquia constitucional representativa e a descentralização política, aspectos que foram enfaticamente defendidos pelo frei. Todavia, a partir desta data, Caneca passou a defender o regime republicano confederado" ("In summary, until the bestowal of the constitution in 1824, the Carmelite's political project focused on two points: a representative constitutional monarchy and political decentralization, emphatically defended by the clergyman. Nevertheless, after this period, Caneca began to defend a republican confederation regime").

based monarchy. There was also a radical anti-monarchical liberalism inspired by France and North America, a strain she claims Brother Mug believed in.<sup>15</sup> In other words, a philosophy preaching a sort of national conservatism with liberal elements coexisted with a radical classical liberal tradition. Azevedo de Lima notes that Caneca believed God did not grant sovereignty to kings but only to the people, in whom sovereignty is invested via natural law, tying Caneca's beliefs to St. Thomas Aquinas, Spanish theologian Francisco Suarez, Grotius, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, and the German legal scholar Samuel von Pufendorf.<sup>16</sup>

Although scholars writing about the Confederation have identified bits and pieces of the ideology Brother Mug advocated, they have failed to present a comprehensive summary of the worldview embodied by the *Typhis Pernambucano*, a form of anti-authoritarian Catholic classical liberalism.

Brother Mug affirmed the importance of ideology in his writings.<sup>17</sup> He claimed he was publishing his articles to teach common people who could not read or write, not the wealthy, implying he expected his newspapers to be read aloud.<sup>18</sup> An analysis of the *Typhis Pernambucano* reveals several recurring themes: constitutionalism; limited government; faith; and a republican concern about the excessive wealth he believed was produced through the cooperation of private and public power.

The journalists of the Confederation of the Equator supported free speech, freedom of worship, opposition to caste systems, and the gradual abolition of slavery. They criticized arbitrariness using the terms *governo arbitrário* (arbitrary government) and *arbitrariedade* (arbitrariness) frequently, stating that legal proceedings followed different rules depending on which group was affected. They thus sought objective, standardized legal

---

<sup>15</sup> Lima, "Frei Caneca," 146–147.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 153–154, 156–158, 158–161, 161–164, 164–166, 166–168, 168–171. In these pages, Lima provides a summary of Caneca's philosophical influences as she understands them. The authors she names are primarily European classical liberal philosophers.

<sup>17</sup> Caneca, Frei Joaquim, 55. Brother Mug writes that "as idéias falsas e inexatas, que fizermos das coisas, produzirão infalivelmente juízos falsos, incoerências; crimes, atentados, perturbações da sociedade e a sua ruína afinal" ("false and inexact ideas, which we make of things, will infallibly produce false judgments, incoherencies; crimes, attempts, disturbances in society and its final ruin"). We can see then that finding the right ideology was important to him.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 57. Brother Mug tells us: "eu não escrevo para os homens letrados; sim para o povo rude, e que não tem aplicação às letras" ("I do not write for lettered men; but for the rude people and those who do not have knowledge of letters").

procedures and adjudication that could not be manipulated as easily. They opposed the creation of titles such as baron and count, believing that the special privileges assigned to such inventions should be eliminated. The law should apply equally to everyone regardless of class, skin color, or any other aspect of the individual.

The participants of the Confederation of the Equator referred to Switzerland as a model to emulate and the Chinese empire as a model to avoid. Brother Mug believed that as “os cantões suíços sacodem o jugo dos austríacos” (“the Swiss cantons shake off the dominance of the Austrians”), so too could Brazil shake off despotic rule based out of Rio because Pernambuco would not be alone should a civil war be necessary to change the political order of the country, but would be joined by the other provinces.<sup>19</sup> Brother Mug viewed a confederation as the perfect model of order for Brazil because if any province would attempt to attack any other province, the others could rise up to protect their sovereignty through a cooperative network.<sup>20</sup>

The *confederados* presented the Swiss system as a form of decentralization that would amplify the voices of the less well connected and the Chinese system as a form of national organization that would allow a minority composed of the wealthiest individuals to exercise control over and impoverish the majority of the country. Another author associated with the movement for federalism in northeastern Brazil described the monarchical system as an “espécie de Império da China, retalhando todo o terreno em pequenas porções, para poder-se bem dominar a cada uma pela rivalidade das outras, e dominar as daqui pelas dali, e estas pelas de acolá, e assim chegar-se ao fim de dominar, desfrutar e tyrannizar imunemente a todas” (“a sort of Chinese Empire, breaking up territory into small portions to better dominate each one with rivalries and dominate these ones with those ones, and those ones with these ones, to dominate, take advantage of and tyrannize all of

---

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 112, 124–125, 137. Brother Mug writes: “nós não nos veríamos sós em campo, e a braços com esse Rio e suas aderentes do Sul; porém sem dúvida teríamos mais províncias com que dividir o trabalho, e a refrega” (“we would not see ourselves on the battlefield alone in battle against this Rio and its adherents in the south; but would without a doubt have more provinces with which to divide the work and war”).

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 257. Brother Mug writes: “na confederação, pode sim escravizar-se uma república, mas todas as outras a defendem, e fazem a guerra ao opressor” (“in a confederation, yes one can enslave oneself a republic, but all the others will defend her, and make war against the oppressor”).

them with impunity”).<sup>21</sup> The northeastern confederates believed that a plot to consolidate power was being developed in Rio.

Brother Mug wrote in the January 15, 1824, issue of the *Typhis Pernambucano* that he believed Brazil needed a political center. He also wrote that this capital city could strengthen the bonds uniting the provinces. When the Confederation of the Equator began, he wrote that the Confederation would be the salvation of the entire nation, not just his home state of Pernambuco.<sup>22</sup> Brother Mug’s goal was to propose a new model of national order, as he wrote in the May 27, 1824, issue that the spirit of his nation was a democratic spirit appearing throughout its history and that a constitution was needed to guarantee liberties and preserve national integrity.<sup>23</sup> The

---

<sup>21</sup> Barata, *Sentinela da Liberdade*, 501.

<sup>22</sup> Caneca, *Frei Joaquim*, 335, 360. Brother Mug writes that “não havendo um centro comum a que se referam todas as vontades, e donde partam as direções das marchas seguras, ficavam as províncias isoladas, tomando cada uma seu rumo diferente, e por isso aptas a serem subjugadas, uma após outra, vindo rematar o negócio na escravidão de todas” (“not having a common center to which all desires are referred, and from which would originate defined marching orders, all provinces would remain isolated, each taking its own path, and for this reason apt to be subjugated, one after another, resulting in the slavery of them all”). He also wrote, on February 19, 1824, referring to the Confederation of the Equator, that “dadas as mãos entre nós, e com as províncias nossas limítrofes, na firme esperança de que ... seremos a salvação dos nossos brasileiros,” “[s]eremos beneméritos da pátria, com um inauferível direito à sua gratidão” (“us holding hands, and with our neighboring provinces, in the firm hope that we will be the salvation of our Brazilians... we will be meritorious of the fatherland, with an undeniable claim on its gratitude”).

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 448, 452, 456. Brother Mug informs us that an opposition paper “está em contínuas declamações contra o sistema democrático...nada obstante ter à vista os Estados Unidos na América do Norte, os novos governos da do sul, Cantões Suíços” (“is making continual denunciations against the democratic system ... notwithstanding having in sight the United States of North America, the new governments of South America, the Swiss Cantons”). He also writes that “se conhece que a tendência do Brasil é para o governo democrático; a qual seria sopitada, se em câmbio se lhe desse o regime constitucional representativo; que esse espírito é indomável, nos mostra a história” (“it is known that the tendency of Brazil is for democratic government; which would be silenced if in exchange was given a constitutional representative regime; that this spirit is unconquerable, history shows us”). Brother Mug makes his demands clearer on the 3rd of June 1824 writing that “nós queremos uma constituição que affiance e sustente a nossa independência, a união das províncias, a integridade do império, a liberdade política, a igualdade civil, e todos os direitos inalienáveis do homem em sociedade” (“we want a

---

*confederados* claimed they wanted to take the following powers away from Rio: levying taxes on citizens as opposed to depending on requisitions made on the states; forming a permanent national military force; creating a national bank; and appointing local officials. The confederates wanted each state to pass tax revenue and troops to the federal government, serving as mediators between citizens and the central authorities to protect individual liberties.

In the June 17 issue of the *Typhis*, Brother Mug published an anonymous letter from a reader addressing the issue of patronage in the following terms: “o sistema liberal não convém a estes amigos, porque lhes encurta o elástico da teia legal, e não podendo eles extraí-la, e estender a vara, seca-se a lavoura, e se lhes diminui a colheita” (“the liberal system is not convenient to these friends because it decreases the elasticity of their legal webs and, not able to manipulate it, to extend their powers, their crops dry up and they collect less”).<sup>24</sup> He was suspicious of military recruitment and war, preferring a small government without much power.<sup>25</sup> Constitutionalism, states’ rights, limited government—these three items formed the core of Brother Mug’s ideology.

### A Liberty Faith

The participants of the Confederation of the Equator created what they called a “liberty faith” to help promulgate the system of government they favored. Their message of constitutionalism and federalism had to be justified theologically to be taken seriously in a Catholic country. The problem was

---

constitution that furthers and sustains our independence, the unity of the provinces, the integrity of the empire, political liberty, civil equality, and all inalienable rights of man in society”).

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 478.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 227. Brother Mug writes: “é necessário, ou que o Exército não seja permanente, ou que aqueles que se empregam no Exército tenham bens para responderem da sua conduta aos demais cidadãos, e não sirvam mais do que um ano, como foi em Roma” (“it is necessary either that the army not be permanent or that those employed by the army have property to stand for their conduct with regards to their fellow citizens, and that they do not serve more than a year, as it was in Rome”). He also writes that “é necessário que eles habitem com os demais cidadãos, que não tenham campo separado, nem quartéis, nem praça de guerra” (“it is necessary that they live with the other citizens and that they do not have separate quarters nor barracks nor bases”) because “fora desta circunstância, a Força Armada sempre foi o instrumento da tirania” (“outside of these circumstances, armed forces have always been the instrument of tyranny”).

that most Catholic thinkers held that monarchs were chosen by God. As such, the participants had to formulate their own version of Catholicism. A *federalista* journalist and farmer named Cipriano Barata, for example, included the following prayer in a number of issues of his publication, the *Sentinela da Liberdade* (*Sentinel of Liberty*):

Sinal da [cruz] Católico e político que devem fazer todos os Brasileiros de manhã quando se levantarem, quando saírem para a rua e quando se deitarem... Em nome do Padre, Seja criada a completa Liberdade da Imprensa e da Consciência. Em nome do Filho, se crie a liberdade das Indústrias de Corpo e Espírito para se gerarem Ciência e riqueza, com toda segurança individual. Em nome do Espírito Santo [cruz] se crie já o verdadeiro Tribunal do Jurados e a Responsabilidade dos Ministros e de todos os Empregados públicos. Amém.

(Sign of the [cross] Catholic and political that all Brazilians should do in the morning when waking up, when leaving their homes and when lying down at night... In the name of the Father, let there be created complete Liberty of the Press and Conscience. In the name of the Son, let there be created liberty for all the Industries of Body and Spirit to generate Knowledge and wealth, with individual security. In the name of the Holy Spirit, let there be created a true tribunal of juries and Responsibility for all Ministers and all public Employees. Amen.)<sup>26</sup>

Brother Mug distinguished his religious vision from “religiões monarcais” (“monarchical religions”) that live off the public purse.<sup>27</sup> He did not believe in the divine right of kings, believing instead that the title of emperor comes not from God but from the public through a democratic delegation of powers.<sup>28</sup> He believed that the “demônio” (“demon”) of absolutist monarchy is a difficult one to exorcize and that “mãos sacrílegas” (“sacrilegious hands”) should never touch the “sagrada” (“sacred”) constitution.<sup>29</sup> In his view, the constitution was to be worshipped as a holy document.

---

<sup>26</sup> Barata, *Sentinela da Liberdade*, 472–473. I replace the symbol of a cross with the word “cruz” (cross) in this quotation.

<sup>27</sup> Caneca, *Frei Joaquim*, 299.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 503. Brother Mug argues that the power of kings comes “não de Deus, sim da soberana e generosa nação brasileira” (“not from God but from the sovereign and generous Brazilian nation”).

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 516, 518.

Brother Mug's relationship to the ideas of one of the most important religious figures in Brazilian history, the famous Portuguese theologian Antônio Vieira, is important because he presented his liberty faith as a response to Vieira's ideas. In a letter to Andrés Fernandes, bishop-elect of Japan, dated April 29, 1659, Vieira expressed his belief that King Sebastian I of Portugal would be resurrected, having disappeared in the Battle of Alcácer Quibir in 1578 in Morocco, and would conquer Constantinople and bring about an age of world peace after the conversion of the world to Catholicism.<sup>30</sup> This belief in the resurrection of an all-powerful leader is known as Sebastianism. Vieira based his letter on verses of the prophetic poetry of the early sixteenth-century Portuguese shoemaker and author Gonçalo Annes Bandarra, whom Vieira declared a true prophet.<sup>31</sup> For Vieira, the colonization of northeastern Brazil helped prove that the entire world should be subject to the Portuguese, all heads bowing before one Catholic king, a Portuguese Fifth Empire following the Assyrians, Persians, Greeks, and Romans.<sup>32</sup> Vieira's religious view was typical of Catholic thinkers who believed in a strong central authority that could be mobilized for conversion.

Brother Mug rejected this view. He sarcastically equated his own ability to predict the future with Vieira's in the latter's work *História do Futuro* (*History of the Future*), which discusses the Fifth Empire. At the same time he argues that limits should be placed on any ruler's power to dismiss an elective body, in contrast to Vieira's utopian vision, which depended upon an all-powerful Catholic king.<sup>33</sup> Caneca asks, "E que império então vem a ser o Brasil?" ("And what sort of empire will we see in Brazil?"), and answers, "Até hoje é incognita a ordem das *potências projetadas*" ("Up until today *projected empires* are unknown"), thus rejecting utopian visions.<sup>34</sup>

For Brother Mug, the merger of spiritual and military/government power perverted the functioning of both spiritual and civil authorities. Strict federalism, limited government, opposition to militarism, and support for

---

<sup>30</sup> Vieira, *Obras Escolhidas Vol. 6*, 1–66.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 1–66.

<sup>32</sup> Vieira, *Obras Escolhidas Vol. 8*, 25. Vieira writes: "tudo que abraça o mar, tudo o que alumia o Sol, tudo o que cobre e rodeia o Sol, será sujeito a este Quinto Império" ("all that embraces the sea and all that the sun illuminates, everything the sun covers and circles, will be subject to this Fifth Empire") and "todos os reinos se unirão em um ceptro, todas as cabeças obedecerão a uma suprema cabeça" ("all the kingdoms will be united under one scepter, all heads will bow to a supreme head").

<sup>33</sup> Caneca, *Frei Joaquim*, 512, 513.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 340.

democratic institutions could be merged with religious conservatism to form an anti-centralist ideal. Brother Mug did reveal himself to be a cultural conservative at various points in his writings. He uses the term *sans-culottes* (men without fancy breeches), originally referring to the populists of the French Revolution, as a derogatory term for the opposition in his war of words against the *unitario* newspaper *Arara Pernambucana (Macaw of Pernambuco)*. He employed this rhetoric to send a clear message that he did not support radical policies. In the same piece, he also wrote that one cannot respect impious men who do not respect the divine, calling his enemies irreligious and immoral.<sup>35</sup> Brother Mug further suggested that the former president of the Portuguese censorship board was good at cracking down on traitors to the faith.<sup>36</sup> His own religious views did not lead him to embrace a central authority mobilized to enforce the faith.

### Discourse against Excessive Wealth, and Opposition to Slavery and Caste Systems

Montesquieu was the theorist whom Brother Mug quoted most often. Montesquieu believed that the unequal distribution of wealth corrupts republican governments.<sup>37</sup> The participants in the Confederation of the Equator were likewise concerned about excessive wealth, believing that

---

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 125, 127, 147. Brother Mug argues that “não pode respeitar a honra dos homens o ímpio, que não reverencia a divindade” (“one cannot respect the honor of impious men who do not revere divinity”), and he goes on in other publications to insult the person in question as “um ímpio que, pelos seus desaforados ataques à divindade, foi acusado ao tribunal da fé” (“an impious man who, for his mad attacks against divinity, was accused before the inquisition tribunal”). Brother Mug states that “[o] conceito que de ti tem feito toda aquela em que tens existido é de um *velhaco, irreligioso, immoral, debochado, sacrilege, perjuro*” (“the understanding of you produced in all places in which you have existed is of a crook, irreligious, immoral, debauched, sacrilegious, perjurious”).

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 180. Brother Mug writes: “quando o imortal bispo ... d. frei Manuel do Cenáculo viu começarem de grassar por Portugal impressos que espalhavam proposições perigosas, fontes caudais de erros na fé, corruptoras dos bons costumes, e germes da libertinagem, não ficou mudo espectador do mal” (“when the immortal bishop ... Brother Manuel do Cenáculo saw leaflets beginning to sprout in Portugal that spread dangerous propositions, the source of torrents of errors in the faith, corrupting of good customs, and germs of debauchery, he did not remain a silent observer of the evil”).

<sup>37</sup> Montesquieu, *Spirit of Laws Vol. I*, 104. Montesquieu writes: “we have observed that in a republic, where riches are equally divided, there can be no such thing as luxury... this equal distribution constitutes the excellence of a republican government.”

extreme riches were harmful to republics and that laws had to be implemented to generate a primarily middle-class nation and address the problem of *latifúndio* (large plantations), including laws to limit the size of estates and land holdings.<sup>38</sup> The latifundiary structure of the country resulted from the colonial practice of granting large tracts of lands to administrators and cooperating clergy, but the *confederados* believed such large land grants should never be gifted to the wealthy but that land illegally taken by the powerful, such as land formerly possessed by small farmers adjacent to larger estates, should be returned to its rightful owners.<sup>39</sup> In other words, the ability of government to manipulate land holdings through a variety of means had to be restrained. Brother Mug saw the monarchy in Rio as using its power to consolidate land in fewer hands.

Brother Mug also opposed caste systems. He ridiculed the fact that many people wasted time feeling ashamed of having African roots, and he looked forward to a time without slavery.<sup>40</sup> The following dispute with a journalist over the problem of race shows just how far ahead of his time Brother Mug was:

---

<sup>38</sup> Barata, *Sentinela da Liberdade*, 910. Barata writes: “mesmo nas Repúblicas, as grandes riquezas costumam fazer mal, por isso que trazem consigo o luxo de grandes casas, ou palácios, carruagens, móveis pomposos, ouro, prata, etc.... é bom evitá-las por leis sábias, o que se pode conseguir, obrigando por essas Leis a que os bens nunca sejam amontoados permanentemente e sim divididos pelos herdeiros e não consentindo que um só indivíduo possua imenso território” (“even in republics, great riches are usually bad, for this reason they bring with them the luxury of large houses or palaces, carriages, pompous furniture, gold, silver, etc... it is good to avoid them via wise laws, which can be achieved, forcing through these Laws that possessions never be collected permanently but yes divided by heirs and not consenting that one individual possesses immense territory”).

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 854–855. Barata includes the following quotation: “a forma absoluta... só é favorável a seus vícios, corrupção, poderio e posse injusta dos terrenos de certo modo usurpados... por isso é que brado a favor da Federação” (“the absolute form... is only favorable for their vices, corruption, control and unjust possession of usurped lands... for this reason I cry out for the federation”). We see here a clear worry about government taking property from the poor.

<sup>40</sup> Caneca, *Frei Joaquim*, 255. Brother Mug proclaims that “é a maior infâmia e indignidade ter um cidadão no seu vigésimo avô uma sutil porção do sangue africano, como já foi dos caboclos” (“it is the greatest infamy and indignity for a citizen in his twentieth grandfather to have a mild portion of African blood, as it once was with indigenous people”), and remarks that there may be a time “quando se destruir a escravidão dos africanos” (“when the slavery of the Africans shall be destroyed”).

Pois a pureza de teu sangue! Tem seu peso!!! Que entendes, Cachorro, por *sangue puro*? És o primeiro filósofo que deu com esta melgueira... Na espécie humana se reconhecem cinco variedades... Pergunta-se qual destas diferenças é a mais perfeita! ... Qual delas é a mais pura?

(The purity of your blood! It has weight!!! What do you understand, Dog, pure blood to be? You're the first philosopher to come up with this foolishness... In the human species we can see five varieties... Ask yourself which of these is more perfect! ...Which one is more pure?)<sup>41</sup>

Brother Mug also concluded that in a slavery-based society, admittedly one with many slave owners of mixed background, a society where everyone was eager to earn a title and place himself above others: “infere-se do exposto que é estúpida a tua bazofia de branco, e que pelo lado do sangue não és mais puro que o samoeda, o chines, o kalmouk, o housouana, o noolk; que o negro da Guiné; que o da Nova Zelândia” (“we can infer... that your white bravado is stupid and that your blood is not more pure than the Samoyedic, Chinese, Kalmyk, Hausan, Norfolk; than the black man from Guinea-Bissau; than he from New Zealand”).<sup>42</sup> In the July 1, 1824, issue of his newspaper, Brother Mug’s “Bases para a Formação do Pacto Social Redigidas Por Uma Sociedade de Homens de Letras” (“Basis for the Formation of a Social Compact Edited by a Society of Men of Letters”) argued for a constitution protecting the right to act as long as one does not harm others; protecting the right to speak and publish one’s opinions; maintaining equality under a well-defined and pre-established system of laws without special privileges in government work and career advancement; ensuring prosperity by limiting taxation and ending commercial monopolies; protecting the right to resist those who would oppress others; and abolishing the right to acquire slaves. Also in that issue, Brother Mug published an anonymous letter from a reader claiming that “todos sabem que a América do Sul está toda livre” (“everyone knows all of South America is free”), meaning South America was without monarchy.<sup>43</sup> The law should not privilege particular persons through the creation of arbitrary categories.

---

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 153–154.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 155.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 490–491, 494–495, 496–497.

## Conclusion

Brother Mug's political philosophy comprised a mixture of views that transcended left and right. He opposed excessive income inequality, which he viewed as caused by the cooperation of state and private power; affirmed democratic norms; and viewed racial caste systems as problematic. He condemned the work of censors and repeatedly praised the role of faith in public life. He believed in a government restrained by constitutional norms and strict federalism. In doing so, he elaborated a Catholic political ideal that is difficult to label.

Despite this problem, his vision is best understood a form of classical liberalism. Of course, the entire movement cannot be easily encapsulated. Some participants in the Confederation seemed to have supported protective tariffs. We also cannot know what prescriptions Brother Mug would offer our modern society. Yet regardless of how he would face the contemporary world, his ideals represent an important addition to political thought. Latin American thinkers are not limited to left-wing liberation theologians or right-wing groups supporting dictators. Nor do they merely ape European political ideas. Thinkers like Brother Mug developed their own vision of the ideal political system in response to the conditions they faced at the time. Thus, Brother Mug's ideas were a reaction to the events occurring at a specific place and time. They are useful for thinking about current problems, but are also part of the unique history of a South American monarchy.

## References

- Alarcão, Janine Pereira de Sousa. "O saber e o fazer: república, federalismo, e separatismo na Confederação do Equador." Diss. Universidade de Brasília, 2006. Print.
- Barata, Cipriano. *Sentinela da Liberdade e outros escritos (1821–1835)*. São Paulo: Editora da Universidade de São Paulo, 2008. Print.
- Brito, Lemos. *A gloriosa sotaina do Primeiro Império (Frei Caneca)*. São Paulo: Companhia Editora Nacional, 1937. Print.
- Cabral, Eurico Jorge Campelo. "O liberalismo em Pernambuco: As metamorfoses políticas de uma época (1800-1825)." Diss. Universidade Federal da Paraíba, 2008. Print.
- Caneca, Frei Joaquim do Amor Divino. *Frei Joaquim do Amor Divino Caneca*. São Paulo: Editora 34, 2001. Print.

- Carrijo, Liliane Gonçalves de Souza. “Frei Caneca, um republicano?” Diss. Universidade de Brasília, 2013. Print.
- Leite, Glacyra Lazzari. *Pernambuco 1824: A Confederação do Equador*. Recife: Massangana, 1989. Print.
- Lima, Kelly Cristina Azevedo de. “Frei Caneca: entre a liberdade dos antigos e a igualdade dos modernos.” *Revista Eletrônica de Ciências Sociais* 12 (2008): 126–196. Web. March 7, 2015. Available at: [http://www.cchla.ufpb.br/caos/numer012/REVISTA\\_12\\_2007\\_Kelly%20Cristina%20Azevedo.pdf](http://www.cchla.ufpb.br/caos/numer012/REVISTA_12_2007_Kelly%20Cristina%20Azevedo.pdf). Accessed March 9, 2015.
- Mello, Evaldo Cabral de. *A outra independência: o federalismo pernambucano de 1817 e 1824*. São Paulo: Editora 34, 2004. Print.
- Montenegro, João Alfredo de Sousa. *O liberalismo radical de Frei Caneca*. Rio de Janeiro: Tempo Brasileiro, 1978. Print.
- Montesquieu, Baron de. *The Spirit of Laws, Vol. I*. Revised by J.V. Prichard. Littleton, Colorado: Fred B. Rothman and Co., 1991. Print.
- Morel, Marco. *Frei Caneca: entre Marília e a pátria*. Rio de Janeiro: FGV, 2000. Print.
- Vieira, António. *Obras Escolhidas, Vol. 6*. Ed. Hernâni Cidade and António Sérgio. Lisbon: Livraria Sá da Costa, 1952. Print.
- Vieira, António. *Obras Escolhidas, Vol. 8*. Ed. Hernâni Cidade and António Sérgio. Lisbon: Livraria Sá da Costa, 1952. Print.