

## 16. From a Dilemma to a Sociological Problem of Formation

Jessé Souza and José Maurício Domingues have been moving with and against the previous interpreters of Brazil in order to articulate their own interpretation. In this sense, they expose lines of continuity at the same time that they mark specific discontinuities in relation to them. Ultimately, my position is that they provide critiques of modernization and modernizing perspectives on the formative process of Brazil.

The problematization I have been delineating here is particularly indebted to Sergio Tavolaro's texts. His efforts also move with and against many of the interpreters of Brazil I have already discussed, and, similarly to Jessé and José Maurício, Sergio proposes an interpretation of modernity in Brazil that implies an alternative interpretation of modernity as whole. That said, I will now follow closely some of his texts.

The first sustained published engagement with this problematization came in 2005. The very first lines of the text make explicit the contours of the "dilemma" at stake: "what is the status of modernity in Brazil? Is there a Brazilian modernity?" (Tavolaro, 2005, p.5). To his reflection, Sergio identifies two main approaches: the "sociology of dependence", in which he includes Caio Prado Jr., Florestan Fernandes, Fernando Henrique Cardoso and Octávio Ianni; and the "sociology of the patriarchal-patrimonial heritage", in which he includes Gilberto Freyre, Sérgio Buarque de Holanda, Raymundo Faoro and Roberto DaMatta (see Tavolaro, 2005, pp.5-6).<sup>673</sup> In both approaches, according to him, contemporary Brazilian society is never conceived "on equal foot" in relation to "the so-called central modern societies": for the first one, the economically dependent condition of Brazil is an obstacle to its total integration into the group of central modern countries, while, to the second, Brazilian past diverges from, and precludes the formation of, what has consolidated as a sociability pattern in central societies (see, for instance, Tavolaro, 2005, p.6; and Tavolaro, 2011, p.27). In this same vein, Sergio argues that an "essentialist tonality" cuts across both currents, implying that "aspects at first seen

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<sup>673</sup> To reiterate, I am not concerned with challenging Sergio Tavolaro's interpretation of the names mentioned, but to discuss how his interpretation of Brazil is built from them.

as historically constituted are subtly displaced from the dynamic and multidimensional contexts from which they originated, and transformed into 'independent variables', supposedly capable of explaining, in any moment of Brazilian history, the kind of sociability consolidated here" (Tavolaro, 2005, p.6; see also Tavolaro, 2008, p.126; Tavolaro, 2011, p.28). In another text, he says that both approaches share a diagnosis and the corresponding "disorienting feeling" that contemporary Brazil is "neither traditional nor fully-modern" (Tavolaro, 2008, p.110, italics dropped). Overall, both approaches endorse the "thesis of the exceptionality of the experience of modernity in Brazil" or, as he also formulates, the "thesis of Brazilian singularity".

Three brief remarks before I proceed. First, Sergio refers to that as one of the main "dilemmas" of "Brazilian sociology". My previous discussions have suggested that this is a wider problem, running across different fields of knowledge and requiring, indeed, the challenge of "disciplinary" differentiations and specializations. Second, I have insisted as well that this problematization is not exclusively "academic", "intellectual" - neither it is, to be clear, restricted to "common sense" or "popular imagination". Rather, it permeates contemporary Brazil. The notion of "interpretations of Brazil", as I understand it, does not necessarily correspond to "academic" articulations, even if I am dealing here only with texts that would fit immediately fit into this category. Finally, instead of "dilemma", I would rather suggest that there is an "aporia" - an "aporetic performance" - at stake. All these three remarks will continue to be reinforced as I move along.

The central move in Sergio Tavolaro's texts is intrinsically linked to the "fundamental pillars" that in his view structure the "pattern of modern sociability": social differentiation/complexification, secularization, and separation between the private and the public. These are the pillars that form the "common denominator among Karl Marx, Max Weber, Émile Durkheim, Georg Simmel and some of the most influential contemporary sociologists, such as Talcott Parsons, Niklas Luhmann and Jürgen Habermas", constituting the predominant "epistemic reference to the sociological productions on a global scale", a "hegemonic sociological discourse of modernity" (Tavolaro, 2005, p.18, n.3). The identification of this "epistemic reference" is crucial to Sergio's overall problematization, since it allows at least three subsequent interrelated steps: first, the assessment of the

limitations of those two dominant approaches to Brazilian modernity; second, the proposition of a different interpretative frame to modernity (in Brazil and elsewhere); and, third, the overcoming of those limitations.

Sergio Tavolaro recalls that Jessé Souza mobilized the notion of "sociology of inauthenticity" to refer to the interpretations of Brazil by Gilberto Freyre, Sérgio Buarque de Holanda, Raymundo Faoro and DaMatta; then, he proposes to extend the qualification of "inauthenticity" to the other approach, the "Brazilian sociology of dependence". As I said, according to Sergio Tavolaro, both approaches take for granted the reference of a "central modernity" and, from that, end up considering Brazilian modernity "incomplete", "imperfect", "distorted", "deviant" (see Tavolaro, 2005, pp.6-7). In this vein, and having in mind the "hegemonic sociological discourse of modernity", Sergio argues that the interpretations comprising the "sociology of the patriarchal-patrimonial heritage" implicitly or explicitly claim that, first, "in contemporary Brazil, state, economy and civil society have never been able to be fully differentiated and, this way, to become dynamic according to their own logics and codes"; and, second, that "the public spheres remained subsumed to and delineated by personal and private codes", often relegating "the impersonal and rationalized rules" (Tavolaro, 2005, p.10). The "sociology of dependence", in turn, instead of focusing on the Iberian reminiscences in the Brazilian formative process, assumes that elements of the traditional order have been eradicated, but, at the same time, that modern patterns of sociability have not been consolidated. In Brazil, the argument goes, more frequently than in "central countries", the state would necessarily intervene "both in economy and in politics", in order to face structural deficiencies and the lack of autonomy on the part of social sectors. As a result, Brazilian modernity would be nothing but "peripheral" as opposed to "central modernities" (see Tavolaro, 2005, pp.10-1).<sup>674</sup>

Sergio Tavolaro identifies in both approaches, after all, a certain shared diagnosis: the three pillars of modern sociability would not have been consolidated in Brazil as they have in "central modern countries" (see Tavolaro, 2005, p.11). As he puts elsewhere, no matter which "independent variable" is considered (the

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<sup>674</sup> In other texts, Sergio Tavolaro relates these two approaches and the three fundamental pillars of modernity to the issue of "citizenship" in Brazil, where he sees similarly the kind of essentialization of an independent variable that he raises to the discussion of "modernity" (see, for instance, Tavolaro, 2009; Tavolaro and Tavolaro, 2010; and Tavolaro 2011, especially chs. II and III).

patriarchal-patrimonial heritage or the dependent position in the international economic order), some similarities are evident: "[s]tate, market and civil societal institutions and organizations are seen as considerably dedifferentiated", with the prevalence of the state over the other spheres; the "normative order ruling over social relations is said to be only partially secularized", so that non-secular worldviews and traditional patterns of coexistence remain as references to daily life; and the public and the private domains are seen as "barely divided", since certain private interests sometimes prevail over social order and the public sphere is not strong enough to effectively promote the dispute among different demands and interests (see Tavolaro, 2008, p.126). In other words, by taking for granted the "hegemonic sociological discourse of modernity", those interpreters could only arrive at the conclusion that Brazilian modernity is, in fact, a "peripheral" or "semi" modernity. In Sergio's words, "[t]he classical sociology and our sociology of inauthenticity operate thus as self-fulfilling prophecies: by trying to explain the 'center', the 'margin' is reaffirmed as the deviation from the former, and vice-versa, with no space for questionings" (Tavolaro, 2005, p.13).<sup>675</sup>

Having set the limitations of those interpretations of Brazil, Sergio Tavolaro proposes an alternative interpretative frame, aiming at escaping from that "sociological dilemma". In this sense, he proposes that modernity should be conceived "as a kind of sociability that is historical and *contingent* (since it stems from constant disputes among various projects), *multifaceted* and that *tends to be global*" (Tavolaro, 2005, p.11, italics in the original). While the contingent character works towards the escape from any essentializing aspect of Brazilian modernity, the multifaceted character pluralizes the possible patterns of modern sociability. With that move, Sergio does not aim at dismissing the fundamental pillars he ascribes to modernity, but rather he proposes to see them in terms of their variations in different national contexts: "these variations are experienced not only in the so-called 'late modern societies', but also in the 'central societies'" (Tavolaro, 2005, p.12). In other words, there are indeed varied patterns of social differentiation/complexification, of secularization, and of separation between the

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<sup>675</sup> Elsewhere, one can see a Table in which Sergio includes the interpreters associated to each of the two approaches according to their conceptions related to the three fundamental pillars identified by Sergio (see Tavolaro, 2008, p.126; and Tavolaro, 2011, pp.52-3). A similar Table, but in relation to "citizenship", can be seen at Tavolaro (2011, p.74).

private and the public, that are formed through continuous and contingent disputes for leadership among different projects, interests, claims, worldviews (see Tavolaro, 2005, p.13).

Hence, as I have anticipated above, Sergio makes a triple move: he identifies the limitations of the main approaches of Brazilian sociology of inauthenticity, he proposes an alternative interpretative frame for modernity in general - therefore also for modernity in Brazil - and he goes beyond those limitations, by emphasizing the historical character of modernity and the contingent disputes around leadership in societies. It seems plausible to say that this triple move enables a double comparative move is also at state: societies are compared to the pillars that work as parameters of assessment of modern sociability; and societies are compared to each other.<sup>676</sup> More precisely in relation to Brazil, this interpretative frame is helpful, according to him, in rejecting the notion of a "singular" Brazilian modernity - indelibly marked either by a persistent patriarchal-patrimonial heritage or by an unchanging structurally dependent condition. To be clear, at stake thus is not only an alternative interpretation of the formative process that has led Brazil to be what it is now, but an alternative interpretation to the potential transformations in the future of this formative process: it is the competition among projects, interests and claims that carry varied patterns of sociability eventually institutionalized (see Tavolaro, 2005, p.16).

These disputes are not interpreted from an exclusively national point of view. As I have pointed out above, modernity is taken by Sergio as increasingly global. Hence, to him, "the hypothesis of the existence of 'national routes towards modernity' have been showing itself increasingly problematic even when it refers only and exclusively to the early moments of modern experience" (Tavolaro, 2005, p.16). A historical expansion is noted by Sergio, when he states that modern societal forms have been each time more capable of "penetrating to most diverse territories and social experiences beyond the local and national boundaries" (Tavolaro, 2005,

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<sup>676</sup> This double move enables Sergio to insert a series of tables in his text, placing different countries in different historical moments, in order to evaluate the specific quality of each of those three patterns. For instance, the post-II World War Germany is said to have "accentuated secularization" (pattern of secularization), "social democracy" (pattern of social differentiation) and "public as general will" (pattern of separation of the public from the private); Brazil, from 1964 to 1985, is said to have experienced "publicly active religion" (pattern of secularization), "authoritarian order" (pattern of social differentiation) and "public controlled by the state" (pattern of separation of the public from the private) (see Tavolaro, 2005, pp.14-5).

p.16). This leads Sergio, moreover, to challenge the very hierarchy between "center" and "periphery", since, "in global conditions, although the so-called 'central modern societies' can still be labeled the 'historical initiators' of modernity, they can no more be conceived as the exclusive propagators and disseminators of modern sociability" (Tavolaro, 2005, p.17). Despite far from neglecting the asymmetrical character of globalization, Sergio poses that no reception process is merely passive; no receiver is "inauthentic" as opposed to an "authentic" center of irradiation; and those that receive are also able to exert an impact upon the so-called "center". In other words, Sergio claims that the production and dissemination of modernity have been "de-centralized", in such a way that the attribution of qualities such as "incomplete", "deviant", "imperfect", "inauthentic" to "peripheral" or "semi-modernities", becomes contested.

The global scope of modernity is tied to Sergio's claim, following Jessé Souza, that since the XIX century Brazilian society is organized around "a cognitive and practical-moral universe that is *modern by definition*" (Tavolaro, 2005, p.17, italics added; see also Tavolaro, 2011, pp.57-8).<sup>677</sup> Once modernity is established, levels - local, regional, national - become interconnected to processes that go beyond their boundaries. Sergio Tavolaro builds his framework in order to enable the identification of the operation of the fundamental pillars of modernity in different parts of the world - in his case, more specifically in Brazil. As he puts elsewhere, "more than a Brazilian dilemma, the experience of modernity in Brazil seems to be a problem of sociological nature" (Tavolaro, 2011, p.193). In short, his interpretation of Brazil points to a formative process that has already achieved a modern condition, so that any comparison now takes place among variations upon modern patterns.<sup>678</sup>

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<sup>677</sup> The modern cognitive universe is that in which "science and other disenchanting conceptions of the world and explanatory systems occupy the most privileged places in interpretative efforts and in other attempts at defining what is 'reality'"; the modern practical-moral universe relates to "the set of normative precepts and codes that help in conceiving how 'social reality' should be", these precepts being, in modern times, "human constructions rationally justified and opened to modification by the society to which they refer" (Tavolaro, 2005, p.19, n.16).

<sup>678</sup> In another text, Sergio proposes three steps to systematize his alternative interpretation of modernity in Brazil: the first step is the notion of "varying patterns" or, as he also calls, a sort of "prismatic approach on modernity"; the second seeks a "truly cosmopolitan understanding of modernity-globalization relations", overcoming the initiator-late comer trope that usually frames those relations; finally, the third step "brings history back in", that is, stresses that social dynamics is contingent on social disputes, with no prior independent variables to be unveiled (see Tavolaro, 2008, p.127).

Recently, Sergio Tavolaro revisited the "thesis of Brazilian singularity". What is crucial for me in Sergio's effort is the different emphasis he places in the relation between that hegemonic discourse and the interpretations of Brazilian modernity. If, on the one hand, he mentions that recent challenges to that discourse have led to the questioning of that thesis of Brazilian singularity, on the other hand he proposes another angle to the problematization:

perhaps with some irony..., it is possible to identify in the most renowned interpretative works on 'Brazilian peculiarity' - the same that carry central elements of that thesis - anticipations to contemporary critiques of the discourse of modernity. The possibilities of these anticipations are associated to the non-hegemonic position of enunciation of the interpreters, which enabled them to envisage the modern experience from angles that are uncommon to the hegemonic positions (Tavolaro, 2014, p.635).

This is a major move towards the problematization I am proposing in this text. Instead of being only expressions of a "peripheral" or "incomplete" modernity, those interpretations of Brazil are now also potential sites to challenge the hegemonic discourse. In my terms here, they are modernizing texts and also critiques of modernization.

I will make four brief remarks on what was said so far, before I proceed to other aspects of Sergio's texts. First, Sergio Tavolaro widens the scope of the texts he deals with, but remains circumscribed to the "academic-intellectual" domain of the "interpretations of Brazil". As I have already stressed, I am too circumscribed to this domain in this text. What is worth stressing, however, is that Sergio's recent effort goes in line with my suggestion in this text; that is to say, the expression "interpretations of Brazil" goes beyond its "academic-intellectual" expression.<sup>679</sup> A future exploration of this suggestion is a pressing need, problematizing aspects such as the "ivory tower" perspective on the "academic sphere"; the separation between

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<sup>679</sup> In another text, Sergio Tavolaro notes that "reaching for modernity" is, in a certain way, an "obsession that crisscrosses and permeates the public imagery of a wide range of sectors in Brazilian contemporary society" (Tavolaro, 2008, pp.109-10).

a high, erudite and a low, popular culture; the distinction between so-called "scientific" analysis and "non-scientific" interpretations; among others. Second, when Sergio brings to the table that a "non-hegemonic" position of enunciation enables alternative perspectives in relation to "modern experience", one should avoid the risk of an essentializing view of this "position". The "non-hegemonic" position can be occupied anywhere geographically speaking - on that, I refer the reader to my discussion on "place" at the beginning of this text (see ch.2 above).

Third, when Sergio points to potential "anticipations" of critiques of modernity, I would resist the temporal tone of his interpretation. To speak in terms of "anticipation" can imply a teleological understanding of the production of knowledge that would be worth questioning in the first place. It is certainly the case, on the other hand, that to replace "anticipations" by a vocabulary linked to "structural" problems could ultimately relapse into an ahistorical conception that would also need to be problematized. For sure, not all historical (or, for that matter, diachronic) interpretation is teleological; and not all structural (or, for that matter, synchronic) interpretation is ahistorical. In any case, my point is to warn against potentially problematic implications of thinking in terms of "anticipation". Finally, still in the topic of "anticipations", the very notions of an "epistemic reference" and a "hegemonic sociological discourse of modernity" that would only in a later stage be challenged by "recent" texts, cannot imply that these "classical texts" themselves, such as Max Weber's, Karl Marx's and Émile Durkheim's, to name but those Sergio himself mentions, are potential sites of problematization of something such as "an epistemic reference" or a "hegemonic discourse". At the same time, however, it is indeed the case that those texts have been mobilized as hegemonic references. I am pointing out, then, that to make the latter claim is crucially different from claiming that those texts form in themselves an "hegemonic reference" only *later* and from the *outside* challenged. That said, I will go back to Sergio's texts.

After approaching briefly some interpretations of Brazil that have discussed the transformative appropriations of "European" cognitive, practical-moral, aesthetic, and institutional references to Brazilian condition, Sergio poses three general considerations.<sup>680</sup> First, he raises the relation established in those

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<sup>680</sup> More precisely, Sergio mentions texts by Silvio Romero, Sérgio Buarque de Holanda, João Cruz Costa, Roberto Schwarz, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, Roberto Ventura, among others.



interpretations between, on the one hand, metal and normative universal forms and, on the other hand, concrete social experiences. Put in those terms, "when deployed or applied to other societal configurations, those forms of thinking and acting would inevitably need to be somehow adjusted, or even 'deformed' or 'distorted'" (Tavolaro, 2014, p.639). Second, a national frame remains central to those interpretations of Brazil, in such a way that it is established "a silent pact - and very effective in its interpretative effects - between the observer and its object, united by the previous and indisputable existence of a certain national life (often shared by both)" (Tavolaro, 2014, p.639). The combination of elements from "central countries" and elements that are peculiar to "peripheral countries" leads to the affirmation of a "singularity" that is both the starting and the end points of the interpretation. Finally, the distinction between producers and receivers leads to the assumption that there is some kind of "intimate connection between 'original ideas and references of modernity' and 'central societies'" (Tavolaro, 2014, p.639). The general picture is that a dissonance is reiterated between "central societies" and their others. Hence, despite important differences, sometimes even incommensurable, among interpretations of Brazil across various fields of knowledge, some regularities can be identified. This is the core of Sergio Tavolaro's problematization.

In this text, as in the previous one, Sergio identifies fundamental pillars of modernity. But, this time, instead of three, the "hegemonic sociological discourse of modernity" brings five of them: in addition to those already mentioned, now phrased as social differentiation/complexification, societal secularization, and disjunction between the private and the public, he adds the emotional economy anchored in a "centered/indivisible subjectivity" and the separation between nature and culture (see Tavolaro, 2014, p.666, n.2).<sup>681</sup> In respect to these five elements, the "thesis of Brazilian singularity" exhibit the following characteristics (see Tavolaro, 2014, pp.642-4). First, Brazilian society is often conceived as socially undifferentiated, mainly in terms of the social, economic, political, and cultural and intellectual spheres. Second, it is a not-fully rationalized society, which implies that Brazil has not supposedly witnessed a complete transition from a traditional to a post-traditional order. Third, the public and the private have not been detached from

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<sup>681</sup> In a 2013 text, Sergio stipulates four elements to the sociological discourse of modernity, the "disjunction between nature and society" being added to the three previously articulated (see Tavolaro, 2013, p.296, pp.311-4).

each other, therefore conserving patriarchal, personalistic and/or particularistic values that preclude the formation of solid impersonal and egalitarian patterns of sociability. Fourth, the emotional economy is distinct from modern patterns, since it remains the image of "a psychic structure that lacks internal profoundness, the main reason for the absence of a fully centered subjectivity" (Tavolaro, 2014, p.644). Being responsible for the obstacles to the internalization of methodic and disciplined behaviors, this psychic structure would hamper the consolidation of the chain linking impersonal, egalitarian and universalist rules of coexistence to key modern institutions, such as the rational state, the capitalist economy and the public democratic sphere. Finally, five, Brazilian society would still be composed by some segments that have not ruptured with nature: "[i]n virtue of a set of aspects - technical, symbolic, aesthetical, organic etc, combined with one another or not -, it is argued that wide sectors of Brazilian population have not fully accomplished this rupture" (Tavolaro, 2014, p.644), in such a way that some collective and psychic dynamics would still be subsumed under aspects of the "natural world" - in short, the dichotomy culture/nature or society/nature has been incompletely delineated in Brazil. In sum, those five aspects constitute the core of the "thesis of Brazilian societal singularity" and imply a gap between Brazil and "central modern countries".

After defining this core, Sergio brings to his text some challenges recently raised by thinkers from different parts of the world to the "hegemonic sociological discourse of modernity". In his view, the main elements challenged relate to the "scientific validity of this discourse", as well as the empirical scope it encompasses; the "temporal reference" in terms of its origins and developments; the "units of analysis adopted in the assessment of manifestations of the modern experience"; the accurateness of its "conceptual structure" through which degrees of modernity are measured; and the "constructed and projected image regarding its 'Others'" (see Tavolaro, 2014, p.647).<sup>682</sup> As I have already said, the main contribution of Sergio's

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<sup>682</sup> Facing those challenges, Sergio distinguishes two groups of perspectives: those that claim that certain adjustments of categories and concepts are necessary; and those that take a more radical path, according to which a whole new epistemological reference, detached from the discourse of modernity, is needed. In the first group, Sergio includes the debate on "globalization", the notion of "multiple modernities" and the discussion around a "global modernity"; in the second, the debates around the "post-colonial condition" and around "*decolonialidad* (decoloniality)" (see Tavolaro, 2014, pp.647-654). Sergio had already raised questions brought by some of the thinkers he included in these two groups in previous texts (see, for instance, Tavolaro and Tavolaro, 2010, pp.354-7; and Tavolaro, 2011, pp.155-7). I am not interested for now in discussing his interpretations of both

recent text to my own problematization relates to the way the interpretations of Brazil are approached not only as different reproductions of the "hegemonic discourse" - including first and foremost, I would say, its modernizing perspective -, but also as "non-hegemonic" sites of potential critique of modernization.

In this vein, he proceeds by exploring these sites in relation to the challenging elements he mapped in recent perspectives.<sup>683</sup> Then, his text brings a formulation that is directly and closely related to one of the crucial aspects of my general problematization here. In his words:

in face of the feeling of disembeddness of [Brazilian] society in relation to the hegemonic frames of conceptual reference, our interpreters tended to point towards two directions. On the one hand, by reaffirming the peculiarity of Brazilian experience in contrast to "central societies", they tended to enhance the self-fulfilling prophecies of the discourse of modernity. But, on the other hand, to the extent that the supposed exceptional qualities of our society were brought to light, it was also exposed the very limits and inappropriateness of the notions, concepts and parameters from which this sociological imaginary aimed at describing and codifying the many and varied contemporary societal experiences (Tavolaro, 2014, pp.654-5).

In short, in some occasions, "the promise of critique of the *thesis of Brazilian singularity* is announced" (Tavolaro, 2014, p.655, italics in the original).<sup>684</sup>

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groups or their individual thinkers, but in grasping the link between Sergio's interpretation of the interpretations of Brazil and the alternative he proposes.

<sup>683</sup> To be clear, Sergio Tavolaro concedes that these sites of critique of modernity are not generalized among the interpretations of Brazil, but can be seen in few occurrences (see Tavolaro, 2014, p.654).

<sup>684</sup> In a 2013 text, Sergio had already articulated that, but more focused on a reinterpretation of Gilberto Freyre's texts. One reads, then, that "[Gilberto] Freyre anticipates some recent critiques to the sociological discourse of modernity", but that his "ambitious" attempt to "destabilize the epistemological centrality of European modernity ends up inadvertently frustrated to the extent that this same experience... is retaken as the standard to measure the singularity of modernity in Brazil" (Tavolaro, 2013, pp.286-7). Or, as he puts later, "within this effort at dismantling the stigma of inferiority of Brazilian society..., the image [Gilberto] Freyre projects from this supposed 'singularity' relies on epistemic references that inadvertently reinforce the diagnosis of 'incompleteness' of the experience of modernity in Brazil in relation to the so-called 'hegemonic centers'" (Tavolaro, 2013, p.295).

Bringing Sergio's words to the terms I have been mobilizing here, interpretations of Brazil potentially expose an *aporetic performance*.

Nevertheless, when Sergio Tavoaro explores the existence of this potential promise of critique, he makes two moves I would be inclined to resist. I will, first, identify those moves, than pose my resistances. The first move relates to a certain causal relation he proposes. According to him, "the fact that our interpreters occupy a non-hegemonic place of enunciation within the frame of modernity had at least two important *effects* in relation to the sociological discourse of the modern experience" (Tavolaro, 2014, p.655, italics added). The first effect is the reinforcement of "Brazilian modernity" as diverse or even original in comparison with "central modernities". This has led to the diagnosis of modernity in Brazil in terms of "incompleteness", "absences", and other notions related to that. The second effect is that this non-hegemonic position has enabled the interpellation of modernity from angles often ignored, neglected or obliterated by hegemonic narratives.

In this sense, in those occasions where that promise of critique is identified, Sergio sees some convergences between "the works and efforts of comprehension of the Brazilian social *formation* and experience" and "the challenges to the sociological discourse of modernity" mentioned above (Tavolaro, 2014, p.656, italics added). Among these convergences, he stresses the identification of the following "weaknesses": the "historicism" on which the hegemonic discourse relies; the "methodological nationalism" underlying it; the "scope of application" intended for its categories, as well as the "prescriptive insinuations projected" to "incomplete" modernities; and the very conceptual structure it puts forward as the "reference to assess successes and failures of diverse modern experiences" (Tavolaro, 2014, p.656). Sergio even claims that, however few, there have also been some occasions in which the need to overcome the hegemonic frame of reference has been announced as a requirement to the understanding of "Brazilian singularity".

The second move also relates to Sergio Tavolaro's text crucial turn to the interpretations of Brazil in order to explore the "promise of critique of the thesis of Brazilian singularity", which also implies a critique of modernization in his text, a critique of the "sociological discourse of modernity". Thus, through an interpretation of thinkers such as Gilberto Freyre, Florestan Fernandes, Sérgio

Buarque de Holanda, Caio Prado Jr., Oliveira Vianna, Raymundo Faoro, among others, he raises a series of challenges they expose to the "hegemonic discourse". First, some of them point out that the formative process of Brazil is "way more complex than and resistant to the progressist-linear conception of the imaginary of modernity". Second, the constant emphasis on the connections (historical, political, cultural, institutional, economic, and others) of Brazilian formation with other regions and places "suggested the insufficiency of the national society as the primordial unity of analysis". Third, the inadequacies of the conceptual structure - the fundamental pillars of modernity - mobilized to grasp "the degree of modernity" of societies and institutions other than the central was also brought to the fore. Finally, fourth, "the very scientific validity" of the hegemonic discourse was sometimes put under suspicion.<sup>685</sup>

According to Sergio Tavolaro, those "mismatches between some 'interpretations of Brazil' and the 'hegemonic sociological discourse of modernity' could in principle be taken exclusively as evidence and confirmation of the 'incompleteness' of Brazilian society in relation to scenarios and contexts conceived as models to the modern experience" (Tavolaro, 2014, p.660). Yet, in Sergio's view, "revisited from the contemporary debates, these mismatches can also be perceived as challenges that non-hegemonic places of enunciation raise to that discourse" (Tavolaro, 2014, p.660). In other words, through the interpretation of Brazilian singularity, a certain "marginal" place opened up the possibility of a gaze on modernity that is often ignored, neglected or obliterated by the "central" place.

That said, my two main resistances to Sergio's two moves are the following. First, it does not seem to me consistently articulated in Sergio's text how this "non-hegemonic place" should be conceived. Let me raise some possibilities. If it is the case that this place is a "geographical" one, then it would be interesting to understand why, according to him, some interpretations of Brazil do not carry the promise of that critique and, moreover, why innumerable thinkers of "hegemonic places" do carry a promise of critique of modernization and of their respective "national singularity".<sup>686</sup> But, if it is the case that this place is a "cognitive" one,

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<sup>685</sup> In an earlier text, he had posed that "many of those interpretations of Brazilian *formation* anticipated critiques and considerations to the discourse of modernity that have gained nowadays an international scope" (Tavolaro, 2013, p.307).

<sup>686</sup> Suffice to recall, for instance, a series of "French", "German", "English", "American"... thinkers who have advanced profound critiques of their "national" modernities and of modernity as a whole.

then it would be interesting to discuss whether and how this cognitive place has a social, political, historical dimension, and whether and how this cognitive place needs to be "consciously" articulated in the text. What is at stake, I think, is the risk of reinforcing a dichotomy between "hegemonic" and "non-hegemonic" places, according to which some variable (class, race, gender, and, mostly in this case, nationality or geography) would be essentialized. In general terms, this would imply in two crucial problems Sergio wants to avoid to begin with: the essentialization of a certain variable and the reproduction of a certain dichotomy.

Second, when he suggests that the exploration of the potential related to the "non-hegemonic" place is conditioned by the "contemporary debates", he seems to imply some problematic things. First, that those contemporary debates are the condition of possibility for the identification of those mismatches. Well, if that is the case, one would have that those debates are ultimately the condition of possibility for the critique of the "thesis of Brazilian singularity" and, moreover, for the critique of modernization itself. Related to this first point, there is a second one. The reference to the opening of critique by "*contemporary* debates" could lead to the conclusion that the production of knowledge is following to some extent a continuous improvement that places "us", "present thinkers", in advantage over "them", "past thinkers", even if some of "us" will eventually not explore the greater scope of possibilities "we" have in relation to "them".<sup>687</sup> Both these points rely on a periodization of knowledge production that reproduces aspects of a progressist conception of history that Sergio seems to be resisting in the first place.

These two resistances aside, let me recall that one of the aspects Sergio Tavolaro explores revisiting the interpretations of Brazil is the potential challenge to methodological nationalism. As the national experience cannot remain as "an unequivocal analytical category", two tasks are at hand: the confrontation of the methodological nationalism and the search for an interpretation sensible to "the connections and intertwinements involving diverse societal experiences (in all their levels)" (Tavolaro, 2014, p.662). These tasks have not been completely alien to many interpretations of Brazil, as Sergio himself acknowledges citing Caio Prado

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<sup>687</sup> For instance, in a 2008 text, one reads that "it would be *too much* to demand from the classics of Brazilian sociology such a multi-focal and cosmopolitan epistemological perspective. *Times were different then*. But contemporary scholars are certainly *much better equipped and prepared* to avoid essentialist and ossified portraits of concrete social scenarios" (Tavolaro, 2008, pp.127-8, italics added).

Jr., Florestan Fernandes, Celso Furtado, Sérgio Buarque de Holanda, Gilberto Freyre, among others. The point is that, however sophisticated, their texts have not had "the effect of dismantling entirely the methodological nationalism [that oriented them] - among other reasons, because this was not the intended effect" (Tavolaro, 2014, p.662). In this sense, "contemporary debates" enable, in Sergio's view, the "promise of critique of the thesis of Brazilian singularity" and also contribute to bring to light the fact that the so-called "central societies" expose "a series of incongruities and mismatches" in their own societal experiences (see Tavolaro, 2014, p.663).

Those tasks also point towards the necessity of focusing of connections among diverse societal experiences. The insistence on this aspect sheds a different light on the comparative mobilizations that put national units in contrast to one another. The confrontation of methodological nationalism requires the attention to "connected histories", that is, the emphasis on multiple connections - for instance, symbolic, epistemic, economic, cultural, institutional - that "from a historical point of view have revealed themselves to be fundamental to the Brazilian societal *formation* and experience" (Tavolaro, 2014, p.663, italics added).<sup>688</sup> Sergio claims that the multiple possibilities of exploring this path of "connected histories" must displace the "national unit" from its exclusive position in the interpretations of Brazil and of modernity in general. In other words, the five fundamental pillars of modernity - social differentiation/complexification, societal secularization, disjunction between the private and the public, emotional economy anchored in a centered subjectivity and the separation between nature and culture - are detached from their almost automatic relation with the "nation", and from the corresponding comparative perspectives that qualify different experiences with modernity in terms of "(in)authenticity", "(in)completeness", "normality/deviation", "original/copy", among others.

Some final remarks below will help me in connecting my discussion so far with what comes in the last part of the text. All his texts approached here share a series of interrelated moves. First, he stipulates fundamental pillars of a "hegemonic

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<sup>688</sup> But, Sergio warns, the notion of "connected histories" can lead to multiple directions, among which one would find conceptions of "globalization", "multiple modernities", "global modernity", "center/periphery", "post-coloniality", "decoloniality". Each of these notions is linked to a different approach to modernity (see Tavolaro, 2014, pp.663-5).

sociological discourse of modernity" - three, four or five, depending on the text. Second, he problematizes the implicit or explicit mobilization of these pillars across the "interpretations of Brazil", most often dividing them into two major groups that share a common thesis - the thesis of Brazilian singularity. Three, having identified the limitations deriving from the endorsement of that thesis, Sergio proposes an alternative interpretation to modernity in Brazil. And, four, his alternative interpretation also implies a critique of some of the central assumptions of the hegemonic discourse. More recently, as I have noted, another move is more clearly made, according to which some "interpretations of Brazil" are read not only as variations upon the endorsement of that thesis, but also as potential sites of critique themselves to that thesis and to the hegemonic sociological discourse of modernity.

What I want to stress here is Sergio's position in relation to the fundamental pillars of modernity. It seems to me that his critique of the hegemonic discourse has implications not yet explored. When he stipulates those pillars - in the 2014 formulation, social differentiation/complexification, societal secularization, disjunction between the private and the public, emotional economy anchored in a centered/indivisible subjectivity, and the separation between nature and culture -, his ultimate goal is the proposition of a framework that enables societal experiences of modernity to be interpreted "on equal foot" in relation to one another. That is to say, he aims at resisting dichotomies such as center/periphery or any other one that leads to a hierarchy among (complete and incomplete) modernities. What seems to me deserving a further problematization, however, is the fact that Sergio has never questioned (at least in the texts I had access to) his insistence on assuming the centrality of the fundamental pillars themselves. It seems to me that, by raising challenges to the hegemonic discourse, but at the same time preserving those pillars as interpretative parameters of different experiences of modernity, Sergio runs the risk of imposing upon these diverse experiences a frame that has itself a contingent, historically situated emergence linked to the so-called "modernity".

Let me assume that it is safe to say that Sergio does not inscribe in those pillars a position according to which, so to speak, "the more the better". That is to say, more social differentiation/complexity; more secularization; more separation between the public and the private; a more centered subjectivity; and more separation of society from nature: it seems plausible to say that Sergio's interpretation exposes a political position according to which more of those



elements is not necessarily better to any society, hence his assertion that one should understand them in terms of "varying patterns" (although I must confess I am not particularly convinced that his texts do not imply a certain variation of "the more the better" trope).

Nevertheless, two aspects are not discussed by Sergio in this respect. Firstly, his interpreter may ask himself why does Sergio fix those pillars as parameters to all experiences of modernity. In other words, it would be possible to say that the rejection of the modernizing assumption according to which, in relation to those pillars, "the more the better", should be followed by a questioning of the centrality of those pillars itself. Related to the first point, the second refers to a move that is often taken for granted in his texts, but that has important implications to his interpretation: ultimately, those fundamental pillars of the hegemonic discourse are abstracted from their historical articulations, becoming universalized standards from which variations of experiences of modernity are identified (even if not scaled).<sup>689</sup> I am not claiming that those pillars have an indelible "mark of origin" that makes them necessarily attached to a "modernizing perspective", but abstracting them from their historical contingency, on the other hand, can lead to an understanding of "differentiation", "secularization", "public/private", "centered subjectivity" and "society/nature" that misses their political implications in the "connected histories" Sergio proposes. Hence, if, on the one hand, he defends a global perspective on varying patterns of modern sociability, on the other hand, the very notion of a *modern* sociability remains somehow unquestioned - not to mention the assertion that Brazil is a modern country.

My purpose next is to explore the notion of "aporetic performance" as an alternative interpretation to the formation of contemporary Brazil, following the path I have been tracking in this text.

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<sup>689</sup> If the scope of my text allowed me, I would have to advance a detailed interpretation of how those five pillars Sergio identifies are linked to a periodizing claims according to which "modernity" is differentiated from "its others" in time (as periods) and in space (as geographical locations).