

TYPES AND MYTHS IN BRAZILIAN THOUGHT

Octavio Ianni

Brazil may be seen as a country, a national society, a nation or a nation-state in search of a concept. In spite of the fact that it has a name and history, land and frontiers, flag and anthem, people and government, heroes and saints, memory and oblivion, glories and sufferings, ruins and monuments, there is a periodical and continuous debate in order to know it, to define it and to establish its place in the world's map: Europe, Africa or the New World; white, half-breed, indigenous or black; archaic or modern; authentic or erratic; pristine or future; third world or first world to be; a state whose name may be that of a country, a tree or a commodity.

That is the state of mind or mentality that permeates some authors' inquietude, moving them to search the semblance, mode of being, reality, dilemmas and perspectives of Brazilian society, of the Brazilian people, of Brazil as a nation-state. Many are the authors who ask about its face, its explanation, its concept. They ask themselves what could be its "north", or direction, because of the repetition of predicaments, reorientations, progress and regress.

That is the climate that inspires a good part of the interpretations of Brazil. Among the many interpretations, both wide ranging and specific, there is always a question about what the country was, what it has been and what it could become, as if it were a formless cloud, in search of articulation and direction.

Some studies and accounts are representative of that inquietude and questions. It is worth remembering some of them, like the works of Tavares Bastos [1839-1875], *A província* [1870]; Silvio Romero [1851-1914], *História da literatura brasileira* [1888]; Joaquim Nabuco [1849-1910], *O abolicionismo* [1883]; Raul Pompéia [1863-1895], *O ateneu* [1888]; Euclides da Cunha [1866-1909], *Os sertões* [1902]; Lima Barreto [1881-

1922], *O triste fim de Policarpo Quaresma* [1915]; Oliveira Vianna [1883-1951], *Evolução do povo brasileiro* [1923]; Mário de Andrade [1893-1945], *Macunaíma* [1928]; Paulo Prado [1869-1943], *Retrato do Brasil* [1928]; Graciliano Ramos [1892-1953], *Vidas secas* [1938]; José Lins do Rego [1901-1957], *Fogo morto* [1943]; Caio Prado Jr. [1907-1990], *Evolução política do Brasil* [1933]; Sérgio Buarque de Holanda [1902-1982], *Raízes do Brasil* [1936]; Gilberto Freyre [1900-1987], *Interpretação do Brasil* [1947]; Raymundo Faoro [1925-2003], *Os donos do poder* [1958]; Florestan Fernandes [1920-1995], *A revolução burguesa* [1972]; Clovis Moura [1925-2003], *Rebeliões da senzala* [1959]; Antonio Cândido [1918], *Formação da literatura brasileira* [1959]; Alfredo Bosi [1936], *Dialética da colonização* [2000]; Celso Furtado [1920-2004], *Brasil: a construção interrompida* [1992].

Many are the inquietudes, questions or even interpretations elaborated in these and other studies and accounts, aiming at shedding light on the history, describing periods, explaining the roots or discovering the perspectives of the country, national society, people or nation-state.

Many are the lines of thought or even “families” of interpretations of Brazil. They are lines or families that are developed, recreated or simply reiterated. But they are felt and evident in many studies and accounts. They are drawn as if they composed a wide, polychronic and polyphonic cartography of Brazilian imagination. It is worth mentioning some of them, although briefly.

(a) In Brazil, the state constitutes civil society, for society is little organized, disperse, jellified; so the state works as the society’s organizer, providing its articulation and direction, promoting its change, always in accord with the elites’ evaluation.

(b) Brazil is a country whose history is largely determined by movements and requirements of external markets, from colonialism and imperialism to globalism, defining itself in terms of the different modes of its insertion in external markets.

(c) Brazil is seen as a country marked by patriarchy, formed and developed in the course of centuries of slavery, “coronelism” [kind of patron-client relationship characteristic of the countryside, named after the patron figure, the “coronel”], “caciquism” [power relationship named after the local chieftain, the “cacique”] and

oligarchy; all that within something named “lusotropicalism”; not forgetting the continuous and repeated association, mixture or confusion of public and private.

(d) Brazil is singled out as a “racial democracy”, in spite of centuries of slave labor and the way the Indian, Black, Arab, Japan, Polish and other individuals and collectivities are treated ideologically and practically in that singular “racial laboratory”.

(e) Brazil has been seen as a country also singled out by its “bloodless history”, a history of “white revolutions”, where a “lusotropical racial democracy” flourishes.

These and other interpretations, always together with inquietude and questions, allow us to reassert the hypothesis that Brazil is a nation in search of a concept; a cloud moving through the course of modern history in search of articulation, direction. It is worth highlighting one interpretation, both original and impressive, among those followed and repeated in different studies, monographs, essays and literary accounts. It is the perspective of Brazil, its history, as a constellation of types, some of which were used to construct typologies, in some cases unfolded in myths and mythologies.

The “typological” perspective focuses on social reality or the country’s history mainly in cultural terms, with clear socio-psychological ingredients. And focuses society, politics and culture, be it in terms of the social sciences or literary accounts, as sectors or circles that can be treated separately, each with its own dynamics, and some degree of autonomy. It is as if the country’s history were developed in terms of signs, symbols and ensigns, figures and figurations, values and ideals, foreign to the domination and appropriation relations, processes and structures with whom the links and movements of the society in its different configurations and historical development could be properly unveiled.

Yes, what is to be inferred of the many types that inhabit Brazilian social thought, in its scientific and literary versions, and in the versions of different social sectors, in their activities and legends, is that they carry a strong cultural connotation, with marked socio-psychological overtones. There comes “cordial man”, in the sense of a man strongly determined by emotions, subjectivity and the heart [from Latin, *cordis*], alien if not opposed to the “rational”. There also come the “bandeirante” [crusader and explorer],

“indian”, “black”, “immigrant”, “gaúcho” [type that lives in the countryside in the far south], “sertanejo” [inhabitant of the backlands = *sertão*], “seringueiro” [that exploits *seringueira* = the rubber tree], “colonizer”, “adventurer”; “Macunaíma” [main character in Mario de Andrade’s novel], “Martim Cererê” [after a poem by Cassiano Ricardo (1928)], “João Grilo” [character in *Auto da Compadecida* (1955), a play by Ariano Suassuna (1927)], “laziness”, “luxury”, “Jeca Tatu” [character in *Urupês* (1914) by Monteiro Lobato (1882-1948)], the “three unhappy races”, the “conciliation” politics, the theses of the “white revolutions”. That is also the way of flourishing of figures and figurations, myths and mythologization like “Lampião” [1898-1938, bandit’s chief in the Brazilian northeast’s countryside], “Padre Cícero” [1844-1934, catholic priest in Ceará, object of strong popular devotion and said to work miracles], “Antônio Conselheiro” [1830-1897, messianic leader who established himself and his followers in Canudos, and against whom the federal government sent three large military expeditions], “Tiradentes” [1746-1792, Brazilian hero of the *Inconfidência Mineira*, a conspiracy for Brazil’s independence, sent to death by the Portuguese crown in colonial times], “Zumbi” [1655-1695, runaway slave, one of the leaders in the refuge of Palmares] and others, real or imaginary. Many are the types and myths that inhabit the studies and accounts, reality and fantasy, composing a vast cartography.

This interpretative line permeates the writings of Sérgio Buarque de Holanda, and counts with notable contributions by Ribeiro Couto [1898-1963], Graça Aranha [1868-1931], Paulo Prado, Cassiano Ricardo, Menotti Del Picchia [1892-1961] and others. In these we may find a resonance of writings by Silvio Romero, Ruy Barbosa [1849-1923] and, before them, José de Alencar [1829-1877] and Gonçalves Dias [1823-1864]. But we should observe that such a view of Brazil’s history also impregnates the writings of some authors of the 1922 Modern Art Week (the well known *Semana de Arte Moderna*). We should not forget social science studies that multiply themselves afterwards, conferring to some types and myths other, new modulations.

Once again, it is worth acknowledging that each interpretation of Brazil is born in a given intellectual climate, involving questions and tensions, that seem to drift in the air. The climate translated by Sérgio Buarque de Holanda in the drawing of the “cordial man” is the same that generated “Macunaíma”, “Martim Cererê”, “laziness”, “luxury” and “Jeca

Tatu”, according to the writings by Mário de Andrade, Cassiano Ricardo, Paulo Prado and Monteiro Lobato, among others.

In the history of Brazilian thought on society and its culture, created and recreated types are frequent and, at times, notable, stenographing the difficult and complex reality. Thus, history appears as a collection of figures and figurations, or types and myths, relative to individuals and collectivities, to marked situations and contexts, to moments of geo-history that are recorded metaphorically or allegorically. They give clarity and order to what appears complex, contradictory, difficult, as generally happens to social and historical reality, in its forms of sociability and in its social force games.

In history, geography, anthropology, sociology, political science, psychology, theater, romance, poetry and other languages typical constructions are frequent. Some are close to the empirical universe, other catch “median” types, but there are some that elaborate “extreme” or “ideal” types. They could be taken as naturalist, realist, impressionist, surrealist or other styles. They are stenographies of a difficult history. One should note that many types share something, reveal proximities and similarities, giving the impression that they are composed as a “family” or a “lineage”. They are those that reveal themselves akin or even mutually referred: “cordial man”, “Macunaíma”, “Martim Cererê”, “Saci Pererê” [folkloric figure popularized by Monteiro Labato in his “Sitio do Picapau Amarelo”], “laziness”, “luxury”, “Jeca Tatu”. They are, perhaps, single and occasional expressions, or fantasies of imagination. But it is also possible to acknowledge that they have roots in society, culture and history, from a given intellectual perspective, a given style of thought. It should also be noted that the types and myths seem well rooted in the Brazilian social, cultural, economic, political and psychological formation. In such formation there are traces of Indigenous, African and Portuguese traditions, besides other less strong, up to the end of the nineteenth century. They are traditions, practices, values, ideals, myths and fantasies well present in a society where, since its beginning, there are manifestations of animism, fetishism, shamanism, *candomblé*, *umbanda*, *quimbanda* [different forms of religion of African descent], popular spiritualism, rural catholicism and other traits not only of Indigenous, African and Portuguese origin, but also Spanish and Mediterranean. There is a vast, complex and magical cultural “pagan” substrate in the formation of Brazilian society, entering the twentieth century and still evident in the

twenty-first. That is, probably, the historical, social and cultural context where the matter for the types and myths is created; it is also the context for its articulation in “families” and “lineages”. It is in that sense that “Macunaíma” and the “cordial man” belong to the same “stock”. They may well be magical forms of exorcism through which centuries of slavery and alienation are sublimated. We must acknowledge, however, that this type family points to informality, innocent liberty, labor as a game, indiscipline, rejection of labor as an obligation, lose sociability and unpredictability. They are traits of cordial man, Macunaíma, Martim Cererê living in laziness and luxury, Jeca Tatu’s indolent prostration.

It is symptomatic that these figures and figurations are formulated and lived in a society with four centuries of slavery. Here we face a dilemma: in a society where labor is seen as a subaltern, slave activity, adequate to an inferior caste, another race, when slavery is abolished, confronts the urgent challenge of giving labor a new definition, giving it a dignity through which the society’s and the individuals’ dignity express themselves, resulting in riches and prosperity; especially to the owners of the means of production, the bourgeoisie in formation. To a large extent, these are the ideas of the abolitionist movement, present in Joaquim Nabuco’s *O abolicionismo*, and unfolded in the speeches, chronics, reports, editorial articles and other manifestations that celebrate the May 13, 1888 [abolition of slavery].

What happens is that slavery declines and is finished as a slave, forced, compulsory, subordinated and totally alienated labor regime. At the same time, European immigration is intensified, with “arms to the farms” destined to replace slaves and, at the same time, to “whiten”, “europeize” or “arianize” the population, society, culture, civilization. Suddenly, a whole culture of labor as an activity of the “slave laborer” has to be forsaken or redefined in terms of labor as an activity of the “free laborer”. Suddenly, all the people are challenged to redefine a labor ethics. A vast and complex social, cultural, ideological and psychological process develops, destined to grant dignity to labor and the laborer. Hence, the types, as satiric, irreverent and critical, innocent and negative stereotypes, with whom to stenograph and exorcise traits, figures and figurations, or ways of being that the new dominant ideology abhors. It goes without saying that “cordial man”, “Macunaíma”, “Pedro Malazarte” and “Jeca tatu”, evoking laziness and luxury, carry with them many and notable meanings, participating in the composition and movement of the society’s and of its

different social sectors' imagery, in different modulations. But we may also acknowledge the possible kinship of "cordial man" and "Macunaíma", among others, evoking "laziness" and "luxury" as figures and figurations that also function to demonize values, ideals and modes of being that flourish close to the mansion, far from the shanties. What is under scrutiny, implicit, underlying or evident, is the genesis of a new labor ethics, where labor is a dignifying activity. That is the reason why "Jeca tatu" suffers so much.

In many cases, it becomes difficult, even impossible, to distinguish the "type" as explanation, from the "myth" as reiterative ideological formula. Many are the cases of metamorphosis of type into myth. Insofar as formulations are reiterated, orally or in writing, for some notable texts are read and reread, commented and repeated, a process of ideologization or reification may develop. The concept may acquire a width and a constancy that transcends a little, or a lot, the context to which it originally referred. From a certain moment on, "Macunaíma" may reveal itself as a myth, as well as "cordial man" or the "politics of conciliation" or the "white revolution". This is a metamorphosis that may occur, and has occurred with many social science concepts, in different societies and periods.

In the case of Brazilian society, sometimes one has the impression that its history is translated, and reduced, into a collection of myths, originated in types, that may have been elaborated in the effort to understand or explain situations, events, dilemmas, perspectives. Facing a complex and problematic historical and social reality, authors elaborate types through which reality reveals itself intelligible. Slowly, however, ideologization or reification may occur, promoting the metamorphosis of type into myth. Then, the distance from type to reality increases; and even more that from reality to myth. Thus, reality displaces itself, removes itself, evaporates itself, it becomes harmless.

That is the idea: the path of reflection, in search of "understanding" or "explanation" may carry on with it something, or a lot, of fiction. Reality transfigures itself into concept and category or metaphor and allegory. Such metamorphoses are frequent, sometimes inevitable. There is always some counterpoint among them. By the way, metaphors often acquire the meaning of concepts, and there are cases in which concepts acquire that of metaphors. But they may certainly be modulations of knowledge. Yes, metaphor and allegory may also be forms of knowledge, means and modes of reaching

understanding. Yes, types and myths may be forms of knowledge, modulations of understanding, other meanings and connotations notwithstanding. They may be signs, symbols or ensigns, concepts or metaphors, categories or allegories, with which to stenograph situations, events and predicaments or fabulations, exorcisms and sublimations. In all cases, there is always some contribution to the knowledge of reality and its imaginary, both for its unveiling and for its hiding. Even when only some aspects of the situation or event are highlighted, at the expense of other aspects, even in these cases there is some form of elucidation.

There are types and myths that reveal some form of “carnivalization” of the situation, event or impasse. It is obvious that “Jeca Tatu”, “Macunaíma” and even “cordial man” may be seen as signs of denouncement, distorted emphasis, caricature of what could be “Brazilian”, “Brazilian’s identity”, the symbol of a population that takes too long to assume the figure of “the people”, the “citizen’s” figuration. They may be satires through which the “new times” reject “old times”, the “present” rejects the “past”, the “modern” caricatures the “archaic”. They are stenographies to mimic, reject or carnivalize individuals and collectivities that might have formed along history. And even more, for “cordial man”, Jeca Tatu and Macunaíma are symbols of a world where “labor” is a punishment, suffering, damnation and alienation, all this naturalized or ideologized by the caste culture formed along slavery’s history. The three symbols, in different intonations, secret a very suggestive disposition: “ai que preguiça” [*oh, what a lazyness*]; obviously with some, or much, “luxury”. The new cycle of the society’s development, with the end of monarchy and of slavery, depends on other forms of technical and social organization of labor and production, of the division of labor, of the juridical and political organization of society as a whole, including the metamorphosis of “slave labor” into “free labor”, of population into “people”, and of subject into “citizen”.

Other types and myths contribute to stenograph, organize and manage a young civil society, not yet well articulated, where there is a mixture of Blacks or former slaves, natives or Indians, European immigrants brought as arms to farms and many other individuals and collectivities making up a great part of society, of the subaltern social sectors, as well as of the dominant social sectors, originated from the caste of the masters and conquerors; as well as other individuals and social groups that also become part of the dominant classes,

coming from firms, agencies, organizations from other nations, colonialisms, imperialisms and globalisms. The transformation of castes into classes, both dominant and subaltern, is under way. That is the context of the formulation of the social types and their related myths, expressed in terms of “racial democracy”, “the pacific temper of the Brazilian people”, “white revolutions”, “conciliation and reform”, among others. What is in question is to “un-politicize” a civil society in formation, to define it and organize it from above, to take it as little active and scarcely organized, in need of tutelage. Hence, a strong state, oligarchic, authoritarian and tyrannical. All that as expression of an arrogant and oppressive political culture, generated in the course of centuries of slavery. That is the reason why large sectors of the dominant classes, or their “elites”, keep behaving, when in power, both in private and in public affairs, as colonizers, conquerors.

Once again, we see that the types and myths of Brazilian thought and culture are not innocent. They reveal a good part of what are the configurations and movements of society from different perspectives, at different times. They may be seen as collections of figures and figurations, at times families or lineages of interpretations, with which to draw and give movement to a cartography of Brazil, in a way in which the country seems situated, organized, understood, explained and decanted.

ABSTRACT

"Ideal types" elaborated by different authors and that have become emblematic, notorious or even definitive, sometimes representing myths are quite frequent in Brazilian thought. That is the case of the *bandeirantes* (colonial crusaders), the *gaúcho*, *Jeca Tatu*, *Macunaíma*, cordial man and others. It is worth contemplating this aspect of Brazilian culture and thought.

Keywords: Brazilian thought; Brazilian culture; Ideal types; Myths

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