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## History and Culture of Public Agents Corruption in Brazil: A Transversal Reading of the works of Sérgio Buarque de Holanda, Raymundo Faoro and Darcy Ribeiro

Historia y Cultura de la Corrupción de los Agentes Públicos en Brasil: Una lectura transversal de las obras de Sérgio Buarque de Holanda, Raymundo Faoro y Darcy Ribeiro

História e Cultura da Corrupção dos Agentes Públicos no Brasil: Uma Leitura Transversal das obras de Sérgio Buarque de Holanda, Raymundo Faoro e Darcy Ribeiro

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### ABSTRACT:

**Research Purpose:** The objective of this essay is to carry out a transversal reading of the works “*Raízes do Brasil*” (1995) by Sergio Buarque, “*Os donos do Poder*” (2001) by Raymundo Faoro and “*O povo Brasileiro*” by Darcy Ribeiro (1995), analyzing theoretical aspects that touch on the historical construction of the corruption of public agents in Brazil and its cultural implications.

**Results:** Holanda and Faoro present patrimonialism as a reason for corruption in Brazil, according to Weberian theory. In another step, Darcy Ribeiro presents, as a foundation for these practices, the relationship between the elites that, together, have always worked to maintain their privileges, expiating the Brazilian people.

**Originality:** We introduce the reader to historical and cultural elements regarding the political formation of the country and its intrinsic relationship with corruption, challenging the Weberian tradition (patrimonialism) and demonstrating the contradictions between the versions of history originally proposed by Sérgio Buarque de Holanda and Raymundo Faoro and the dissident narrative constructed by Darcy Ribeiro

**Theoretical Contributions:** We build a critical narrative of the Weberian tradition in national studies on corruption. The contributions proposed in this article have profound implications in relation to the culture rooted in the organizational spaces of Public Administration. The ways of managing public affairs in the country, historically, are based on three main axes that can be expanded in future research: a) inheritance of Portuguese modes of government, b) domination of the elites over the people and c) alienation of the people in relation to public affairs

**KEYWORDS:** Corruption, Patrimonialism, Brazilian Social Thought.

### RESUMEN:

**Objetivo de Investigación:** El objetivo de este ensayo es realizar una lectura transversal de las obras “*Raízes do Brasil*” (1995) de Sergio Buarque, “*Os donos do Poder*” (2001) de Raymundo Faoro y “*O povo Brasileiro*” de Darcy Ribeiro (1995), analizando aspectos teóricos que tocan la construcción histórica de la corrupción de los agentes públicos en Brasil y sus implicaciones culturales.

**Resultados:** Holanda y Faoro presentan el patrimonialismo como motivo de corrupción en Brasil, según la teoría weberiana. En otro paso, Darcy Ribeiro presenta como fundamento de estas prácticas la relación entre las élites que, juntas, siempre han trabajado para mantener sus privilegios, expiando al pueblo brasileño.

**Originalidad:** Introducimos al lector en elementos históricos y culturales sobre la formación política del país y su relación intrínseca con la corrupción, desafiando la tradición weberiana (patrimonialista) y demostrando las contradicciones entre las versiones de la historia propuestas originalmente por Sérgio Buarque de Holanda y Raymundo Faoro y la narrativa disidente construida por Darcy Ribeiro.

**Contribuciones Teóricas:** Construimos una narrativa crítica de la tradición weberiana en los estudios nacionales sobre corrupción. Los aportes propuestos en este artículo tienen profundas implicaciones en relación a la cultura arraigada en los espacios organizacionales de la Administración Pública. Las formas de gestión de los asuntos públicos en el país, históricamente, se basan en tres ejes principales que pueden ser ampliados en futuras investigaciones: a) herencia de los modos de gobierno portugueses, b) dominación de las élites sobre el pueblo y c) alienación de los personas en relación con los asuntos públicos

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Corrupción, Patrimonialismo, Pensamiento social brasileño.

## RESUMO:

**Objetivo da Pesquisa:** O objetivo deste ensaio é realizar uma leitura transversal das obras “*Raízes do Brasil*” (1995) de Sergio Buarque, “*Os donos do poder*” (2001) de Raymundo Faoro e “*O povo Brasileiro*” de Darcy Ribeiro (1995), analisando aspectos teóricos que tangenciem a construção histórica da corrupção dos agentes públicos no Brasil e suas implicações culturais.

**Resultados:** Holanda e Faoro apresentam como motivo da corrupção no Brasil o patrimonialismo, conforme a teoria weberiana. Noutro passo, Darcy Ribeiro apresenta como fundamento para essas práticas a relação entre as elites que, de forma conjunta, sempre trabalharam para manter seus privilégios, expiando o povo brasileiro.

**Originalidade:** Introduzimos ao leitor elementos históricos e culturais a respeito da formação política do país e a sua relação intrínseca com a corrupção, desafiando a tradição weberiana (patrimonialismo) e demonstrando as contradições existentes entre as versões da história propostas originariamente por Sérgio Buarque de Holanda e Raymundo Faoro e a narrativa dissidente construída por Darcy Ribeiro.

**Contribuições Teóricas:** Construimos uma narrativa crítica à tradição weberiana nos estudos nacionais sobre a corrupção. As contribuições propostas neste artigo têm implicações profundas em relação à cultura arraigada nos espaços organizacionais da Administração Pública. Os modos de gestão da coisa pública no país, historicamente, são pautados em três principais eixos que podem ser expandidos em futuras pesquisas: a) herança dos modos portugueses de governo, b) domínio das elites sobre o povo e c) alienação do povo em relação aos assuntos públicos.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Corrupção, Patrimonialismo, Pensamento Social Brasileiro.

## INTRODUCTION

This theory essay analyzes and expands theoretical constructions on the history of the political and managerial formation of Public Administration in Brazil through the transversal reading of three key Brazilian works addressing national political theories on historical modes of public affairs management and the political formation of the country: (a) *Raízes do Brasil* (“Roots of Brazil”), by Sérgio Buarque (1995); (b) *Os donos do poder* (“The Owners of Power”), by Raymundo Faoro (2001); and (c) *O povo brasileiro* (“The Brazilian People”), by Darcy Ribeiro (1995). The research problem that inspired this essay concerns the following question: which theoretical aspects identifiable in the writings of Holanda (1995), Faoro (2001) and Ribeiro (1995) can contribute to the debate on the history and culture of corruption of public agents in the Brazilian Public Administration?

Therefore, this essay aims to identify and analyze theoretical aspects present in the works mentioned above that are tangent to the historical formation of corruption of public agents in Brazil and its cultural implications. Indeed, works like this have attracted interest and become necessary to the topic of corruption since recent research has pointed out the significance of the cultural dimension in the dynamics of public

agents' corruption and personalistic and patrimonial favoritism in Brazil (Schwarcz, 2019; Santos, 2017; Azevedo & Peres, 2017; Couto, 2016).

To answer the research question, this study falls within the growing tradition of Political Administration in Brazil since it aims to conduct a more complex analysis of the political corruption phenomenon by integrating the fields of sociology, history, and political science into administration to create meta-paradigmatic knowledge (Santos, Santana, Santos, & Braga, 2014). As consistently as Political Administration has developed in the field of new development, it also embraces fundamental questions regarding the dynamics of social relations management (Gomes, 2012; Santos, 2010).

The choice of these seminal works stems from a genuinely nationalist movement stimulated by dissident currents in the fields of Administration and Organizational Studies. Studies based on decolonial approaches, Brazilian social thought, and Political Administration have gained momentum among Brazilian scholars and aimed to incorporate new contributions into national critical theory. The influence of the authors chosen in this essay on how Brazil was constructed as a nation is undeniable (Abdala, 2019). In this sense, works by Sérgio Buarque de Holanda and Raymundo Faoro were chosen because these authors have exerted enormous influence on national studies on corruption (Azevedo & Fernandes, 2017). This paper innovates by contrasting these authors' thoughts – widely consolidated in what concerns the narratives on patrimonialism in Public Administration – with Darcy Ribeiro's dissident narrative about the formation of Brazil (Giarola, 2012).

Therefore, this essay dares to incorporate historical and cultural elements regarding the country's political formation and its intrinsic relationship with corruption, challenging the Weberian tradition and exposing the contradictions between the versions of history originally proposed by Holanda and Faoro and the dissident narrative developed by Darcy Ribeiro. We believe this framework adds substantive content to the debate on the subject, especially in a scenario where the social, political, and technical roles of the public administrators that Brazil aims to train are under debate (Pinto, Silva, Matos, & Pereira, 2017).

This paper argues that public management practices have been historically linked to anti-democratic relations between politicians and businessmen with no major concern for society or a nation project. The works mentioned above reveal how the country has been ruled from the colonial period until now. Indeed, Holanda and Faoro understand the Brazilian government as a result of the original structure of the Portuguese Empire, along with its patrimonial aspects, in addition to the leniency of the Brazilian population and the presence of an elite unconcerned with the Enlightenment ideals. In turn, Darcy Ribeiro adopts a more nationalistic approach as he describes the history of the country and the emergence of three Brazilian classes, namely the patrons, the patricians, and the other Brazilians.

This paper departs from the critique of the Weberian tradition in national studies on the historical corruption that has plagued Brazil. As will be seen, the contributions proposed here may have profound implications for the culture ingrained in the country's Public Administration organizational spaces. The management of public affairs in Brazil has been historically grounded on three primary axes: the inheritance of Portuguese modes of government, elite dominance over the people, and alienation from public and political affairs. Each of these axes represents characteristics still rooted in the national culture, in the existing discourses on corruption and organizational practices, and have inflamed the debate on the topic.

## WEBERIAN PATRIMONIALISM IN NATIONAL WRITINGS

The Brazilian cultural identity and, mainly, the country's management modalities were analyzed by Sérgio Buarque de Holanda (1995) and Raymundo Faoro (2001) based on the Eurocentric and Weberian concepts of legitimate domination, bureaucracy, and patrimonialism (Oliveira Júnior, Costa, & Mendes, 2016; Silveira, 2006). Indeed, Holanda and Faoro employed Weber's Political Sociology matrix to explain the most striking features of the foundations of the Brazilian legal-political framework. Accordingly, they perceived

the history of Brazil as the continuation of the form of government of the Portuguese Crown and identified a typical patrimonial structure in the country.

The conceptual reception of Max Weber's patrimonialism implies considering that a small group, through a "legitimate" political power anchored by traditional domination, rules the population for its own political and economic interests, transforming the handling of public affairs into something private (Albuquerque, 2011; Campante, 2003; Couto, 2016; Silveira, 2006; Weber, 2004). More specifically, "domination" is the probability of finding obedience to a specific norm among a given group of indictable persons. Dominating refers to an idea of "power" and the possibility of imposing one's will in a social relationship (Rocha Neto, 2008; Silveira, 2006).

Weber aimed to discover how domination proceeds and endures within social relationships. The author concluded that obedience to the political leader was assured by a "domination system," whose taxonomy is represented in his writings by the "three types of legitimate authority," namely, "charismatic," "rational-legal," and "traditional domination." The phenomenon of patrimonialism concerns "traditional domination" (Rocha Neto, 2008; Silveira, 2006).

Indeed, patrimonialism is a way of exercising "traditional domination" because its authority is legitimized by tradition and the power to rule creates a government apparatus solely based on personal criteria and exercises political power through these very means (Silveira, 2006). The legitimacy of this form of power, institutionalized by patrimonialism, is based on traditionalism – i.e., something is so because it has always been (Oliveira Júnior, Costa, & Mendes, 2016). Therefore, the private and the public spheres are not distinguished in the patrimonial office; the Prince addresses the Public Administration as a purely personal matter. The commands issued by the authority have features focused on the master's personal values and opinions, and the acquired state property and the personal property of the political authority are merged into a single sphere (Azevedo & Peres, 2017; Campante, 2003; Faoro, 2001; Schwarcz, 2019).

In traditional domination, the command order is vertical and top-to-bottom. The State is configured as the Prince's true enterprise, and he intervenes in all respects (Weber, 2004). State domination keeps social structures stratified and hampers mobility between various social strata (Rocha Neto, 2008; Santos D. M., 2017; Silveira, 2006). Viewed from the angle of traditional sociology, Brazil is strongly marked by traditional domination, as it is grounded on its ruling classes' political and management structures and the inequality that has historically plagued the population.

That is the predominant view of various national theorists on corruption. Next, we will analyze how Sérgio Buarque de Holanda and Raymundo Faoro relied on Weberian theoretical matrices to investigate the Brazilian experience. In *Roots of Brazil*, Holanda bases his writings on the influence of patriarchalism in the formation of Brazilian society. In other words, the author considers that the behavior of the patrimonial officer extends to other spheres of life, and private interests invade public affairs. In *The Owners of Power*, Faoro interprets patrimonialism from an opposite angle. For the author, what dominates in Brazil is not the domestic environment in which patriarchalism flourishes but the State element concerning the emergence of patrimonialism (Ricupero & Ferreira, 2005).

## SÉRGIO BUARQUE DE HOLANDA AND THE CORDIAL MAN

The first notions about patrimonialism in the structure of the Brazilian social fabric were dealt with by Sérgio Buarque de Holanda in 1936 in his book *Roots of Brazil*. In this work, the São Paulo scholar shows, through psychology and social history, how the characteristics inherited by Brazilians during the colonization shaped their culture, leading to the development of patriarchal institutional archetypes of subordination to authority and explicit disregard for public affairs (Silveira, 2006).

Employing Weber's theory, Holanda points out that the social organization based on the *patriarchal family* drove the development of cities and the public apparatus, along with the typical flaws of this

formation. Accordingly, the political agents trained by patriarchalism could not distinguish between the private and public spheres. Therefore, it was impossible to separate the “patrimonial officer” from the “pure bureaucrat,” as defined by Weber (Oliveira Júnior, Costa, & Mendes, 2016).

Holanda (1995) details the difference between the patrimonial officer and the bureaucrat:

For the “patrimonial officer,” political management presents itself as a matter of their personal interest; the functions, positions, and benefits they can receive concern the officer’s personal rights but not objective interests, as happens in a truly bureaucratic State, in which the specialization of functions and the effort to ensure legal guarantees for citizens prevail. The men who will exercise public functions are chosen according to the personal trust the candidates deserve, but much less according to their abilities. Everything is missing from the impersonal orderliness that characterizes life in the bureaucratic State (Holanda, 1995, pp. 144-145).

By examining the potential behavior of individuals in the context of the formation of Brazilian society, Holanda (1995) coined the notion of “cordial man.” The key features of the Brazilian citizen’s caricature created by the author are their cordiality and ethics based on emotions. Stemming from the Latin word *cor*, which also alludes to the Portuguese word *coração* (“heart”), the adjective “cordial” conveys a tendency towards emotional irrationality and resolving issues with one’s heart; i.e., based on one’s emotions. This cordiality of the Brazilian people highlights their weakness in public life and their inability to differentiate between the private and collective spheres (Couto, 2016; Holanda, 1995; Schwarcz, 2019; Silveira, 2006).

The “cordial man” construct imprints affection, familiarity, and the desire for intimacy as the defining Brazilian traits, as opposed to politeness and reverence (Azevedo & Fernandes, 2017; Holanda, 1995). Therefore, in the author’s view, the Brazilian identity has been marked by personalism and a lack of rationality, which stems from the frequent predominance of particular aspirations in small groups of individuals in which an impersonal orderliness is hardly accessible. Among the small groups, the family group more notoriously expresses the society’s resourcefulness, insofar as decisions are based on blood and emotional ties, of unquestionable supremacy involving the family nucleus (Holanda, 1995; Schwarcz, 2019).

Since relationships were based on personality, it was impossible to establish boundaries between the separate roles played by individuals. Therefore, in Brazilian history, no autonomous public space was established because traditional ties, particularly family relationships, intruded the public sphere (Azevedo & Fernandes, 2017; Silveira, 2006). Consequently, Brazilian society came to be ruled by a form of social capital characterized by personal relations consisting of personalism and relationships based on protection and favors. This culminated in an institutional organicity cultivated by a group of pre-modern and parasitic State agents spread throughout society (Azevedo & Fernandes, 2017).

According to Holanda (1995), three characteristics of the Portuguese colonizers are crucial to understanding the social formation of the Brazilian society. The first one refers to the indistinction between the personal interests of the authorities and the administrative dimension since the patrimony acquired by the royal treasury through tax collection was not distinguished from private property. The second characteristic comprises the aversion to work and the cult of idleness. They refer to the search for prestige, economic gain, and the benefits of public employment. The third characteristic is the Iberian rejection of rationalization and depersonalization, which posed an obstacle to applying impersonality to Brazilian territory (Holanda, 1995; Rocha Neto, 2008; Oliveira, 2017).

In this sense, corruption in Brazil has stemmed from Portuguese colonization since Portugal’s institutional model was marked by the absence of separation between the public and private spheres in social, political, and economic relations (Holanda, 1995). Therefore, the Brazilian scenario unfolded unnaturally, grounded on personalism and patrimonialism – that is, characterized by the overlapping of personal interests regarding jobs, benefits, and interests, which allowed certain families to remain in power (Medeiros & Freitas Júnior, 2019; Oliveira Júnior, Costa, & Mendes, 2016).

## RAYMUNDO FAORO AND THE OWNERS OF POWER

Raymundo Faoro was a Rio Grande do Sul-born jurist, historian, and political scientist, who found the roots of Brazil's ills in State actions, according to a view based on the logic of patrimonial domination (Brito, 2018). In *The owners of power: the formation of Brazilian political patronage*, originally published in 1958, Faoro explains the social ills of Brazil through the country's historical formation as a result of its colonial past. The author argues that the patrimonial power administrative structure of the Portuguese State was entirely imported to the colony and maintained by the sugar mill owners and the ruling class. Indeed, this practice consolidated as a pattern during Brazil's Independence, Empire, and Republic (Rocha Neto, 2008; Santos, 2017; Brito, 2018).

Faoro (2001) revisited Portuguese history to explain that the vices initiated by the Portuguese State in the 14<sup>th</sup> century are the keys to understanding Brazilian political culture. By resorting to Weberian concepts, the author explains how Portugal's patrimonial juridical-political model was inherited by Brazil and grounded on the supremacy of the king over other subjects, whose instruments of power were the land, the property, and the rule exercised by the royal house. Moreover, there were no intermediaries between the king and his subjects; that is, the king ruled whereas the others obeyed. Anyone who went against the king's supremacy fell into treason, and the Lord admitted no one above him or even to have associates; he would only heed the demands of the Pope and the Holy See (Faoro, 2001).

The fact that the Portuguese State originated from war ensured that the king ruled over wealth, public functions, communes, and the clergy; therefore, it ensured that the country's trade would be carried out for the benefit of royal patrimonialism (Faoro, 2001; Ribeiro & Mesquita, 2019; Santos, 2017). In turn, this led to the inseparability between the public and private spheres for incomes and expenses applied to family expenses or goods and general utility services without prior normative discrimination. Therefore, a political organization that converges with the ruler's private sphere will eventually be managed by the administrative will of the Prince. The latter was equipped with an apparatus of officials and loyal subjects who appropriated the State and used it for their benefit in a particularistic fashion (Faoro, 2001; Silveira, 2006).

The elite that managed the royal affairs constituted the *estamento burocrático* ("bureaucratic estate class"), a concept coined by Faoro to explain how a specific group of prestigious men conducted public affairs based on a patrimonial order. Strongly inspired by Weberian thought, the bureaucratic estate class is defined as a social order in which power relations are transmitted from top to bottom. It consists of a group of individuals aligned to the Prince's wishes not only to direct and manage the Crown's business by collecting taxes but also to appropriate the State structure, acquire personal advantages by employing the public machine for their benefit, and emerge as the true "owners of power." Thus, they help to consolidate social inequality, attracting material privileges that will sustain their power position in society (Faoro, 2001; Santos, 2017; Silveira, 2006).

The patrimonial estate class tradition, inherited from Portugal's political system, was structured by the Crown in Brazil on commercial and territorial grounds (through the expedient of the *sesmarias*). Therefore, the colonial structure was dominated by eminently commercial interests under the leadership of the Portuguese Crown. The institution of the Moderating Power was vital to this process since it authorized the emperor to reign, rule, and manage through his means without ministerial support (Ribeiro & Mesquita, 2019). Initially, the king's income was derived from whatever was produced on his lands. First, by direct exploitation, through the free labor of the subjects; then, by indirect exploitation, through modern leasing and usufruct of the soil. Evidently, the king ultimately owned everything, and everything orbited around him. In the 13<sup>th</sup> century, trade and marine navigation were encouraged and became a secondary income source for the Lusitanian Empire. Thus, the Crown generated income through its property, involved private assets, and controlled trade to safeguard its privileges and the security of its rule (Faoro, 2001).

The Brazilian political estate class became constituted by a community that, alongside the king, ruled not only the civil and military branches but also the economy and politics. This ruling class used the public sector for their benefit and cultivated a stylized way of life, exclusive and endowed with shared prestige, and usually hereditarily transmitted to individuals. Grounded on social inequality, the estate class projects itself from top to bottom, dividing the country into a bureaucratic estate class and the rest of society. This gap between civil society and the estate class results from at least four reasons. First, the existence of a patrimonial bureaucratic order marked by the superimposition of the sovereign over the citizen; second, by state capitalism; third, by the weakening of public and economic liberties; and finally, by the intrinsic relationship between the monarch house and the cadre of civil servants (Azevedo & Fernandes, 2017; Faoro, 2001; Oliveira, 2017).

The power instrument employed by the estate class structure is the patrimonial control of the State, which translates into appropriating the public sphere as though it were private and managing public affairs in favor of personal privileges and interests. This promotes a centralizing State imbued with personalism and favoritism as means of social ascension. Formal or legal equality is set aside, suffocating the requirements that allow economic dynamism and social development (Couto, 2016; Freitas, 2018; Santos, 2017; Silveira, 2006). Faoro (2013) explains that estate classes arise in societies where liberal principles are not fully in force; therefore, individuals detach themselves socially (and from legality) to appropriate lucrative activities and public positions. For the author, a State that does not merge the public and private spheres can only be established based on a system in which the free market prevails and consolidates true liberalism. Otherwise, what will predominate is not a class society but a society of estate class that co-opt interests inconducive to a free, fair, and fraternal society (Couto, 2016; Faoro, 2001; Neto, 2008; Silveira, 2006).

From this perspective, the implementation of liberalism in Brazil has been fallacious and contrary to the precepts of the Enlightenment, which configures an unfinished republic – or perhaps one that never even existed. Faoro (2001) asserts that Brazil has been unable to experience true liberalism since most liberal party militants during the Empire were everything but liberal, as they reconciled their ideologies with slavery and the power of the Church and merely aspired to enjoy the freedom granted by the Portuguese Crown to exercise their rulings in Brazil freely and in their best interest.

Facade liberalism was created as an ideology due to formal irrationality that prevented patrimonialism from being overcome. Institutionally built by the political elites, liberalism did not constitute a market economy, nor was it characterized by legal equality. Faoro (2001) explains that traditional, Enlightenment-inspired liberalism originates from the feudal world, responsible for the institution of a full market economy, the reunion between State and society, and, consequently, development. However, this is not what happened in Brazil or Portugal. (Faoro, 2001; Ribeiro & Mesquita, 2019)

The non-existence of a feudal system in both countries culminated in the appropriation of the State as an enterprise by the Prince and in the form of capitalism referred to by Faoro (2001) as “politically oriented.” This specific modality of capitalism is paternalistic, clientelistic, and slavish, for it sought advantages for the king through tithing and the monopoly of brazilwood, spices, and precious metals. Therefore, politically oriented capitalism lacks predictability, rationality, and calculability, all of which characterize the modern and authentic capitalist system that originated from feudalism. For this strand of liberal thought, the result was state interventionism and the absence of private enterprise, free enterprise, free competition, and freedom of occupation (Couto, 2016; Faoro, 2001; Ribeiro & Mesquita, 2019).

In this sense, the strong presence of patrimonialism and the State repelled private industrial capitalism, relegating control to the estate classes. The relationship between colonists and the colony succumbed to administrative and bureaucratic structures typical of the patrimonial State, in which the king deliberated on the administration and managed it alongside his officials, who sustained domination (Couto, 2016; Santos, 2017; Silveira, 2006). The country’s political and administrative affairs remained under the ruling of a dominant social group that prioritized their interests over public ones (Dias, Lúcio, & Coelho, 2015; Pinho & Sacramento, 2018; Santos, 2017).



For Faoro (2001), the Brazilian people are superstitious, submissive, and parasitic. Moreover, the author considers that the identity of Brazilian political subjects depends on State action and is, therefore, lenient with collective probity and efficiency (Ribeiro & Mesquita, 2019; Silveira, 2006). However, we must highlight that the Portuguese State did not incorporate the local populations into the political sphere. The African populations did not have their citizenship recognized, and the restrictions of the estate class structure prevented the social ascension of native populations (Dias, Lúcio, & Coelho, 2015). During the formation of the Brazilian State, the population remained oblivious, watching the establishment of a government structure that did not strive to ensure individual rights and guarantees nor the democratic supremacy of an autonomous people. Liberalism in Brazil was tied to the dynamics of the local elites, which lent themselves to preserving benefits, prestige, and wealth to impede the elaboration of a project of nation, which, in turn, paved the way for historical corruption in the country (Faoro, 2001).

Along these lines, control by the elites estranged effective public management in favor of private business, using the State sphere as an extension. Moreover, State-controlled capitalism, with little affection for rational and impersonal administration, annulled public liberties and stifled economic dynamism and social development, creating enormous obstacles. For these reasons, Faoro (2001) points out that only legitimate liberalism will free Brazil from its relative backwardness. The author considers that, in the malformation of Brazil, the State has played the role of the villain. Through state interventionism and the formation of the patrimonial estate class, the fulfillment of personal interests was prioritized by those holding political power, who did not aim to sustain an impersonal and universal legal order.

## DARCY RIBEIRO AND THE DISSIDENT THOUGHT: A POTENTIALLY DECOLONIAL VISION?

Darcy Ribeiro (1995; 2016) is one of the most important Brazilian intellectuals addressing the origins of “Brazilianness” through political, ethnic, and social lenses. He describes a narrative of the Brazilian society formed by people stripped from their identity and cultural origins.

One can affirm that Darcy Ribeiro was a Brazilian thinker with genuinely decolonial thought. Endowed with a bold writing style, uncompromising with the academic standards that surrounded science, the author dreamed of developing a theory that would allow a broad political coalition of countries, or a federation of Latin American states, to confront the cultural hegemony imposed by the Western countries (i.e., the United States and Europe). His project was to create a counter-utopia whose centrality would reside in the colonized countries from realizing an image developed in the present, not the future. Darcy Ribeiro looked at Latin American societies and culture from the popular bases that composed the society, considering the national particularities and the history of the traditional communities (Guzmán, 2011).

Darcy Ribeiro was a militant intellectual and a polymath thinker. He engaged in the most diverse functions and tasks as an anthropologist, educator, politician, writer, essayist and novelist, professor, and “utopist” since he dedicated himself to studying Latin America, especially Brazil, which he believed could and would succeed. As a public figure, he achieved international projection and recognition. Born on October 26, 1922, in the city of Montes Claros, in the northern region of the state of Minas Gerais, Brazil, Ribeiro died in 1997, at 74, respected as a brilliant intellectual by countless voices that were never consensual voices, given the ideological combats subjacent to his writings. His thought and work aligned with the ideals of a solidary and emancipatory society, and he creatively relied on classic writings to encourage new developments through debates and theoretical reconstructions. Therefore, he never denied the cosmopolitanism of knowledge (Miglievich-Ribeiro & Romera, 2018, pp. 114-115).

Throughout his career, Darcy Ribeiro advised on the geopolitical mapping of each national community’s relationship with its Indigenous peoples. “Darcy Ribeiro found no explanatory possibilities in the known theories. For him, those could serve a theoretical version of the European performance but failed to explain the history of the Eastern societies, the Arab world, and even less of us, Latin Americans.” (Miglievich-Ribeiro & Romera, 2018, p. 119)

In his works, Ribeiro diverged from the modernizing nationalist discourse of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century because he claimed the need to incorporate Indigenous peoples and their cosmovision (i.e., their technologies, ideologies, and policies) into national development. Darcy strongly criticized state policies promoting the westernization of these populations and the forced imposition of a fictitiously homogenous nation. For the author, the nation's elites should not endeavor a quest for national identity in relation to Europe (Ribeiro, 1995; 2016; Guzmán, 2011) as they have done since the country's independence.

Instead, Brazilianness originates from the divinizing treatment given to the Portuguese newcomers on the Brazilian coast in the 1500s. In their turn, the Portuguese had been newly freed from the influence of Arabs and Jews and had a mission to expand to unite all men into one Christendom. Upon arriving in Brazilian territory, the Europeans found nomadic peoples with a precarious organizational structure and no warfare tactics or firearms. The natives were enticed by the Lusitanian delicacies and offered little resistance. The colonization missions were expeditions aimed at “humanizing local natives” (Ribeiro, 1995).

The actions to subdue the natives were justified by their social habits and war-based cannibalism. For the Portuguese, the natives were soulless creatures and, therefore, could be enslaved for colonization and to work in the lands occupied by the colonizers. In this sense, the locals were catechized and subjected to labor regimes that served as payment for the spices brought by the Europeans. Over time, the abuses perpetrated by the colonists became evident to the native peoples, who tried, unsuccessfully, to offer resistance (Ribeiro, 1995).

The domination of the Indigenous peoples and the “humanization of the land” occurred in three ways: disease, enslavement, and strategic crossbreeding. More specifically, the latter happened through the institution of *cunhadismo* (from Portuguese *cunhado*, “brother-in-law”). This term refers to Portuguese men's practice of marrying into Indigenous families to become part of their communities. This integration with the native families allowed the Portuguese to use their blood ties to obtain knowledge of the land and facilitate the task of civilizing society through labor. This crossbreeding constituted a *mameluco*[1] population that was neither native nor Portuguese. Therefore, the *brasilíndios* were a new people that emerged with no identity associated with a specific origin. The Indigenous population in Brazil is estimated to have decreased by at least four million in 100 years (Ribeiro, 1995).

Brazilian subjects are distinguished from their origins since birth, hostilized, and hostile. The mamelucos reject the native mother who gave birth to them and opposes his blood brothers in the Americas, although they remain unknown to their white fathers and are banished by their overseas brothers. As an oppressed and an oppressor, the identity of the *brasilíndios*, referred to as mamelucos by the Spanish Jesuits, is built upon a contradiction (Ribeiro, 2011, p. 27).

On the other hand, in the captaincies of the Northeast, the slave economy producing sugarcane thrived, anchored on enslaved African labor. The Africans were responsible for spreading the Portuguese language in the national territory and were more resistant to the diseases they were exposed to. The treatment of enslaved Black people was more brutal and crueler, and the status of “non-human” also applied to this newly arrived population in the Americas. The treatment of Black people in Brazil is one of the most painful wounds in national history – and to this day, the traces of this violence reside in the resilience of the enslaved person and the hatred of the elites (Giarola, 2012; Ribeiro, 1995).

The Portuguese also mixed socially with Black people by raping slave women. At that time, the settlers were subdivided into three classes: (a) the rural producers were the captain Generals or land/sugar mill lords ruling the workforce; (b) the religious were settlers who sought catechization and social order under the laws of Rome; and, finally, (c) the traders were the agents aiming at exportation and the exchange economy. Portuguese agents came to Brazil through religious or economic ventures, seeking means to exploit the land and expand a Christian mercantilist agenda (Ribeiro, 1995).

The Brazilian person is a mixture of the *brasilíndio*, the *mulato*, the Portuguese, the Black people, and the natives. The population now unable to identify where they have come from has emerged from this social melting pot. In this sense, the Brazilian society results from a sort of residual genocide that purged the people

of their own original cultures. In this regard, the Portuguese elite was the only social group that remained strictly consistent with the civilizing process, focused on their purposes of exploiting the riches of the land for their benefit (Ribeiro, 1995).

A racial whitening ensued, and *brasilíndios* and *mulatos* would no longer accept being treated as Black people and natives. Hence, the notion of “new people” arose, characterized by the national communities that, since colonial times, had reached a high degree of miscegenation. Although they were far from egalitarian societies in racial or class terms, those peoples were orphaned from their ethnic and cultural origins, implying the absence of a well-established identity and nationalistic feelings of attachment and belonging to the national territory (Guzmán, 2011).

The Brazilians-brasilíndios-mamelucos expanded the Portuguese dominance as Brazil was formed, punishing the peoples of maternal blood. By doing so, they interrupt the previous evolutionary line of the subjugated Indigenous populations as servile labor for a new society integrated with a higher stage of sociocultural evolution. It is not ethnic assimilation but integration (Ribeiro, 2011, pp. 37-38).

Throughout the country’s history, all attempts to establish a genuinely Brazilian culture and identity were systematically rejected by the Portuguese Crown. In this sense, the *Cabanagem*, the *Balaiada*, and *quilombola* insurrections were popular movements that sought the emancipation of communities as autonomous peoples (Ribeiro, 1995). The structure of the Brazilian State was founded on the conquest and domination of a foreign ruling class – a class that never turned to the interests of the local population but only on its profit (Ribeiro, 2016).

Brazil was hegemonically seen as a slavish, landowning, and monocultural enterprise. Colonization took place through de-tribalization and genocides, which made way for the territory to be occupied by slave traders, landowners, traders, bankers, and bureaucrats. Always treated unmercifully, the people were assigned to use their labor force for production. Thus, the country was born as an urban civilization with economic purposes and institutionalized exploitation processes (Ribeiro, 2011; Ribeiro, 1995; 2016).

No society going through this on a daily basis for centuries would come out without indelible marks. All Brazilians are the flesh of those tortured Black and Indigenous peoples. All of us, Brazilians, are equally the possessed hand that tortured them. The most tender gentleness and atrocious cruelty have been combined here to make us the heartfelt and suffering people we are and the insensitive and brutal people we also are (Ribeiro, 1995, p. 120).

The social classes stemming from this structure can be subdivided into three categories. The first consisted of the large landowners and Portuguese immigrants. The second was composed of whites and free mestizos, who lived at the mercy of the lords. This one depended on the first and consisted of army officers, teachers, merchants, etc. The third, consisting of remaining natives and Black people, comprises the poor urban mass exposed to crime, alcoholism, and addiction (Ribeiro, 1995).

The country’s ruling class was subdivided into “patrons” and “patricians.” The “patronage” comprises businessmen and landowners whose power stemmed from the economic exploitation of the land. The “patriciate” emerged from official positions such as generals, deputies, union leaders, etc. Indeed, this is similar to Faoro’s notion of patrimonialism (2001), because the patronage and the patriciate were closely related since their members belonged to the same families or social groups and constituted coalitions that helped each other to keep power based on the economic power of the former. Below this stratum were the middle classes (the petty bourgeoisie, teachers, lawyers, engineers, etc.), and below the middle classes were the uneducated, wage workers. As a result, this system has perpetuated its injustices and power asymmetries to privilege the country’s elites (Ribeiro, 1995).

Although this corporate-bureaucratic-ecclesiastical dominant class has acted as the agent of its prosperity, it has also acted, secondarily, as the driving force behind the formation of Brazilian society. We are the way we are because of how that class shaped us by configuring us according to their culture and interests. It even reduced what would be the Brazilian people as a civic and political entity to a mere supply of servile labor (Ribeiro, 1995, p. 178).

Based on these constructions, Darcy Ribeiro formulates a theory of Brazil. Despite the project of the Portuguese Crown, and differently from what Sérgio Buarque de Holanda postulated when portraying Brazilian people as “cordial,” quiet, with weak participation in public life, Darcy Ribeiro (1995; 2016) created the figure of a society purged from their origins, alienated from public life and relegated to the servitude of a ruling class that never bothered to develop a project of industrialization, social education, and popular autonomy. For Ribeiro, the President Juscelino Kubitschek administration and the CEPAL studies were significant milestones in trying to dynamize the nation’s economy. However, these movements failed due to the politics of appeasement conducted by a national elite that repeatedly benefited from corrupt structures (Ribeiro, 1995).

Darcy Ribeiro was a man of his time and a brilliant intellectual. However, above all, he had an ethical commitment to change society, to materialize the other world he knew to be possible, and to contribute to transforming us into what we could and should be so that we did not carry on doing what they did (or else, what we let them do) to us (Nepomuceno, 2009, p. 10).

For Ribeiro, Brazil does not have a plan for economic restructuring nor a development project, and the discursive liberalism disseminated in the country has historically kept the vulnerable people in inferior conditions. This has benefited the continued exploitation of Brazilian wealth and the sale of national assets and heritage as the greatest driving force in the national economy. For Darcy Ribeiro, we have been forced to participate in an extraneous nation project which has not been developed by the people themselves (Ribeiro, 2016). In this sense, overcoming structural corruption requires society’s awareness of social structures through political education or politicization.

### THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF CLASSIC WRITINGS TO POLITICAL ADMINISTRATION

Following the transversal reading of the works analyzed, we designed a theoretical framework (Figure 07) capable of summarizing the phenomenon of political corruption in Brazil in three cultural dimensions: (a) inheritance of Portuguese modes of government; (b) elite dominance over the people; and (c) alienation from political and public affairs. The three dimensions are interrelated as they constitute a historical process:

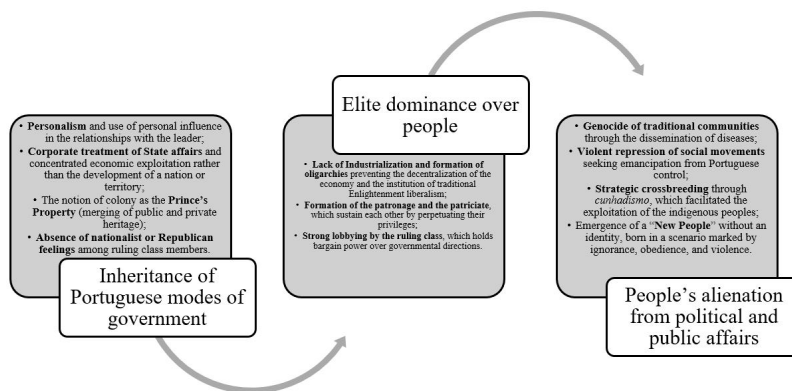


Figure 01: Cultural dimensions of political corruption in Brazil  
Source: Prepared by the authors, 2021.

As for the first dimension, the examination can be performed by reading patrimonial scholars, who perceive the cultural environment of Brazilian corruption as something based on merging private and public lives into one single element in such a way that rulers see the State as an extension of their domains. In this sense, the legacy of the Portuguese modes of government concerns the exacerbated personalism between public and private agents; interest restricted to personal gain rather than collective gain aimed at a project of

nation or society; constant overlapping of the public and private spheres in governmental affairs and absence of a nationalist or patriotic feeling.

As for the second dimension, we analyze the elements comprising the behavior of the ruling Brazilian elites, especially concerning their mechanisms for perpetuating the privileges granted by State power. Along these lines, Faoro (2001) believes that Brazil has only known the experience of oligarchic exploitation of its economy without featuring large-scale industrialization or real contact with the Enlightenment principles comprising economic liberalism. For the author, the State has always operated as a bureaucratic and rigid order that hindered the advance of economic freedom and a genuinely Brazilian way of thinking. In turn, according to Holanda (1995), these processes are not only aggravated by State power but by the weakness of Brazilian public life as well.

In this sense, the second dimension examines the relation of the elites with the maintenance of their privileges, especially regarding: (a) the relationship between the patronage (the entrepreneurs) and the patriciate (the State bureaucratic elite), which come from the same social groups and families; (b) the perpetuation of oligarchies through the maintenance of economic privileges for privileged families, which is ingrained in the country's structure; and (c) the lobbying and influence mechanisms among dominant social groups.

Various forms of patronage allow this relationship and the influence of the private sector over the State. The most common are party lobbying, public bids, campaign donations, consortia and concessions, alliances, and labor and trade associations. Although these acts are common to the functioning of the State, they constitute opportunities for utilitarian alliances that lead to corruption (Rodrigues & Barros, 2021).

The notion that patrimonial and clientelistic behaviors are incompatible with the republican and democratic model holds that, as long as these practices subsist in our political practice and Brazilian public institutions, our collective thinking will remain outdated. Therefore, as long as the relationship between the private and public spheres persists, collective and diffuse rights will remain relegated to the background concerning the interests of small groups that dominate the economy (Schwarcz, 2019).

An authoritarian idea of power and doing politics has remained in Brazil, so it has not been able to disentangle itself from the traditional elites, who align themselves to their own interests without respecting the will of the people. In this sense, Brazilian democracy has grown old and weak and remains uncommitted to the population (Ribeiro, 1995).

Finally, the third dimension deals with people's alienation from political and public affairs. For Darcy Ribeiro (1995), the Brazilian population did not passively watch the constitution of an oligarchic government system in their country. On the contrary, from the genocide of Indigenous populations to the violent repression of social movements in Brazil, the emerging people were expropriated of their identity, culture, and traditions. Similarly, with the institution of *cunhadismo*, the Portuguese people were inserted into the local families, facilitating the exploitation of the local labor force by incorporating natives into the customs and habits of the colonizers. As a result, a "new people" emerged, rejected by the European matrix and expropriated from its original Indigenous culture, and these people have failed to form a nationalist feeling or shared social identity that raises their spirit to engage in popular struggles.

In this sense, these people are alienated from State affairs, relegated to perform obedient work, accept violence, and become accustomed to slavery and the racial stratification structures established in Brazil (Ribeiro, 1995). The lack of class consciousness and political awareness hinders the emergence of new social movements and a culture of political activism, allowing broad popular participation in public debates.

When analyzed together, the three dimensions portray a cultural scenario conducive to the emergence of an environment marked by political corruption. The lack of a vigilant eye by the population associated with State patrimonialism and the coalition of dominant oligarchies in Brazil make the country an easy prey for the imposition of the personal interests of agents who aim to protect their interests above economic or social development. In combination, the elements presented here result in the flaws of the Brazilian political

system and the population's lack of identification with their rulers. Therefore, the works analyzed in this study portray a country caught in a continuous cycle of exploitation during the exploration of the Americas and has ever since struggled dramatically to emancipate itself from the power exercised by the Portuguese and the national elites who settled here during colonial times.

## FINAL REMARKS

Despite the clear divergences, the thoughts of Sérgio Buarque de Holanda and Raymundo Faoro converge as to the reasons explaining the consolidation of corruption in Brazil since they rely on the same matrix to explain the issues involving this phenomenon, that is, the notion of patrimonialism. Therefore, their writings focus primarily on the entanglement between private and State affairs, resulting from the Lusitanian legacy that was later established in Brazil. The divergences are primarily because Holanda understands that the patrimonial officers' behavior unfolds in other domains of life, and the public sphere is invaded by the private one, whereas Faoro explores patrimonialism from an opposite angle.

In turn, the work of Darcy Ribeiro (1995) differs from the other authors' by approaching the topic from the perspective of the communities that already lived in these lands, by identifying the union between two classes that, against the will of the Brazilian people, have corrupted the State structure. Thus, this does not have to do with the lenience of the population, as Holanda proposes, but with the trajectory of a society purged from its history, and that was never considered in the scope of a national project.

Based on the contributions of these authors, it is possible to elaborate on the phenomenon of political corruption from three specific dimensions, namely the inheritance of the Portuguese modes of government, the elite dominance over the population, and the alienation from political and public affairs, all of which are interrelated. The first dimension emerges from the patrimonial vision, in which rulers perceive the State as an extension of their domains. The second dimension refers to the elites' relationship with maintaining their privileges. Finally, the third dimension deals with the alienation of the local population from political life.

Based on the ideas proposed by the authors, the Brazilian elite (whether business or governmental) has remained unconcerned with local reality and the construction of a national project. In this sense, there remains a clear link between the small, privileged groups and the public sphere. Even after the emancipation from the Portuguese Crown, the metaphor of Brazil as an enterprise is still present in the discourse of all authors who have set out to portray the formation of the Brazilian society.

On the other hand, the solution to the proposal in the literature analyzed is somewhat divergent since Sérgio Buarque (1995) and Raymundo Faoro (2001) adopted a liberal bias and believed that the solution to the problem of corruption and the management of the country lies in reducing the power of the oligarchies and the size of government, in the pure form of a bureaucratic estate class, and creating conditions for a liberal economy and an elite endowed with liberal ideals to thrive. On the other hand, Darcy Ribeiro (1995) suggests that corruption be solved through popular reforms aimed at making the State more democratic and allowing the equalization of power through popular participation in political decisions. As for us, we do not understand such solutions as divergent but complementary in the context of suggestions that can be followed to emancipate Brazil from its colonial matrix.

When analyzed together, these elements bring about interesting contributions to contemporary explanations for the country's corruption phenomenon. The implications of the findings in public organizations can enrich investigations into the pathological impunity of economic and political authorities, the alienation of the working classes, the appropriation of public resources by private agents, and, above all, the perverse association between agents of the ruling classes that have perpetuated legal violations and the full exercise of citizenship. Furthermore, the maintenance of the alienation of the working masses and the feeling of aversion to politics have contributed greatly to the current status. This paper has demonstrated that the alienation from political affairs and a growing feeling of aversion to the national State among Brazilians

are not merely random; instead, they result from a historical and intentional project to perpetuate Brazil's colonial status.

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