

Introduction

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INTRODUCTION

This book is about Brazil, the country I live in, the country I love, the country that haunts me with its Sphinx-shaped sociability. For the last 25 years or so I've been researching and publishing on various aspects of the State-capital-labour relations, and then State building, inequality and class formation, and then youth and informality. The array of issues that interest me is widening as I struggle to understand our Sphinx. Frustration is inevitable.

Brazil has changed enormously in the last five or six decades and more intensely in the last 15 years, at a pace that makes it easy to misguidedly take glittering surface fluctuations as the 'reality' of its ingrained social dynamics. The challenge of any analyst of our world is to try and avoid the blinding shine of the 'new' and to unveil the deep rooted structural and cultural forces that guide change. In Brazil, as anywhere else, the new is always heir of multiple dimensions of the past, and the past, in our case, is marked by social and political authoritarianism, deep socio-economic inequalities, racism, social injustice, poverty, vulnerability of the majority of the population, meagre social policies, a rachitic welfare state... the list is long. While acknowledging and celebrating changes, one must always call attention to the internal mechanisms that, very often, limit the number of Brazilians that benefit from them. This is what I try to do in this book, focusing on selected aspects of the social, political, institutional and economic dimensions of our Sphinx.

The chapters I present here were either written in English or translated into it for somewhat fortuitous reasons. In conversation with friends around a bottle of wine (actually several bottles...) it occurred to us that our ideas about, and our understanding of Brazil should reach wider audiences than those who read Portuguese. Foreign scholars interested in Brazil need to grasp our language if they want to do serious theoretical or empirical research and when they do, they invariably publish in their native languages before having their work translated into Portuguese, so their ideas reach us second-hand. But they eventually do reach us, while our ideas and research and our interpretation of Brazil, if written in Portuguese, reach only the interested scholar. Of course, there are many Brazilians working in universities and research centres around the world, but foreign academic communities have rules of their own, and to be accepted as an internationally-respect scholar, a Brazilian must learn how to think and write like an American or French or German, otherwise he or she will not be published in the journals for which the peer review is most often exercised by established Anglophone (or Francophile, or Teutonic) Brazilianists or Latino-Americanists, who may be predisposed to reject arguments that contradict the mainstream interpretation within each country's community of Brazilianists and Latino-Americanists. Those of us who have tried to publish in a foreign journal know what I am talking about.

As a consequence, the world knows little about the vigorous Brazilian social sciences. Most of what is canonical about what we 'are' was not established by us, but by Brazilianists or by Latino-Americanists writing about us in the US or elsewhere. Of course, the list of excelling figures that made empirical research on, and wrote about Brazil includes Claude Lévi Strauss, Anthony and Elisabeth Leeds, Robert K. Merton, Alberto O. Hirschman, Alfred Stepan, Phillip Schmitter, Ruth Collier,

David Collier, Thomas Skidmore, Leslie Bethel, John French, Brodwin Fisher... The list is lengthy, and their work is actually very good and has certainly helped us understand ourselves. But their gaze, welcome as it is, is inevitably that of the stranger, and very often theories and concepts developed in the North are 'adapted' to our reality, which results in arguments built either in the negative (Brazil does not have a developed democracy, lacks republicanism...) or underlining its alleged specificities (its deep inequality, its corrupted politics, its violent sociability, its 'sub-citizenship'), that is, the strangeness and otherness of its configuration. Even the more recent theories on 'multiple modernities' have led to ideas such as 'globalization from below' and to a growing field of research on 'subaltern studies', and they also tend to emphasize the uniqueness of the 'global south', Brazil included.

We live in a global world. Social theories must be general enough to account for the diversity of the world without individualizing particular geographical areas as unique or specific. Of course, we do have our particularities (otherwise I would not have used the metaphor of the Sphinx), but as in any other country or region in the world, the particular is a case of the universal. We are a democracy, a republic, a finance-dominated capitalist economy with its cycles. We have a State, a welfare state, borders, geopolitical interests, in and emigration. We have political disputes on the horizons of the good life, political competition, social parties, social classes, class struggle. We have cities, metropolises, megalopolises. We have social violence, police violence, political violence, symbolic violence. Information technologies are the element of our lives, global warming is affecting us deeply, and risky environments are a product of our capitalism, as anywhere else. All these concepts and analytical frames fit. We are not unique in every respect, but we have our particularities, as has any other country.

This book focuses on a very small cluster of these particularities. Because the chapters were written in the last 13 years for different purposes and for different audiences, they differ somewhat in style, research design and approach. But they do have a general background: the investigation of some of the multidimensional legacies of the Getúlio Vargas's Era. Even Chapter I, on slavery and the transition to free labour at the turn of the 20th Century, was written to make intelligible the enormous changes brought about by the advent of the Vargas Era in the 1930s. Most of the institutions created under Vargas's rule (1930-1945 and 1951-1954) are still with us. State-labour-capital relations are still framed by those institutions. The labour market is still regulated by laws enacted in the 1930s and consolidated in 1943. Collective bargaining, labour inspection, the labour and capital organizations are all elements of the Vargas legacies that, albeit with adaptations over time, still impinge upon our present. For that reason, it is impossible to understand what we are without looking back and trying and reconstruct the trajectories of the current institutions, social and political actors, and even the economy. As a consequence, four of the six chapters adopt a historical sociological perspective, in dialogue between the contemporary context and the country's vivid historiography. The other two benefit in one way or another from this dialogue.

Based on historiographical studies that since the 1980s have undertaken a broad review of the social history of labour in Brazil, Chapter I presents a number of sociological hypotheses about the permanence of structural features of the 'slavery past' in the process of building of the capitalist sociability in the country. This legacy includes the perceived depreciation of manual work, a derogatory stereotype for black and the Brazilian laymen as workers, a moral indifference of the elites toward the fate of the poor (who constituted the large majority

of the population), and extremely rigid social hierarchies. This framework of structural inertia provided the general parameters of free labour's reproduction in the beginning of capitalist order in Brazil, structuring the life chances of native Brazilians, ex-slaves and their offspring and also the European immigrants in the first decades of the 20th Century.

Chapter II joins the persistent (and recurrent) effort to decipher the riddle of Brazil's equally persistent inequality. Resuming the interpretation of modern Brazil proposed by Juarez Brandão Lopes in the 1960s, the chapter revisits the 'Vargas Era' and its historical meaning and scope, in light of the reproduction of inequalities over time. I propose that 'regulated citizenship', a concept crafted by Wanderley Guilherme dos Santos in the 1970s, captures the bulk of the social dynamic of the Vargas Era and beyond, for it generated the *expectation* of social protection among Brazilian workers, feeding the *promise* of citizens' integration which, however, was never actually fulfilled. This gave the social order a double coordination mechanism: incorporation nourished workers' expectations, resulting in extensive migration from the countryside to the cities and there producing urban poverty, urban violence and urban inequalities; and at the same time, because the social and labour rights that defined the 'regulated citizenship' were part of the federal constitution and the legal system that defined the State, but were ineffective in practice, workers had to fight to make them real. As a consequence, while struggling for the validity of the social rights, workers were incorporated as an integral part of the Brazilian state-building process.

In Chapter III I develop the argument further, scrutinizing the long-lasting consequences of this double coordination mechanism for the social and political dynamics from Vargas to Lula. I show that the communists and other left-wing factions of the labour movement strongly opposed the union structure

created by Vargas after the end of his dictatorship in 1945, but soon adhered to its appealing elements, most particularly the control over official unions and their legally assured financial mechanisms and their captive represented workers, which assured labour leaders social and political power. The military rule (1964-1985) was a first attempt to bomb down the pillars of the Vargas's legacies, in part because it had allegedly empowered the communists and, in the paranoid view of the militaries and the civil elites that supported them, fuelled a project of a 'syndicalist republic' in the tropics. But the military rule failed in its intent to expunge Vargas and its ingrained heritage, for the major opposition agent that forced the end of the dictatorship was, precisely, the 'new unionism', or the labour movement nurtured within the Vargas's union structure which the military thought they controlled. The 'new unionism' was itself a second intent to contend the Vargas's institutions, for its project was to substitute the law (the Vargas's legacy was a legislated labour relations' system) by a national collective contract bargained by free unions. This project was abandoned in the 1990s when neoliberalism targeted the labour market regulations and their 'rigidities'. Even the 'new unionists' dig trenches against the reforms and became ferocious guardians of the Vargas's institutions. With the advent of Lula in the 2000s many of these were renewed, engorged or perfected.

The fourth chapter explains in depth why the 'new unionism' adhered to the Vargas's legacies in the 1990s. The Brazilian trade unions faced a multidimensional crisis of representation as a consequence of structural shifts in the social and economic conditions of union action and of unresolved institutional dilemmas in the union structure established by legislation in the Vargas era. These two vectors have joined to undermine the very basis of the unionism consolidated in Brazil since 1978, dramatically reducing the ability of unions

to represent their constituencies' interests. The chapter first discusses the general conditions that favoured union growth in the 1980s. It then moves on to a brief description of the changes that occurred in the 1990s and the consequences of these changes for the inherited pattern of unionism. Next, collective action and union density data are scrutinized in order to show how these changes affected the main pillars of that heritage. An analysis of the findings of the People's Social Security Survey (PSS) conducted in Brazil in 2001 is then presented. The analysis shows how the structural changes affected unions' efficacy and efficiency in interest representation. The conclusion connects the various dimensions of the crisis. I could have updated the discussion, but the arguments made in 2002, when the chapter gained its final form, are still valid, so I only made minor stylistic revisions.

Mobilizing Census data, household surveys and administrative records, Chapter V advocates taking a long-term perspective on the structure and dynamic of the Brazilian labour market. It shows that the country has been faced with considerable social, economic and demographic inertia resulting from long lasting economic stagnation and poor growth rates, which have affected successive generations in the 30 years ending in 2012, and have created a new kind of labour market dual dynamic which is seldom taken into account in mainstream analysis and public debate. A substantial proportion of the 40 percent of the labour force informally occupied in 2009 *are no longer employable* in the formal labour market. In addition, the growing formal labour market *is not* creating enough jobs to accommodate the new generations of workers, many of whom are restricted to long periods of unemployment or of precarious informal jobs before they are 'entitled' to a formal, regulated position. And this position, once attained, is unstable for most workers. If things are much better today than they used to be

for a significant proportion of the labour force, their stability and sustainability, if maintained in the future, are no guarantee of better labour market positions for what I call here *the lost generations* that have had to make their living in very precarious economic environments in the past.

Lastly, in Chapter VI I argue that the literature on the effects of labour market regulations on market efficiency often overlooks the degree of the legislation's effectiveness (i.e. its actual enforcement in daily labour relations). Even the more sophisticated econometric studies that take into account the interaction effects between labour market regulatory institutions in explaining its dynamics leave this central issue aside, namely, enforcement versus non-enforcement of the law. Keeping this issue in mind, this chapter (which was written with Telma Lage) seeks to answer the following question: given that the effectiveness of labour legislation depends on the interaction between the overall sanctions and the probability of the employer getting caught breaking the law, and given that the law's effectiveness is a decisive aspect for the real measurement of a country's labour costs, to what extent is the Brazilian labour inspection system designed to meet its objective, namely, to enforce the law? Lage and I inquire on the design and functioning of the labour inspection mechanisms to show that, all in all, the system is not able to reduce informality and does not target small and medium firms, more prone to evade the law.

Institutional frameworks, political action, social and political identities, class relations, social inertia and path dependence are the main aspects inquired in this book. Taken together, the chapters present a coherent and systematic portrait of Brazil, or a plausible point of view about the dynamics of our sociability which, so I hope, may interest the foreign reader.