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Brazil 1870–1914 – The Force of Tradition

JOSÉ MURILO DE CARVALHO*

Although in the literature there is almost a consensus that there was an advance of modernity in Brazil after 1870, tradition was sufficiently strong to maintain the values of a rural, patriarchal and hierarchical society. This modernity assumed characteristics that distinguished it from the classic model, represented by the Anglo-Saxon experience. In the period between 1870 and 1914 the ground was cleared for the conservative modernisation of the 1930s.

The advance of modernity

The evidence for the theory of the advance of modernity is well known. It will be useful to reiterate it, however, in order better to understand the alternative.

In economic terms the period 1870–1914 was characterised in the whole of Latin America as the high point of externally oriented development, and of the integration of the area into the world capitalist economy during its phase of imperialist expansion. In Brazil these years saw the peak of the coffee production cycle, then concentrated in São Paulo; it was also the period of the rubber production cycle in the Amazon, which despite its brevity had important repercussions for the region and for the North East, from where there was a high level of migration. This was the time of foreign investment, especially from England, in railways, shipping, urban services and commerce, and also of the coffee valorisation policy.¹

Socially, this was the period of abolition of slavery, accelerated in 1871 by the freeing of unborn slaves, and completed in 1888 by total abolition.

* Translated from the Portuguese by Denise Nacht, of Oxford.

¹ For an overview of the period see Leslie Bethell (ed.), *Brazil: Empire and Republic 1822–1930* (Cambridge, 1989), Sérgio Buarque de Holanda, *História Geral de Civilização Brasileira*, II, vol. V: *Do Império à República* (São Paulo, 1977), and Boris Fausto (ed.), *História Geral da Civilização Brasileira*, III: *Brasil Republicano*, vols. I and II (São Paulo, 1977). On intellectual and scientific progress, see Roque Spencer Maciel de Barros, *A ilustração Brasileira e a idéia de Universidade*, unpubl. PhD diss., Univ. of São Paulo, 1959, and Nancy Stepan, *Beginnings of Brazilian Science. Oswaldo Cruz, Medical Research and Policy, 1890–1920* (New York, 1976). On social and cultural modernization see Gilberto Freyre, *Ordem e Progresso*, 3rd edn. (Rio de Janeiro, 1977), Monteiro Lobato, 'Jeca

At the same time as slavery was being abolished, foreign immigration was promoted, reaching its maximum for the period. Between 1884 and 1920 three million immigrants, mainly Italian, entered the country. Of these, 60% went to São Paulo, profoundly altering the demographic composition of that state. The capital of the state entered a period of explosive growth and came to rival Rio de Janeiro in terms of industrial production. Anarcho-syndicalism influenced the formation of a more militant working class in São Paulo.

Politically, 1870 was the last year of the War with Paraguay and of the Manifesto of the Republican Party. The following year saw the beginning of Rio Branco's reformist government, which faced up to all of the major problems of the country: slavery, immigration, the National Guard, military conscription, the judicial system, the reform of the system of weights and measures, and Church-State relations. Two bishops went to prison for challenging the authority of the government. From 1873 the Paulista Republican Party developed, although slowly, in due course becoming the source of opposition to the monarchical regime that had the most solid civilian base.

The republicans of São Paulo insisted on the defence of Federalism, while those of Rio de Janeiro selected as their goal the democratisation of the government, the end of the Emperor's personal power and of the senate for life and the State Council. Both groups considered themselves the bearers of progress confronting monarchical backwardness.

In the history of ideas the claim is well known that there was a renewal of Brazilian thought starting from the 1870s. Eclecticism in the style of Victor Cousin was eclipsed by new schools of thought also imported from Europe, such as evolutionism, materialism and positivism. The ideal of progress, a mark of the Brazilian political elite since the times of Pombal, acquired a concrete historical dimension through the evolutionism of Spencer, and particularly of Comte. Progress, it was said, advances through historically defined phases. Brazil was at the theological-metaphysical phase of monarchy and should move forward to the positive phase of a Republican industrial regime.

This new version of the idea of progress gave even more emphasis to science and technology as factors of social transformation. This emphasis

Tatu' in *Problema Vital* (São Paulo, 1918), Jeffrey D. Needell, *A Tropical Belle Epoque: Elite Culture and Society in Turn-of-the-Century Rio de Janeiro* (Cambridge, 1987), Francisco Foot-Hardman, *Trem Fantasma. A Modernidade na Selva* (São Paulo, 1988). On the role of São Paulo, see Simon Schwartzman, *São Paulo e o Estado Nacional* (São Paulo, 1975). On the working-class movement see Boris Fausto, *Trabalho Urbano e Conflito Social* (São Paulo, 1977).

was reinforced by the advance of science itself, by new discoveries in physics, biology and mechanical engineering. In the Brazilian case the major impetus arose from the appearance of an urban and educated social group that felt suffocated in a rural, slave society. This group grew from the creation of the Polytechnic in Rio de Janeiro, the School of Mines in Ouro Preto and, by the twentieth century, the Manguinhos Institute in Rio de Janeiro and Butantã, in São Paulo, dedicated to medical and biological investigation. In Manguinhos, Oswaldo Cruz, sanitary reformer of Rio de Janeiro, directed a brilliant and internationally recognised staff. There was a great expansion of civil engineers, geologists, specialists in public health, hygienists, coroners and criminologists. The latter believed in the possibility of using modern physiology in the analysis and treatment of delinquents.

Transformations in literature and art were more timid. In the former, however, symbolism made some inroads and, in the latter, impressionist traces could already be noticed in some painters. In education there was an upsurge of American-style schools emphasising pragmatism, greater student participation and physical education. The Francophile dandy with his *belle-époque* style began to feel the challenge of the dynamic, enterprising sportsman, with his veneration of the physical.

Separation of Church and State, carried out by the Republic, made official the civil registration of births and marriages, secularised cemeteries, sanctioned the public practice of other religions and broke the monopoly of the Catholic Church over the lives of citizens. Technical innovations introduced a small revolution in the habits of the main urban centres' populations: the telephone, gramophone, cinema, the typewriter and the electric tram. The airplane, tested by a Brazilian in the skies of Paris, was of particular importance. In 1903 Santos Dumont was triumphantly received in Rio de Janeiro as a national hero.

Even the collective consciousness underwent transformations. The attempt to reinforce the American identity of the country was of particularly importance for the four-hundredth anniversary of Columbus' voyage. Republican propaganda was partly constructed around the argument that the republic was part of an American identity, and that the monarchy was a residue of old Europe in America.

The republic and America represented the new, progress and the future. When the Republicans spoke of America, they were referring especially to the United States. That country represented the spirit of initiative, economic liberalism, federalism, industrialism against centralism, ruralism, *bacharelismo* (domination of society by liberal arts degree holders) and monarchical society. On 15 November 1889, when the republic was proclaimed by a military revolt, the flag that was carried

around the streets of Rio de Janeiro was a copy in green and yellow of the Stars and Stripes. The public hero of the new regime, Tiradentes, was a rebel of colonial times who drew his inspiration from North American independence.

The modernising effort manifested itself in various civilising campaigns – one might say missions. Through these, groups of technicians and scientists tried to civilise the populations of the interior and of the urban periphery, still trapped in what was considered superstition and backwardness. The new missionaries came from Medical Schools, the Polytechnic, the School of Mines and the Military School. Their methods of proselytisation were varied but their gospel was one: progress, civilisation, modernity.

There were far-flung missions aimed at the interior of the country and more local ones aimed at the urban world. Among the former the campaign of Canudos (1896–7) was undoubtedly the most dramatic. Antônio Conselheiro's *sertanejo* revolt was repressed with an iron fist by the jacobin Moreira Cesar's army, who believed that they were fighting against barbarity and superstition sheltered under the cloak of monarchism. A similar campaign was conducted against the rebels of Contestado between 1910 and 1915. This was a revolt of the same dimensions as Canudos, only without the same repercussions, due to the absence of a chronicler of the stature of Euclides da Cunha.

Less violent methods were used in the missions of the sanitary reformers, led by Doctors Arthur Neiva and Belisario Pena who, in 1912, traversed a great deal of the North and North East of the country, researching sanitary conditions of the populations, and introducing sanitary measures. Pena extended his action through a national sanitation campaign. The Paulista writer Monteiro Lobato provided an effective mouthpiece for the idea that the country was a big hospital. National salvation would come from science and from the scientists of Manguinhos. In a famous pamphlet, Lobato portrayed a sick and indecisive peasant who, once treated, would be transformed into a Yankee-style entrepreneur. The peasant has convinced himself of the value of science: whatever 'Ma'am Science' says, he obeys.

General Rondon, an orthodox positivist, was another missionary of progress and science. He was entrusted with the Serviço de Proteção aos Índios created in 1910. Rondon traversed a large part of the Brazilian west, opening roads, laying telegraph lines through the Amazonian forests, and establishing friendly relations with the Indians, to whom he distributed tools in order to hasten their evolution towards progress. In the same wild region, along the border with Bolivia, another experiment,

although tragic, also marked the dream of reforming nature by the force of technology. It was the attempt to construct the Madeira–Mamoré railway linking Brazil to Bolivia. The work of North American entrepreneurs, this was an insane venture which took the most modern railway equipment to the heart of the jungle. Between 1907 and 1912 approximately 30,000 people struggled in vain against malaria and the forces of nature. The number of lives claimed by the ‘Devil’s Railway’ is calculated at around 6,000.

The most spectacular internal mission was the reformation and sanitation of Rio de Janeiro, undertaken by the engineer Pereira Passos and by Dr Osvaldo Cruz, beginning in 1903. A new port was constructed, streets were widened or laid down, and hundreds of houses were demolished. A new boulevard tore the heart out of the old colonial city, driving people away, altering transportation and changing the face of the city. The mayor, Passos, also wanted to change the habits of the population; in this as well the city would follow the Parisian model. He drove beggars away, banned cows and dogs from the streets, and forbade spitting in public places and on vehicles. Osvaldo Cruz employed new discoveries in medical and biological research. He attacked yellow fever, bubonic plague and smallpox. Sanitary brigades travelled around the whole city inspecting, cleaning, disinfecting and ordering either the repair or demolition of houses. These actions culminated in the introduction of an obligatory vaccine against smallpox, which led to the popular revolt of 1904. There was euphoria: Rio was becoming civilised.

Missionary zeal and naïve belief in the power of science and technology and in the inevitability of progress, are reflected in the famous phrase by Euclides da Cunha in *Os Sertões*: ‘We are condemned to civilization. We either progress or disappear.’

The force of tradition

This brief description seems like a formidable argument in favour of the theory that the country underwent a great modernising transformation from the 1870s. It cannot be denied that there were changes, especially in the mentality of the elite which came to power following the proclamation of the republic. But caution is called for when evaluating these phenomena. The theory of change can partly be fruit born of the vision of the modernisers themselves and from the history told by them. Resistance was formidable. Beyond that it is also necessary to enquire into the meaning of the modernity that was being preached. Depending on who was speaking it could be partial, ambiguous or just reactionary. Let us start by examining the elements that openly opposed the new gospel.

These civilisatory missions uncovered, through the opposition they provoked, a Brazil that was far from convinced of the values of the missionaries. The strongest reaction, naturally, came from rural Brazil, which constituted, at that time, almost the whole of Brazil. In 1872, cities with more than 20,000 inhabitants did not represent more than 8% of the population and even by 1920 this figure barely reached 13%. Manifestations from this Brazil were sporadic, and in general defensive, but they left no doubt as to the content of the values that inspired them.

In the period that interests us, the first reaction of the rural world appeared in the revolt of the 'Quebra Quilos'. In 1862 the government adopted the metric system and established a term of ten years for its implementation. In 1871 there was a popular rebellion in Rio de Janeiro against the new system. The new weights and measures were broken, leading to the origin of the name 'Quebra Quilos'. The rural revolt happened in 1874 in a North Eastern region embracing parts of Paraíba, Pernambuco, Alagoas and Rio Grande do Norte. Studies on the movement affirm that the motives were complex, but they agree that prominent among them was a reaction against the new weights and measures and against the imprisoning of the bishops of Pernambuco and of Pará, Dom Vital and Dom Macedo Costa. The government at the time was headed by Viscount Rio Branco, masonic grand master. On the whole, the rebels were small farm owners who took action preferably at popular markets. They attacked symbols of government action: registry offices, municipal chambers, tax offices, army recruiting offices and also business places and masonic lodges. They destroyed taxation forms and broke the new weights and measures.²

What were the *sertanejos* really against? They were reacting against a government that offended their values, their traditions and their centuries-old customs as embodied in the Church, which gave them a spiritual measure, and in the system of weights, which gave them a measure of material things. The masonic government attacked the Church, losing, in the process, the legitimacy that it needed to alter ancient customs. Rio Branco also secured approval for the new law of military conscription, and the province of Paraíba established new taxes. The new conscription law

² On the reactions to modernity coming from rural populations, see, for Canudos, Euclides da Cunha, *Rebellion in the Backlands* (Chicago, 1944); for the Contestado, Duglas Teixeira Monteiro, *Os Errantes do Novo Século* (São Paulo, 1974); for Padre Cícero, Ralph Della Cava, *Miracle at Joazeiro* (New York, 1970); for messianic movements in general, Maria Isaura Pereira de Queiroz, *O Messianismo no Brasil e no Mundo*, 2nd edn. (São Paulo, 1977) and *O Campesinato Brasileiro* (São Paulo, 1973), and Armando Souto-Maior, *Quebra-Quilos. Lutas Sociais no Outono do Império* (São Paulo, 1978), for the revolt of Quebra-Quilos.

was progressive in that it introduced a lottery for military service, but in the tense and adversarial atmosphere of the time it was accused of ‘enslaving the people’, a serious accusation in a slave society. The *sertanejos* reacted against attempts to secularise the state and to reshape their lives through the actions of government.

Undoubtedly the most dramatic and tragic rural reaction was the revolt of Canudos in the remote interior of Bahia. The episode is well known through da Cunha’s work and more recently through the romanticised version of Vargas Llosa. A charismatic leader, Antônio Conselheiro, traversed the North East for many years, gaining the admiration and respect of the *sertanejos*. Initially completely pacific and religious, Conselheiro’s action acquired connotations of political resistance in 1893. Municipalities created after the proclamation of the republic had introduced new taxes. Conselheiro reacted by burning the lists where the new taxes were announced. Persecuted by the police, and accompanied by many followers, he retreated to Canudos where he built a holy community. First Canudos was attacked by the army in 1896; then, after four military expeditions, the little city was completely destroyed by Krupp cannons in 1897 – the most barbaric massacre in the history of the country. The *sertanejos* defended their traditional practices, which included religious marriage, processions, and rituals of piety and penitence; they were defending their ethic of brotherhood, their communal spirit and a paternalist image of government incarnated in the figure of the emperor. In the name of progress and civilisation, the wrath of the government and republican jacobinism was unleashed. Even Euclides da Cunha, who denounced the enormity of the crime, initially agreed that the monarchist reaction in defence of the old order was our ‘Vendée’. In *Os Sertões* there are unequivocal statements that the conflict was a fight between remnants of a distant past, preserved in isolation over three centuries and the ‘modern ideals’ brought by the new regime. It was a war against a defunct society brought to the surface by a civilising movement.

Still among the *sertanejos*, but now in the south of the country, another demonstration of the strength of tradition occurred between the states of Paraná and Santa Catarina. As in the case of Canudos, the movement of Contestado originated way back, and was led by a monk, João Maria. Then, under the republic, a second João Maria took the leadership, and opposed the new regime, accusing it of representing ‘the law of perversion’, a phrase resembling the ‘law of the dog’ (i.e. of the devil) employed by Conselheiro. In 1911 there appeared a third leader, José Maria, a deserter from a cavalry regiment. Denunciations of monarchism and subversion led to an attack by military forces in 1912, killing José Maria. But the movement only continued with increased strength under

collective leadership. As in Canudos, further armed military expeditions dispersed the believers with machine guns and cannon. These however regrouped, launched a monarchist manifesto and proclaimed an illiterate farmer as their king. Their final surrender occurred in 1915.

In Contestado, as in Canudos, the communal ideal of life predominated. There was no commerce, no republican money and religious practice filled a good part of the believers' time. Their holy book was *Carlos Magno e os 12 Pares de França*. Thanks to the military experience of José Maria, organisation was superior to that in Canudos – Contestado had cavalry and infantry. There was a guard of honour called the 'Twelve Pairs of France'. The number of rebels has been calculated at between 5,000 and 12,000.

Returning to the North East: another movement revealed the *sertanejo* soul of a Brazil that Euclides considered lost in the mists of time. This was the extensively studied 'Movement of Juazeiro', in Ceará, led by Father Cícero Romão Batista. Cícero, afterwards nicknamed 'Padrinho Ciço' (Godfather Ciço), or 'Padim Ciço', started preaching in the 1870s and continued to be active until his death in 1934. When he became established in Juazeiro, it was a small hamlet of around six houses; at the time of his death it was a city of approximately 40,000 inhabitants. Cícero's relationship to modernity was somewhat different from that of Conselheiro or José Maria. It cannot be claimed that he was reacting to the pressures of modernisation and social and political change. He was not opposing the Republic: he was not protesting against government and taxes. On the contrary, he was involved in politics, was mayor of Juazeiro, vice-governor of Ceará, and a federal deputy. He mediated in conflicts between the 'coronels' and promoted commerce and agriculture.

His modernity, however, was different from that of the coastal theorists, of the positivists, Spencerists and jacobins. His activity started with a religious crusade to regenerate traditional catholic practices and customs and the family. His values were traditional. Juazeiro became a New Jerusalem, with Calvary and holy sepulchre. The manner in which he treated his followers had nothing to do with republican concepts of citizenship. Cícero was not a representative, an elected leader or even the republican dictator dreamed of by the positivists. The titles given to him by his followers illustrate well the relationship between them: *Padrinho* (Godfather), Father, Patriarch, Protector, Counsellor, Eternal Father, Jesus Christ and Holy Spirit. Cícero treated his followers/subjects as children: admonishing, advising, punishing. He even used corporal punishment, the school cane, applied to adults. He had an astute perception of the *sertanejo* soul, and it was to his credit that he could manipulate their values in a manner that did not bring his followers into

open conflict with the new times. He used traditional values to facilitate, and more often to introduce, change. The fact remains, however, that the society created by him, which survives until today, is far from a secular and rational modernity.

Some of Cícero's followers did not have his wisdom, for example José Lourenço who, sent by Cícero, formed his own community in Caldeirão, also in Ceará. Joined by Severino, another pious man, they built a radical community without money or private property. In the 1930s they were accused of Communism and were attacked by the police. Their village was bombed and destroyed. A disciple of Severino – Senhorinho – was also attacked by military forces, resulting in a massacre with over 400 deaths.

This was *sertanejo* Brazil in ferment, revealing values that were antagonistic to those of the urban modernising elites. There was still the vast rural world which remained silent, subject to the power of the large landowners, including the areas of agricultural export. The messianic movements of the North East and South were symptomatic, occurring in regions with small properties, far from the domination of large plantations. The rest of the rural world was the kingdom of the 'coronels', who dominated the state republican parties, gave support to the federal government and lent stability to the oligarchic republic. This world, as well as the Republic, from which 95 % of citizens were excluded, included nothing modern. It was a world of illiteracy, paternalism, semi-servile labour and an absence of rights.³

The state of São Paulo, where the bulk of European immigration was directed, was possibly the only exception. Between 1880 and 1920 almost two million immigrants, mostly Italians, went to São Paulo, deeply altering the demography, economy and society of the state. Even the distribution of rural property was democratised through immigrant social ascent, while the state displaced Rio de Janeiro from its leadership in the process of industrialisation. Scholars agree in accentuating the gap which had started to separate São Paulo from the rest of the country. The Paulistas rejoiced in portraying themselves as the locomotive that pulled the empty cars of the other states.

The reaffirmation of traditional values did not only come from the rural world. The capital itself was a setting for reaction, starting with the Revolt of the Armada in 1893, which kept Rio de Janeiro under siege for six months, and which by the end had assumed monarchical characteristics. Apart from the total support of the navy, many elements of the political elite showed sympathy for the movement, which branched out into the

³ On the politics of rural oligarchies see Victor Nunes Leal, *Coronelismo: The Municipality and Representative Government in Brazil* (Cambridge, 1977), and Oliveira Vianna, *Populações Meridionais do Brasil*, 2nd edn. (São Paulo, 1922).

federalist revolt of Rio Grande do Sul. For some time, the survival of the new regime was in serious danger.⁴

The most spectacular urban reaction was undoubtedly the revolt of the population in 1904 against obligatory vaccination and reformation of the city undertaken in the best spirit of the civilising missions. The history is well known. After various frustrated attempts to sanitise the city and put an end to the epidemics which turned it into a terror for diplomats and foreigners in general, Rodrigues Alves handed the task over to Pereira Passos and Osvaldo Cruz, giving them almost dictatorial powers. We have covered the principal initiatives of the two reformers, disciples of Haussmann and Pasteur. The reaction was immediate. A popular revolt took control of the city for a week, putting the stability of the government at risk. Parts of the city were taken by rebels who set up barricades resembling those of the Parisian revolts of the nineteenth century, the very revolts which, according to Engels, Haussmann had created boulevards to prevent. The bulk of the population was sympathetic to, if not totally supportive of the revolt. Even sectors that could be considered as modern, such as the textile workers, adhered to the revolt. Sectors called 'marginals', composed of street vendors, *capoeiras*, petty criminals and prostitutes, formed the front line of the battle.

For the government and the reformers, it was an obscurantist reaction in the manner of Canudos. If Euclides had written about the episode, he would possibly have had to rewrite his theory explaining isolation as the cause of backwardness, because the demonstrations were taking place in the capital of the country. There is no doubt that the popular reaction was due to the prevalence among the population of values incompatible with those of the government. Strong and rigid standards of family morality were applied, especially to women. Visits by the doctor in the possible absence of the head of the household, and especially the possibility of a stranger physically touching a wife and daughters, or simply seeing parts of their bodies, seemed like a violation of the household, a threat to the honour of the husband and an unbearably demoralising act. There was still a traditional conception of the relationship between citizen and government, a kind of unwritten pact according to which an active participation in public affairs was forsworn in return for government non-involvement in ordinary people's lives. The government should not interfere in traditional norms that ruled people's daily domestic life. As the

⁴ On the urban reactions to modernity see Nicolau Sevcenko, *Literatura como Missão. Tensões Sociais e Criação Cultural na Primeira República* (São Paulo, 1983), José Murilo de Carvalho, *Os Bestializados. O Rio de Janeiro e a República que não Foi* (São Paulo, 1987), Sandra Lauderdale Graham, 'The Vintém Riot and Political Culture: Rio de Janeiro, 1880', *HAHR*, vol. 60, no. 3 (1980), pp. 431-49, and Maria de Lourdes Mônaco Janotti, *Os Subversivos da República* (São Paulo, 1986).

government violated their side of the pact, the population felt within their rights when they reacted violently.

Growing state interference in people's lives was one of the most frequent causes of popular revolt, especially because this was happening without allowing an increase in political participation. This applied to the cases of the introduction of the metric system, the draft lottery, the census, secular weddings and vaccinations. In the case of the latter, as we have seen, the effort to regulate went beyond vaccination, as it included the manner in which houses were built, the treatment of sick people and the way to behave and dress in public. The most traditional cause of revolt was, naturally, the increase of taxes and transport fares. The collection of taxes was to be considered as legitimate, but on the other hand, any increase considered as unjustified was a good reason for protest. Rio de Janeiro was the setting for one of these revolts in 1880. Increased fares on public transport to one vintém (20 reis) provoked a popular revolt that was exploited by the republicans. For three days crowds of more than 5,000 people invaded the streets, attacked trams, pulled up lines, beat drivers and erected barricades.

The revolts in Rio de Janeiro, the most cosmopolitan city in the country, showed that the strength of tradition was not limited to the interior, as Euclides da Cunha had thought. Part of the population of the capital, if not the majority, was conducting its life according to values foreign to those of the modernising elite. Statements of the time indicate that the poor population of the city, including those under the scrutiny of the police, were sympathetic to the monarchy. About 12 years after the proclamation of the Republic, the chronicler João do Rio, when visiting a prison, observed that 'with rare exceptions, which possibly do not even exist, all of the prisoners are radically pro-monarchist'. They had the monarchical coat of arms tattooed on their bodies, and read tales of chivalry. Charlemagne was possibly as popular among these people as Dom Pedro II, and certainly a lot more so than the then President of the republic. As monarchists the population of Rio rivalled the followers of Conselheiro and of monk José Maria. Such sympathies were also widespread among the black population of Salvador, capital of Bahia, where the republican leader Silva Jardim was almost lynched in 1888 when he used anti-monarchical arguments to oppose the Comte Dieu. The black population of São Luis, capital of Maranhão, rebelled against the proclamation of the Republic, leaving more than 20 corpses in the street, the only victims of the change in regime.

Which modernity?

The force of tradition did not only become apparent as a response to change. It was also present in what was seen and considered to be modern by sectors of the elite. During the times that we are examining the terms modern, modernity and modernisation meant many different things. There was technological innovation: the railway, electricity, the telegraph, the telephone, the gramophone, the cinema, the automobile and the airplane. There were scientific institutions: Manguinhos, Butantã, the Escola de Minas and the schools of Medicine and Engineering. There were new ideas: materialism, positivism, evolutionism, Social Darwinism, free trade, secularism and republicanism; there was industry, European immigration and the white man. There were the latest women's fashions from Paris, the latest men's fashions from London, French language and literature, the dandy, the *flâneur*; and there was also North Americanism, pragmatism, a business spirit, sport and physical education. The Portuguese, the colonial, the catholic, and the monarchical were viewed as antiquated, traditional and backward; so were the Indian, the black and the *sertanejo*; the bachelor of arts, the jurist, the priest, the Pai-de-Santo (priest of Afro-Brazilian religion); political centralism, Parliamentarianism, protectionism, spiritualism, and philosophical eclecticism.

All of the former can be included within concepts of the modern, but the manner in which these sometimes contradictory elements were combined is what gave modernity its meaning, and its greater or lesser degree of rupture with tradition. From the list above it is possible to establish what Brazilian modernity was not. Ideas of egalitarianism and democracy were not incorporated into the political aspect. If some Republicans, especially those of Rio de Janeiro, spoke of democracy and an end to privilege, they would not go beyond rhetoric. The idea of 'the people' was purely abstract. In the main the people were hostile or indifferent to the political system. No effort was made to incorporate them through the electoral process. The Brazilian republic was unique: it did not have 'people'.⁵

More than indifferent, modernity was allergic to the Brazilian people. Racist theories which were viewed as the latest advances of science propagated disbelief in the black and half-caste population's capacity for

⁵ On the content of modernity, see Tavares Bastos, *A Província*, 2nd edn. (São Paulo, 1937), Eduardo Prado, *A ilusão Americana*, 2nd edn. (São Paulo, 1902), José Enrique Rodó, *Ariel* (Montevideo, 1900), Richard M. Morse, *O Espelho de Próspero. Cultura e Idéias nas Américas* (São Paulo, 1988), Monteiro Lobato, *Problema Vital* (São Paulo, 1918), Sueli Robles Reis de Queiroz, *Os Radicais da República. Jacobinismo: Ideologia e Ação, 1893-1897* (São Paulo, 1986), José Murilo de Carvalho, *A Formação das Almas: O imaginário da República no Brasil* (São Paulo, 1990).

civilisation. From this came the faith of many modernisers, for example Tavares Bastos, in the redeeming role of European immigration, echoing the beliefs of the Argentinian Sarmiento, for whom progress depended upon a total renewal of the population of the Americas. The republic was particularly hostile to blacks and half-castes who formed the bulk of the population of Canudos, Contestado and even of the lower classes of Rio de Janeiro. One of the first actions of the new government was to arrest and exile the *capoeiras*.

If we also consider democracy as a part of modernity, Brazilian reformists did not have a brilliant record. There was not even a consensus among them concerning the representative system. For the positivists, parliamentary representation was a farce that should be replaced by a republican dictatorship. The jacobins did not have much respect for the mechanisms of political representation either. The Spencerian Liberals paid lip service to democracy, but in practice would not do anything to make it a reality. Authoritarianism was a permanent characteristic of these Brazilian modernisers. Sometimes, as we have seen, they used cannon to impose progress; in other cases they despised the opinions of their opponents; at their best, they were paternalistic, like Rondon. Even among modernisers who admired the United States, like Monteiro Lobato, a technocratic and authoritarian vision predominated. According to Lobato, Brazil should get rid of the Bachelors of Arts, of the 'Triatoma Baccalaureatus' and hand all power to the hygienists for them to 'sanitise' the country. The reformers saw themselves as messiahs, saviours of a sick and illiterate people that was incapable of taking responsibility for its own actions, bestialised, if not definitely incapable of progress.

Another indication of ambiguity was the relationship of modernity to the idea of civilisation. When it was said that Rio was civilising itself, the expression indicated an aristocratisation of urban life, rather than its democratisation. It indicated the creation of an urban space for the elites, debarring the inelegant presence of poverty. Gilberto Freyre suggests, with his usual astuteness, that the sophistication of behaviour and fashion and the mania for imitating Paris were a reaction to the abolition of slavery, a way of delineating a distance between poor and rich and blacks and whites, now that slavery no longer separated them. Jeffrey Needell concluded his book about the 'carioca *belle-époque*', by affirming that ways of life and social relations were ever more influenced by French and English aristocratic paradigms, accepted by the elite as indicators of civilisation.

This ambiguity penetrated the minds of supposedly modern intellectuals. The story of the *caboclo* (a half-caste of white and Indian),

Euclides da Cunha, is well known. He was obsessed with progress and civilisation and was a genuine republican, but was also under the sway of the racist ideas of the time, which impeded him from believing in the majority of the Brazilian population. The jacobin writer Raul Pompéia was desperate about the lack of support for the new regime in the capital, and ended up by considering the Fluminense people as enemies of the nation. Baron Rio Branco, Minister of External Relations for years, re-oriented external policy towards the United States, the clearest example of modernity. But at the same time he tried to hide illiterate and half-caste Brazil, selecting civil servants of Caucasian appearance and bringing nuns from Sacré Cœur, in France, to educate future diplomats' wives in the best school of European etiquette.

There was still ambiguity at the heart of orthodox positivism – a doctrine that exerted a great influence at the time. Positivism saw the history of mankind as a continuous march towards progress, impelled by science. At the same time, however, the final visions of Comte accentuated the affective and religious aspects of human action, putting them above reason and science. One of the consequences of this hierarchical inversion was the exaltation of the Latin people over the Anglo-Saxons, because the former were considered more affective and spiritual, while the latter were considered more rational and pragmatic. The positivist reaction against Anglo-Saxon preponderance was expressed in a battle of symbols. When the positivists saw the Brazilian copy of the American flag circulating in the streets on the day that the republic was declared, they quickly mobilised, had a new flag designed and persuaded the provisional government to adopt it after only four days. The new flag kept the characteristics of its imperial predecessor and introduced the positivist slogan 'Order and Progress'. In order to justify the new emblem, they alleged continuity with the past and links with France, the centre of western civilisation.

In their combat against Americanism, the positivists were helped by one of their great enemies, the monarchist Eduardo Prado. In *The American Illusion* published in 1893 and soon confiscated by the police, Prado reacted against the Americanism of the new regime, arguing that everything separated Brazil from the United States: distance, race, religion, language, history and traditions. He virulently attacked North American policy towards Latin America and in particular the examples set by North American society and government. After an initial period in which civic virtue predominated, the republic of the North had become corrupted by industrialisation and turned into a kingdom of monopolies, plutocracy, and political corruption. Undoubtedly it was a rich and prosperous country, but civilisation should be measured not by material

prosperity but by moral elevation and by respect for human values. The American spirit was violent and the Latin spirit was juridical. The moral influence of the United States was pernicious, he concluded.

This text by Eduardo Prado – legitimate son of the Paulista coffee aristocracy – anticipated another, more famous text by Uruguayan J. E. Rodó. Published in 1900, *Ariel*, although less aggressive towards the United States, established essential distinctions between the two civilisations on very similar lines to Eduardo Prado's. North American civilisation, according to Rodó, was dominated by utilitarianism and egalitarianism, material interest, pragmatism, immediatism and mediocrity. Latin American civilisation was characterised by a predominance of the soul, appreciation of beauty, culture, contemplation and the ideal of disinterest. The two texts, despite the aristocratic preconceptions that they reveal, were also an attack on a concept of modernity that was starting to invade Latin America and that Rodó denounced as *Nordomanía*: a fascination with technical progress, material wealth and mass culture. They were attempting to define a Latin American identity that would not be a return to the past, but which would also not be a renunciation of the region's authentic values.

A last example of the precariousness of modernity can be found in the labour movement. Stronger in the big cities like Rio de Janeiro, it also felt the weight of tradition. From the turn of the century, anarchism made incursions into the working classes of Rio de Janeiro, bringing political and social initiatives that confidently confronted traditional values. The proposals of negotiation, of direct struggle with employers without recourse to State mediation, were new; radical anti-statism, denial of political partisan mediation, the rejection of the notion of nation and nationalism, and opposition to military service were new; the emphasis on the creation of a working-class culture, of alternative education and of open relations between the sexes, were also new. On these issues the anarchists clashed with imperial tradition and also with positivist and liberal views. In spite of gaining some influence in the labour movement (more evident after the Brazilian Regional Working Class Congress, in 1906) anarchism had to face strong opposition. Its influence was strongest during moments of economic crisis, when workers were more disposed towards aggressive action. Against anarchism were reformism – the tendency to solve problems of class conflict through negotiations with state and employers, and the so-called 'yellow' unions that cooperated openly with employers. The anarchist struggle to transform traditional working-class organisations of mutual aid into politically militant organisations was difficult and often inglorious. In 1909 the majority of organisations still played a welfare role in the old style of the colonial

brotherhoods. Anarchist intolerance towards certain popular traditions, like carnival, football and gambling did not help them either. Anarchist newspapers would not stop protesting about what they considered to be the lack of awareness and apathy of the masses. The constant appeal for the working classes financially to support, for example, the anarchist press, would always fall on deaf ears. A great distance separated the bunch of devoted leaders from the majority of the working class.

Again São Paulo was the exception. The absence of a traditional working population derived from slavery and a massive presence of European immigrants allowed the development of a more aggressive labour movement strongly influenced by anarchism. This, however, happened only in the second decade of this century. Innovative and revolutionary action also encountered obstacles even in São Paulo. There were conflicts generated by ethnic, cultural and linguistic diversity, even among the Italians, who were the majority. Many Italians also came from rural areas without a tradition of political struggle. In addition to this, the first generation of immigrants was more concerned with social advancement than with affirming its working-class identity. That is why anarchism in São Paulo also had its moments of glory only during times of crisis, such as World War I, and in the immediate postwar period, when the increase in exports and reduction of imports caused a great increase in the price of necessities.

A conservative society

Arno Mayer said that, despite the advances of modernity, Europe up to 1914 was a predominantly traditional, agrarian, aristocratic, pre-industrial and pre-bourgeois world.⁶ The same can be said about Brazil, with more reason. Until the war, Brazil was an agrarian society, exporter of primary products, governed by an oligarchy of large landowners with a Europeanised elite disdainful of the majority of the population, which was mainly poor, illiterate and Black. The areas most affected by economic and demographic transformations, like São Paulo, were only halfway towards being in the modern world. Capitalist production in São Paulo came via the rural world, which kept many of its aristocratic and slave-based values. The industrialisation that followed was led by a bourgeoisie closely linked to coffee production and its values. Immigrant entrepreneurs frequently searched for ennoblement through establishing familial links with the old, traditional families. The modernist movement in literature and the arts, which emerged in the capital of the state in 1922, was sponsored by traditional families from which many of its participants also came. Social

⁶ See Arno J. Mayer, *The Persistence of the Old Regime: Europe to the Great War* (New York, 1981).

conservatism and political authoritarianism hid behind the aesthetic revolution.

The missionaries of modernisation identified the Brazilian population as the great obstacle to progress. For some, we were made inept by our racial composition, and therefore only European immigration would save us. For others, the cultural traces of Lusitanian or Iberian origin constituted the major impediments to progress. The latter compared Brazilians to Anglo-Saxons and concluded that we lacked a sense of value of the individual, the belief in the strength of individual initiative as the main motor of social transformation. The absence of a strong individualism impeded the development of the art of association which de Tocqueville had judged to be the secret of North American dynamism.

This negative diagnosis was made with small variations by many thinkers of the time, from Tavares Bastos, the *nordomaniaco* liberal, passing through the Spencerists Sílvio Romero and Alberto Sales, to Monteiro Lobato. According to these authors we had a communal and familial formation and our solidarity was restricted to small circles of family and friends. We were incapable of solidarity beyond these limits. As a consequence we did not have a civic spirit and we remained dependent on the state. Communal ethics, argued Sílvio Romero, led to pork-barrel politics, one of the great plagues of the republic. Romero ended up by defending the return of the military to power, so that they could bring morality to the republic.⁷

The positivists shared the same diagnosis. Our culture was communal, integrationist, collaborative and affective; the Anglo-Saxon culture was selfish, individualistic, materialistic and rational. The difference between the Positivists, on one side and Sales and Romero, on the other, was that the former believed the advantage to lie with Brazilians. Communalism, collaboration and integration were the basis of a future society: they were modernity. According to the positivists, a regime of integration would occur through republican dictatorship.⁸

Whether they believed in ‘the people’ or not, the modernisers came to the same conclusion: authoritarianism, violent or paternalistic. The authors that followed them in the second decade of the century, like Alberto Torres and Oliveira Viana, clearly elaborated what was being developed: the state should take responsibility for organising the nation and for modernising the country. A programme of conservative

⁷ See Sílvio Romero, *O Brasil Social* (Rio de Janeiro, 1907), and Alberto Sales, ‘Balanço Político: Necessidade de uma Reforma Constitucional’, in Antônio Paim (ed.), *Plataforma Política do Positivismo Ilustrado* (Brasília, 1980), pp. 63–75.

⁸ On the Positivists, see Ivan Lins, *História do Positivismo no Brasil*, 2nd edn. (São Paulo, 1967).

modernisation was fully adopted by the regime that emerged after 1930 under the tutelage of the military and the technicians.

It was a modernity that was not based on the strong Anglo-Saxon tradition of individual initiative, nor did it have a place for the popular Brazilian traditional exercise of fraternity. The relationship between state and individual was a combination of repression and paternalism. It did not promote citizenship, at the most it created statehood, incorporation into the political system through an increasing network of state bureaucracy. Both the good features of modernity and those of tradition were thereby simultaneously perverted.