

State and society in Brazil: A deferred meeting with democracy

ANDRÉ BOTELHO^I

GABRIELA NUNES FERREIRA^{II}

“Three things remained from it all: the certainty that he was always beginning, the certainty that he had to continue and the certainty that he would be interrupted before finishing.”

(Fernando Sabino, *O encontro marcado*, 1956)

IN THE PREFACE he wrote especially for the Brazilian edition of one of his books, Charles Tilly (1996, p.37) states that the crucial sociological program for “non-European” researchers of national construction would today be to understand how “the export of European State structures produced such different states in regions of European colonization”. A program for whose good execution the important thing, as the author emphasizes, is not “mechanically applying European models, but examining the types of causes and effects that produced different things when they were applied in distinctive environments” (ibid., p.40).

The tensions imprinted by the bureaucratization, rationalization and nationalization of the State’s public authority, as well as by the formation of a corresponding social solidarity, progressively incorporated into the idea of nation, on the dynamics of social life have always been present in Brazilian social and political thought. More than that, in fact, they structured the formation of a broader and more creative reflection on the relations between State and society in Brazil that was not always limited to repeating European models without differences and, in the best cases, challenged the geopolitics of knowledge that divides societies into producers and consumers of theory. In a society with a colonial matrix like the Brazilian one, somehow, it was not necessary to wait for the intensification of debates on globalization to understand that the nation-state, after all, was not a universal experience or a “natural” result of societal dynamics (Wagner, 1994, p.73), but rather a very specific and contingent form of articulation between authority and social solidarity.

Few elements have been so problematized in Brazilian thought as the relations between State and society in Brazil; they aroused the interest and deman-

ded the concentrated attention of intellectuals, State makers and political actors in general of different theoretical and ideological orientations and at different times. In this sense, the reflection on these relationships forged a kind of custom or line of continuity in the interpretations of Brazil that still impresses today. It was also a legacy actively assumed by the Brazilian social sciences that, from their own perspectives, have been scrutinizing the phenomenon from different empirical, historical and also theoretical angles.¹

The Bicentennial of Independence is an invitation to review the debate on the relations between State and society in Brazil, a relatively long process (especially for the social sciences in general and increasingly focused on the analysis of the present) and bumpier than it is generally considered, in order to rethink recreations and impasses of these relations for democracy as well, which, to a large extent, remain open at present. It is not by mere historical chance that this commemoration will be joined by another one, that of the centennial of the *Semana de Arte Moderna*, held in São Paulo in February 1922. Especially if we understand modernism from a sociological point of view as a cultural movement, that is, as a collective action that disputes cultural control for the change of society (Botelho; Hoelz, 2022), it is clear how it comprises at least two central problems regarding the relations between State and society. First, modernism was a movement of strong collective mobilization of identities that also implied violent symbolic processes of domestication of regional diversity and social inequalities in a unitary national identity. Second, modernism puts into debate the question of the persistent cultural dependence that survived the political independence of 1822, initiating a powerful reflection on the impasses of modernity, of which the so-called essays on the interpretation of Brazil in the 1920s and 1930s are some of the best expressions (Ferreira; Botelho, 2010). Not by chance, perhaps, the relations between public and private as impasses in the relationship between State and society were also at the center of these essays, as in *Raízes do Brasil* (Holanda, 2016).

Thus, the last 100 years are, in fact, the decisive ones for the re-discussing of the nation-state, since it was in them that the very relationship, represented by the hyphen, between the pole of public authority, embodied in the State, and the pole of social solidarity, in the nation, finally, poses itself as a problem, a necessity, a challenge. Upon becoming politically independent in 1822, Brazil formally became a free State, which implied an internal process of political, administrative and bureaucratic centralization, in addition to the nationalization of social life and public authority, but not necessarily a nation-state. During the Empire (1822-1889), the feeling of belonging to the political community was meticulously constructed both by the condition of subjects of the Crown and by an idea of freedom in opposition to the enslaved, the basis of society. With most of the population excluded from civil and political rights, the construction of the imperial State did not even mobilize a strong sense of nationality (Carvalho,

1990; Schwarcz, 1998). In this sense, Abolition and the Republic introduce an intense crisis, broadening and making the notion of citizenship even more abstract and problematic. They begin the long process of cultivating new feelings of belonging and political mobilization of national identity among Brazilians, who have become formally free citizens (Carvalho, 2004; Botelho; Schwarcz, 2012). To a large extent, the obsession with Brazilian culture that marks the years 1920-1940 is related, in many ways, to the theme of the nationalization of social life, of the formation of the nation as a form of social solidarity.

The social sciences under development in Brazil in the 1930s and 1940s were, however, less interested in questions of national identity than in certain tenacious impasses in the relationship between State and society. Few elements have been so thematized in Brazilian social thought and social sciences than the shuffling between public and private, a recurring phenomenon in the long and problematic nationalization of Brazilian social life or in the conversion of our colonial matrix society into a modern nation-state. In this sense, it can be said that it is towards the very relationship between State and society that the interests of the social sciences increasingly turn to the point that, around 1970-1980, between the civil-military dictatorship (1964-1985) and the transition to democracy, the democratic question was imposed and began to guide the reflection on the relations between State and society. It is in this context that such categories as “patrimonialism” and “autocracy” gain the center of the debate, expressing the undemocratic character of the relations between State and society in Brazil.

The richness of the debate on State and society in Brazilian thought, however, brings difficulties that are practically insurmountable for any more synthetic view of the last 200 years, given the extension, the variety of the repertoire and the differences in context and also in the analysis of the categories that were being forged on the subject. In an attempt to give at least an idea of the scope, diversity and theoretical and political reaches of the debate on State and society, instead of a more fragmented panorama, as would necessarily be the case here, we chose to work on three decisive moments that permeate the debate. The first is focused on the State and strongly marked by the issue of political centralization and decentralization that occupied the best of the intellectual and political debate of the Empire (1822-1889), from Tavares Bastos and the Viscount of Uruguay. In the second moment, starting with the First Republic (1889-1930), but, in fact, with decisive consequences also for the entire modernizing and authoritarian cycle that followed the 1930 Revolution, the debate is marked by the return of society, especially focused on the question of the adequacy or otherwise of institutions to society, which is then scrutinized from different angles. No other author stands out in this period like Oliveira Vianna. The third moment, although it can be recovered throughout the course of the relations between State and society, will gain its own contours and status precisely in the

context of the transition from the civil-military dictatorship of 1964-1985, putting the problem of democracy directly into question, and not just tangentially as in other periods – Raymundo Faoro and Florestan Fernandes are unavoidable authors in this regard.

Centralization and decentralization

The debate on the relations between State and society in Brazil gained an important first formulation during the Empire, in the dispute over the organization of State power. In the early 1860s, after almost two decades of relative calm, a debate about the bases of constituted power was reborn, calling into question themes such as the representative system, the role of the Moderating Power and, what interests us most here, the most appropriate model of State for Brazil, in the controversy over political-administrative centralization and decentralization. Founding and perennial problems of reflection on the nation-state in Brazil cross this theme: the historical legacy of the colonial past, the adequacy of liberal institutions to Brazil, the relationship between public and private power, the enormous Brazilian regional disparity. The debate between the conservative politician from Rio de Janeiro, Paulino José Soares de Sousa (Viscount of Uruguay) and the liberal deputy from Alagoas, Tavares Bastos, reveals very different perspectives on these problems.²

There was a consensus, among the elite of the time, about the low level of education of the Brazilian population, particularly with regard to its political capacity, its “civic virtues”. On this point, the Viscount of Uruguay and Tavares Bastos were in agreement, as well as on its origin: the fact that the country was colonized by the centralized Portuguese monarchy and not (alas!) by a nation like England, where the habit of self-government had flourished:

We inherited the centralization of the Portuguese monarchy. When Independence came and with it the Constitution that governs us, we left the administration of the captains-generals, the county magistrates [...] We did not have, as the English had formed for centuries, as the United States had inherited it, an education that would enable us practically to govern ourselves; we could not have acquired the habits and practical sense necessary for this. (Uruguay, 2002, p.429)

Tavares Bastos (1975b), in turn, went further in his assessment of the colonial legacy, developing, in his pamphlet *Os males do presente e as esperanças do futuro* (1861), an acidic critique of the society and politics of sixteenth-century Portugal, from where the settlers of Brazil had left carrying their “moral depravity”. The absence of public spirit and “entrepreneurial activity” in Brazil had been, argued Tavares Bastos, reinforced by the centralizing and selfish way in which the metropolis had undertaken colonization.

Another point of agreement was the finding of the enormous Brazilian regional diversity, but here the tone used by each author was different. Paulino de Sousa, since his reports and speeches as Minister of Justice in the early 1840s,

when he led the centralizing reforms of the *Regresso*, emphasized the difference between the relative civilization of the coast and the barbarism of the backlands (*sertões*), especially in the northern provinces. In the sparsely populated backlands, the minister observed in 1841, there lived a population that “does not share in the few benefits of our nascent civilization [...] It thus constitutes a distinct part of the Society of our coast and of many of our towns and districts, and is mainly characterized by barbaric customs” (Sousa, 1841, p.18-19). In his 1862 work, Uruguay (2002, p.470) argued that the liberal and decentralizing reforms of the Regency – both the Criminal Procedure Code, centered on the figure of the elective judge of peace, and the Additional Act, which created the Provincial Assemblies – had not considered the Brazilian regional heterogeneity and the inexistence of a unity “born from the similarity of social elements”.

Tavares Bastos also criticized the “defect of uniformity” present in the Criminal Procedure Code which, according to him, had designed a country where the levels of civilization, morality and respect for the law were uniform. There were disparities between provinces on these issues. There were “the solitudes of the Amazon” and “the forests of Mato Grosso and Goiás”, practically wild. But the Criminal Code Reform of 1841 had the same defect, with the opposite sign: it had imagined “a corrupted country, an anarchized people” (Tavares Bastos, 1975a, p.112). Although recognizing these disparities, the politician from Alagoas did not accept the thesis of the inferiority of the northern provinces in relation to the southern ones, quite the contrary. In his 1870 book, Tavares Bastos accused the provinces of Rio de Janeiro, Minas Gerais and São Paulo of delaying the necessary advance of measures aimed at the emancipation of slavery, by concentrating a large number of slaves. In the North, by contrast, several provinces did not own slaves and all practiced free labor on a large scale. The eleven northern provinces, argued Tavares Bastos, were the great victims of the state centralized around Rio de Janeiro, in several aspects: involvement in wars that had little to do with them, great financial losses, delay in the emancipation process.

Another aspect, little touched by Tavares Bastos, but central to Uruguay’s arguments, was the strength of private power and its influence on political life and the functioning of institutions. The “powerful people” who dominated local politics were, according to Uruguay, driven solely by private interests, promoting disorder and arbitrariness. Decentralizing power meant, in a country like Brazil, handing it over to the petty passions of factions born in the localities. That had been the mistake of the Regency liberals, who had tried to adapt US-owned institutions in a country that lacked the basic preconditions to support them. The argument here closely followed the topic, typical of conservatism, contrary to the universal applicability of political-institutional solutions: “The greater or lesser centralization or decentralization depends a lot on the country’s circumstances, education, habits and national character, and not just

legislation” (Uruguai, 2002, p.437). As we will see, this line of thought would be very strong in the reflection on the relationship between State and society in the first decades of the 20th century.

For Uruguay, the Brazilian circumstances, including the great regional diversity, recommended the adoption of an institutional model closer to the French one, with a hierarchically organized administration. According to the viscount, this did not imply copying such a model without criteria, allowing and expanding, whenever possible, the participation of citizens in the specific affairs of their province and municipality, “thus getting the people used to the use of a practical, serious and calm freedom” (Uruguai, 2002, p.498).

Much more than the viscount, Tavares Bastos believed in the ability of laws and institutions to change circumstances, to act on the people and their political aptitude – for good or for bad (Ferreira, 2010, p.61-2). The biggest problem in Brazil, according to him, did not derive from the social backwardness inherited from the colony, but from the adoption, from 1840 onwards, of a centralized system of power organization that eliminated the possibility of overcoming backwardness: “They deny to the country the ability to govern itself, and for that they condemn it to the tutelage of the government. It is to expect that we acquire civic qualities and virtues, which we certainly lack, under the spoiling action of a political education regime that precisely generates and perpetuates opposing vices” (Tavares Bastos, 1975a, p.32). The exercise of political freedom was presented by him as the most effective means of moral and political improvement of the population. The Brazilian regional diversity, pointed out by Uruguay as an argument for political-administrative centralization, was used by Tavares Bastos to, in the wake of the radical liberals of the 1830s, defend his model of a federative monarchy – which, according to him, would allow a better adaptation of the laws to local circumstances. In this proposal for the organization of the State, the author from Alagoas founded his entire project of reforms aimed at promoting the “material and moral” development of the country: economic freedom, public education, gradual abolition of slavery, incentive to immigration.

With a strong political-institutional focus, very focused on the theme of the State and its organization, the debate between Tavares Bastos and the Viscount of Uruguay touched on fundamental questions that would remain open and would emerge in other moments of reflection on the nation-state in Brazil, although with different emphasis.

Political institutions and social life

It was practically a commonplace in the First Republic to attribute to the liberal political institutions adopted in the 1891 Constitution a legality without correspondence in society, which seemed to be able to be confirmed by daily evidence by all sorts of oligarchic practices. *À margem da história da República*, organized by Vicente Licínio Cardoso (1981) in the context of the centennial of

Independence, but published in 1924, brings together a representative group of intellectuals of the generation born with the Republic that experienced the crisis of the 1920s. In it we find A. Carneiro Leão, with *Os deveres das novas gerações brasileiras*; Gilberto Amado, with *Instituições políticas e o meio social no Brasil*; Pontes de Miranda, with *Preliminares para a reforma constitucional*; Oliveira Viana, *O idealismo da Constituição*; Ronald de Carvalho, with *As bases da nacionalidade brasileira; uma síntese histórica*; and Tristão de Ataíde (pseudonym of Alceu Amoroso Lima), with *Política e letras* and five other authors, in addition to Vicente Licínio himself.

The volume proposes a critical assessment of the Republic in which, from different angles, problems related to legality without correspondence in Brazilian society of liberal republican institutions are highlighted. The social reorganization proposals launched in the book covered a wide spectrum, ranging from society to the State, including the reform of the 1891 Constitution, the educational reform and the moral reform of Brazilian elites. The criticism of the political artificiality of the First Republic permeates all the articles; some of them advance on the role of intellectuals in the search for a Brazilian “culture” as a social basis for the institutions of Brazilian society. A broader contemporary problematic field, as can be seen, which also centrally involves modernism as a cultural movement and the debate on nation building (i.e., a national identity as united and cohesive as possible across regional diversities and social inequalities) as a form of social solidarity corresponding to the bureaucratized and rationalized form of public authority. In a word, the hyphen that links State to nation. Let’s look at two of the very representative articles of the assessment.

As bases da nacionalidade brasileira, by Ronald de Carvalho (1981), appears in the same year, 1924, in the magazine *Terra de Sol*, edited by Tasso da Silveira and Álvaro Pinto, in Rio de Janeiro, the first of them also present in the collection organized by Vicente Licínio Cardoso, and also in *Estudos brasileiros – 1ª série*, by Ronald himself. Widely publicized, the essay argues that the meaning of the formation of Brazilian nationality would be given by the progressive incarnation, since colonial times, of a “national vocation” of which the ruling elites would be the original bearer in the State. It is not, however, about any State. Much less the liberal and oligarchic State of the First Republic. But about a strong and centralist State that, based on the historical role played by the elites in shaping society, would be able to reorder it.

Driven by the diffuse modernist desire to make “Brazil” more familiar to “Brazilians”, Ronald de Carvalho seeks at the same time to denounce the idea of cultural and institutional transplant and to define the search for an “authentic” Brazilian culture as an element of continuity and cohesion for society to face the challenge of modernly rebuilding itself as a nation-state. This did not appear, however, to be a modest challenge. In the first place, given the formative historical dilemmas of Brazilian society, not even the political independence

achieved in 1822 had completely assured society a cohesive autonomous project and destiny, so deeply marked that it was by its colonial condition of origin. Associated with this, secondly, because the contemporary influx of the normative principles of liberal and democratic political cultures, taken as merely imported, made it difficult even to identify the “particularity” of our social formation, an intellectual condition for a more organic organization of Brazilian society as a nation-state (Botelho, 2005).

To complete the independence begun a century ago, it would be up to the State to promote that adjustment between institutions and culture, object of commitment and guarantee of participation of intellectuals themselves in national construction. But, it should be noted, the success of the enterprise would be conditioned to the capacity of the State to, simultaneously, incorporate the historical experience of the traditional ruling elites and promote the centralization and strengthening of power as the basis for ordering the national society. Perhaps that is why, in the posthumous homage he paid to Ronald de Carvalho, Alceu Amoroso Lima, also present in Vicente Licínio Cardoso’s collection, did not fail to point out that, “in recent times, when we get closer again, after his return [from Paris], he was the integral nationalist, apologist for the Strong State, praising the reactionary attitude” (Lima, 1942, p.280).

Ronald de Carvalho’s essay repeated the identification between political elites and state bureaucracy which, as shown by José Murilo de Carvalho (1996, p.129), already characterized the Brazilian imperial political elite “like other elites from other countries and latecomer or frustrated capitalism”. However, the task of reconciling a new reorganization and centralization of the State with the guarantee of a certain social continuity, ensured, above all, by rescuing what the author understood to be the historical experience of Brazilian elites, would not prove to be exactly simple. A problem that Francisco José de Oliveira Vianna was already facing and would continue to face, and to which he will give the most significant formulations in the period.

It is true that Ronald de Carvalho found arguments for his ideas in part in *Esplendor e decadência da sociedade brasileira*, of 1911, and in *Bastões da nacionalidade brasileira*, of 1922, by Elísio de Carvalho, to whom he even attributes the thesis according to which Brazil would have been born “from the sincere and persistent effort of an aristocracy” (Carvalho, 1981, p.22). There is sharing in these interpretations, above all, perhaps, as regards the refusal of democracy and acceptance of the proposition of a social order based on the ideals of “authority” and “order” of the dominant classes. There are also disagreements. For example, regarding the profile of the elites in both cases praised. In *O espelho de Ariel*, Ronald de Carvalho (1976, p.137) observes that, contrary to what Elísio de Carvalho wanted, “we are not and will never be a society of salons, of friendly intrigues, of clever disguises. Who were our purest nobles, those who founded nationality? Above all, men of action, idealists it is true, but full

of beautiful enthusiasm that only the vast horizons of the earth can awaken”. Hence his constant references to Oliveira Vianna. According to Ronald, Vianna had demonstrated in *Populações meridionais do Brasil*, published in 1920, “the role of the mill lords and farmers in the evolution of national society”, that is, that the “great agricultural domain, like the rock castle of the feudal baron, was the basis of all our economic and social progress” (ibid., p.120). Ronald is particularly interested in the thesis that the “rural clan” and not the municipalities and communes, “artificially implanted here, in imitation of European political systems”, would have played the role of “*cell of public life*” in Brazil (ibid., p.121, emphasis in the original). We can thus see how the important debate in the Empire between Tavares Bastos and the Viscount of Uruguay returns in the 1920s.

Not by chance, Oliveira Vianna (1981) is present with *O idealismo da constituição* in the Vicente Licínio Cardoso’s collection we are dealing with. Two years earlier, precisely in another commemoration of the centennial of Independence, that of *O Estado de S. Paulo*, his *Idealismo na evolução política do Império e da República* (1922) had already appeared. In it, Vianna made the well-known distinction between “utopian idealism” and “organic idealism” which, having as a criterion precisely the adequacy of “doctrinal systems” or “set of political aspirations” to “national reality” (Vianna, 1981), such a fortune he would find in Brazilian thought. The special edition featured thematic articles by Oliveira Lima, Plínio Barreto, Amadeu Amaral, Ricardo Severo, Sud Mennuci and, among others, Ronald de Carvalho.

In the text published for the first time in Vicente Licínio Cardoso’s collection, Oliveira Vianna (1981, p.108) focuses on the criticism of the 1891 Constitution, the fruit of “republican idealism”, and whose principles would be at odds with “the psychological and structural conditions of our people”. Fundamentally, Vianna argues, there is no “organized public opinion” in Brazil – presupposed by the constituents – nor is there any type of class solidarity or “feelings of collective interests”. Under these conditions, the conduct of the country would necessarily be at the mercy of the “political clans”.

If in *O idealismo da constituição* Vianna (1981, p.117) goes so far as to state that, in his proposal, “political reforms, that is, constitutional reforms, will only be auxiliaries of other major reforms, of a social and economic nature”, in *Problemas de direito corporativo* (Vianna, 1938) he seeks to provide new legal resources aimed at guaranteeing the State’s ability to intervene in various domains of social life – which will enable the very future organization of the economy along corporate lines. It should be noted that this book rebuts Waldemar Ferreira’s criticisms made in *Princípios de legislação social e direito judiciário do trabalho*, also published in 1938. The debate, in Vianna’s own words, exposes the “conflict” between two competing conceptions in the field of law: on the one hand, “the old individualist conception” defended by Ferreira, for whom labor conflicts

should be treated from the canons of classical doctrinal liberalism; and, on the other hand, “the new conception, born from the growing socialization of legal life, whose center of gravity has been moving successively from the *Individual* to the *Group* and from the *Group* to the *Nation*”, defended by him (Vianna, 1938, p. 9).³

Permeating these texts, there is the unavoidable essay *Populações meridionais do Brasil*, written in 1918, in which Oliveira Vianna (1973) diagnosed a “gap” between the living Constitution, practiced by the “people”, and the written Constitution, made by the leading elites. It is for no other reason that his debut essay already brings in its title, as a given, the Brazilian heterogeneity. *Populações meridionais do Brasil* was part of a larger project, and only partially carried out, aimed precisely at clarifying the differences between the “institutions” and the “political culture” of the country’s rural populations. More than anything, the essay shows how Vianna was able to translate the political criticism common to the First Republic into relatively consistent theoretical-methodological terms, formalizing it in the thesis that the foundations and dynamics of political institutions would be found in social relations. From this perspective, institutions would not be virtuous in themselves, as his discussion of justice (Vianna, 1973, p.139-41) well expresses, they would not be places of autonomous action in relation to the values and practices in force in society as a whole and could not be taken as independent variables of other social forces.

As we said, the task of reconciling a new reorganization and centralization of the State with the guarantee of a certain social continuity would not prove to be, however, at all simple. Even Oliveira Vianna’s “authoritarian” conviction about the transforming action of the State, present in the first volume of *Populações meridionais do Brasil*, turned out to be more contingent, tense and discontinuous throughout the development of his work. For example, the statement made in *Instituições políticas brasileiras* (Vianna, 1987) that “cultural complexes” tend towards stability reveals not only a maturation of ideas, but a new perception of the very limits of State action. For, by mobilizing culture to emphasize the uselessness of political and legal reforms made in disagreement with the values established in society by tradition (what he calls “customary law”), Vianna problematizes his own initial position on the capacity of the State to recreate the old society corrupted by privatist practices. This is a further question in the posthumous book *Introdução à história social da economia capitalista no Brasil* (1958), in which he proposes precisely a kind of return to “patriarchal” and “pre-capitalist” values present in the origins of Brazilian social formation as a possibility for non-conflicting reordering of social life.

This innovative perspective of Oliveira Vianna highlights him in the Brazilian intellectual tradition considered not only in synchronic but also diachronic terms. This is what happens in relation to the production of the Empire (1822-1889), to which, on the other hand, Vianna is also linked. If, in the Empire,

problems related to the construction of the State on the political-administrative level were forcing some statemakers to formalize their positions also on the intellectual level, from which the clash between Tavares Bastos and the Viscount of Uruguay on the centralization and decentralization of political institutions remains emblematic, as we have seen, Oliveira Vianna did not limit himself to repositioning the problem from a strictly institutional perspective, redirecting the analytical interest to the relations and tensions between political institutions inherited from the Portuguese colonizer and/or adopted from Europe in general and the social life that has been forming since colonization in Brazil.

The democratization of the state and society

The issue of the relationship between State and society came back to the fore in the 1970s, during the military dictatorship established in 1964. It is not by chance that *Os donos do Poder*, a work that Raymundo Faoro (2021) had published in 1958 with little repercussion, had a great impact in its second edition, published in 1975, revised and greatly expanded. As the author observes in the preface to the second edition, the basic thesis of the book has not changed: the suffocating domination, throughout Portuguese and Brazilian histories, of the nation by the bureaucratic estate, within the framework of the patrimonial State. It is understandable that in the 1950s, when the dominant tone of the political and intellectual agenda was developmentalism, the book did not get a good reception. In 1975, on the contrary, Faoro's thesis made much more sense, and the category of patrimonialism provided ammunition for the critique of current authoritarianism (Werneck Vianna, 2009; Jasmin, 2021; Ferreira; Ricupero, 2021).

The main thesis of *Os donos do Poder* is well known: the formation and persistence, from the beginnings of the formation of the Portuguese State to contemporary Brazil, within the State, of what he calls the bureaucratic estate, the "owners of power", a "community of domain" that appropriates the State apparatus and becomes "owner of sovereignty", operating a split between State and nation. Unlike the political elite, present in many societies, it is not a heteronomous and open layer, nor does it express and represent the forces acting in society: the estate is an autonomous and closed social structure acting as a community and monopolizing the political domain. Against the Marxist thesis that only in exceptional historical moments, of balance between classes, the State would gain autonomy in relation to society, Faoro maintains that in Brazil the independence of the State is not the exception, it is the rule. Not only is the State autonomous in relation to the nation, but it also subordinates, suffocates and deforms it.

As already mentioned, in his interpretation of the Brazilian historical process, Faoro relies on the Weberian category of patrimonialism – a subtype of traditional domination marked by the existence of an administrative framework that owes personal loyalty to the lord – to characterize the Brazilian State. Linked

to patrimonialism is the category, fundamental in Faoro's analysis, of politically oriented capitalism, in which economic activities and private interests are subordinated to the needs and interests of the State. This Iberian patrimonialism, which originated in the 14th century in Portugal, with the early formation of an absolutist state and the defeat of feudalism, comes, according to Faoro, to shape the Brazilian historical experience as a kind of "vice of origin" from which the country can never get rid of. Even if another trend present in Brazilian history, supported by liberal ideas, with a decentralizing and autonomist sense, had achieved partial and temporary victories at times, the dominance of the bureaucratic estate would always impose itself again: "From D. João I to Getúlio Vargas, in a journey of six centuries, a political-social structure resisted all the fundamental transformations, the deepest challenges, the crossing of the wide ocean" (Faoro, 2021, p.693).

The Brazilian State, as characterized by Faoro, would impede not only the full development of modern capitalism, but also the exercise of public liberties and the flourishing of democracy in the country. The pattern of multi-secular domination portrayed in *Os donos do Poder* would always be, in a simple expression often used by him in his writings, "from top to bottom": "On society, above classes, the political apparatus – a social, communal layer, although not always articulated, often amorphous – rules, conducts and governs, in its own name, in an impermeable circle of command. This layer changes and renews itself, but it does not represent the nation..." (ibid., p.647).

Although Sérgio Buarque de Holanda (2016) had already, in *Raízes do Brasil*, referred to patrimonialism in a Weberian key, Faoro claimed to have pioneered the use of this category in the interpretations of Brazil. Although Holanda, argued the jurist from Rio Grande do Sul, had used the term "patrimonial official", he had based his analysis of Brazilian history on the category of patriarchy and not on that of patrimonialism (Faoro, 1993, p.18; 1999). Disputes aside, the patrimonialism emphasized by Sérgio Buarque de Holanda and Raymundo Faoro is not exactly the same. In *Weber e a interpretação do Brasil*, an article dealing with the various uses of Weber's work in Brazil, Luiz Werneck Vianna (1999) makes a distinction between what he calls "civil society patrimonialism" and "State Patrimonialism". While authors guided by the first aspect (such as Florestan Fernandes and Maria Sylvia Carvalho Franco) would direct their gaze to the "slave lordship" Brazilian society and give great centrality to the agrarian question, such interpreters as Raymundo Faoro and Simon Schwartzman, guided by the idea of State patrimonialism, would see the legacy of Iberian patrimonialism as a vice of origin in Brazilian history; fundamentally, for this second aspect, patrimonialism would be a mark of the State and not of society, hence the primarily institutional emphasis of the analysis. Based on this suggestive distinction, we can suggest that the use of the Weberian concept made by Sérgio Buarque de Holanda in *Raízes do Brasil* is closer to societal than state patrimonialism.

Shortly after the second edition of *Os donos do Poder* was released, in an interview given to *Veja* magazine in 1976, when asked about the pessimistic view of the history of Brazil expressed in his book, Faoro (1976) replied:

And how not? This is inevitable, when the subject is a country without people, or rather, where the people were ignored by the political process. Mind you: it is not the fact that the history of Brazil is the history of a minority; this is true of the history of many other countries. But what is sad, bitter, is to see how much this minority is stagnant, dissociated from the rest of society, feeding and re-feeding itself only on itself.

This fundamentally pessimistic view of the Brazilian historical pattern did not prevent him from looking, as a jurist and publicist, in the daily life of politics, for openings to fight for a change in this pattern, in the sense of the democratization of the country – as in 1981, during the campaign to convene a constituent assembly, when he wrote *Assembléia constituinte: a legitimidade recuperada* (Faoro, 2007).

More than contributing to the reinvigoration of interest in the State, Faoro was one of those responsible for a pioneering reorientation of political studies, for his conception of the State as an empirical reality and analytical variable relatively independent of classes and other social forces. In this perspective, at the limit, institutions not only gained autonomy as an empirical locus of policy implementation, but also the ability to shape political life and the broader social life itself. Of course, this reorientation proved to be particularly important for political science, even because its privileged object has traditionally been the State.

At the opposite pole of institutionalism, in a way announced by Raymundo Faoro, we have the reaffirmation of sociology in Florestan Fernandes (2008), who had been discussing the limits and possibilities of democracy based on social participation, the theme of *A integração do negro na sociedade de classes*, of 1965, and from the point of view of the sociopolitical structure that permeates institutions and social life, notably discussed in *A revolução burguesa no Brasil* (Fernandes, 2020) a decade later. If, in fact, as Sallum Jr. (2002) pointed out, Florestan conferred little explanatory efficacy to the institutional dimensions of political power, despite this, as Gildo Marçal Brandão (2007, p.168) reminds us, the strength of the concept of bourgeois autocracy “does not limit the gaze to the purely institutional dimensions of the political game, seeks to capture a structural dimension – the structuring presence of the economy and society at the political level”.

In *A integração do negro na sociedade de classes*, Florestan Fernandes (2008, p.21) analyzes what he himself calls the emergence of the “people” in the history of Brazilian society, seen from the point of view of the social group that had the worst starting point in the process of transition from rural to urban – the black population, made up of former slaves and freedmen in the slave and

manorial order. As the very use of the term “people” clarifies, this is an analysis that goes beyond the issue of racial relations in Brazil, as it aims to understand, from the angle of the most vulnerable sector of society, the more general limits of carrying out a democratic social order. The dilemmas faced by black associations expressed, according to the argument of *A integração do negro na sociedade de classes*, the more general dilemmas of democratic participation in a society that did not experience a classic process of bourgeois revolution. And that, for this very reason, given the conservative pattern of transition to the urban world, does not open up to the lower classes the legitimate use of competition and conflict as instruments of democratization and universalization of social rights and guarantees. Despite the specificities of the racial issue addressed, the actions of black associations would reveal, with considerable clarity, the limits imposed on political participation for the set of popular strata: the negative effects of pauperization and anomie in the forms of collective action, the identification with values of the current order in general, associated with the phenomena of ascending social mobility – even if the channels for this are narrow – as well as the pressure for individualized solutions to problems of a collective order and, finishing off the set of problems, the restriction of the benefits of urbanization to a “closed circuit”, that is, to reduced portions of the population that monopolize income, social prestige and political power.

In the following decade, in *A revolução burguesa no Brasil*, Florestan Fernandes (2020) articulated this view of the process of social change in Brazil with a long-term analysis of the constitution of political power in Brazil⁴. The monopolization of income, social prestige and political power by the dominant layers, a point already identified in *A integração do negro*, came to be understood as constituting a special style of capitalist transformation, which Fernandes called “autocratic-bourgeois”. Thus, the closing of the possibilities of autonomous political participation by the subaltern sectors, exemplified here through the problems faced by the black movements in São Paulo, as they are treated by the author, would reveal the privatist orientation in relation to power, which would not legitimize the conflict by those “from below” as a mechanism for the democratization of society.

A revolução burguesa no Brasil was also not an easy book for readers in the 1970s. To return to a central issue, his concept of “bourgeois autocracy” was somewhat desolating for those of his contemporaries who sought directly in the book, shall we say, an operational means of combating the civil-military dictatorship. After all, Florestan makes in it a crucial heuristic distinction that makes the understanding of social reality and the democratic transition much more complex and nuanced than, perhaps, his readers at the time were ready for. He shows that “democracy” would not only constitute a form of “exercise” of political power (which would oppose the dictatorship then in force), but that it also concerned the social forms of “organization” of political power. Here, all the sociological quality honed in more than two decades of rigorous work rea-

ches its apex, and Florestan begins to interrogate the social foundations of both politics and economics. For this reason, Florestan forges the idea of “autocracy” to interpret the phenomenon of the persistence of a more general, radically anti-democratic ordering principle of the State, society and the market, even in formal or openly democratic moments. The relationship between autocracy and democracy is not one of opposition, but precisely, paraphrasing the image of Gabriel Cohn (2015), “its shadow always present in the background, to emerge, with greater or lesser virulence, in situations of crisis of bourgeois power”. The twists and turns in the spiral of democracy have not stopped – as we well know today, in Brazil and in the world. And so, Florestan’s crucial distinction seems to make even more sense to us than in the context of democratic transition. Autocracy came out of the shadows.

By analyzing the connection between capitalist transformation and bourgeois autocracy, Florestan shows how the process of internal expansion of capitalism was not carried out *against*, but *based on* the colonial social legacy, with its terrible effects of uneven internal development and dependent articulation with the central bourgeoisies. (what he calls “double articulation”). In this sense, he highlights the bourgeois revolution that we had to experience. What, after all, is the meaning of the actions of the bourgeois layers in the process of incorporation of Brazilian society into capitalism? It is, says Florestan (2020), a kind of difficult capitalism, because our “bourgeoisie” does not have autonomy – after all, without its association as a minor partner of the central bourgeoisies, the bourgeois layers on the periphery would not be able to accelerate capitalist accumulation. However, its heteronomous condition (another expression that the author likes) is not antithetical to an immense margin of maneuver at the domestic level, which is associated with a chronic collective irresponsibility of the “ones at the top”.

In this narrow terrain of a competitive social order that does not gravitate towards the democratization of society, but towards bourgeois self-privilege, the resulting autocratic State would have a double face of Janus: one turned to the past – the reiteration of the Brazilian tradition of *mandonismo* (bossism) and restricted democracy – and another for the future, which wants to modernize institutionalized power through the “normalization” of bourgeois autocracy in legal and democratic-representative terms. It was in this register that Florestan began to distrust the effectively democratizing character – in terms of the forms of organization and social distribution of power, and not only in the institutional models of the exercise of political power – of the process of political opening that was then being announced on the horizon.⁵ Bourgeois autocracy thus constitutes a concept that guides a more general discussion on the relationship between State and society and in relation to power that, without being limited to the purely institutional dimensions of the political game, seeks to capture a structural dimension, the structuring presence of the economy and society at the political level.

Final considerations

A Província, Ensaio sobre o direito administrativo, Populações meridionais do Brasil, Os donos do poder and A revolução burguesa no Brasil, among others mentioned in these comments, deserve to be re-discussed in any reflection on the political independence of Brazil, for the innovation that, without a doubt, they brought, but also because of the heuristic character that the comparison or theoretical confrontation between their main propositions allows us to observe in the debate on State and society in Brazil. Not many Brazilian books have survived their time. In different ways this happened with the books we highlighted. It is true that the problems dealt with in them, each from its own perspective, concern long-term historical, social and political processes that constitute, but also exceed, the original circumstances of their publication.

Centralization and decentralization, the relationship between political institutions and social life, patrimonialism or bourgeois autocracy, after all, are not restricted to dated events, but involve and imply the multiple temporalities typical of historical and social processes. So the themes of these books still concern us. Even more so in a society like the Brazilian one, in which change takes place more through reiteration and accommodation than just through rupture – as, by the way, we are being the protagonists/witnessing in crucial events that are taking place again at this moment.

We are aware of the risks of placing such different interpretations side by side, but, nevertheless, we decided to run such a risk to, in a kind of theoretical debugging, rethink them as heuristic analytical resources on the relationship between State and society in Brazil. The proper question is not, from our point of view, whether there is a better interpretation than the other in Brazilian thought. Taken together, as in this opportunity, these research results allow us to bet on a metatheoretical reflection to systematize a kind of intellectual repertoire that at the same time points out impasses for the realization of the nation-state in Brazil and draws attention to political and theoretical challenges still open.

Thus, it is necessary to problematize both formalist views of the study of the State, which tend to consider political institutions virtuous or not in themselves; but also analyses of the State focused exclusively on society, which tend to characterize it as a space in which interest groups are allied or opposed in order to define public policies. The distinction between State and society underpins the possibility of a differentially sociological approach to politics, although this does not necessarily imply corroborating a dichotomous conception of this relationship, as if State and society did not constitute intertwined spheres. For this reason, the relationship between State and society constitutes an analytical axis that allows us both to situate particular historical experiences and to unify the diversity of the thematic repertoire of political sociology in a broader explanatory framework. It is clear that without an integrated view of the general movement of society, it is difficult to specify both how democratic institutions take

root or not through the socialization of actors, and how the meanings of this socialization are affected and can change the institutions themselves. And this is a central intellectual challenge of our time, unfortunately, still quite marked by simple oppositions between State and society, as, moreover, it appears even in certain contemporary representations of “civil society”, in which, at the limit, sectors of society are taken, on the one hand, as allegedly virtuous, and, on the other, the State as an oppressor and corruptor of social virtues and liberties.

Studying the consolidation of the social sciences in Brazil from the daily life of the main association in the area, Anpocs, and analyzing in a more detailed way the bibliographic balances induced by it directly over the last twenty years for the areas of sociology and science politics, Botelho, Ricupero and Brasil Jr. (2017) found the lack of empirical basis for the recurrent opposition between engagement and theorizing. On the contrary, they realized how the dynamics of knowledge production in the social sciences practiced in Brazil successfully combines the universalist vocation of the discipline with a priority interest in the country’s sociopolitical problems. Thus, they conclude that the Brazilian social sciences, as we know it today, are, to a large extent, the result of the search for answers and analytical tools to understand the situation that the country was experiencing after the civil-military coup.

This history of the relations between the social sciences and public issues, particularly during the last democratic transition, indicates that we should not shy away from facing the problems posed by the current political moment in Brazil, in which the normative consensus around democracy in the public sphere looks broken. But it also warns us that, as in the recent past, the ability to respond to the challenges that arise today will determine the very relevance of Brazilian social sciences in the future. Forging consistent explanations about the relations between State and society in the present is a crucial challenge of our time, and in order to face it, it is necessary to take into account their history of encounters and disagreements with democracy over the last 200 years. If our unhappy history with democracy no longer allows us to take, without further ado, the full realization of a democratic political community as an irreversible process, skepticism must not dampen commitment. So, as in Fernando Sabino’s *O encontro marcado*, quoted as the epigraph of this article, there is no way around it, we will once again have to turn “interruption into a new path. To turn a fall into a dance step, fear into a ladder, sleep into a bridge, search into a meeting”.

Notes

- 1 André Botelho (2019) reconstructed the formation of a Brazilian political sociology between the 1920s and 1970s precisely around the discussion on relations between State and society and, in particular, the shuffling between public and private in Brazil.

- 2 Gabriela Nunes Ferreira (1999) examined this debate in depth in *Centralização e descentralização no Império*. Although the Viscount of Uruguay died in 1866, before the publication of *A Província* (1870), Tavares Bastos's most important work, it can be said that there was a debate between them. The deputy from Alagoas dialogued directly with Uruguay in *A Província*. The latter, in turn, was familiar with the *Cartas do solitário* (1862) by Tavares Bastos and, in his two breathtaking works – *Ensaio sobre o direito administrativo* (1862) and *Estudos práticos sobre a administração das províncias no Brasil* (1865) – he dialogued with the generation of liberals in the 1830s, from whom Tavares Bastos was inspired to defend his model of a federative monarchy.
- 3 On this debate, see Brasil Jr. (2007 and 2010).
- 4 For an analysis of the continuities between *A integração do negro na sociedade de classes* (Fernandes, 2008) and *A revolução burguesa no Brasil* (Fernandes, 2020), but without minimizing the differences between the two contexts, see Bastos (1987).
- 5 Botelho and Brasil Jr. (2020) jointly developed these questions in the preface to the new edition of *A revolução burguesa no Brasil*.

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ABSTRACT – Three decisive moments in the relations between State and society in social and political thought are discussed: the Empire, with the debate between Tavares Bastos and the Viscount of Uruguay; the First Republic, when Oliveira Vianna is the central author; and the transition from the civil-military dictatorship of 1964-1985 to democracy, where Raymundo Faoro and Florestan Fernandes are inescapable. If in the first moment the debate about political centralization and decentralization concentrates various ongoing interests, in the second the question of the adequacy of political institutions to society is the main theme; and in the third moment confronting the problem of democracy in the relations between State and society could no longer be postponed. By outlining this historical framework on the Bicentennial of Independence, we want to rethink the deadlocks in the relations between State and society that remain relevant in the present.

KEYWORDS: State and society, Political and social thought, Bicentennial of Independence.

RESUMO – Três momentos decisivos das relações entre Estado e sociedade no pensamento social e político são abordados: no Império, o debate entre Tavares Bastos e o Visconde do Uruguai; na Primeira República, Oliveira Vianna é o autor central; na transição da ditadura civil-militar de 1964-1985 para a democracia, Raymundo Faoro e Florestan Fernandes são incontornáveis. Se no primeiro momento o debate sobre centralização e descentralização política concentra os interesses, no segundo a questão da adequação das instituições políticas à sociedade é o grande tema; mas, já no terceiro momento, o enfrentamento do problema da democracia nas relações entre Estado e sociedade não poderia ser mais adiado. Traçando esse histórico, no Bicentenário da Independência, queremos repensar impasses dessas relações que permanecem em aberto no presente.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Estado e sociedade, Pensamento social e político, Bicentenário da Independência.

Andrew Botelho is a PhD in Social Sciences from the State University of Campinas (Unicamp), an associate professor of the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ) and a researcher at Brazilian National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq) and the Carlos Chagas Filho Foundation for Supporting Research in the State of Rio de Janeiro (Faperj). @ – andrebotelho@digiotas.com.br / <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6815-9040>.

Gabriela Nunes Ferreira is a PhD in Political Science from the University of São Paulo (USP), an associate professor at the Department of Social Sciences of the Federal University of São Paulo (Unifesp) and a researcher at the Center for Contemporary Culture Studies (Cedec). @ – gabriela.ferreira@unifesp.br / <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8299-8649>.

Received on 10.15.2021 and accepted on 12.12.2021.

^I Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, Instituto de Filosofia e Ciências Sociais, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

^{II} Universidade Federal de São Paulo, Departamento de Ciências Sociais, Guarulhos, São Paulo, Brazil.

