

Democracy and (in)equality in Brazil today¹

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DOI: 10.18829/rp3.v0i12.31108

ABSTRACT

This article has as a goal to debate a political hypothesis about what would be the weight and the role of the conflicts surrounding the inequality/equality agenda, and how they affect Brazilian democracy today. The central hypothesis of this article is that the current political tension in the country is a result of the rupture of social acceptance of inequality. We begin with the premise that the tense societal relations, that are expressed more and more through conflicts of opinion which come across as radical and excluding- in social networks and on the streets- are more serious than they appear. And they may also worsen if the democratic windows are not kept open by civil and political society. Furthermore, we argue that the evidence and perceptions about the huge inequality which is present in our society is at the root of this conflict, and that forces us to review some ideas about our social conciliatory formation and the acceptance of inequality as a value.

Keywords: Brazil, Democracy, inequality

1. Introduction

This article has as a goal to debate a political hypothesis about what would be the weight and the role of the conflicts surrounding the inequality/equality agenda, and how they affect Brazilian democracy today. The central hypothesis of this article is that the current political tension in the country is a result of the rupture of social acceptance of inequality. We begin with the premise that the tense societal relations, that are expressed more and more through conflicts of opinion which come across as radical and excluding- in social networks and on the streets- are more serious than they appear. And they may also worsen if the democratic windows are not kept open by civil and political society. Furthermore, we argue that the evidence and perceptions about the huge inequality which is present in our society is at the root of this conflict, and that forces us to review some ideas about our social conciliatory formation and the acceptance of inequality as a value.

¹ Artigo apresentado no painel “Consolidação da Democracia em um Mundo de Desigualdade”. Congresso da Associação Internacional de Ciência Política, IPSA, julho de 2016. IPSA 24th World Congress of Political Science Poznan, Poland, July 23-28 Panel: Consolidation of Democracy in a World of Inequality.

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Based on this premise, here we argue that the historical process of political arrest by the elites, in other words, the mechanisms of control for the reproduction of power have been challenged. New forms of representation and circulation of ideas and proposals in the public spheres (mainly through social media) have questioned this monopoly and have brought into light the radicalism of the current conflicts.

Therefore, our hypothesis gives secondary weight to the debate about the breakdown of the current Brazilian political system, known as ‘coalition presidency’, marred by high levels of fragmentation of political parties. This article seeks to show how the main element needed to understand the nature and dimension of the recent crisis of Brazilian democracy are the social signs of rejection of inequality. These signs are diffused and in certain aspects may seem contradictory, as they provoke actions and reactions without being properly distributed along the social pyramid. This article also discusses the process and reconstruction of Brazilian democracy in the last three decades. During this period (1985-2015) the country has gone through many challenges in its process of democratization: the end of the authoritarian regime (1964-1985) brought about a constitutional process, in which the choices related to the design of the political institutions were made, which led to the development of many of the economic stability plans, and improved civil (in part), political, economic, social and cultural rights, along with creating new public policies in several areas to overcome the extreme levels of poverty.

However, this process has always been tense and difficult, having as its greatest challenge, historical inequality. Due to this, the tensions returned with greater intensity during July 2013, when diffuse political movements took to the streets to protest against the living conditions, especially the living conditions in major urban areas. Since 2013, Brazil has been involved in a polarized political struggle, through different extracts of social classes, which has had strong reflections on democratic institutions. Analyzing the 2013 conflicts as signs of rapture from the social acceptance of inequality can perhaps help to explain better the current challenges in the country within the debate on the breakdown of the representation system.

Although there is a long discussion on Brazilian social inequality, there are insufficient studies about the emergence of radical political conflicts as a result of this framework. The main argument is that such studies are necessary for the continuity of the democratic process as a response for this challenge. Brazilian inequality is nothing new and has been greatly debated under various different angles in the last three decades, especially

when the concepts that measure it become more well-known to a broader public audience, especially when the analysis of the concentration of income supplied by the Gine Coefficient and reflexes that are amplified in the inequality in the access to public goods that are measured by the Human Development Index – HDI of the United Nations. In relation to this, there is a methodological debate about the evolution and/or regression of inequality in the various political contexts of the country throughout the past century and in the first 15 years of this century that have been receiving significant attention from the academy, bringing out new and important revelations². But in this analysis, the present proposal has another goal, which concentrates especially on the political challenges.

It is true that Brazilian inequality has historical and social specificities that deserve attention and investigation for a better design of policies that are favorable to its transitions for standards that are acceptable and aligned to the democratic process. However, here we argue that many of the symptoms of the current political tension are the fruit of the tension provoked by inequality, and this has much in common with the global political symptoms that pressure the process of globalization in a world that is marked by the questioning of the advent of inequality. In this sense, the analysis of the Brazilian case demands some contextualization.

2. The discontents of globalization

The long and historical process of globalization has radically accelerated in the last decades, which had some impulse from the political and technological changes from the 80's and from the beginning of the 90's of the last century (GIDDES, 1991; ROBERTSON, 1992). Among the structural changes and the emerging new global order that we can highlight, according to the sequence of events presented by Viola (1992) there are some central aspects: the dwindling down of east-west conflict, with the reform of the Ex-Soviet Union and the posterior dismantling of socialism in Eastern Europe; the new technological paradigm, that began in the 70's of the last century; the advance of liberalism to the detriment of stronger state policies and the consolidation of the role of the market as a dynamic mechanism in the allocation of goods and services; the expansion of NGO's as a new political and social pole alongside the market and the State; the acceleration of the economic component in the process of globalization through transnational companies and global financial markets; the

exponential growth of air transportation and the emergence of information systems with planetary dimensions; the emergence of global problems, with emphasis on the environmental issues and human rights. In this process, the hegemony of the economic component has intensified, along with the liberation of the global markets to the detriment of the regulatory capacity under the scope of the Nation States. In relation to the global structure of governance, it also developed through an asymmetrical process, because an institution that is capable to moderate this movement that provoked radical changes from the previously established order was not created.

Therefore, the contemporary political analysis still seeks answers for a phenomenon that is provoked by this process and is made manifest through the agenda of the redistributive conflict and in the demand for the recognition of rights. This has a direct impact on the political processes in the area of values and institutional frameworks both on the local and transnational levels. The dynamic of global markets that emerge in the process of globalization shed light on the difficulties that exist when dealing with the inequalities in the scope of national policies. In some countries that are characterized as western democracies there is an intense debate about the decline of governmental redistribution programs, which are considered to be insufficient to compensate for the inequalities generated by the market.

The case of Greece and the dismantling of the bipartite system in the recent Spanish elections reflect this debate. In Europe, there is also the growing debate about the decline of public support to redistribution policies and the advance of political lines that are opposed to ethnic and racial diversity in the labor force, revealing at the most part, intolerance and the violation of human rights. This framework is another permanent source of tension in relation to the global migratory process and to the refugee crisis' that the poorer regions of the planet are currently facing.

A theoretical attempt to map out the changes in contemporary social and political life, which was initially labeled as pessimistic, can be found in the work of Bauman (1999, 2000, 2001), for example. Some general issues that emerge in the theoretical effort of Bauman brings to the fore several challenges to the political rightist and leftist trends that fully accept the democratic game and elect as a priority the defense and the development of democracy as the only possible space for the debate of ideas and mediation of human conflicts that are inherent to the freer egalitarian organization of human communities.

For Bauman, we would need to start with the premise that globalization is not a choice. We are all submitted to this process and this basically means the same thing for all of us. We are living through a process of globalization that divides us as well as unites us. In this global movement that we are all involved in, be it “*against our will, through designation or default*”, a globalized minority that freely circulates around the world excels. But the broader idea of freedom of movement is a mirage, a scarce product, distributed in an unequal way, revealing the elements of stratification in late modernity. We can see in this movement a progressive special segregation, separation and exclusion. Understanding these general characteristics is the basic condition necessary to deal with other challenges that are made manifest in the receptive point in the process of globalization where neo-tribal and fundamentalist trends emerge.

Bauman’s analysis proves itself to be in this sense, connected to an extensive and plural critical literature on the globalization process, which would be named as the reflexes of the crisis of contemporary democracy in the context of the undeniable conservative hegemony in the market societies. The challenge for the trends that bet their cards on a more inclusive democracy and that are opposed to the logic of progressive expansion of inequality are those that map out the process of the disaggregation and representation of social players that seek to discuss the possible signs of re-aggregation of a social and political field that would be able to support the agenda of human rights in the 21st century.

The academic and broader impact from Piketty (2014) important work can be explained partially by these signs of global discontentment along with evidence and the perceptions that are provoked by the growing inequality in the world. This process is diffused, incipient, and contradictory; but also, it reflects signs of organization and the articulation of demands for rights that are beyond the thresholds of traditional institutional policy, according to the description by Castells (2007; 2011), Piketty’s work returns to another level, in the context of the questioning of inequality, which are the academic debates on equality and justice. He duly advocates the idea that the issue of inequality and of redistribution is at the crux of the current political conflicts.

He discusses the choices related to the dimension of public actions of redistribution, bearing in mind that there is an ample debate that organizes these options, placing on one end, the theoretical defense of moderate action, limiting the instruments of action of the State, and on the other hand, the defense of a more incisive public action, with strong State action that

goes beyond only tax collection. These strong divergences on the dimension of political action reflect options related to economic and social mechanisms that act in the production or reduction of inequality. Such differences, however, do not pose any impediment to a reasonable theoretical consensus on basic principles of justice. In this consensus, the idea that inequalities that originate from the family or simply luck are highlighted, and therefore individuals cannot be held responsible, and they demand the action of the State to improve the conditions of that person or social group. (PIKETTY, 2014a). On this point, Piketty takes on a clear position in favor of more incisive political action, supported by the principles of justice formulated initially by Rawls (1971). This action is guided by the principle according to which each society must maximize the opportunities and minimum conditions supplied by their social system.

The data related to the evolution of inequality in this phase of ample hegemony from the financial and economic component in the process of globalization are clear, even for the wealthier and developed nations. The more recent data on the evolution in the last 25 years of the countries that are members of the Organization for Cooperation and Development – OECD – show that there has been an increase of seven times per nine times and a half, in the difference among the wealthiest 10% and the poorest 10% (Keeley, 2015). Since there is no regulatory force in the instruments of political mediation in the global, regional and local scope to deal adequately with this trend, it is possible to observe clear signs of questioning on the persistent growth of inequality in all of the regions under new forms of political action. This issue questions contemporary politics in the more developed and underdeveloped nations, in more deficient and consolidated democracies, besides being a source of concern in relation to the political leadership of closed regimes, as revealed in the excellent works of Zhang (2013) on the reflection and intervention of the decision makers in China in the articulation of the transformations of the governmental functions during the Era of economic reforms, which were articulated with the strategic concern on the risks of the growing rates of inequality.

Movements that are impelled by regional, religious and cultural identities are at the core of the political movements for recognition and inclusion. Old and new social movements raise the issue of inequality as a point of articulation for the political agenda. That is what happened, for example, in the Occupy movement first in the United States and later in other countries such as Spain, besides the huge mobilization of the “Arab Spring” that shook and

took down governments in the Middle East. It was no different in Brazil with the mobilizations of July of 2013, that still remain to be better understood as a phenomenon of questioning the contradictory changes in course, that challenge our capacity to find new democratic paths to overcome our difficult social, political and cultural reality.

3. The Brazilian case

The Brazilian challenges in respect to the tension between democracy and inequality present both the elements of this global trend as well as endogenous dimensions. A short explanation can exemplify this historical tension. The conflicts surrounding land, for example, would be a good place to start. There is abundant literature available in order to understand how this country was able to produce so much inequality and endemic violence, in a context of several initial comparative advantages (large territory and uncountable natural resources), and after almost two centuries of independence, how it still is a society with significantly high poverty indicators and low income per capita (middle income according to the average criteria of some international agencies).

There is a large amount of political and sociological literature that seeks to explain the Brazilian trajectory in comparison with others, especially the United States- which is comprehensible due to the similarities between both countries in size, as well as colonization and slavery experiences. The main bulk of these studies is internal and was structured from the so-called essay tradition from the 30s in the last century.

We also have the contributions from what we can call 'Brazilianist' schools of thought, that began to work on interpretations with an external gaze during the 20th century. During the 60s there was a lot of investment from the United States on these studies, especially after the Cuban revolution in 1959. This event increased the American interest on the subject and fostered academic incentives for research on the Latin American reality. Brazil became a study case in these terms, with lots of support through study grants for generating this research.

A study that has been overlooked from this time period that has interesting elements on the endogenous options responsible for a large amount of the country's economic backwardness is found in Leff (1991) work. This study interacts in a critical manner with a

vision that for a long time was consolidated in Brazilian literature on the reasons for our backwardness, and is mostly attributed to Caio Prado Jr. and Celso Furtado, that gave a lot of importance to the unequal commercial trade between the metropolis and the local elite, in which the latter were under benefited. Leff points out another interpretation that highlights the endogenous decisions from the elite that would later be reflected in the consolidation of low per capita income, with high rates of inequality.

It is along these same lines that an effort of historical research was carried out by Fragoso (1998), in which a reinterpretation is brought to light on the explanatory models of colonial economics, that reinforced the arguments on the endogenous accumulation and the weight of the internal decisions from the economic elite in the configuration of our post-independence society. This study presents exhaustive empirical data that demonstrate how part of commercial accumulation did not go to the metropole. In fact, it was reinvested here, provoking the diversification of the activities of the large businesses in commerce and finally, the emigration of those merchants to the profitable business of rural properties.

The issue of redistribution of assets is a central aspect of this analysis. In *Underdevelopment and Development in Brazil* (1991), Leff emphasizes the decisive weight of the distribution or restriction of access to the land asset in the differentiated trajectory of both countries in the process of opportunities that were opened to the black population and the newly arrived European immigrants, who in general, were also illiterate. This shows how in Brazil, the institutional political options drastically restricted access to land a maintained the predominant rule of the colonial period, which was abundant labor at a low cost. What was continued effectively for this new group of people, made up mostly ex-slaves and immigrants, was the classic sale of their labor through unfavorable conditions and degrading negotiations. In the United States, the opposite happened: the incomes from salaries increased, because although there was a strong influx of immigrants, the large land availability reduced the bargaining power of the land and industrial owners for hiring salary paid labor.

Leff's effort sought to answer a question that Celso Furtado himself made in his book, *Formação Econômica do Brasil* "Economic Formation of Brazil" (2007) about the motives that could explain why the United States was able to industrialize in the 19th century, closer to the European reality, meanwhile Brazil, in the 20th century, was still a very underdeveloped region. Furtado's elaborates this question while dismissing other superstitious and racist explanations related to an inferior climate and race. Leff goes to great lengths to answer

Furtado's questions, by reevaluating the obstacles to economic development before industrialization, which would occur only after the 1930 Revolution. He discusses arguments on the social and cultural conditions, imperialism, international trade, slavery, European immigration and the elastic supply of labor. He gives more importance to this last issue, since in a contest of rapid demographical growth, low educational levels persist. Meanwhile;

[...] throughout the entire century, unoccupied land continues to be abundant in Brazil. Apparently, this was not enough to neutralize the impacts of rapid demographic growth on the salaries and income distribution. Due to high demographical growth, labor continued to be abundant (and cheap) in relation to capital, and this situation has important economic and social consequences for Brazil (LEFF, 1991, pg. 150).

This partial and direct selection of the historical factors that helped to shape the current profile of Brazilian society is important to the debate on inequality. Obviously, it does not explain everything but it does carry some weight. Brazil is a rare case of a country that has had in its reach, an excessive amount of land and a population demanding access to this land. However, it has not been able to find political and institutional mechanisms to redistribute this property.

To the contrary, the main measures adopted after the transition from the slave regime to the paid labor in the 19th century always went in the sense to maintain the large land owners and create barriers for the expansion of small properties, and in this manner guaranteeing a legal mechanism to create a model that excludes the occupation of the territory, consolidating the practices that would complicate the emergence of capitalist work relations. (MENDES, 2009) The Land Law, from 1850, was a landmark in this process with impact on the following decades in regards to the large property profile of the country and the occupation of the territory. It broke away with the previous land concession policy, and centralized a huge amount of unclaimed land in the State and established that from that moment on, the access to those lands would only be done through a sale process. In practice, this law shut down the access of recently freed slaves to land, along with the immigrants, setting the tone for a system of protection to the interests of the large land owners and then the eventual slavery crisis.

This can be understood as a preventative measure created by the rural elite right at the first years of independence. Additional instruments facilitated the land owners of that time to falsify documents and title deeds to prove and amplify their properties. This was an endogenous decision made by the elites that is radically different from the *Homestead Act* from 1862 in the United States, that started in the direction of the concession of unclaimed lands, that attracted to the American Midwest millions of European immigrants, which had a direct impact on the negotiations surrounding paid labor, as Leff's study shows.

The conflicts surrounding a political agenda for land reform was intensified at the first half of the last century and was responsible for large scale violence and death in the field; this carries on until today. But from an objective point of view, it lost its historical and structural opportunity during the 50s, when most of the country's population was in rural areas. As the migration process from the fields to cities intensified and consolidated, a fact that is to blame for the inhuman living conditions in the peripheries of the large and medium sized cities, this agenda all but lost its position as a strategic solution.

Although there is still a significant amount of low income people that follow on in the political mobilization and fight for land in the last 50 years, in which the peak was during the years before the military coup of 1964 and during the comeback of the fight for democracy in the 80s, the democratization of land agenda no longer responds to the main issues raised by Leff. It would be unreasonable to suppose that even though the populations that live in the urban peripheries are denied acceptable material conditions to live in, that there will be a migration back to the field of today's generation whose grandparents and parents migrated from the field to the cities.

As is known that late industrialization occurs due to the wrong decisions made in the past, this ended up being imposed on the present, allowing for the accumulation of the terms described by Leff and Fragozo and the decisive State leadership. As if by luck, this same situation happened in all of Latin America. Given this context, national developmental paradigm was born.

The national-developmental model was influenced by the dominant ideas in the Economic Commission for Latin America (CEPAL). In the industrialization process of the 50s, 60s, and 70s from last century, this heterodox model launched the main principles for planning, and established the State as the main articulator for development, since there was a lot of doubt on the capacity of the private sector

being able to lead this process. Therefore, this model mirrored the wealthy countries in relation to the import substitute policy. The model from CEPAL was responsible for excellent growth rates, but did not affect at least three outstanding problems: inflation, economic inefficiency and the crystallization of inequality” (ALMEIDA, 2005, pp. 180-181).

With all its limitations, the fact is that when the national-developmental model collapsed it left the country with a fairly complex society. A very different profile than the rest of Latin America. It can be called a society at the periphery of capitalism, but with some indicators that should not be dismissed such as industry, services sector, university system and networks of research, size of the middle class, amongst others. As well as the size of the economy. The collapse of this model came at the same time as the end of the military regime and at the time of a new attempt at re-democratization.

4. Historical inequalities and democratization

The country went through a new constitutional process at the end of the military regime (1985). This process was concluded in the later years of the Cold War, still marked by high expectations on the production capacity and quick solutions for the problems and demands suffocated by the military dictatorship. As will be demonstrated further on, many of these demands were met, showing the strength of this new attempt of democratic reconstruction.

Other civilizational impasses, however, remained and in some cases, broadened and were reproduced, as for example, the violence indicators showed. One issue related to how to deal with these conflicts that was not debated was in regards to the fact that the country had entered into a more capitalist rationale, after opening their markets to international finance and after the monetary stabilization that happened in the 90s. Still, it was a capitalist rationale of the periphery, in which the economy was strongly associated to the State, as Brandão argues (2007). And what are the main features of this essentially unequal society that develops under this imposition of this new rationale? How did it react to this globalization process and carries in its womb internal contradictions from the internationalization of goods and services? Being that its strategic element is the controls of technological innovations, competition between multinational companies- with the support of their National States,

freedom of the circulation of capital and the national restriction (and practically the immobilization) of labor? (Bauman 1999, Brandão, 2007). The effects that persist throughout the 30 years process of democratic experimentalism are also contradictory, as Brandão (2007) argues. This is the argument that is stated here, and in so doing it is possible to identify examples of social experiences that share hypermodernity dilemmas along with colonial heritage; shy guarantee of basic civil rights, which are almost nonexistent to low income populations; more insecurity, harsh living conditions, fear and despair. While poverty is reduced, unacceptable levels of inequality remain.

We are not denying the visible progress that came about during this peripheral transition from underdevelopment to a fully capitalistic perspective, as Brandão upholds:

The country became a full flung capitalist society, and its most serious problems were not only inherited from the past, but they seemed from the capitalist methods of social organization. In this sense, it is undeniable that large social sectors- and not only amongst the dominant- have better lives than 30 years ago; still after 50 years, new shapes of injustice were added to the historical ones (pp.162-163).

Thus, the present dilemma stems from the premise that these new shapes of injustice that were added to the historical ones are not easily deflected by conciliations from the elite, which historically have been chosen to delay civilizational demands, as happened with the prolonged delay of the end of slavery. In a more open society with multiple channels of expression, the demands for more equality provoke tension in the political system. In the Brazilian case, the historical resistance of the elite and segments of the middle class that are resistant to changes that provide more equality tend to generate unimaginable deadlocks, that have the potential to put the entire democratic system on hold. For democracy to survive and mature, the current standard of inequality will have to be substantially overcome.

However, this will not be an easy task. History has shown that throughout the 20th century, the achievement of equal standards in democratic contexts are the exception, not the rule. For it to come about, strong political organization and favorable historical contexts must be in place. This allows for the equality perspective to prevail, as the experiences of strong states and systems of social well being in Europe and other countries demonstrate. (HOBSBAWM, 1990; ELEY, 2005).

The Brazilian experience of the last two decades, which was a period in which public policies that focused on the low-income population were developed and in effect had positive results on poverty reduction, confirm that little has changed in terms of inequality. Quantitative data from a recent study from Souza and Medeiros (2015) demonstrates that the distribution of income at the base of the social pyramid does not alter inequality significantly, due to the historical maintenance of income concentration in the hands of the wealthier groups:

Income inequality was stable between 2006 and 2012. Different from what sample survey data alone shows, there are no major changes in the Gini coefficient when tax and sample survey data are combined to form a complete distribution of incomes among adults. The reduction of inequality in the bottom of the distribution was offset by the slight rise in top income shares revealed by the tax data. (pg.125). First, inequality in Brazil has been very high during the nine decades since 1928. On average, about 15% of all income accrued to the top 1%. Their income share fluctuated between 10% and 20% most of the time. Yet, this is just a lower bound. At least since the 1970's about one-third of total income is non-taxable or taxed separately at preferential rates. It is then reasonable to conclude that actual levels of inequality are much higher and that the concentration of income at the top was persistent over the 20th century (pg.127).

Our hypothesis is that the current political tension in the country has roots in growing social unrest and dissatisfaction with this standard of inequality, however there are no clear political alternatives yet on how to breakthrough this barrier. Adopting the hypothesis that the survival of Brazilian democracy depends on the establishment of a minimum reasonable solution in order to overcome the current standard of inequality, is the reason for which here, we seek to map out what would be the main obstacles and possible paths to overcome them.

An important starting point for this assessment is the trajectory of the last experience of the reconstruction of democracy in the country in the last three decades, after 20 years of the military regime. It is considered positive, since it was the longest period of continuous democratic alteration in the country. In this experience of 30 years, all of the most representative political forces had the opportunity to compete in free elections, to win and put into practice their political proposals; in other words, from the point of view of the rules of the game and the nonexistence of any constraints or restrictions to the dispute for democracy, in the polyarchic model that Dahl (1971) developed, we complete the transition process of

democracy. But today's scenario points to the fact that this model fell into a deep crisis as it was not able to meet democratic demands from Brazilian Society for more equality, as those seen in the diffused political demands in the 2013 protests.

After 2003, we went through the greatest test of this democracy with the arrival of the government of the party that was the leader of the democratic reconstruction process, to the opposition of the leftist party. We certainly cannot state that the socialist leftist, reformist or social democratic party represented by the Workers Party (*Partido dos Trabalhadores* – PT) came into power in Brazil to implement their project as happened in other experiences throughout the 20th century. Beyond the different historical context that limits the greater process of change, we must take into account the Brazilian political system- characterized by 'coalition presidential system'- that is structured by a fragmented party framework where the winning party of the presidential elections rarely reaches 20% of the parliament. In order to govern, it is mandatory to set up a frequently contradictory coalition in ideological terms. Despite this, the party that leads the coalition still has power and in a general sense, is capable of guiding the public policies and strategic choices.

This coalition that was led by PT governed Brazil for 3 mandates between 2003 and 2014, and conquered another mandate for 2015-2018. The coalition is in crisis and the Workers Party is in an even greater crisis due to involvement in corruption and the loss of credibility of their political discourse and economic proposals. The mandate of the president of the Republic, Dilma Rousseff, is temporarily interrupted due to a controversial democratic process of impeachment. A final decision should be reached through a vote at the Federal Senate in around August. A classic coup is not amongst the alternatives after Dilma Rousseff reaches the end of her mandate, as has historically been the case in the region. On the other hand, the criticism of the fragility of the legal arguments used to justify the impeachment are not merely political, but casuistry.

It is a fact, however, that the government led by the Workers Party fell apart from the inside, putting it at the center of a situation of loss of legitimacy and the conditions needed to keep on governing, as Naim (2013) describes in *The end of power*. Despite the way that this more immediate conjuncture plays out, we watch the end of a political cycle. This cycle is closed not only due to the deadlocks that were created by coalition under the PT's leadership. The political and economic analysis that dominate the debate in the media, and also in the academic field concentrate on the errors of the economic choices taken and in the visions

related to the insertion of the country in globalization. With no disregard to this debate, which is certainly important, it is necessary to go beyond it, and investigate the structural aspects that are relocated in another level of the current conjuncture, starting with the demands that come into play related to rights and equality. In this sense, the closing of this cycle indicates with more emphasis that the nonexistence of a political agenda that is able to respond to these demands, and still, inevitably, indicates the necessity of a formation of a new coalition that is able to propose a new agenda for the country.

The current interim and probable definite government until 2018 will not dispose of the legitimacy to point out this agenda of changes. Probably what will happen is that it will continue as a fragile government that will keep on making contradictory concessions in order keep on governing.

We expect that the democratic learning process of the last three decades and the economic potential of the country along with the reasonable institutional framework of the State will supply an agenda solution and the emergence of a new coalition that is able to provide the necessary leadership. The institutional conditions for this effect, however, need to be built, as they are not clear. It is always possible to mobilize institutional and symbolic instruments of power to maintain the essential *status quo*, according to the Brazilian historical tradition of highly concentrated economic wealth, political capital, as well as human and cultural capital that is generated by society as a whole. The price of this option is the coexistence of a violent society, profoundly unequal and perplex when facing the societal changes in course. This is a price that need not be paid and would not even be the case if there was the preponderance of a minimal strategic consensus as a result of a more mature political debate.

In this sense, a constructive and plural vision on our democratic experience of these last three decades may reveal progress, backtracks and crystallized resistance, that mask the demands for a more democratic, inclusive and tolerant society. It is not in any way an easy task, because there are many uncontrollable variables that are mainly exogenous. It is a huge challenge to negotiate internal pacts in a world in which national mediation resources are more and more fragile. The existence of a greater crisis that covers all societies is not an impediment to the redesign of democratic policies and pacts that are inclusive for certain national communities.

5. The end of a cycle and new challenges

As a preliminary balance of the 30 years of democracy in the country some of the central aspects that deserve more attention as far as the research agenda that is concerned with new paths for the renovation of the democratic agenda. We can point out five preliminary aspects: 1) Valuing and the deepening of the institutional process; 2) Universal and reparatory public policies; 3) the articulation between civil and political rights and an agenda of reduction of inequalities; 4) rethinking of the productive base and the country's international insertion; 5) modernize the political system and amplify the mechanisms of debate and the circulation of ideas.

The current Brazilian political situation is tense. The political system, according to the opinion of a good amount of political analysts, is in a state of collapse. A reflection of this tension is the emergence of aggressive conflicts on social networks or those that are for now, isolated in public locations. In this scenario, it is important to look toward the positive aspect of the development of institutions and society itself, in regards to the questioning of the historical conflict between the private and public spheres, that challenges all of the democratic societies, as Bobbio (2000) argues. It is important to register, for example, that many of the cases of corruption that became public in the last few years is due to the process of modernization of the institutions of the State in its various levels (Judiciary, the Public Prosecutor's Office, the system of fiscal control, among others) that provided grater control and inspection of the relations between the State (through which the greater amount of the economy of the country passes) and the private world and the political world. These institutions are working despite their failures and limitations. However, it is fundamental to value this process of institutional construction in a country that is marked by ruptures in its democratic order. To recognize that this process is effective in some dimension and that possible solutions may arise from it is the first step.

The conquest in the articulation and development of a network of public policies in that last 30 years is another aspect that deserves a pondered analysis, to identify the progress, the setbacks, the tensions and the blockages. In the second half of the 80's of the last century the country experienced a deep economic crisis with the exhaustion of the economic and political options of the military regime. The crisis of this period overflowed into a social crisis with the occurrence of many acts of civil disobedience and vindications such as supermarket robberies, and thefts in the transport of cargo, along with occupations in rural and urban areas,

among others. All of this discontentment was channeled into the process of the formulation of the new constitution of 1987-1988. The new Constitution that entered into force on the 5th of October of 1988, elaborated before the dismantling of real socialism in Eastern Europe, rejected significant proposals of the redistribution of assets (land reform, for example), but pointed to a generous pact of the construction of new economic, social and cultural rights, besides formally reestablishing civil and political rights.

A hopeful agenda with a lot of expectation emerges as the result of this new constitutional process and inaugurates a new attempt for democratic construction in the country. And despite the persistence of the economic crisis – which will progressively demand the search for new paths due to the exhaustion of the national developmental model which became unfeasible in the globalization process – the democratic experience is effective in many areas. A significant contingency of the population begins to revel in the rights through the social security systems (especially in the rural areas) and of social assistance. The universal health and education policies, although they are low in quality, they do not eliminate the efforts of a greater coverage and the beginning of a process of continuous evaluation in the educational system and the inclusive and innovative conception of the Unified Health System – *Sistema Único de Saúde*. With the economic stability that was reached in the middle of the decade of the 90's in the last century, the country began the structuring of a network of social protection, by articulating focal reparatory policies along with the universal policies.

They are the conquests of democracy that do not rupture the standard of inequality in a consistent way, but that still need to be valued and improved. There was an expectation that with the rise to power of the leftist party in the government for the first time in the country, that an agenda would be set up that could tackle and face in a deeper way the inequalities that generate so much tension in Brazilian democracy. The Lula and Dilma governments did approach some points of tension, but they did not outline structural postures, such as for example, the redistribution of assets for a more equal society, as did the reformist left during the 20th century. Some sectorial policies were amplified, as well as the implementation of others that were important for the Brazilian societies. Among these are the quotas for public universities, the increase of support to family farming, social programs, and the valuing of the minimum salary. They were important gains, such as the stabilizing of the Brazilian currency, provided by the real plan, in the beginning of the 90's. They are gains for society and democracy, fruit of a clear singling out of rights, given through the constitution of 1988.

Alongside these positive points that we can emphasize, drawbacks and inertia in other areas of rights and public policies may be pointed out, such as in public security, environment, land reform, and indigenous lands. But considering that the gains and progress in social indicators were big, and, yet, in the period strong economic expansion due to the commodities cycle- a good amount of that happened during the Lula government and in the first two years of Dilma's mandate- the income of the poorer segments of the population increased considerably⁸, how can we explain the political radicalness that began to take over the country, after the protests of July 2013? Part of this explanation may come from the electoral dispute itself, which was strongly impacted by the evidence of a systemic network of corruption that brought so much discredit to the political system, beyond what was historically well known.

But the hypothesis that we intend to explore here- although it does not despise that explanation- goes along the lines of trying to understand the changes in society that are related to the conflicts that emerge between connected and disconnected factors, starting with the issues such as new channels of information, consumerist values, greater comprehension of the relations of inequality, exhaustion of public policies of self-reproduction of privileges, political crisis, the crisis of institutions, among others.

What seems to have happened were silent movements within society, which indicated new demands for political renovation and the expansion of rights. In this sense, many of the rhetoric disputes and symbolic disputes that happened during this period seem to be disconnected from the deeper issues that challenge us. They do not dialogue with the root of the tectonic movements of a complex society, that as it gathers more information, demands new rights and services, but does not find decent paths for deeper reforms in the direction of a civil level of equality and citizenship. Here therefore, we reject a catastrophic forecast and instead bet on the construction of political alternatives, and attempt to map out what could be the main outlines of a new agenda that is able to articulate civil and political rights and the strong reduction of inequalities in the current Brazilian reality.

A crucial issue in order to face this challenge is linked to the need to rethink the productive base and the international insertion of Brazil. The excessive prejudice and ideology of the debate about alternatives for the country in the context of globalization has provoked huge damage to society. Extreme positions that go from the complete denial of the possibility of the State developing a strategic role in the articulation of development, to the

idea that the State can perform all the coordination of the agenda, as what occurred during the national developmental period, contaminate the alternatives. Instead of this polarity what we need is the construction of a strategic consensus that can comprehend the limits and possibilities of all the players.

It is necessary to articulate long-term projects and not to create illusions based on favorable economic circumstances, which are not sustainable as what happened in recent years during the cycle of high demand for commodities in the more intense period of ‘Chinese globalization’. Of course, that is not wrong and any government should take advantage of those opportunities. To the contrary, they should be used to support initiatives that can bring the country to break away from the predominance of the export of primary goods. In this period, the government forwarded some megalomaniac-like proposals that are typical of the military regime, with a focus on large projects, with very little concern for the protection of the environment and the rights of indigenous and traditional peoples. The opportunity to invest in public policies of innovation was lost, as well as policies of transition to a low carbon economy, the structuring of inclusive entrepreneurship, support to the creation of medium sized ventures with the capacity for insertion in global value chains, institutional modernization of the public universities, among other measures.

At last, we have the challenge to modernize the political system, to open the mechanisms of debate and the circulation of ideas. The defense of the democratic legacy of these three decades- the longest period of democratic regulation in the history of the country- does not mean being blind to the limits of the current political model and its legitimacy crisis. There is a generalized discredit with politics in Brazil, but this is not exclusively an internal problem and it can be observed in other democracies.

However, our problems are very far from suggesting that the political system is the only one responsible for this crisis. The system allowed the alteration of the government through all of the relevant political lines that were organized in the process of re-democratization. It certainly is now in collapse and needs to be reviewed, but the greater dilemma goes way beyond: we do not have a minimum consensus on a project for the nation that can prepare us for the gigantic task of producing wealth, maintaining and increasing rights in a globalized world, in which decisive variables such as education and innovation, for example, have a lot of weight. Our performance in these areas is pitiful and we need new institutional mechanisms for debate in order to revert the deficit of strategic formulation.

The problems and challenges are gigantic. But the only path out is renovation of politics and hope. The only thing worse than the exit of the current political system would be its criminalization as the discourse of some minor sectors suggest that despise democratic rules, that at this moment, for obvious reasons, finds echoes in common sense and due to the distaste and rejection of corruption. It is time to look again at the idea that our society, in its majority, supports inequality and corruption. We need to politicize the fight against corruption and praise the work of the bodies responsible for the processes of investigation and punishment as an institutional advance and not the persecution of a certain political party/current.

This process of questioning the political structures that merely reproduce and that are addicted to power is a worldwide phenomenon. It is the natural result of the emergence of a society in a network that demands the updating and the capacity of dialogue of the institutions that are responsible for taking care of social demands. Also, it displays attempts of social re-aggregation in order to maintain the perspective of sociability. Different than what conservatism defends, it does not exclude the reflection of agendas of democratization that were not yet performed. To the contrary, it offers the reconstruction of meaning and replaces all of the vindications that are linked to the values of freedom and equality, despite the hegemonic rationale of production.

In any case, the difficulties for a transition toward reaching a more equal society in the country will be huge. As argued, the countries that did reach more equal levels, did so in very specific historical contexts that are difficult to reproduce in the current stage of globalization, which greatly reduces the regulatory capacity of the State. In the domestic sphere, Brazil's historical trajectory is also negative, as explained in the redistribution of assets issue, such as access to land. Part of the current political crisis can also be explained by the social resistance of the middle class and privileged sectors in regards to the weak reform proposals that were carried out by the experience under the Worker's Party government. Therefore, although there is a real demand for more equality, though fragmented mobilizations in the midst of society, Brazilian democracy seems to still be far from a level in which a more effective agenda will be brought to the fore, that would seek to reduce the extension of inequality in the previously mentioned terms, as for example, by Piketty (2014) and Atkinson (2015).

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