

1. Introduction

(...(Pau-)Brasil...)

It could be said that the formation of contemporary Brazil encompasses moments *before* the lands of the "New World" were encountered by the Portuguese. Not only for the obvious, even if often silenced, reason that various "Indigenous" peoples already lived in what would later be named "Brazil". Also, XIV century maps showed a certain mythical island identified as "*Ui Breasail*", "*Hy Brasil*" or "*Breasal*" (among other orthographic forms), that would be located in the Atlantic ocean to the extreme west of Ireland. "Breasal" is likely to refer to a certain North-Eastern Irish clan, to an immortal god or to an edenic place of the blest.

The Irish mythology and chronicles have stories about "*Hy Brasil*" dating back to many centuries before the Portuguese arrived at the "New World". "*Hy Brasil*" became part of maps, poems, literature, arts in general. Among the many phantom islands of the Irish folklore, the island "Brazil" came to be one of the most diffused abroad, getting to be known by the Portuguese cartographic history before the so-called "great discoveries" (see Casement [1908], edited by Mitchell, 2006; Cantarino, 2005; Donnard, 2009).

After arriving at the "New World", some believed to have reached an island, not a continent. In a anonymous report from 1507, for instance, one reads: "The place is big and we do not know whether it is an island or mainland [*terra firme*], but, for its size, we suppose it is mainland" (*The Report of the Anonymous Pilot, 1507 apud* França, 2012, p.101). The use of the word "*Brasil*" to refer to the land actually encountered first came in 1512 and gradually replaced the official denomination "*Terra de Santa Cruz*" (see Couto, 1999, p.59).¹

The formation of contemporary Brazil also encompasses events taking place *outside* those lands. The cultural, political, economic and social "European" and "Latin American" dynamics, not to mention the contact with "Africa", have performed a double role in that aspect. On the one hand, they have directly impacted

¹For more on that, see Ribeiro (1995, pp.126-7); Couto (1999, pp.47-53, pp.63-4); Schwartz (1999, p.106); Chauí (2000, pp.59-60); França (2012, pp.101-2); Schwarcz and Starling (2015, pp.31-3). All translations here will be mine, except when otherwise specified.

upon the formation of Brazil - think, for instance, on how the Napoleonic wars led to the transference of the Portuguese Crown to Brazil in 1808. On the other hand, "Europe" and "Latin America" have been constantly evoked as parameters (models to be followed, rejected or appropriated) to the interpretation of Brazil. In addition to that, one should not forget the traffic of slaves in the Atlantic ocean as another crucial vector in Brazilian formative process.

Sérgio Buarque de Holanda points out that, even before the "New World" was encountered, some theologians considered the "terrestrial paradise" a reality that could eventually be found; following that, those "visions of paradise" seemed to many to have become concrete as soon as the "new" continent was "discovered" (see Holanda, 2000 [1968], pp.x-xi). "New" meant not only that that world was previously ignored, but also that it represented a renovation of beliefs: "it is not in vain, but with much cause and reason, that this is called the New World; it is not because it was found only a while ago, but because it is like that world of the first and the golden age in terms of the people and in terms of everything" (Vasco de Quiroga, 1535 *apud* Holanda, 2000 [1968], p.254; see also Chauí, 2000, p.62).²

The edenic motifs worked differently in the "English America" than they did in "Latin America" (those are Sérgio's identifications): up in the North, "the first colonizers of the English America came motivated by the eagerness to construct, defeating the rigor of the desert and the wilderness, a blessed community, free of the religious and civil oppressions suffered by them in their land of origin, and where the pure evangelical ideal would finally be realized"; down to the South, the colonizers were "attracted by the hope of finding in their conquests a paradise made of worldly richness and celestial beatitude, that would be offered to them without the necessity of much labor, but as a free gift" (Holanda, 2000 [1968], p.xviii). There is also a difference between the Spanish and the Portuguese, since the "universal seduction" of the edenic motifs have become less intense among the latter - what Sérgio treats in terms of a "plausible attenuation" linked to a certain

² The encounter with the "New World" did not have a considerable impact on "Europe" until the XVII century, although before that important reflections on that event had already come out (for instance, Thomas More's *Utopia*, from 1516, or Michel de Montaigne's *Essais* [Essays], from 1588, especially "*Des Cannibales* [On Cannibals]" and "*Des Coches* [Of Vehicles]") (see França, 2012, pp.21-87). Despite this late impact, a considerable degree of skepticism was triggered by the "discovery": "[e]ffectively, who is able to affirm for sure anything about what was, what is or what will be?... A new world was discovered..." (Francisco Sanches, 1581 *apud* França, 2012, p.21).

"realism" and "naturalism" endorsed by the Portuguese (see Holanda, 2000 [1968], pp.289-92, 371-2).

After arriving at the "new" continent and after the first contacts with natives, the edenic motif was spatially dislocated to the interior of the lands: "[t]he fantastic geography of Brazil, as well as in the rest of America, relies to a great extent on the narratives that the conquerors heard or wished to hear from indigenous people" (Holanda, 2000 [1968], p.83). The way those narratives were "translated" is thus inseparable from previous "visions of paradise" constructed through experiences in other parts of world and from biblical references. All that, including what was taking place at the same time in the Spanish America, conditioned the colonial enterprise in the Portuguese America. The confluence of travel writings (fictitious or not), translated indigenous narratives, and religious texts pointed to the belief in the reality of the Eden in what came to be called "Brazil" (see Holanda, 2000 [1968], p.183). The news from the "New World" would foster in the XVII century a vast production of general histories, travel writings, novels, polemics, philosophy and geography texts, paintings, poetry, maps (see França, 2012, pp.21-87)³

The travel writings were received in "Europe" with a considerable suspicion in relation to their faithfulness to the real state of affairs in the "New World"; the same happening in relation to the "Orient", as Luiz Costa Lima reminds (see Lima, 1991 [1988], p79). On the one hand, one could agree with Luiz in that those writings have become "decisive elements in the derangement of the "European discursive order" (Lima, 1991 [1988], p.79; see also Lima, 1991 [1990a]); on the other hand, one could consider Aníbal Quijano's point that the encounter with the "New World" would constitute a "new pattern of world power" and as a consequence a "historically new region", that is, the "Occidental Europe" (Quijano, 2000, p.198). I am not sure whether both positions are mutually exclusive, and it is not my purpose to settle that issue. The point is that the colonial encounter is indeed constitutive of a certain idea of "Europe" and of a certain "European" projection of

³ For instance, it is estimated that by the end of the XVIII century around 5,562 travel writings had been published (not to mention the unpublished ones), 25% of which were dedicated to "America" (see França, 2012, p.45). I am not going into the details of how exactly this impact has been felt, but it is crucial to have in mind that it goes much beyond the religious, economic and political spheres; the very notion of "human being" had been impacted, as the "Valladolid debate" (1550-1551) attests and the history of "skepticism" exposes, not to mention the reconfiguration of "racial" discriminations. On "skepticism" and the "New World", see Popkin (2003) and França (2012); on "race" and the "New World", see Quijano (2000) and Mignolo (2002).

how the "New World" and its inhabitants should be defined. Also, the colonial encounter is not a one-way process, passively received by the "natives". It does not go uncontested.

The prevalence of edenic motifs is intrinsically related to the formation of contemporary Brazil - religiously, economically, socially, politically. The Portuguese eagerness to explore and exploit the "New World" is inseparable from that. But, as Jean Marcel Carvalho França notes, since the second half of the XVI century onwards, the metaphor of the "paradise" has become decreasingly mobilized, at the same time that the valorization of nature, including fauna, flora, climate and land fertility, remained being diffused (see França, 2012, p.194). Hence, if it is indeed the case that the long-awaited "paradise" had been less evoked, the vision of a wonderful nature has increasingly permeated the travel writings. Instead of a "vision of paradise", a metaphor that would not persist for a long time, it would be more precise to say that a "rich and pleasant land" was depicted, "a land with a good climate, good rivers, good ports etc., whose fertility announced much wealth to its colonizers" (França, 2012, p.215). As Lilia Schwarcz and Heloisa Starling put, "[a]s the 'other' of the West, Brazil emerged represented sometimes by stereotypes that designated it as a huge and unexpected 'lack' - lack of law, hierarchy, rules - sometimes by the 'excess' - excess of lust, of idleness or of parties" (Schwarcz and Starling, 2015, p.18).

(All I said so far relates to how "Europeans" (en)visioned the "New World". As an experience of thought, one could speculate how different would it be if I had a different entry point. Actually, Eduardo Viveiros de Castro is one of those who have made the job of turning that into more than an experience of thought. According to him, "[i]f the Europeans desired the Indians because they saw in them either useful animals or potential Europeans and Christians, the Tupi desired the Europeans in their full alterity... [as] an opportunity of self-transfiguration..., and they were therefore capable of expanding the human condition, or even going beyond it" (Castro, 2011, p.30). In that sense, "it was perhaps the Ameridians, not the Europeans, who saw the 'vission of paradise' in the American (mis)(sed)encounter" (Castro, 2011, p.30). The "inconstancy of the savage soul", as he names it, refers to the "openness" to the "other" and to the corresponding transformation of one's "identity" - something very different from any identitarian imposition. In other

words, rather than a "substantial identity", one sees an "ontological incompleteness" providing a "relational affinity", or an "immanent relation with alterity", through which the absorption of the other would be a process of changing the self (see Castro, 2011, pp.30-2, pp.47-51).

Well, I would be completely incapable of taking seriously this alternative entry point. And this is the case not only because I am not trained in what is generally called "anthropology". Perhaps a much more telling reason for that is that I have been consistently trained, until relatively very recently at least, by and through what would be identified as variations upon "European visions". In fact, I would say that this text is to a certain extent an attempt to go with and against that background. Not exactly as a "parricide", but as a certain "anthropofagic" move...)

There is indeed a connection between the depiction of nature and the colonial enterprise - and therefore, the formation of Brazil. In that sense, the narratives expressed in the travel writings "have molded not only the European 'common sense' about Brazil and about Brazilians, [but also...] the expectations and actions of men from the Old World in relation to their country and its people"; and, it could be added, also "the actions and expectations of Brazilians in relation to themselves and to their country" (França, 2012, p.286).⁴

Speaking through Caio Prado Jr.'s words, Sérgio Buarque de Holanda says that "[i]f we assess the essence of our *formation*, we will see that, in fact, we were constituted to supply sugar, tobacco, and some other commodities; later, gold and diamonds; then, cotton and, even later, coffee, for the European trade"; this means

⁴ By the end of 1990s, two public opinion surveys asked respondents whether they were proud of being Brazilians. In one of them (conducted in the metropolitan area of Rio de Janeiro), 59.9% said they were "very proud"; 27.4%, "somewhat proud"; 6.8%, "not proud"; and 4.4%, "ashamed". In the other survey, 84% felt pride for being Brazilians and 5%, shame. When reasons for being proud were asked in the first survey, 26% named "nature"; 11.3%, "character of the people"; 13.8%, "characteristics of the country"; 6.8%, "sport/music/carnival". In the second survey (nationwide), 25% named "nature", 20%, "character of the people"; 10%, "characteristics of the country"; 11%, "sport/music/carnival". Both surveys also asked respondents reasons for being ashamed of their country. In the first (conducted in the metropolitan area of Rio de Janeiro), 20.1% mentioned "misery/unemployment"; 3.9%, "health/education"; 21.2%, "politicians"; 6%, "corruption"; 19.6%, "violence". In the second (nationwide), 29% mentioned "misery/unemployment"; 3%, "health/education"; 18%, "politicians"; 17%, "corruption"; 9%, "violence". The detailed numbers can be seen in Carvalho (2000). In 2010, another survey (nationwide) showed that 78% were proud of being Brazilians: 57% were "always proud"; and 21.4%, "most of the time". When asked for the reasons of being proud, 46% named "natural beauties"; 33%, "carnival"; 26%, "national symbols"; 31%, "people". The detailed numbers (which show a considerable variation depending on the region of the country) can be seen at Ribeiro (2010).

that Brazilian formation has been "turned towards the outside of the country and it is with no attention but to that trade that Brazilian society and economy will be organized" (Caio Prado Jr., 1942 *apud* Holanda, 2000 [1968], p.402, italics added). To conclude his text, Sérgio says that this exterior orientation has not been accompanied by a retribution of benefits, so that "[t]he procession of miracles will continue this way during all the colonial period; and not even Independence, or the Republic, will interrupt it" (Holanda, 2000 [1968], p.403).

The connection between the edenic motif, the vision of nature, and the exterior orientation of trade reinforces the point I have made above: the formation of contemporary Brazil also takes place *before* the land was encountered by the Portuguese and *outside* the confines of the colony. Or, I should now say, the formation of contemporary Brazil does not have a pure temporal and spatial origin; it is a process that constantly produces the very distinction of inside and outside, past, present and future.

On the ocean that hollows the rocks where ye dwell
 A shadowy land has appeared, as they tell;
 Men thought it a region of sunshine and rest,
 And they called it Hy-Brasail, the isle of the blest;
 From year unto year, on the ocean's blue rim,
 The beautiful spectre showed lovely and dim;
 The golden clouds curtained the deep where it lay,
 And it looked like an Eden, away, far away!
 (part of the poem **Hy-Brasail, The Isle of the Blest**)
 Gerald Griffin (1803-1840)



Image of Rodrigo Braga's "Tombo".⁵

Rodrigo Braga - born in the Northern Brazil, raised in the Northeast, and currently living in the Southeast -, in his first individual exhibition (2015), "*Tombo*", presents imperial palm trees lying on the floor, composing the scene with so-called "Neoclassical" pillars of what is nowadays the *Casa França-Brasil* (France-Brazil House), built in 1820 to be the first Commerce Square in Rio de Janeiro. The "Neo-classical" buildings erected in the city by that time brought an architectural "tradition" previously absent in the country. The National Library, the Botanic Garden, the Commerce Square and the Imperial Academy of Fine Arts were all part of that "modernizing" move.

"*Tombo*" comes from the verb "*tombar*", which, in Portuguese, means both "to fall over" and "to preserve a patrimony (material or immaterial) through legal means issued by some sphere of the public power, municipal, state or federal". It encompasses, thus, both a "natural" and an "official" move, nature and culture.

The imperial palm trees were first brought to Brazil in the beginning of the XIX century, probably from the Caribbean. The first seed, as Thais Rivitti (curator of the exhibition) remarks, would have been planted in the Botanic Garden by Dom João VI (the Emperor John VI) of Portugal, in 1809, a year after the Portuguese

⁵ Labra (2015). Available at: <<http://oglobo.globo.com/cultura/artes-visuais/rodrigo-braga-apresenta-sua-primeira-exposicao-individual-na-casa-franca-brasil-15853445>>. Last access: July 22, 2015.

Royal Family escaped from Portugal and transferred the Crown to the colony, due to the Napoleonic wars in "Europe". The near-five-meter-tall imperial palm trees mobilized to the exhibition were removed, after being already condemned, from the same Botanic Garden where the first seed was planted.

According to Rodrigo Braga, the word "*Tombo*" exposes the dispute between "human being and nature"; the tension between "the force of nature" and "the force of man"; what "man can do to nature and how nature is capable of reacting".⁶ In Thais' words, his work "articulates those two essential elements to the formation of a national identity: the natural and the architectonic... Beyond problematizing the artificial character of the notion of "Brazilianess", [it] crosses history in order to place itself in the present".⁷

The XIX century in "Brazil" is marked by an increasing influence of "French" and "English" models of behavior, architecture and political ideas. Mário de Andrade, in a letter to Carlos Drummond de Andrade, wrote in 1924:

I do not love Brazil spiritually more than France or Cochincina. But it is in Brazil that I happened to live and now it is only about Brazil that I think and for it I sacrificed everything... I write in silly language, I think naively, only to call the attention of those stronger than me to this pappy and indecisive monster that Brazil still is. (Mário de Andrade [November 10, 1924], in Santiago, 2002, p.51).

In his reply few days later, Carlos wrote:

⁶ See Brito (2015), available at: <<http://odia.ig.com.br/diversao/2015-04-04/a-natureza-e-o-concreto-lado-a-lado-na-casa-franca-brasil.html>> (last access: July 22, 2015). See also Veras (2015), available at: <<http://www.cultura.rj.gov.br/materias/o-homem-e-a-natureza>> (last access: July 22, 2015).

⁷ Thais Rivitti's (2015) text to the exhibition is available at: <<http://www.casafrancabrasil.rj.gov.br/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Leia-aqui-o-texto-da-curadora.pdf>>. Last access: July 22, 2015.

I am a bad citizen, I confess. The point is that I was born in [the state of] Minas, while I should be born... in Paris... I am accidentally Brazilian (as you yourself, by the way, confess in your letter: 'It is in Brazil that I *happened* to live... etc...')... I have to convince myself, before convincing others, that we have to repudiate the European experience... You despise above all the vile imitation of foreign models, and I can only agree with you on that attitude. The reason is that, if I respect the French tradition, I do not respect the national falsifiers of that tradition (Carlos Drummond de Andrade [November 22, 1924], in Santiago, 2002, pp.58-60, italics in the original).⁸

These letters, written more than 100 years after the Portuguese Crown transferred itself to the colony, express how the "European experience" remained indispensable and insufficient - not to mention increasingly complex - in "Brazilian(s) life". Now, more than 200 years after that event, considered to have been a fundamental one to the political and territorial unity of the country, it remains as such, even if some imperial palm trees are already dying. Are they?

(Despite ultimately unanswerable, it is at least tempting to pose the question: "was the maintenance of the unity [of Brazil] positive? Has Brazil worth it?" (Carvalho, 2008, p.556). Yet, what kind(s) of unity do "we" have?)

It is not uncommon the position according to which it would not make sense to refer to "Brazil" (and therefore, about "the history of Brazil") before the beginning XIX century when the "colony" gradually became "independent". Commenting on the impact of the transference of the Portuguese Crown to Brazil in 1808, José Murilo de Carvalho said that, without this event, "there would be no Brazil", since the colony would not be maintained and fragmented countries would

⁸ In that same year, Mário had written in a poem (dedicated to Carlos) that "[w]e have even made some tiny progress/ 'Cause progress is also a fate..." (Andrade, 1980 [1924], p.109).

likely be formed, as it took place indeed in other colonies of the region (see Carvalho, 1999 [1994], p.233; 2008, pp.555-6; 2012, p.20).⁹ But one should not exaggerate the ruptures here: 1808 can be politically crucial as a turning point, but it did not eradicate one of the persisting components of Brazilian formative process: the slave trade (see Alencastro, 2000, p.354) - more on that later.

Without questioning the relevance of the Portuguese language and of Catholicism to the unity of "Brazil", it is important not to lose from sight that Catholicism has always coexisted - not always in a peaceful way - with many other religious practices. And, in terms of language, one cannot forget that Portuguese became the official language of the state only on May 03, 1757, following the so-called *Diretório dos Índios* (Indigenous' Law) established by D. José I, king of Portugal, through his minister Marquis of Pombal. Despite that law, which would be extinguished in 1798, language diversity (still seen in many indigenous groups nowadays) has always marked the land of "Brazil".

In the XVI century, priests from the Society of Jesus created the *Tupi Jesuítico* or *Língua Geral* (General Language) as "a systematic process of adaptation, simplification and subsequent grammartization [that is, the production of dictionaries and grammars] of *Tupi*, the indigenous language majorly spoken in the Coast of Brazil" (Mariani, 2003, p.463). *Língua Geral* has become then widespread across the areas where Jesuit missions were established and villages were converted. But, as I said, the promulgation of the *Diretório dos Índios* and, later, the expulsion of the Jesuits from the colony following Marquis de Pombal's decree in 1759, did not eradicate completely the use of previously existing languages (see Mariani, 2003; Silva, 2011b, pp.56-7).¹⁰ One should not forget as well that the coexisting languages include Indigenous and African ones.¹¹

⁹ Elsewhere, José Murilo shows a comparison between the formation of many countries out of some colonies within the Spanish America, on the one hand, and the formation of one country (Brazil) out of some colonies within the Portuguese America, on the other hand (see Carvalho, 1996, pp.14-5). In 1850, while the Portuguese America had become one country, Brazil, the Spanish side had become at least sixteen countries.

¹⁰ Such as *nheengatu*, *quimbundo*, *iorubá*, *mandinga*, *hauçá*, *suaíli*, *axante*, *gã*, *evé*... (see Silva, 2011b, p.56). See also Weffort (2006, pp.72-4).

¹¹ Recent statistics estimate that close to 5,5 million blacks were taken by force to Brazil, 12% of which having died before disembarking (see Manenti, 2015). Detailed numbers and huge database can be accessed at the website of "The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade" (www.slavevoyages.org/). They came from different parts of the African continent, and it would be incorrect to assume any kind of cultural homogeneity among them. The indigenous groups are also heterogeneous. According to *Fundação Nacional do Índio* (National Foundation of the Indigenous People, FUNAI), there were 3 million native people in Brazil in 1500 (100% of the population), while today there are 817,962

The year of 1822 marks the official declaration of the independence of Brazil. It also marks the point of arrival of a process that had begun in the XVIII century through which Brazil became increasingly independent from Portugal and increasingly dependent on England, since Portugal itself had become increasingly dependent on England (see Maxwell, 1999, pp.183-4; Santos, 2003, pp.24-6; Weffort, 2006, p.166; Ricupero, 2011, pp.125-8; and Caldeira, 2011, pp.181-195). Actually, the transference of the Portuguese Crown to Brazil in 1808 has generated an unfamiliar situation: the capital of the Empire moved to the colony, leaving the metropolitan place. Moreover, in 1815 Brazil became part of a United Kingdom, on equal foot in relation to Portugal. The Portuguese situation even lead, in 1820, to a "liberal revolution", aiming at a "political regeneration" of the country (see Neves, 2011, pp.81-95). In a Manifest released in the Portuguese city of Porto in 1820, one reads that "[t]he idea of the colonial status to which Portugal has been effectively reduced deeply afflicts all those citizens that still preserve the sentiment of national dignity" (Manifest of the Portuguese Nation to the Sovereigns and Peoples of Europe, 1820 *apud* Maxwell, 1999, p.188). The colonizer claimed to have become colonized. The colonized, in turn, became independent remaining dependent.

By then, it had not yet been defined how the inhabitant of "Brazil" would be called: *brasileiro*, *brasiliano*, *brasiliense*, *brasílico*. The first option was seen pejoratively by that time and the sentiment of belonging was felt first and foremost in terms of an anti-Portuguese register or a regional level, rather than a "Brazilian"

(0.26% of the population); from 1500 to 1957, the number decreased from 3 million to 70,000, beginning to increase again since then. Currently, 274 indigenous languages are registered. Detailed numbers can be accessed at FUNAI's website (www.funai.gov.br). The picture gets even more complex if one takes into account the immigration from Europe that began in the second half of the XIX century, as a way to replace slave in agriculture (mainly in coffee farms). In 1872, in the first official census, 3.8% of the 10 million people in Brazil were foreigners (most of them Portuguese and German) (see Bethell, 2012, p.151). This number would increase in the decades to come: while 110,093 immigrants entered Brazil in 1860-1869, 1,129,315 entered in 1891-1900 and 1,469,095 in 1901-1920 (see de Paula, 2012, p.193; Schwarcz, 2012, p.42. The numbers are not always the same, but their difference is irrelevant for my purpose here). From 1819 to 1883, 436,522 European and Asian immigrants entered Brazil; from 1894 to 1940, 4,158,717 (see Schwarcz, 2012, p.67). An additional issue would be the internal dislocation of migrants accentuated during the XX century. Angela de Castro Gomes, for instance, identifies three major routes of internal migration during the XX century: one concentrated in 1940s, when workers from the Northeast went to the Amazon because of the rubber production; a second one, more persistent, related to the movement from the Northeast to the South/Southeast; and a third one, related to the construction of the new capital, Brasília, during the 1950s and 1960s (see Gomes, 2013b, pp.71-82). The reader will note that I have kept in this footnote the commonsense distinction between "slaves", "immigrants", "colonizers" and "migrants" to refer to "foreigners" entering "Brazil" or "Brazilians" moving within "Brazil". A lot of boundaries are presupposed in this vocabulary, however...

one encompassing the "nation" as a whole (see Carvalho, 1999 [1994], pp.236-7; Schwartz, 1999, pp.106-7; Jancsó and Pimenta, 1999; Alencastro, 2000, p.28; Carvalho, 2008, p.559; Silva, 2011b, pp.70-1; Rocha, 2011, pp.12-3; Neves, 2011).¹² Until the end of the XIX century, even the spelling of the country's name was being disputed: "*Brazil* or *Brasil*?" (Carvalho, 2008, p.559, italics in the original). Orthographically, the question has nowadays an exclusively historical interest. Nevertheless, Roberto DaMatta's question - "what makes *brasil*, *Brasil*?" (DaMatta, 1983 [1978], p.14; 1986) - is far from having an unequivocal answer.

(Should "we" search for an unequivocal answer? Or should "we" problematize the question itself?)

As Carlos Guilherme Mota posed once, "[w]hat idea of 'Latin American', 'Iberian-American', 'Luso-Brazilian', 'Afro-Luso-Brazilian' or even 'Brazilian' studies can we suggest to a new millennium, taking into account... that such categories are too generalizing and too restrictive at the same time?" (Mota, 2003, p.410). By mobilizing the "interpretations of Brazil", I am opting for one of those too restrictive and too generalizing studies. I have no clear suggestion in terms of how one should proceed in relation to them. But I do want to explore their potential in being too restrictive *and* too generalizing.

This text will deal almost exclusively with "intellectual" manifestations from the XX and XXI centuries grouped under the notion of "interpretations of Brazil", that is, writings that have reached directly a very small group of people in face of the general population of Brazil. It is indeed the case that some of the central "concepts" present in some interpretations of Brazil have gained life much beyond the academic environment - I mean that even in the strongest sense of a "double hermeneutics". "The owners of power", "racial democracy", "cordial man", "big house [*casa grande*]", "patrimonialism" are just some of the expressions that have come to be more widely mobilized in (self-)interpretations of Brazil(ians). Moreover, most of the thinkers I will be focusing on have been directly engaged in

¹² Rigorously speaking, "*brasílico*" designated the colonial society in the part of America colonized by the Portuguese; "*brasiliense*", the indigenous people; "*brasileiro*", "pau-brasil" tree-cutters. "*Brasílicos*" became "*brasileiros*" (in the current sense) during the XVIII century (see Alencastro, 2000, p.28).

the construction of "academic" and "intellectual" fields and/or with "political practice" as commonsensically understood. Nevertheless, my purpose here is neither to provide a biographical narrative of their multiple engagements nor to advance a history of the use of those expressions or even of the impact those interpretations may have had upon other environments, intellectual or not. Rather, I will be focused on the interpretations of Brazil selected, aiming at interpreting the traces inscribed in their uses of the concept of "formation".

The texts selected are the following: Gilberto Freyre's *Casa Grande & Senzala* (The Big House & the Slave Quarters), *Sobrados e Mucambos* (The Mansions and the Shanties) and *Ordem e Progresso* (Order and Progress); Antonio Candido's *Formação da Literatura Brasileira* (Formation of Brazilian Literature); Nelson Werneck Sodré's *Formação Histórica do Brasil* (Historical Formation of Brazil); Florestan Fernandes' *A Revolução Burguesa no Brasil* (The Bourgeois Revolution in Brazil); Caio Prado Júnior's *Evolução Política do Brasil* (Political Evolution of Brazil) and *Formação do Brasil Contemporâneo: Colônia* (Formation of Contemporary Brazil: Colony); Celso Furtado's *Formação Econômica do Brasil* (Economic Formation of Brazil); Oliveira Vianna's *Populações Meridionais do Brasil* (Meridional Populations of Brazil) and *Instituições Políticas Brasileiras* (Brazilian Political Institutions); Raymundo Faoro's *Os Donos do Poder: Formação do Patronato Político Brasileiro* (The Owners of Power: Formation of the Brazilian Political Patronage); and Sérgio Buarque de Holanda's *Raízes do Brasil* (Roots of Brazil).

In my interpretation of the above-mentioned texts, I have identified five traces in the uses of the concept of "formation": (1) the centrality of the *nation*; (2) the *incompleteness* of the transition from the colonial to the modern condition, marking a coexistence of the old and the new; (3) the *internal inequality* within the country; (4) the mobilization of *external parameters* in the definition of Brazil; and (5) the focus on the *specificities* of Brazilian formative process. More precisely, my point is that these five traces are shared by all the texts selected; but, at the same time, they are expressed in different ways according to each text.

I do not pretend these traces to be exhaustive of the conceptual field of "formation". Nor is it my claim that, from the point of view of those common traces, crucial differences among the texts can be overlooked. Although all the texts selected are, in a certain sense, "historical", since they reflect upon different

dimensions of the formative process of Brazil, they have different immediate focuses: "history", "literature", "economy", "politics", "culture", "society", "people". This is often expressed already in their titles. To the sequence proposed for the discussion of each text, I have deliberately avoided a chronological criterion that would lead from the "more ancient" to the "more recent" text. It is my purpose with that choice to preclude a certain progressivist interpretation of the track I will move along. The "newer" is not necessarily the "better" or the "truer".¹³ Indeed, the problematization of "newness" and "truth" permeates the text, even if this will not be addressed explicitly and in any philosophically dense way.

(The problematization of "truth" precedes Friedrich Nietzsche, for sure. But his texts pose questions that have not ceased to be pressing (and haunting). "Truth was never allowed to be problematic", he once stated. What is thus truth?, he once asked. Has it presented itself to us? Has it been presented to us? Or, to the contrary, have we presented ourselves to it?¹⁴ Or, going back to Michel de Montaigne, one reads that "experience makes it manifest, that so many interpretations dissipate truth and break it" and that "[t]here is more ado in interpreting interpretations than in interpreting things, and more books upon books than upon any other subject; we do nothing but comment upon one another" (Montaigne, 2012 [1588], p.1174, p.1176).¹⁵

What seems less often problematized, however, is "newness". I do not mean the assertion of the existence of "the new", much less the prognosis of its

¹³ In a interview, Luiz Costa Lima once said that "[a]mong us, during the military dictatorship, some people came to the point of affirming that the teaching of theory was a tool used by the military to back students away from the reading of literature! This would be a good joke in case a few people with some talent were not part of those diffusing it. And, even after dictatorship, it remains the belief that a 'progressist' work is that which reflects reality" (Lima, 2008, p.431).

¹⁴ "Suppose we want the truth: *why not rather* untruth? and uncertainty? even ignorance? The problem of the value of truth presented itself before us - or was it we who came before the problem?" (Nietzsche, 1992 [1886], p.199, italics in the original). "People should examine the oldest and the most recent philosophers on this question. They all lack an awareness of the problem of the extent to which the will to truth itself first needs some justification - here is a hole in every philosophy. How does that come about? It's because the ascetic ideal up to this point has been *master* of all philosophies, because truth has been established as being, as god, as the highest authority itself, because truth was not *allowed* to be problematic. (Nietzsche, 2009 [1887], p.127, italics in the original). "What is then truth? A movable host of metaphors, metonymies, and anthropomorphisms... Truth are illusions which we have forgotten are illusions..." (Nietzsche, 1993 [1873], p.84).

¹⁵ The French text brings "Il y a plus à faire à interpréter les interprétations qu'à interpréter les choses, et plus de livres sur les livres que sur autre sujet : nous ne faisons que nous entregloser" (Montaigne, 2002).

(inevitable) arrival. This has been repeated over and over again. I mean the interpellation of "newness" "itself". It is hard to think of "modernity" apart from a certain periodizing practice or boundary-production separating and uniting the "old" and the "new". "New world" is but one instantiation of that. The conflation of "the modern" with "the new" is but one face of "modernization" and the resistances and/or counter-conducts it raises. The widespread mobilization of the prefixes "neo" and "post", within and beyond the academic and artistic circles (neorealism, neoliberalism, neocolonialism, post-colonialism, post-development, post-modernity, post-humanism...), is telling in itself. Yet, if one wants to remain within the interpretations of Brazil of the XX century, one will face *Estado Novo*, *Bossa Nova*, *Cinema Novo*, *Nova República*... What is thus "new"? - a series of questions paraphrasing Friedrich Nietzsche could (re)begin...

As I have decided to deal with texts that have triggered many controversies and a complex history of interpretations, I will inevitably be unable to do justice to the complexities of the debates surrounding them or even to their (cross-)influences; it is also beyond my scope a detailed discussion of each text, which would lead me to a much longer text. But I insist on the track proposed here because its potential remains underexplored. The sequential discussion of the texts selected does not have the primary concern of comparing them with each other. This allows me to stress more easily how the texts express those five traces of formation mentioned above. In this sense, instead of reinforcing an "authorial" criterion, this frame puts into relief how different texts, published at various moments during the XX century, also have certain regularities in their interpretation of the formation of contemporary Brazil. I have not concerned myself with the different lengths of my discussion of each text. It seemed to me that imposing any kind of formal symmetry on that aspect would be at odds with one of the main concerns of this text, which is to tackle the fragmented and unequal (de)formation of Brazil as it is exposed in the interpretations selected.

Despite the fact that my selection is almost exclusively "intellectual", I do not take "interpretations of Brazil" to refer only to this kind of text. My selection, in this sense, is first and foremost an outcome of my limitations in terms of background and in terms of the texts I ended up encountering, rather than a product of a previous delimitation of what counts as "interpretations of Brazil". Everyone

reflecting upon Brazil is in a certain sense an "interpreter of Brazil" - and much could be gained if that venue becomes further explored in efforts to come, also problematizing the all-too-common assumption that the "more scientific" and/or "more scholarly", the "truer". In any case, even restricted to "intellectual" interpretations focused on the concept of "formation", this text inevitably excludes many others, including some that have gained a high status in universities throughout the XX century.¹⁶ Although readers familiarized with the "interpretations of Brazil" very easily recognize the texts and interpreters selected here as "classics" (taking into account the significant problems this label may entail), I have no strictly and undisputably objective criteria to provide in order to justify the selection. In fact, a closer reflection on that would possibly arrive at a series of accidents, events, coincidences. In short, *fortuna* would soon prove its force once again.

That said, what comes next is structured as follows. Part I presents some aspects of the "interpretations of Brazil" and stresses the recurrence of the concept of "formation" (chapter 2); after that, it lays out general lines of the perspective from which the uses of "formation" will be interpreted in the texts selected (chapter 3). Part II (chapters 4-12) is devoted to the interpretations of the texts selected, focusing on the uses of "formation" and those five traces previously mentioned. As I have decided not to presuppose from my reader any kind of familiarity with the "interpretations of Brazil", this Part became both necessary and very long. Part III begins with a controversy that took place mainly in the late 1980s and that is expressive of many aspects raised in Part II regarding political and interpretative positions on "modernization" in "Brazil" (chapter 13); then, it tackles three interpreters of Brazil that have advanced, in different ways, efforts similar to the one I will embrace myself in the last part of the text, that is, an alternative interpretation of the formation of contemporary Brazil from some kind of engagement with previous "interpretations of Brazil" (chapters 14-16). Finally, Part IV (chapter 17) builds on the previous discussion, in order to reflect upon, or "theorize" from, the five traces of "formation" in the "interpretations of Brazil".

¹⁶ It should be noted that the "interpreters of Brazil" recognized in the academic environment are mostly "men" and "white". The gendered and colored aspects of the "interpretations of Brazil" remain underexplored.