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ROBERTO SCHWARZ AND THE BRAZILIAN DIALECTIC OF ENLIGHTENMENT

On the Reception of Critical Theory in
Brazil

Luiz Repa*

ABSTRACT

This article aims to reconstruct Roberto Schwarz's reception of Adornian Critical Theory, particularly in what concerns the dialectic of Enlightenment. It argues that a specific intellectual experience of Brazilian reality, produced by alliances between archaic and modern forces and filtered through some Brazilian theories of modernisation, determined this reception to a great extent. In this way, Adorno's dialectics of myth and reason had unexpectedly encountered a particular historical framework in Brazil. By discreetly joining Fernando Henrique Cardoso's Theory of Dependency and Adorno's Dialectic of Enlightenment, Schwarz could spell out the ideological life of Brazilian elites incomparably. At the same time, this unpredictable arrangement tends to diminish the critical place for social conflicts. The crucial concept of favour takes a meaning considerably different from that originally stated by Maria Sylvania de Carvalho Franco in her theory of Brazilian social violence. Furthermore, when seeking to interpret, in Brazilian literature, some contesting characters, illustrative of historical, social struggles, Schwarz has to

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presuppose a concept of Enlightenment that contradicts the volatile reversion of the modern into the archaic.

KEYWORDS

Roberto Schwarz — Theodor W. Adorno — Critical Theory — Brazilian Modernisation

ROBERTO SCHWARZ E A DIALÉTICA BRASILEIRA DO ESCLARECIMENTO

Sobre a recepção da Teoria Crítica no Brasil

RESUMO

Este artigo visa reconstruir a recepção de Roberto Schwarz da Teoria Crítica adorniana, particularmente no que diz respeito à dialética do esclarecimento. Argumento que uma experiência intelectual específica da realidade brasileira, produzida por alianças entre forças arcaicas e modernas e filtrada por algumas teorias brasileiras da modernização, determinou, em grande medida, esta recepção. Desta forma, a dialética adorniana entre mito e razão inesperadamente encontrou um quadro histórico particular no Brasil. Ao juntar discretamente a Teoria da Dependência de Fernando Henrique Cardoso e a Dialética do Esclarecimento de Adorno, Schwarz pôde decifrar a vida ideológica das elites brasileiras de forma incomparável. Ao mesmo tempo, este arranjo imprevisível tende a diminuir o lugar crítico dos conflitos sociais. O conceito crucial de favor tem um significado consideravelmente diferente daquele originalmente afirmado por Maria Sylvia de Carvalho Franco na sua teoria da violência social brasileira. Além disso, ao procurar interpretar, na literatura brasileira, algumas personagens contestadoras, ilustrativas de lutas históricas, sociais, Schwarz tem de pressupor um conceito de esclarecimento que contradiz a volátil reversão do moderno no arcaico.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Roberto Schwarz — Theodor W. Adorno — Teoria Crítica —
Modernização brasileira

Undoubtedly, Roberto Schwarz is one of the most decisive authors in the Brazilian reception of the Critical Theory. Alongside José Guilherme Merquior, who also received it in the context of literary and art criticism, and Gabriel Cohn, who assimilated the Critical Theory of communication in social sciences studies, Roberto Schwarz has early set some of the chief theoretical landmarks for the development of this assimilation in Brazil. There would be no mistake even in stating that Schwarz is the first Brazilian critical theorist in a strict sense: he has appropriated some of the essential lines of this tradition to create his own framework for the critical analysis of historical time both in a local and global meaning.

In contrast to Cohn's and Merquior's exegesis of the theoretical writings and conceptual elements, Schwarz's appropriation has never been so direct. Instead, it has often had the shape of concrete "usages" on account of specific subjects. Schwarz has never written about Adorno, for instance, in a systematic, methodological way (Almeida 2007). Moreover, in comparison to both authors, Schwarz is less interested in delineating the differences between the several contributions to Critical Theory and other correlated thoughts, although he perfectly knows that Marx, Lukács, Brecht, Benjamin, and Adorno constitute a "con-

tradictory” tradition (Schwarz 2001: 4; Almeida 2007; Waizbort 2009).¹

Schwarz has continuously integrated these sources into a productive and incisive interpretation of the particularity of Brazilian reality. Such productivity is evident, above all, regarding a theory of Brazilian ideological life, whose relevance is tough to dispute to date. Especially on this matter, Adorno’s dialectic of Enlightenment seems to play a significant role insofar as it offers a logical matrix of inversions from modernity into archaism which typically characterises the ideological twists of Brazilian elites.

At the same time, however, it is impossible to understand the uses of Adorno’s dialectics without any reference to previous and local understandings on the deep structures of Brazilian society. The reading and uses of some Adornian models, not quoted but with contours anyhow perceptible, as Paulo Eduardo Arantes has outlined for decades (1992), merge with the theoretical elaboration of Brazilian simultaneous experience of modernity and archaism.

¹ It is worth stressing that, at least until the late 1970s, the Brazilian reception had generally been aware of the differences and even oppositions within the so-called “Frankfurt School.” José Guilherme Merquior’s pioneering work on “Arte e sociedade em Marcuse, Adorno e Benjamin”, published in 1969, largely contributed to this perception. It was probably one of the first studies in the world to propose a critical comparison between the three thinkers. This tendency to underline the differences and oppositions was further heightened by Flávio Kothe when he published his book on the confrontations between Benjamin and Adorno in 1978. On the other hand, such sensitivity towards differences has surely to do with Brazil’s cultural and political struggles in the 1960s and 1970s. In my view, this obscure and unstable context determined not only a striking heterogeneity, as Carlos Nelson Coutinho stresses (Coutinho 1986; see Camargo 2012 and 2014), but also a considerable selectivity in the Brazilian reception of Critical Theory.

In addition to Antônio Cândido's model of materialistic articulation of literary form and social content, Schwarz himself mentions "the group which met to read Marx" in the late 1950s as a kind of "preparation" and "basis" for the slow absorption of Adorno's dialectic of Enlightenment (Schwarz 2012: 48 ff.; see Arantes 1992; Ricupero 2013; Lotufo 2014).

The group had reached the daring conclusion that the classic marks of Brazilian backwardness should be studied not as an archaic leftover but as an integral part of the way modern society reproduces itself, or in other words, as an evidence of a perverse form of progress (Schwarz 2001: 3).

Of course, the earlier works by Fernando Henrique Cardoso had a conceptual structuring strength within this group concerning the interpretation of Brazil, as Schwarz makes clear in one of his essays.²

The most comprehensive meaning of this subtle but even so remarkable amalgam of Adorno's faraway models and close Brazilian thought may have the following formulation: Adorno's (and Horkheimer's)³ dialectic of the Enlightenment draws upon

² "Um seminário de Marx", published in 1995, makes clear the profound influence of Fernando Henrique Cardoso's ideas on Schwarz. He addresses three earlier works by Cardoso (*Capitalismo e escravidão no Brasil meridional*, *Empresário industrial e desenvolvimento econômico*, and, with Enzo Falletto, *Dependency and Development in Latin America*) always highlighting the connection between the modern and the archaic revealed by these contributions. Only *Portugal e Brasil na crise do Antigo Sistema Colonial*, by Fernando Novais, and the mentioned thesis by Maria Sylvania de Carvalho Franco, who was not a participant in the Group at all, deserve further considerations in this essay.

³ It is typical of Brazilian reception, even currently in some places, to diminish the role of Horkheimer in the constitution of this work or of the Critical Theory in general. Sometimes, he is ridiculously considered to be an assistant of Adorno. Until the 1990s,

a tenacious junction of modern and archaic, which has a structural affinity with the logic of Brazilian social and cultural life brought about through alliances between slave-owning society and capitalist modernisation.

Accordingly, Roberto Schwarz's Critical Theory succeeds in portraying the volatile dynamics and resilient logic of ideological life amongst ruling classes, who got used to applying the most modern and the most brutal ways simultaneously to justify and maintain their domination. This accelerated reversibility, "the systematic alternation between perspectives", would indeed be the social content that sediments itself into the form of Machado de Assis' novels.⁴ "This literary form captures and dramatises the structure of the country, which becomes, so to

figures such as Horkheimer, (and even less) as Pollock, Neumann, and Kirchheimer aroused little interest both in academic and general public. On the other hand, Walter Benjamin, Theodor W. Adorno and mainly Herbert Marcuse played significant roles in political and cultural debates, not restricted to colleges. The political atmosphere was always determinant for the selectivity of authors and titles in this reception process. Habermas, for instance, attracts some attention in the course of the early 1980s democratization. This state of affairs changed somewhat only from the early 1990s on due to the gradual academization of Critical Theory. About the developments of Horkheimer and Adorno's ideas towards the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* see Abromeit 2011, Fernandes 2019; about Marcuse's and Benjamin's receptions, see Soares 1999 and Pressler 2001, respectively.

⁴ Roberto Schwarz follows a dialectical conception of aesthetical form which could find in Szondi's theory of modern drama an accurate utterance: "Hegel's dialectical notion of the form-content relationship was turned to productive use here [concerning dramatic form]. Form could be conceived as 'precipitated' content. The metaphor points to both the solid and lasting nature of form and to its origin in content – thus its capacity to state something. A valid semantics of form can be developed along these lines, one in which the form-content dialectic can be viewed as a dialectic between the statements made by form and content. The possibility arises thereby that the statement made by the content may contradict that of the form" (Szondi 1983: 192–193).

speak, the musical staff, the order beneath the writing” (Schwarz 2001: 2).

A particular version of Adorno’s *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, whose reading Schwarz started relatively early,⁵ could visibly combine with that perverse reversibility, so much that it would continuously display how the rationalist, modern and bourgeois constructs become almost instantaneously the mythological powers that they have intransigently expelled from the culture. The repeated transitions from the modern products of Enlightenment into the most regressive phenomena would have a suggestive pattern in Brazilian reality. To use an expression from Paulo Eduardo Arantes, Brazil would, therefore, be a “living figure” of the dialectic of Enlightenment (Arantes 1992: 97).

On the other hand, this attractive line of thinking entails some deadlocks, as the formidable analysis of Machado de Assis’ novel *Dom Casmurro* eventually reveals. As soon as Schwarz starts unfolding the “enlightening” struggle of a female character against the obscurantism of Rio de Janeiro’s elite in the context of the nineteenth-century slave-owning society, he assumes a meaning of Enlightenment that does not match the detailed account according to which modernity produces its supposed other. In this and other cases, where what matters is not the elitist reproduction of hierarchic scales but precisely the fights

⁵ Maybe earlier than the North-American reception if we take into account Shierry and Samuel Weber’s acknowledgements in their translation of *Prisms*: “Finally, a particular debt of gratitude is due to Roberto Schwarz, of the University of São Paulo, who introduced us to the work of Adorno and the Frankfurt School” (Adorno 1983: 272). Jorge de Almeida reinforces the familiarity of the Brazilian critic with the German philosopher adding that Schwarz even contacted Adorno for undertaking researches in Frankfurt (Almeida 2007: 45–46).

against it, Schwarz needs to rely on an idea of Enlightenment very different from that which we learn by his dialectics.

In the following text, I first try to show, assuming Paulo Eduardo Arantes's interpretation on Schwarzian contributions, how particular and selective is the presupposed reading of Adorno's dialectics (I). The theoretical core of this reception has to do with one of the most discussed of Schwarz's theses: that according to which the relationships of favour are the mediating form of almost all of Brazilian sociability. At this point, one must stress that Schwarz shifts the sense of his conceptual source, namely Maria Sylvia de Carvalho Franco's in-depth research on violence patterns in the Brazilian countryside. Instead of being an element of violence and conflict explanation, the favour turns into a factor of confrontations appeasement. On my account, this shift stems from the categorial pressure of Cardoso's Dependency Theory on the appropriation of Carvalho Franco's category (II). One of the problematic consequences of this tendency emerges precisely when Schwarz has to deal with some of Machado de Assis' contentious characters, such as Capitu, who wages an "enlightening" struggle against conservatism and obscurantism (III).

I

According to Paulo Eduardo Arantes, in one of the sharpest studies on Schwarz's work, the "negative dialectic" and the "dialectic of Enlightenment" depict the overwhelming logic of Brazil's social and cultural reality such as Schwarz grasps it.

The Brazilian dialectic of the Enlightenment would be a sort of negative dialectic that deciphers the cultural life of a peripheral country unable to overcome its archaic structures; instead, the modernisation processes usually involve their cavernous reproduction:

As Brazil did not become bourgeois by European standards, the classic dialectic was surpassed. Instead of it, another, negative one would govern a huge spinning between excitement and boredom, agitation and melancholy, suffering and lack of appetite [...].

Thus, the effect was doubly critical because a curious dialectic of *Aufklärung* comes into play. Originally, this expression refers to a philosophy of history (empirically verifiable and with critical intention) that traces back the frontiers of capitalism to the most primitive forms of rationalisation and mercantile exchange, in order to expose the march of a reversal: wherever it would be legitimate to expect progress and emancipation, we find regression and subjection. [...] Now, objectively, as our [Brazilian] colonial-bourgeois duality is itself a modern development of the backwardness, [...] we were not, regarding the progress, something like the aberration regarding the norm, the deviation regarding uniform advance; on the contrary, as the present time of the World exposed its secrets on the periphery of capital, which was not a residue but an integral part of an overall evolution, we were, so to speak, a living figure of that same dialectic of Enlightenment (Arantes 1992: 94, 96–97).

Granted the accuracy of this assessment, one can realise a selective and particular feature in the Schwarzian appropriation of Adorno's conceptions or, in his own expression, "revelations" (Schwarz 2012: 48). I mean that we find in Schwarz some differences and contrasts with Adorno's own accounts. As it is well

known, Adorno did not pay much attention to the periphery of the capitalist world system. He focused his criticism on the conditions of late capitalism in Europe and the United States and seldom had a great interest in how the periphery and the centre relate to each other in capitalist reproduction. Of course, the passage by Arantes just quoted shows that the “curious” dialectic of Enlightenment *would change* somewhat when observed from the periphery. The well-known two theses – “Myth is already Enlightenment, and Enlightenment reverts to mythology” (Adorno & Horkheimer 2002: xviii) – cannot have the same weight from this point of view. Because what would spell out Brazilian position in the dialectic of Enlightenment would precisely be the periphery of the economic system. There, the anthropological constitution of Ego, Reason, and the domination of the subjective, objective and social nature, which root on mythical and mimetic behaviour, all this could not play a significant role.

Moreover, Adorno does not use the term “negative dialectics” to designate the impossibility of overcoming contradictions or the dialectic of Enlightenment at all. In general, he sets the dialectical negativity against the positivity of the Hegelian conception of determinate negation *as well as* against the identity thought that drives to the inversion from emancipation into regression. Indeed, one could characterise it as an attempt of breaking the dialectic of rationalisation, seeking the traces of the “nonidentical” under the coercive processes of social reproduction. In that historical and particular perspective, however, any discussion on the discrepancies between *Negative Dialectics* and

Dialectic of Enlightenment would have to sound, to say the least, far distant and very academic.

In any case, it would be very superficial and unproductive to consider this selectivity to be a mere mistake. It is instead understandable only from the intellectual experience in which Schwarz's thought unfolds. Thus, it would undoubtedly be a complete misunderstanding to look for a direct influence from Adorno over Schwarz, as Jorge de Almeida (2007: 45–46) carefully warns. In addition, the political disappointments, such as the disillusionment with the weak resistance of the left-wing culture, supposedly “hegemonic”, during the military dictatorship (Schwarz 1992) or the new waves of conservative modernisation in the course of the Democratic Opening (Schwarz 1999a), cannot be overlooked.

To be more precise, the Brazilian intellectual experience has to do with the slavocracy past whose horrendous iniquities do not weary of reappearing, as the present time has displayed. Roberto Schwarz, like others before and after him, insists on the fact that Brazil arises in Western history as the result of capitalist trade expansion and, at the same time, of slave labour implementation. The fusion of capital and slavery represents the union of modern and archaic constantly reiterated in different ways throughout the history of the country. Concurrently, in the face of this renitent background, much of Brazilian theoretical production had attempted to reconstruct the processes of formation in order to seek, even in economic and political dependency with Europe and afterwards with the USA, the possibilities of a higher level of national integration and develop-

ment, whose political designation in the 1950s was “national-developmentalism.” There was nothing more prevalent in Brazilian sociological literature until the 1990s than the term “formation.” It is a genre of social theory that has found distinct formulations in several areas, from literature to economics, from sociology to history (Arantes & Arantes 1997). The “negative dialectic” that would mark the Brazilian intellectual experience ensues from the failures and reversals of the Brazilian formative processes, for which the military dictatorship was decisive.

Schwarz has tried to present the logic of this “negative dialectic” experience in his analyses of Machado de Assis’ main novels, understood as “the most consummate interpretation of Brazil – and beyond it” (Waizbort 2009: 405). The first substantial step of his analysis is the book *Ao vencedor as batatas* (*The Winner Gets the Potatoes*), which begins with one of the most influential and controversial attempts to interpret Brazilian sociability, the essay “Misplaced Ideas” (Schwarz 1992b; Ricupero 2013).

II

The basic argument of this essay looks initially like Marx’s theorem about the simultaneity of nonsimultaneous times that marks the German backwardness in the 19th century. In the face of backward conditions, despite being as firmly embedded into the international trade as in the Brazilian case, the liberal and progressive ideas are misplaced. They play a shallow, fragile ideological role, always vulnerable to the external injunctions. If in

Europe the ideas of human rights fulfilled an ideological function in covering up the exploitation of wage labour according to a necessary, objective and politically convenient illusion, in Brazil they had to live within the slave labour system, that is, with an entirely different material basis. This conjunction of ideologies coming from the centre and slavery reality inevitably produces a shaky ground where the political and cultural positions quickly, sometimes in a matter of seconds, are reverted through an undetermined and indefinite quid pro quo. “Challenged at every turn by slavery, the liberal ideology – the ideology of the newly emancipated nations of America – was derailed” (Schwarz 1992b: 21).

However, “the effective nexus of ideological life” is then less determined by slavery than by a category that performed a “quasi-universal mediation” in the social life of “freemen” – the bearers of ideological discourse – namely favour.⁶ The “freemen”, socially situated between the slaves and the landown-

⁶ The formulation “Favour was our quasi-universal social mediation” (Schwarz 1992b: 22) immediately reminds, despite or because of its inverse sense, Lukács’ thesis on reification process in the advanced capitalist societies: the commodity-form becomes the “universal category of social being as a whole” in them and thus the immediate form of social mediation (Lukács 1973: 86). This correlation also has consequences on the other usage of Adorno’s model, namely his critique of commodity fetishism, on which importance Schwarz has insisted since at least the 1990s. According to him, the Marx Group ignored the significance of such a critique and this had serious effects on theoretical development, mainly in what concerns its cultural dimensions: “There was not much interest in Marx’s critique of commodity fetishism. [...] The part of the logic of the commodity in the production and normalization of barbarism is hardly in line with its account and becomes the least opportune set of Marx’s work. For the same reasons, the Group lacked understanding on the importance of the Frankfurtian thinkers” (Schwarz 1999b: 126). However, the emphasis on the shaping force of favour in Brazilian sociability seems to oppose a more incisive acknowledgement of the role of commodity form.

ers, lived in dependency relations, which are refractory to rationalised European bourgeois life. Their social survival depended on acts of favour transposed into discourses of symbolic praise:

Slavery gives the lie to liberal ideas; but favour, more insidiously, uses them for its own purposes, originating a new ideological pattern. The element of arbitrariness, the fluid play of preferences to which favour subjects whatever it touches, cannot be fully rationalised. In Europe, when attacking such irrationalities, universalism had its sights on feudal privilege. In opposing this, bourgeois civilisation had postulated the autonomy of the individual, universality of law, culture of its own sake, a day's pay for a day's work, the dignity of labour, etc., against the prerogatives of the *Ancien Régime*. Favour, in turn, implies the dependency of the individual, the exception to the rule, ornamental culture, arbitrary pay and the servility of labour. [...] *Once the European ideas and motives took hold, they could serve, and very often did, as a justification, nominally 'objective', for what was unavoidably arbitrary in the practice of favour.* Real as it was, the antagonism vanished into thin air, and the opposing positions walked hand in hand (Schwarz 1992b: 22–23).

One of the most striking aspects of this concept of favour refers to the reversive mediation of opposites. The arbitrary uses of liberal ideas usually have one orientation: dissolving the open conflicts in such a manner that they cannot unfold. The negative dialectic relates to the favour structures because they can play this role of avoiding the burning divergences, so that it reproduces the same conditions in a rhetorically progressive manner, that is, with conservative effects.

Now, as Schwarz himself has repeatedly stated, he derived the idea of favour as the core mediation of social life from Maria Sylvia de Carvalho Franco's pioneering sociological study on "freemen in the slavocracy order." According to her thesis, favour relationships between free but poor white men and powerful landowners escaped from any formalisation of labour conditions in Brazilian slavocracy. These relations revolved around the figure of "agregado", a dependent man who lived in the property of the landowner, rendering every type of services but simultaneously following some friendship codes. As the political and economic structures of slavery and land-ownership made the existence of poor "freemen" dispensable, the favour of the dominant was seen as an ambiguous act of grace (Carvalho Franco 1974: 104).

Importantly, Carvalho Franco uses the categories of favour and "agregado" in the context of an elaborate explanation of the high rates of social violence involving personal issues, the so-called "honour killing", also between subordinates and superiors, since the economic dispensability of the poor affected the "recognition of the identity between human beings" and the supposed reciprocal equality as freemen (Carvalho Franco 1974: 104). The favour is not only an outcome of dependency conditions; it is paradoxically impossible without this principle of equality. The favour thus bases on that reciprocal recognition of equality, absolutely fundamental for poor freemen, in such a way that it contains a socially explosive charge, capable of undoing the fragile subordination connections.

The opposition of the dominated against “masters” [...] comes to emerge because the same conditions responsible for a real state of subjection are also, in their reverse, for a real state of autonomy. Marginalised from the structural arrangement and the processes essential to social and economic life, “agregados” and comrades form the most underprivileged amongst the freemen and the most qualified to face the established order. I want to emphasise, however, this autonomy takes place only because, amongst farmers and their dependants, the pattern of relationships based on the recognition of the *other* as a fellow, as a person, remained. In an economically differentiated and autocratic society, which both postulates and denies the recognition of human condition in the poor man, it is understandable, after all, how paths are opened for his disentanglement and why this process turns radical. In this way, it becomes intelligible that comrades boldly confront farmers (Carvalho Franco 1974: 100–101).

The social-theoretical category of favour thus involves a contradictory structure because it refers to relationships drawing upon dependency and equality, subjection and autonomy, objective detachment and emotional ties. As favour practices reaffirm and deny the mutual recognition of the identity between human beings, it ends up nourishing the perpetually imminent violence.⁷

⁷ As the principle of equality had an ideological function even within this autocratic society, Carvalho Franco vehemently disagrees with the thesis on the misplacing of liberal ideas: “This equality, deep-rooted on the conscience and practice of lords in the 19th century, was not far from the formal freedom of legal codes and even less from its ideological justification. Constituted in the same movement as the units of mercantile production, this concept of freedom that underpinned *favour* practices was not opposed to the bourgeois ideology of abstract equality: on the contrary, it could absorb it without any difficulty, because they were substantially alike and fulfil the same practical tasks” (Carvalho Franco 1976: 63).

If so, Schwarz does not take the same consequences from favour traditions as Carvalho Franco. On the contrary, as the passage quoted shows, Schwarz draws the principle of an alliance between the incompatible, the undoing of antagonisms. In one case, favour relationships explode into passionate violence; in the other case, they make the oppositions fade away. In one case, favour rituals play a primary role in a general theory about entrenched violent social attitudes that often erupt suddenly; in the other case, conversely, it constitutes the linkage between the opposites, the fluctuation between temporary positions.

This discrepancy surely relates to the immediate subjects, the agrarian world of coffee production in Carvalho Franco's case and the urban elite drawn by Machado de Assis' novels in Schwarz's. However, the "almost universality" ascribed to the category of favour makes clear that the latter thinks of a structuring principle of Brazilian society that goes far beyond a particular context. Indeed, he seems to subsume the theory of favour under the structural analysis that Fernando Henrique Cardoso carried out concerning Brazil's economic dependency within the capitalist system. This constitutive reference to the so-called Dependency Theory, considered by many authors to be the genuine Brazilian and South American contribution to the critique of political economy in a global sense, is what allows explaining why the favour turns out to be a principle of (however false) reconciliation.

As is well known, the Dependency Theory by Fernando Henrique Cardoso and other authors sought to escape from the dualistic schemes which perceived only the pure conviviality of modern and archaic aspects in a peripheral country and at the same time overcome the classical Leninist approach to imperialism. The political mirror of that dualism was summed up into the diagnosis, supported by the Communist Party and filtered in the “national-developmentalism”, according to which the workers’ organisations should ally with the national bourgeoisie so that they could oppose the combination of forces between the European and American imperialism and the land-ownership.

In his early works, Fernando Henrique Cardoso tried to undo this line of reasoning. His research on the slave-owning society in the southern country disproved that politically rooted dualism between modern and archaic, specified in the seeming contrast between modernising capital and barbarian slavery. One of the most remarkable results of this research indeed consisted in the thesis according to which slavery was a constitutive moment of the capitalist system, a means of organising and implementing “large-scale production aimed at the market and profit” despite the obstacles which would arise to the development of capitalism itself (Cardoso 1997: 36).

In a further step, in the studies on the economic behaviour of the national bourgeoisie, Cardoso came to state that the national bourgeoisie had accepted to participate in the international system as a “minor partner.” In this way, Brazilian underdevelopment, as an agrarian but capitalistically organised economy, also became a means of local and international accu-

mulation. It was not, therefore, an overlap of the modern with the archaic, but a reproduction of the modern making the archaic a condition of its very existence: “the modernisation of the Brazilian economy was made by the use and gradual redefinition of traditional forms of economic behaviour” (Cardoso 1964: 185). Some years later, Cardoso could summarise the criticism of the dualism in the following words:

The critique showed that the dynamism of the modern sector of society could not take place independently of the processes that affected the traditional one. Instead of assuming that the modern sector juxtaposes itself with the traditional sector of society, such as oil in water, without leading to an intrinsic redefinition of each of them, critics of dualism seek to show that there is a subordination of the interests of traditional sectors to modern ones and that the latter, if not arising from the former, exist in close relationship with them (Cardoso 1972: 34).

In Roberto Schwarz’s view, the coup d’État in 1964 would then be the final proof of the correctness of this line of interpreting Brazilian misdevelopments:

Thus, imperialist integration, which immediately modernised the economy of the country for its own ends, is reviving that part of ideological and political obsolescence which it needs in order to preserve its own stability. From being an obstacle and a residue, this archaic world becomes an intentional instrument of very modern oppression, just as modernisation itself, from being libertarian and nationalist, becomes a form of oppression (Schwarz 1992: 139–140).

Given this conceptual framework, it is not so difficult to discern the underlying reasons for Schwarz's selective appropriations both of Carvalho Franco's concept of favour and Adorno's dialectic of Enlightenment. Favour can only make explicit the reversion of positions and the vanishing of antagonism because Brazil was fundamentally entangled in the process of reciprocal reproduction of opposites, where the domination structures bring the modern and the archaic together.

Also, as the slave labour was the starting point for the capital reproduction process, Brazil was a living proof that capitalist modernity creates its "other" on the periphery and lives from this other, opposing itself to it and transforming itself into it, as Arantes suggests in the above quoted passage. This unusual unity between the dialectic of Enlightenment and the Dependency Theory can also explain why the anthropological level of the relation between myth and reason plays no role in Schwarz's schemes or why the dialectic of the nonidentical has no place there.

III

In some extent, Adorno's account on the rationalisation process would, therefore, have achieved, through Dependency Theory, a sort of political-economic piece capable of explaining the curious dialectic of Enlightenment by the reproduction of backwardness. The strength of this scheme to interpret the ideological volubility of Brazilian cultural and political life is, as said, undeniable.

However, such a construction has to face some impasses. They result from an approach aiming mainly to explain how social conflicts evaporate under a sociability marked by favour practices and structurally determined by a peculiar conservative modernisation. One of these deadlocks relates to the concept of Enlightenment itself as outlined by this dialectics. In the hands of the critique, it frequently turns out to be as ambiguous and capricious as Machado de Assis' numerous characters. However, Schwarz himself allows putting in question this recurrent meaning, at least regarding the more combative aspects of Enlightenment in a country like Brazil. For instance, his brilliant analysis of Capitu, one of the most emblematic characters of Brazilian literature, predominantly presents her struggle for overcoming the social class barriers imposed by the family of her beloved, Bento, as an actual process of Enlightenment.

Dom Casmurro, Machado de Assis' novel, is narrated by and from the standpoint of Bento Santiago, a supposedly betrayed husband. He presents his resentful remembrances of the relationship with Capitu – a young woman of a lower social class – from dating to married life. Bento distrusts her loyalty and eventually excludes her from family. She finally passes away in exile. In his reminiscences, the “poisoned” narrator steadily wonders if the young girlfriend would have been, since the beginning, the unfaithful, disingenuous, calculating woman who would become later his friend's lover.

In the history of the novel's reception, as Schwarz promptly stresses, the public and the literary critique took a long time to recognize Othello's traces in the character of Bento. In

general, the public was convinced of Capitu's "guilt", although all events were reported through the lens of her husband, who simultaneously played the roles of investigator, prosecutor, and judge. On the other hand, Machado de Assis constructs the narrative in such a way that one can easily put the narrator's bitter objectivity in question (Schwarz 1997).

In Schwarz's words, Capitu appears "under the sign of enlightened spirit," whereas Bento was "under the sign of obscurantism" (1997: 14). In the beginning of the story, Capitu, "internally emancipated", heads the young couple's fight against "superstition and social prejudice", against the obscurantism of Bento's mother, against the obstructions caused by social differences, against "paternalistic subjection", against the "patriarchal order." Afterwards, Bento comes to see Capitu's "use of reason" as a sign of simulation and treachery that would explain her "adultery." In the end, Capitu's guilt would represent the affirmation of pure obscurantism against corrupting Enlightenment. Capitu's condemnation is also that of any "modern, enlightened girl." This is how "the slanderous and sombre defamation of the prized qualities of Enlightenment" begins, according to Schwarz (1997: 17).

In view of such a characterisation of Capitu as an *Aufklärer*, one could expect that Schwarz would change, if not the direction at least the rhythm of the Brazilian dialectic of Enlightenment. One could *also* suppose that Enlightenment would contain irreducible negativity against the patriarchal obscurantist order in such a way Capitu's struggle would have the symbolic

value of so many other combats.⁸ Instead, however, he restates again the junctions that agglutinate the modern and the archaic, not drawing an actual distinction between several meanings, sometimes contradictory, of Enlightenment. At the end of his essay, Schwarz argues that it is because Bento himself is as much sophisticated as rude, as much idealised as ignoble, as much intellectually updated as socially backward, that he ends up representing the dialectic of Enlightenment in his figure:

What does this absolutely strange combination [of sophistication and backwardness] mean? On the one hand, it indicates that there is no reason to suppose that, only because the Brazilian owner has no civility at home, he is not able to or does not want to take part in the advances of contemporary civilisation, whereas we all know that the opposite is the truth. On the other hand, by showing that this participation is effective, that combination gives a non-apologetic picture of progress – topicality in the strong sense – along with a comfortable place for all regressions. It is a counterfeit of enlightened tolerance, which is above all indulgence with its own ever-recurring moments of obscurantism (Schwarz 1997: 40).

Such a conclusion in the novel's interpretation is significant. The perspicacity with which Schwarz deciphers Capitu's

⁸ Schwarz's reconstruction of Helena Morley's diaries follows a similar idea. Like Capitu – the essay's title is indeed "A outra Capitu", "The other Capitu" – Morley is an enlightened girl who steadily challenges the rooted obscurantism of upper classes in her childhood city of Diamantina: her anti-ideological discoveries "suppose active and open curiosity about depreciated zones of life, and they go beyond this, reaching the enlightened understanding, not at all common, of the relationship of reciprocal implications between social positions. [...] We are delighted, in other words, to watch successive youthful remarks on clan and class obscurantism" (Schwarz 1997b: 68; see also Vasconcelos 2006).

struggle as an Enlightenment process, deriving from it a series of relevant political consequences, eventually gives way to a petrified scheme according to which Enlightenment is a device for reproducing domination, and again the modern is a simulacrum and producer of backwardness. The lack of differentiation between contrary meanings of Enlightenment, its diverse roles in opposing or affirming the *status quo*, results in a dilution of political dimension in a broader sense. The social sensibility of the critic, whose rarity one should always highlight, is so suffocated by a social-theoretical formula that nothing seems to make a difference between Capitu's Enlightenment, which challenges the obscurantist patriarchalism, whose gender structures cannot be ignored, and Bento's Enlightenment, which mostly imposes this very same order.

Indeed, if the use of reason is so communal with the most archaic, what is the actual difference between Capitu and Bento? In the current times, an answer to this question has become even more crucial if we want to oppose the new, overwhelming wave of obscurantism, whose dimensions and sources are also global.

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