

revista



ISSN 2179-0892

Volume 28 • nº 3 (2024)

e230310

Caio Prado Júnior and Manuel Correia de Andrade: Brazilian social and territorial formation, the Northeast, and the agrarian question (method lessons)^{1,2}

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How to cite this article: MARQUES, M. I. M. Caio Prado Júnior and Manuel Correia de Andrade: Brazilian social and territorial formation, the Northeast, and the agrarian question (method lessons). Geosp, v. 28, n. 3, e230310. 2024. <https://doi.org/10.11606/issn.2179-0892.geosp.2024.230310en>

¹ This text is the result of my participation in the panel "From Caio Prado Júnior to Manuel: Between History and Geography" at the event "The Brazil of Manuel Correia de Andrade: Interpretations, Dialogues, and Archives," organized by the Institute of Brazilian Studies (IEB/USP) at the Department of Geography, University of São Paulo, held from September 26 to 29, 2023.

² This study was financed in part by the Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior - Brasil (CAPES) - Finance Code 001 .



Caio Prado Júnior and Manuel Correia de Andrade: Brazilian social and territorial formation, the Northeast, and the agrarian question (method lessons)

ABSTRACT

This article examines key aspects of Manuel Correia de Andrade's (MCA) intellectual journey and his engagement with Marxist approaches, with particular focus on his debate with Caio Prado Júnior (CPJR), highlighting their affinities, divergences, and mutual influence. It emphasizes Andrade's contributions to Brazilian social thought, particularly his engagement with national development issues, including the agrarian question and environmental challenges. Finally, it underscores the social commitment and the integration of theory and practice as significant legacies of Andrade and his mentor, Prado Júnior. The article is based on bibliographic research, personal records, and an in-depth study of key works by MCA and CPJR.

Keywords: Manuel Correia de Andrade. Caio Prado Júnior. Agrarian question. Marxist thought.

Caio Prado Júnior e Manuel Correia de Andrade: a formação social e territorial brasileira, o Nordeste e a questão agrária (lições de método)

RESUMO

Este artigo tem por objetivo analisar aspectos da trajetória intelectual de Manuel Correia de Andrade (MCA) e de sua relação com a abordagem marxista, com atenção especial para o debate travado com Caio Prado Júnior (CPJR), suas afinidades, divergências e mútua influência. Ele destaca a contribuição de Andrade para a construção do pensamento social brasileiro e a discussão de questões relacionadas ao desenvolvimento nacional como a questão agrária e a problemática ambiental, dentre outras. Por fim, evidencia o compromisso social e o diálogo entre teoria e prática como importantes legados de Andrade e de seu mestre, Prado Júnior. O artigo se baseia em pesquisa bibliográfica, registros pessoais, e estudo aprofundado de importantes obras de MCA e de CPJR.

Palavras-chave: Manuel Correia de Andrade. Caio Prado Júnior. Questão agrária. Pensamento marxista.

Caio Prado Júnior y Manuel Correia de Andrade: la formación social y territorial brasileña, el Nordeste y la cuestión agraria (lecciones de método)

RESUMEN

Este artículo tiene como objetivo analizar aspectos de la trayectoria intelectual de Manuel Correia de Andrade (MCA) y su relación con el enfoque marxista, con especial atención al debate sostenido con Caio Prado Júnior (CPJR), sus afinidades, divergencias e influencias mutuas. Destaca la contribución de Andrade a la construcción del pensamiento social brasileño y a la discusión de temas relacionados al desarrollo nacional como la cuestión agraria y las cuestiones ambientales, entre otras. Finalmente, destaca el compromiso social y el diálogo entre teoría y práctica como legados importantes de Andrade y su maestro, Prado Júnior. El artículo

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se basa en investigaciones bibliográficas, registros personales y un estudio en profundidad de importantes obras de MCA y CPJR.

Palabras clave: Manuel Correia de Andrade. Caio Prado Júnior. Cuestión agraria. Pensamiento marxista.

INTRODUCTION

This article examines aspects of Manuel Correia de Andrade's (MCA) intellectual trajectory and engagement with Marxist thought, focusing particularly on his dialogue with Caio Prado Júnior (CPJR), their shared perspectives, differences, and reciprocal influence. It draws on an extensive bibliographical review, personal records, and a detailed study of MCA's and CPJR's works dedicated to understanding Brazilian social and territorial formation, particularly in the Northeast and around the agrarian question.

While Andrade recognized CPJR's importance in shaping his intellectual outlook, he also cited Gilberto Freyre as a significant influence, especially regarding the early environmental concerns Freyre raised. This acknowledgment reflects Andrade's intellectual independence and his resistance to rigid orthodoxies.

Manuel Correia de Andrade actively engaged in the debate on agrarian issues and agrarian reform, central themes in his body of work. His landmark publication, "A terra e o homem no Nordeste" (Land and Man in the Northeast), represents a significant contribution to understanding the roots of agrarian issues and their impact on rural workers and the Northeast region. This work explores the different labor relations that shaped the Northeastern countryside in the early 1960s, tracing their historical roots.

I had the privilege of meeting Prof. Manuel at the beginning of my undergraduate studies in geography at the Federal University of Pernambuco in the 1980s. During my internship on research project, he led about the sugarcane system in the Northeast, he recommended Prado Jr.'s "Formação do Brasil contemporâneo" (1942) (The Making of Contemporary Brazil) as essential reading for any geographer (Prado Júnior, 1948). He also advised me to read "Os Sertões" (Rebellion in the Backlands), by Euclides da Cunha to deepen my understanding of the Northeast.

Professor Manuel's dedication as an avid reader and politically involved thinker produced a substantial body of work, whose legacy remains valuable not only to geography but also to the broader field of Brazilian social thought.

This article is organized into six sections: introduction; education and professional trajectory; contributions to geographical thought; relationship with Marxist thought; the debate on the agrarian issue and agrarian reform; and final considerations.

TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL TRAJECTORY

Manuel Correia de Andrade was an intellectual deeply committed to social issues, consistently engaging with the challenges of his time related to national development. In multiple interviews, he cited significant influences from prominent intellectuals, including Gilberto Freyre, Josué de Castro, Caio Prado Júnior, Nelson Werneck Sodré, and Pierre Monbeig (Andrade, 1992, 2002).

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Andrade pursued his studies at the Recife Law School from 1941 to 1945, an institution that had educated influential figures who shaped Brazilian politics, literature, and philosophy throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. Surrounded by a climate of vibrant political and intellectual activity, Andrade began his activism, participating in the Academic Board, joining protests and marches against the Vargas government, with a short-lived, seven-month affiliation with the Brazilian Communist Party (Wanderley, 2024)³.

While still a student, Andrade became close to Gilberto Freyre by engaging in political activities against the Estado Novo. At that time, Freyre, the noted sociologist from Pernambuco, connected with anti-fascist students and helped organize the “democratic left”, a faction of the National Democratic Union (UDN)⁴, in the Brazilian State of Pernambuco. Due to these activities, Andrade, along with colleagues, professors, and Freyre himself, was arrested and prosecuted by the National Security Court.

Andrade considered Freyre’s contribution to Brazilian thought invaluable, recognizing his early concerns with environmental issues in the analysis of society and nature, his emphasis on Indigenous and Black contributions to Brazilian culture, and his unique interdisciplinary approach within the social sciences, blending sociology and anthropology to analyze the regional characteristics of the Northeast.

He also engaged with Josué de Castro, though their connection was not as deep as his bond with Freyre. Castro, a prominent figure in both Pernambuco and national politics, represented the PTB in the Chamber of Deputies during the late 1950s. A doctor and geographer from Pernambuco, Castro had long been committed to addressing hunger and its social, political, and ecological dimensions, focusing on agrarian issues and advancing a politically engaged geography.

Andrade’s relationship with Caio Prado Júnior began during his student years and developed into an enduring intellectual exchange. The following excerpt from Andrade’s interview with GEOSUL Journal details his recollection of the circumstances of his first encounter with Prado Júnior:

[...] I was a student when I read an article by the São Paulo master in the “Rumo” Journal, published by the Casa do Estudante do Brasil, titled “The Human Problem in Brazil”. In this piece, Caio advocated for an agrarian reform that would distribute land by creating small properties. I read, re-read, and reflected on it, eventually writing an article for a modest student bulletin, suggesting that in certain regions dominated by large estates, it could be more effective to establish extensive cooperative units, particularly in areas centered around sugar mills. I sent a copy to Caio, and a few days later, I received a lengthy letter from him, justifying his stance while acknowledging the validity of my views. (Andrade, 1992, p. 155).

In January 1946, on a leisure trip to São Paulo after completing his law degree, Andrade finally met Prado Jr. in person. Andrade recalled that when they were introduced, the São Paulo professor greeted him warmly, calling him “the man of the cooperative mills”. From

³ See Bionotas.

⁴ All acronyms presented in the text follow their original form adopted in Portuguese.

that point, they developed a friendship, regularly discussing the country's issues. CPJR was actively engaged with geography and had a significant influence on Andrade's thinking⁵.

Andrade earned his law degree in 1945 from the Recife Law School, now part of the Federal University of Pernambuco (UFPE), and completed a degree in Geography and History in 1947 at the Manoel da Nóbrega School of Philosophy, currently the Catholic University of Pernambuco (UNICAP)⁶.

Early in his career, he practiced law mainly in the labor sector and taught geography and history in both public and private schools. In 1950, he closed his law practice, and by 1952 he had joined the Federal University of Pernambuco, where he began as an assistant in Physical Geography, collaborating with Professor Gilberto Osório de Andrade. In 1958, with the vacancy in the Economic Geography chair at the School of Economic Sciences following Professor Mário Melo's retirement, Andrade began teaching this discipline. He was officially transferred from the School of Philosophy to the School of Economics in 1962.

From 1963 to 1964, during Miguel Arraes' administration, he directed the Executive Group for Food Production (GEPA), which promoted financing and technical assistance for rural farmers. He also served as a member of the State Education Council in Pernambuco. In 1969, at the invitation of Governor Nilo Coelho, he took on the role of President of the Working Group for Agrarian Reform Recommendations (GTRA-PE), advising the newly established Executive Group for Agrarian Reform (GERA) at the federal level.

Alongside his teaching and public service roles, Andrade coordinated numerous research projects as a consultant hired by Superintendency for the Development of the Northeast (SUDENE). After retiring from his professorship at UFPE in 1985, he was appointed by the Joaquim Nabuco Foundation to lead the Center for Documentation and Studies of Brazilian History (CEHIBRA).

As one of the founding members of the Brazilian Association of Geographers (AGB), alongside Prado Jr. and others, Andrade was deeply involved in its early years, serving as president from 1961-1962 and later as vice-president in the administrations of Araújo Filho (1970-72), David Marcio (1974-76), Jose Cezar Magalhaes (1976-78), and Marcos Alegre (1978-79). He resigned from this role after the 1979 General Assembly held in São Paulo, where the AGB charted a new direction.

Andrade's engagement with Marxist thought and critical analysis of Brazil's social reality predates the renewal movement that led to Critical Geography in Brazil, a movement marked by the National Meeting of Geographers in Fortaleza in 1978. Despite this, his longstanding dedication to the AGB and its foundational members kept him close to that group while, at the same time, being respected by representatives of Critical Geography. That same year, Andrade co-founded the 1st National Meeting of Agrarian Geography, a gathering that included many members of the AGB's older guard.

CONTRIBUTION TO GEOGRAPHICAL THOUGHT

As Maia (2009) notes, Andrade belongs to a distinguished group of geographers who established the foundations of Brazilian Agrarian Geography, along with Orlando Valverde,

⁵ Caio Prado Júnior studied History and Geography at the Faculty of Philosophy, Letters and Human Sciences at the University of São Paulo, where he interacted with many geographers, forming close connections with Pierre Monbeig and Pierre Deffontaines. Caio was one of the founders of the Association of Brazilian Geographers (AGB) (Secco, 2007).

⁶ At that time, Geography and History were part of a single course. The separation of these fields into two distinct courses would only occur in 1955.

Pasquale Petrone, Manoel Seabra, and Maria do Carmo Galvão. However, Andrade's influence on Brazilian social thought extends well beyond this field, addressing topics such as Brazil's settlement and economic occupation, particularly in the Northeast; the history of popular movements; planning and development challenges; environmental issues; and more.

According to Maia, Andrade's admitted heterodoxy regarding the themes and theories that shaped geographical thought in his time stemmed from Prado Jr.'s and Gilberto Freyre's dual influence. Prado Jr. emphasized a focus on the object of study rather than strictly adhering to disciplinary boundaries, a philosophy Freyre also shared.

Alongside his engagement with Marxist thought, Andrade was an early advocate for environmental concerns, influenced by Freyre's research on ecological issues, particularly the environmental impact of sugarcane production. The Joaquim Nabuco Institute for Social Research⁷, where Freyre worked, conducted studies on sugarcane waste's ecological impact. This research produced the four-book series "Os Rios do Açúcar do Nordeste Oriental" (*The Sugar Rivers of the Eastern Northeast*), with two volumes authored by Gilberto Osório and two by Andrade. The problem of the release of vinasse into the rivers by sugar and alcohol mills continues to be an important issue that strongly impacts the areas surrounding the mills.

Andrade's works "A Terra e o Homem no Nordeste" (1963) and "Paisagens e Problemas do Brasil" (1968) (Landscapes and Challenges of Brazil) were inspired by Prado Jr.'s approach in "Formação do Brasil Contemporâneo", characterizing economic activities across Brazilian regions with a focus on natural conditions, land use, and labor relations. Andrade examined the economic history and cultural landscapes of these regions using what he termed the historical method, based on Prado Jr.'s teachings (Andrade, 1968, 1980).

The work "A Terra e o Homem no Nordeste" was commissioned by Prado Jr. during a 1962 visit to Recife. Recognizing the need for an agrarian reform sensitive to regional nuances, Prado Jr. invited Andrade to contribute to understanding the agrarian challenges of the Northeast.

Focusing heavily on social issues and regional history, the book received mixed reactions: traditional geographers often ignored or criticized it, while social scientists appreciated its thesis on large estates and rural worker exploitation. During the 1960s he was much more cited and debated by social scientists than by geographers. Surely, some also regarded it with reservation because the book contained strong denunciations against large estates and the expropriation of rural workers. Despite taking more than ten years to gain acceptance among geographers, it became a classic of Brazilian social thought.

Although initially met with resistance from geographers, the book ultimately became a staple in Brazilian social thought, going on to an eighth edition and being translated into English and Italian (Andrade, 2002). A "Terra e o Homem no Nordeste" has since established a thematic framework in Brazilian Agrarian Geography, particularly with its integrated analysis of land ownership, land structure, and rural labor relations.

This work is among the earliest records of Marxist thought's influence on Brazilian agrarian geography, alongside other seminal texts such as Orlando Valverde's "Estudos de Geografia Agrária Brasileira" (1981) (Studies in Brazilian Agrarian Geography); Pasquale Petrone's "A Baixada do Ribeira" (1966) (The Ribeira Lowlands); Léa Goldenstein's "A

⁷ Created in 1949, it was later transformed into the Joaquim Nabuco Foundation.

Industrialização da Baixada Santista” (1972) (The Industrialization of the Baixada Santista Region); Manoel Seabra’s “Vargem Grande: Organização e Transformação de um Setor do Cinturão Verde Paulistano” (1971) (Vargem Grande: Organization and Transformation of a Sector in São Paulo’s Green Belt) and “As Cooperativas Mistas do Estado de São Paulo” (1977) (The Mixed Cooperatives of the State of São Paulo) (Oliveira, 1999, p. 69).

The Marxist geographer from Pernambuco aligns with Elisée Reclus’ assertion that “[...] geography is history in space, and history is geography in time” (Andrade, 2002, p. 15, emphasis added).

RELATIONSHIP WITH MARXIST THOUGHT

Andrade’s engagement with Marxist thought was non-dogmatic, exemplified by his brief affiliation with the Brazilian Communist Party (PCB). As he recounted:

*I was a member of the PCB for a short period in the 1940s, when it became legal. Until the age of 15 or 16, I was a fervent Catholic, but I left the Church when a missionary criticized me for reading Renan. I thought: between Renan and the Church, I’ll take Renan. And so, I shifted left, reading Lenin, Marx, etc. As a law student, I had access to these banned works during the Estado Novo. I joined the PC, where I remained for six or seven months. Once, I arrived at a cell meeting with Trotsky’s book *My Life* under my arm, which caused a scandal. A communist leader told me, “You’re going to leave that book here. You can’t carry it. I replied, “I bought it; I’ll keep it.” He then asked, “Are you a Trotskyist?” I said, “No, but I admire Trotsky—he writes well.” He argued, “But he’s an enemy of the working class.” My response was: “I’m no worker; I’m from the sugar bourgeoisie.” Many bourgeois were in the PC then. The leader finally said, “You have to choose between Trotsky and the PC.” I replied as I had between Renan and the Church: “I’ll keep Trotsky.” And I left. I was a rebel! (Andrade, 2000 apud Marino, 2014, p. 3).*

For Andrade, freedom of thought was invaluable; Marxism, in his view, should function as a scientific method rather than a doctrine. He criticized the abstract application of Marxist categories and emphasized empirical knowledge, advocating a practice-based understanding of the material world. His engagement with Marxist literature began in university, where he read Prado Jr.’s works as primary references but maintained a strong interest in Trotsky and others.

Prado Jr. adopted Marxism as a historical method or method of interpreting history and played an important role in its dissemination and nationalization within Brazil. His thought strongly influenced the debate on Brazilian economic and social formation, and the general structure of his argument became the starting point for the work of significant authors from subsequent generations, including Manuel Correia de Andrade himself, as well as Francisco de Oliveira, José de Souza Martins, Ariovaldo U. de Oliveira, among others.

On several occasions, MCA expressed his admiration and recognition of CPJR’s contribution to Brazilian social thought, highlighting as his greatest work “Formação do Brasil Contemporâneo”, in which the historian from São Paulo would have made “[...] a

retrospective geography of Brazil at the end of the colonial period” (Andrade, 1987, p. 128, emphasis added). However, even though he recognized himself as a disciple of CPJR, the geographer from Pernambuco disagreed with him on important issues such as the agrarian question, as discussed in the next section.

To better understand the influence CPJR exerted on MCA’s thinking and work, it is essential to know more about the former’s trajectory and how he appropriated the method of dialectical materialism. Initially, it is important to highlight that he had a significant interest in and sensitivity to the geographical perspective, nurtured by a background based on the teachings of the French Lablachean school, which Pierre Deffontaines passed on to him when he taught at the University of São Paulo. CPJR was a profound scholar of Brazilian reality, a knowledge built through his extensive erudition, as well as his constant travels and participation in scientific excursions or fieldwork, in addition to his intense political activity.

Like MCA, CPJR came from a family belonging to the agrarian oligarchy. However, he broke with the interests of his social class and supported struggles for greater social equity. Unlike Andrade, though, he remained affiliated with the Brazilian Communist Party until his death and lived this engagement as a crucial experience in his fight for structural changes. Nevertheless, he always preserved his independence, defending positions that diverged from those of his party on several occasions.

His deep knowledge of the method of dialectical materialism was not solely due to his political activism, but also resulted from a sustained investment in the field of philosophy, which led to works such as “Dialética do Conhecimento” (1952) (*Dialectics of Knowledge*), “Notas Introdutórias à Lógica Dialética” (1959) (*Introductory Notes on Dialectical Logic*), and “O que é Filosofia” (1981) (*What is Philosophy*).

Prado Jr. recognized in Marx the effort to understand reality through reason – a special and distinctive human faculty that enables us to know, accumulate knowledge, and, with conscious awareness, use it intentionally for specific purposes. However, it is a dialectical reason, given that reality itself is dialectical; it is a reason capable of grasping the aspects that make up the real, in its diversity and contradictions, and its movement.

For the historian from São Paulo, dialectical reason is also capable of understanding the historicity or the general behavior of nature. As Jorge Grespan (2008, p. 61-62) explains:

Caio Prado articulates that “the facts of extra-human nature also have their history. [...] in short, all organic and inorganic nature has its history” through the sequence of its events. However, since this historicity is not immediately apparent in all of reality, “metaphysical thought is led to introduce into such seemingly cyclical history the notion of identical ‘cycles’”—an approach that “appears plausible and initially seems somewhat valid, because the historical nature of much of the universe, namely, the authentic history that continually introduces the *new*, is often imperceptible on a human scale”. The cyclical aspect observed in natural phenomena is only “seemingly” historical, as “true history” is defined by its capacity to “continually introduce the *new*,” rather than by the repetition found in predictable cycles where nothing fundamentally different emerges. In contrast, “human history, unfolding at our scale and near us, immediately discloses its true nature”—that which generates

something “new,” a processual relationship linking the past to the future through differentiation.

The dialectical approach must begin with relationships that, in their inherent contradictions, define situations and articulate a process-based temporality—a concrete historical time. Accordingly, Marx’s method of historical interpretation allows us to reveal the logic or “criterion” by which different aspects of reality form a durable structure; it identifies the underlying meaning that temporarily reconciles and aligns the contradictions within reality.

Prado Jr. applies this method to interpret Brazil’s history through an analysis of the power relations forged under the colonial system, later reproduced under imperialism, which subordinated the country’s activities to external interests—first directed by the Portuguese crown and subsequently by England and the United States.

If we go to the essence of our formation, we will see that we were established to supply sugar, tobacco, and some other goods; later gold and diamonds; then cotton, and then coffee, for European trade. Nothing more than this. It is with this objective, an external objective, focused outside the country and without regard to considerations other than the interests of that trade, that Brazilian society and economy will be organized. Everything will be arranged in this direction: the structure as well as the activities of the country. The white European will come to speculate, to do business; he will invest his wealth and recruit the labor force he needs: Indigenous people or imported Black people. With these elements, articulated in a purely productive, industrial organization, the Brazilian colony will be constituted. This beginning, whose character will remain dominant throughout the three centuries that will go up to the moment in which we now address Brazilian history, will be deeply and completely engraved in the features and life of the country. There will be secondary results that tend towards something higher; but they are still barely noticeable. The ‘meaning’ of Brazilian evolution, which is what we are investigating here, is still affirmed by that initial character of colonization. Keeping this in mind is to understand the essence of this picture that appeared at the beginning of the last century, and that I will now analyze. (Prado Júnior, 1948, p. 26, emphasis added).

For CPJR, Brazil’s economic and social formation stems from colonial relations whose purpose lay in European commercial expansion, beginning in the 15th century—a phase he considered a part of capitalism, albeit under the dominance of commercial capital (Prado Júnior, 1979a). He contends that this colonial foundation entrenched Brazil’s subordinate position within the global capitalist system, thereby shaping the country’s economic, political, and ideological dependency on external powers—frequently to the detriment of addressing the wider needs and priorities of its populace.

While we acknowledge the lasting impact of Brazil’s colonial past on its dependency, we interpret this period of commercial expansion as operating under mercantilist principles, marking the transition from feudalism to capitalism. It was an era characterized by profound shifts in the relations of production and productive forces within Western Europe,

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spreading to other continents in what became known as “primitive accumulation”, laying the groundwork for the capitalist mode of production.

For Prado Jr., Brazil’s economic-social formation and the international capitalist system represent two interrelated circumstances that form an integrated whole. However, it is essential to consider particularities in analyzing Brazil’s economic-social formation, rather than treating the concept of the mode of production abstractly.

Prado Jr. assigned climate a decisive role in defining the types of social and productive organization developed in the colonies. In Brazil, among other tropical regions, colonization focused on exploiting natural resources and producing tropical crops within the plantation system: large-scale monoculture based on enslaved labor. In contrast, colonies established in temperate zones functioned as destinations for surplus European populations seeking to establish societies similar to those in their home countries. This settlement colonization deprioritized mercantile aims and the exploitative character that marked colonies in the tropics.

Similarly, Andrade analyzed the economic history of Brazil’s Northeast and the shaping of its cultural landscape through a historical method in “A terra e o homem no Nordeste”. In this work, he also saw geographic determinants, particularly climate, as influential in shaping the region’s landscape, economy, and history.

To further highlight CPJR’s attention to specific circumstances and his dedication to interpreting the unique aspects of Brazilian social formation, we recall Octavio Ianni (2004), who emphasized three historical processes that the historian particularly focused on: the purpose of colonization, the impact of the enslaved labor system, and the distinctive nature of unequal and combined development.

Prado Jr. viewed the slave regime as the foundation upon which Brazilian society was built for centuries, deeply shaping its economy, politics, and culture, and leaving indelible marks on its social structure. Anything not reliant on enslaved labor tended to assume a secondary or transient role.

Uneven and combined development, in his view, characterized the entire history of Brazil, creating a social formation comprising a complex web of loosely integrated economic structures.

The succession of economic ‘cycles,’ coupled with population surges, frontier expansions, extractivism, livestock farming, agriculture, urbanization, and industrialization, all contribute to a successive and combined array of diverse and contradictory forms of organizing life and work. (Ianni, 2004, p. 59).

For Prado Jr., interpreting the historical development of Brazil’s social formation necessitated starting from the “meaning of colonization”. However, he argued that the external determination imposed on Brazil’s internal social dynamics served to dominate rather than homogenize it.

THE DEBATE ON THE AGRARIAN QUESTION AND AGRARIAN REFORM

Andrade often underscored the centrality of the agrarian question in his research, a significant commonality with Prado Jr. However, while Prado Jr. considered the agrarian

issue a central obstacle to Brazil's social development, Andrade analyzed it primarily as a crucial element for understanding the Northeast region and its principal challenges.

Given their closeness and the candid discussions, they engaged in concerning Brazil's rural issues, it can be said that they mutually influenced each other's approaches. Despite agreeing on the importance of addressing agrarian issues to mitigate Brazil's severe inequalities, they diverged in diagnosing the problem and proposing solutions.

To outline these differences, we will present a historical context and their respective actions during the 1960s—a period when agrarian reform was widely debated. This analysis will draw on their writings, statements made at the time, and later reflections, although a more comprehensive understanding could be gained through their personal archives housed at IEB-USP.

The second half of the 20th century saw an expansion in the unionization of rural workers and a growing PCB presence among them, alongside the establishment of Peasant Leagues across the Northeast. During this time, the “peasantry” emerged as a political actor representing the diverse labor relations in rural Brazil, and “agrarian reform” became a rallying cry, driving actions against the common enemy of “latifundia” (Medeiros, 2000).

From its founding in the 1920s, the PCB argued that Brazil's economy was characterized by an agrarian-export structure dominated by imperialist interests and large estates operating with labor relations resembling serfdom—feudal remnants, in their view. These conditions, the Party asserted, kept rural populations in poverty and stifled the development of the domestic market, subjected to bonds of personal dependence and overexploitation. Thus, it advocated an alliance between the working class, the national bourgeoisie, and rural workers, viewing agrarian reform as a fundamental action to combat large estates and feudal relations in the countryside through land redistribution.

On the eve of the 1964 civil-military coup, political tensions were high, and the demand for agrarian reform had gained significant traction. President João Goulart's support for agrarian reform was cited as one of the factors leading to the coup⁸. During this period, violence in the countryside escalated, with threats and assassinations targeting rural workers who advocated for land redistribution. In response, Pernambuco's governor Miguel Arraes supported the workers' demand to enforce the Rural Worker Statute of 1963 and provided technical and financial assistance for small-scale, peasant production, achieving noteworthy economic and social outcomes.

Prado Jr. defended the thesis of an expanded agrarian reform, encompassing a set of demands and emphasizing the importance of the struggle for rights as a central component. He owned both *Editora Brasiliense* and the journal of the same name, through which he published his analyses on Brazilian economic policy, often clashing with the official positions of the PCB. He developed his theory on the Brazilian revolution as a gradual process based on two key axes: “[...] an agrarian, non-peasant revolution, embodied here in the valorization of labor through the universalization of labor laws, completing the work of Abolition; and the reform of capitalism, to generalize employment and homogenize society” (Santos, 2000, p. 271).

⁸ At a rally at Central do Brasil in Rio de Janeiro, held two weeks before the coup, Jango announced that he would expropriate land along highways, railways, and reservoirs for agrarian reform.

Prado Jr. closely followed the political developments in Pernambuco and saw the handling of the sugarcane strike by the Arraes government in 1963, and its outcomes, as an example of the potential for implementing labor-related measures that, instead of focusing on the challenging goal of land expropriation, could immediately improve workers' living conditions and boost the regional economy. According to Santos (2000, p. 290),

[...] in the case of the Pernambuco strike, three categories of effects became emblematic: a) a 'true transformation' had occurred in the living conditions of these rural workers; b) the region experienced a commercial boost; and c) an "economic effect" emerged, as this type of labor force pressure drove access to land. Caio Prado Jr. viewed this experience, in contrast to the "agitation" around the struggle for land, as a movement that opened "broad prospects for reform and economic and social renewal, and perhaps even political change", aligning, as he described, with the "profound meaning of our revolutionary process".

During this period, Andrade coordinated GEPA, an organization created by the Arraes government in 1963 to promote food production and developed a loan program with official interest rates for small-scale farming (Andrade, 2004). In 1963, MCA published "A terra e o homem no Nordeste," in which he analyzed labor relations in the countryside, the actions of the Peasant Leagues and Rural Workers Unions, and the colonization plans proposed by the Pernambuco government through the "Companhia de Revenda e Colonização" and SUDENE. The Pernambuco geographer acknowledged the significance of the land demands raised by social movements and aimed to study agrarian reform experiences in other countries, as well as colonization initiatives in Brazil, to contribute to the construction of Brazilian agrarian reform.

Andrade accepted Prado Jr.'s thesis on the capitalist origin of Brazilian social formation, opposing the Brazilian Communist Party's notion of a feudal past. However, he disagreed with the São Paulo intellectual's interpretation of the capitalist nature of all labor relations in the countryside and, therefore, also disagreed on the primary actions that should make up an agrarian reform policy.

Prado Jr. saw in the historical process of colonization the origin of a dependent social formation based on large-scale exploitation, the production of tropical goods for the export market, and a significant disconnection in the production for the domestic market⁹. Given that export products were subject to severe fluctuations in the international market, this created varying pressures on land use and access, resulting in recurrent crises in food production for domestic consumption. He thus highlighted the contradictory relationship between large-scale export-oriented exploitation and small-scale food production, which he saw as secondary.

In short, land use today, as in the past, is not organized based on the population working and engaging in activities there, but rather primarily

⁹ In recent years, interpretations of Colonial Brazil have been enriched with new contributions and revisions, particularly from historians based in Rio de Janeiro, notably João Fragoso and Manolo Florentino. These historians emphasize the role of the internal market in colonial dynamics, challenging the traditional view that ties the colonial economic activity to the external market and to a perspective that sees the Colony just as a driver of European industrialization (Erbereli Júnior, 2012, p. 137-138).

and essentially on commercial interests and needs entirely unrelated to that population. (Prado Júnior, 1979b, p. 49-50).

He believed that this productive structure relied on a land tenure system based on large estates (*latifundium*) and smallholdings (*minifundium*), as well as on an established labor market. Prado Jr. viewed the power of large estates and their owners as the primary factor responsible for the miserable living conditions of much of the rural population, as limited access to land led workers to submit to highly exploitative labor relations, particularly in large estates.

Given the role of large-scale agromercantile exploitation in the Brazilian rural economy, production and labor relations are naturally determined, primarily and principally, by the nature of that exploitation. In essence, they consist of relationships between, on the one hand, the business operators, who are the large landowners; and on the other, the workers who provide the labor force for large-scale operations. The conditions under which this labor force is supplied shape the essential production and labor relations in the Brazilian agricultural economy. (Prado Júnior, 1979b, p. 57).

For the São Paulo historian, across the various forms of labor found in the countryside, workers appeared merely as sellers of labor power, while the concentrated land tenure structure exerted a depressing effect on their wages, which could be manifested in different forms:

Payment in cash (wages); in part of the product; and finally with the granting of the right to use or occupy, for personal cultivation or livestock, land owned by the large estate where they were employed. (Prado Júnior, 1979b, p. 60).

He regarded the “*foro*” and partnership arrangements as forms of rural labor exploitation that did not represent “feudal remnants” or “pre-capitalist” forms, as the PCB believed, nor any other type of peasant relation. The “*foreiros*” occupied and independently cultivated plots located in more remote areas of the property, for which they paid rent and provided additional free labor (known as “*cambão*”) during the harvest season for the landowner. The partner, in turn, performed the work on the land and shared the production outcome with the owner.

It should be noted that in each of these cases, as well as in others that follow similar patterns—details of which are unnecessary to specify here—it is always a form of payment for services, even when this “payment” is not monetary and takes on unique forms. Thus, as we have seen, there are cases where the compensation provided by the owner consists of a share of the production (where formally the legal relationship would be a partnership) or where it is granted in the form of allowing the worker to use the land independently. It is important to emphasize this character of service leasing that constitutes the true essence of labor relations

in Brazilian agriculture. Essentially, these relations are defined by the provision of services. This, and only this, is what the owner seeks and obtains from the worker; and it is solely services that the latter actually provides to the owner, regardless of the form of compensation received for this provision. (Prado Júnior, 1979b, p. 62).

Andrade had a different understanding of this issue, considering as peasant forms of production those in which the farmer had some control over the land and worked independently.

Social science scholars have differentiated two categories within the broad population of rural inhabitants and workers: those who have already been dispossessed of their land and tools and thus rely solely on selling their labor, typically wage earners, and those who still maintain control over small plots of land, either as owners, tenants, or sharecroppers, cultivating for self-sufficiency and selling any surplus. These individuals also supplement their income by working for large and medium landowners during downtime on their small farms, without formal employment contracts. (Andrade, 1986, p. 6).

For the Pernambuco geographer, the capitalist mode of production had shaped our social formation since the colonial period, though this did not mean capitalist relations were universally applied at all levels. In this context, slavery had been the predominant mode of production during the colonial era, while peasant forms expanded following the abolition of slavery.

Thus, Jacob Gorender introduced the concept of colonial slavery, which I regard as a subordinate mode of production, dominated within commercial capitalism until abolition. [...] Subsequently, peasant forms of labor relations emerged, such as leases and partnerships, which predated the arrival of more explicit capitalist relations in the 1950s. [...] I acknowledge that peasant forms of relations have existed and continue to exist in more traditional areas, but they do not constitute a dependent mode of production. (Andrade, 1992, p. 159-160).

The existence of peasant production in Brazil, or small-scale production as CPJR would term it, continues to fuel intense debates to this day. Particularly noteworthy are the reflections developed by José de Souza Martins and Ariovaldo U. de Oliveira, who shed light on new aspects and contradictions surrounding the agrarian question and the relationship between the peasantry and large estates in Brazil.

In 1979, at the 2nd National Meeting of Agrarian Geography (ENGA), Martins presented a new interpretation of the presence of non-capitalist production relations in the countryside, emphasizing the economic meaning of land ownership within the context of capitalist production. His theory examines the capitalist creation and recreation of the peasantry, even within the framework of agricultural modernization, as a process rooted in the subjection of land rent to capital (Martins, 1981).

Oliveira (1986, 1999) draws on Martins' theory to approach the uneven development of capitalism and the reproduction of the peasant class in Brazil from a geographical perspective¹⁰. He analyzed how monopolistic, commercial and industrial capital operates within various agricultural productions amid the industrialization of agriculture in Brazil, identifying distinct forms of the relationship between capital and land ownership. He explained the expansion of peasant production in specific situations through the subordination of land rent to capital; in other contexts, he identified the advancement of capital territorialization in agriculture. Oliveira argued that it is essential to consider the different moments of the contradictory dynamics of capital production and reproduction, which involve production, circulation, distribution, and consumption, and the various configurations they assume within national territorial formations. Oliveira (1999, p. 75) highlights that "[...] as capital globalized itself, making the capitalist territory global, the land became nationalized."

Whether or not peasant forms exist in the countryside has continued to occupy those engaged in the agrarian debate; however, this discussion has taken on new dimensions in contemporary times, revealing increased complexity. New political actors have emerged in the countryside with an increasing presence in the public sphere, claiming territory rather than land, such as quilombolas and Indigenous peoples. Additionally, although numerically smaller, a growing segment of the peasantry is demanding greater social recognition considering worsening environmental degradation caused by modern capitalist agriculture, through its engagement with agroecology and its contribution to the production of healthy food and a more balanced environment.

While the agrarian question has grown more complex and multifaceted, large land ownership has strengthened. Today, the industrial agriculture model based on large estates has become dominant, forming the basis for structuring large agribusiness groups and linking to global value chains dominated by major transnational corporations. Given the financial instabilities observed in the 2000s, the ties between land ownership and financial capital have also deepened. Consequently, the contradictions surrounding land ownership have intensified, making agrarian reform increasingly challenging. While interest in maintaining and even increasing land concentration has grown among different capitalist fractions, a new development is that this interest is also expanding among segments of wage-earning workers who have become involved with agribusiness through financial capital schemes, whether through acquiring shares in Agribusiness Investment Funds (FIAGROS) or Agribusiness Credit Bonds (LCAs), among others.

FINAL REMARKS

Returning to the works of Andrade and Prado Júnior offers valuable insights into our history and geography, an essential step for understanding the present and contributing to building a desired future. Their method approaches also hold a particular value in this endeavor.

Andrade analyzed the spatial-temporal configuration of the Northeast, examining its constitutive processes and contradictions. He identified the agrarian relations underpinning

¹⁰The emphasis on the peasantry as a social class is an important aspect of Oliveira's approach.

the “latifúndia” and the agrarian issue as central to explaining the region’s condition in the early 1960s, a reality that, in many ways, still holds today.

The coexistence of two forms of agriculture—one primarily export-oriented and the other focused on national food supply—remains a notable feature of our rural production. However, export-oriented agriculture, now integrated into global value chains that also serve the domestic market. For instance, the soybean production chain, with byproducts like oil and margarine, and those related to the production of animal protein, whether from poultry or beef. This reveals how dependency and unequal development continue to take new forms.

Andrade recognized Prado Júnior as his foremost mentor and, in carrying forward his legacy, engaged earnestly with the political challenges of his time. He sought to contribute to Brazilian social thought with a critical and independent perspective, anchoring his work in empirical study and historical materialism, or what they termed the historical method. For us, this serves as both the foundation and the invitation to, in the footsteps of these two great masters, strive to understand and confront the challenges of our time by bringing theory into practice.

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Article editor

Paula Juliasz

Received: Oct. 4 2024

Accepted: Oct. 30 2024