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Project, democracy and nationalism in Álvaro Vieira Pinto: comments on “Ideologia e Desenvolvimento Nacional” [*Ideology and National Development*]

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"In the silence of apparently useless reflection is where vision of reality perfects itself, where its tragic minutiae are unveiled, and where it prepares itself, in full lucidity, to realize contacts with the 'others', in the full force of an invincible efficacy" (Alvaro Vieira Pinto, *A Sociologia dos Países Subdesenvolvidos*)

The citation above is an excerpt from the sixth chapter of "The Sociology of Underdeveloped Countries" (*A Sociologia dos Países Subdesenvolvidos*) (VIEIRA PINTO, 2008: 31), a posthumous work finished by philosopher Álvaro Vieira Pinto in 1975, published in the twenty first century thanks to the efforts of the researcher José Ernesto de Fáveri and the kindness of Pinto's niece, Mariza Urban. This last work was hand written in the course of two years (1974 and 1975), and filled two notebooks, kept by his heiress. The sentence aptly synthesizes the spirit of an entire generation of intellectuals who dreamt with democracy and national liberation but by mid-1970s were fated to "the silence of reflection".

The authoritarian effects of civil-military dictatorship put into place in 1964 first weighed upon peasants, union members, military and intellectual who were under the same national-popular spell. As a result, names such as Alberto Guerreiro Ramos and Nelson Werneck Sodré had long been estranged from public life in 1975. During this same period, the process of university institutionalization advanced, especially starting in the 1970s, enshrining new standards of scientific work and relegating into oblivion intellectual that would later fall under the rubric of "essayists" or "lacking rigor". The silence of Vieira Pinto was thus also the outcome of a long and painful intellectual defeat, as an entire bibliography dedicated to this subject has shown (ABRANCHES, 1997; LAHUERTA, 1999; MOTTA, 2000; MAIA, 2001; CORTES, 2003)

Twenty years before writing about the silence to which he thought himself condemned, Vieira Pinto spoke to the multitudes. After all, from 1955 to 1964 he was a member of the Higher Institute of Brazilian Studies (*Instituto de Estudos Brasileiros* – ISEB), an entity established by the Ministry of Education in 1955 with the objective of promoting research and teaching in the field of social sciences so as to contribute to the progress of development. Vieira Pinto headed the ISEB Philosophy Department and was its last director, from 1962 to 1964, but this was not the beginning of his career. Indeed he had been chair of the History of Philosophy of the National Faculty of Philosophy (*Faculdade*

Nacional de Filosofia – FNFi) since 1950 and in the 1940s he was already renown as a Catholic intellectual with a solid philosophical training, which sent him to the Sorbonne for further studies. Once an integralista¹ (he adhered to the Brazilian Integralist Action, *Ação Integralista Brasileira*, in 1934), after his stint at the ISEB Vieira Pinto became an enthusiast of nationalistic and popular causes. During this period, nothing could be stranger to him than the “silence of reflection” as he regularly spoke to an ever-growing audience and to an ebullient civil society. In one of these conferences, which took place at the beginning of the academic semester of 1956, originated the text I herewith present to readers entitled *Ideology and National Development (Ideologia e Desenvolvimento Nacional)* (Vieira Pinto, 1960).

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One among those in the audience of this lecture, on May 14 1956, was then president Juscelino Kubitschek, who in the coming years would sweep the country (or at least a good part of it) with his project to accelerate development and modernization. In this context, the ISEB figured as a site where the political and intellectual issues related to this project could be discussed even if its members did not, not even by far, espouse it. It is no secret either that the opinions among members of the ISEB varied greatly, meaning there was nothing close to a homogenous school of thought and political action.

I thus follow in the same direction as the recent bibliography, which prefers elaborating specific analyses for each intellectual who at some point was classified as an “isebian”². This qualification many times was simply used to gloss over important subtleties and contrasts. In the case of Vieira Pinto, this proclivity is represented in the book authored by Marcos Cesar de Freitas (1998) and by the magnificent doctoral dissertation by Norma Cortes cited above, and defended at Rio de Janeiro University Institute of Research (*Instituto Universitário de Pesquisas do Rio de Janeiro* – IUPERJ) in its classical institutional formation.

The text condenses questions that would be exhaustively discussed in Vieira Pinto’s classical work *Consciousness and National Reality (Consciência e Realidade Nacional)*, edited in two volumes in 1962. In 1956, the main subjects of the conference were: the historical role of philosophy in Brazil, the relationship between thought and the overcoming of the colonial condition, the ideology of development and, lastly, the relationship between democracy, education and ideology.

The philosopher begins with an assessment of the historical place of philosophy in Brazil, or actually, its “non-place”, as the country never envisioned itself as part of universal History, occupying but a parochial portion within the community of men. Brazilians lacked, in the words of the author by way of Leibniz, “the point of view of the infinite” (Vieira Pinto, 1960:13), the capacity of thinking of the country as a whole and of its place in History. In addition to this empty space, Vieira Pinto points out another lacunae in Brazilian intellectual formation: the inability to interpret the masses that constitute Brazil, a “growing body” (idem: 15). The two topics are related to each other because, in the 1950s, the masses were becoming more numerous and culture was undergoing significant transformation. In other words, Vieira Pinto argues that democratization implied a transformation in the form of consciousness of Brazilians. At the outset he delineated an equation connecting philosophy and democracy, one of the trademarks of his thought.

This equation is associated to the trajectory of consciousness, with a decidedly Hegelian flavor, yet with a peripheral bent. In the language of Vieira Pinto, the enlargement of social life entails injecting the masses into the country’s economic life, arousing them from dormant existences

towards a more complete and elaborate perception of their places in Brazilian society and destiny. "When the process of national development, in all sectors, provides individuals in the masses with the opportunity of overcoming their condition, there is a sudden acquisition of consciousness of their situation, and thereby of Brazilian reality in general (idem: 17).

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The following pages present a phenomenology of sorts concerning the emergence of the "idea", which, in the author's interpretation, is the process which unfolds both individually and in the body of the national community, since the idea is not only something the individual "has" but also something that "possesses" this individual, furnishing modes of interpreting the world at large and individual circumstances. Consciousness, according to Vieira Pinto, has its own ways, that goes from the merely "sensitive" to the "representative" (idem:18), that is marked by the formation of objective and authentic ideas about national life. In other words, the process of formation of a true national community is associated to the consolidation of a consciousness of this very process, a consciousness that is social and historical³.

Such a perspective is based on a strong vision of the role of ideas as a conductor of social life. Formulating the ideology of development is equivalent to being able to connect an adequate understanding of the past, an objective representation of the present and a feasible project to the future. Far from operating as "falsification" or "mystification", the concept of ideology in Vieira Pinto is elevated to the status of a tool capable of conducting the historical process in Brazil, a process that is guided by development.

But then what does "development" means according to these terms? In the first place, it is a "process" (idem: 21), that is, it is endowed with organicity and is related to the connection between past, present and future. This leads us not to the sociology of modernization of North American stripes. After all, being a "process", development can only be defined based on the historical consciousness of each society. Therefore, what is fundamental is not the production of an abstract or formal definition, but rather to be able to elaborate a national consciousness about the past, the present and the future of the country. As with every phenomenon understood as a "process", Vieira Pinto tells us, development must have a "finality" (idem: 22). There is therefore a direction in the process of development, even though it is not framed metaphysically. What is more, development must be thought of as a "unity" (idem: 23), that is, it is not defined as a set of isolated facts, but rather as a common form of locating such acts within a collective trajectory Brazilians live out.

"Process", "finality" and "unity". To the contemporary reader, it is hard not to identify the authoritarian undertones of these concepts, insofar as it is equally hard to imagine that a plurality of man can together be engaged in a "national consciousness". Would this be yet another repetition of the crass mistake committed by every nationalist intellectual, namely self-appointing oneself the enlightened representative of the Nation and its social body? How can a project embedded in the accomplishment of the state count on the spontaneous cooperation of society? Such dangers are not loss on Vieira Pinto, and the text of the conference then begins to debate the antinomies of this formulation. However, its solution is far from lacking its own polemical content.

In the first place, the philosopher resorts to "the clarity of ideas" and to the "degree of the clarity of consciousness" (idem: 24). Persuasion, avoiding all authoritarianism, will only convert resistance into adhesion if ideas present themselves clearly, objectively and in convincing fashion to the eyes of men, that is, they must become "ideology" and

gain collective support (idem: 25). We are thus in dangerous territory, in which collective adhesion figures simply as the outcome of the effort to clarify the "obvious". How then to explain adhesion to equivocal ideas? Vieira Pinto's resolution implies dealing historically with the issue .

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When bound to their colonial condition (idem: 26-27) Brazilians would think based on mental frameworks that did not correspond to their reality, as they merely derivative imitations. In other words, the colonial condition implied a colonial way of thinking, which is by definition inauthentic and, thus, devoid from the dimensions of process, finality and unity. Stated otherwise, there was no "project." In the conditions of 1956, the economic and political signals seemed to suggest to the philosopher that the time was ripe for more objective ideas concerning the national reality and the country's destiny started circulating and becoming more consistent within the Brazilian collectivity. In other words, the philosophical problem — the passage from the multiplicity of private consciousness to the cohesion of national consciousness — would be resolved by the concrete historical dynamics of the Nation's present. In his own words "Brazilian consciousness, by virtue of where it has arrived in the process of material development of the Nation, has reached the degree of clarity that affords us the exact perception of our being" (idem: 28). Since ideology is not only interpretive but also normative, it thus functions as an idea capable of regulating the execution of development. In a bout of tropical Leninism, he thus finishes his argument: "without an ideology of development there is no national development" (idem: 29)

Lastly, the last move to elucidate the question requires taking on the democratic question. The formulation of a project that would embody the representation of the future of the budding consciousness of nationality must not befall upon intellectuals. Vieira Pinto is clear in this regard, as rendered in this simple phrase: "the ideology of development must necessarily be a mass phenomenon" (idem: 30). This is because in order for this ideology to be effective, and not simply the private utopia of a group of leaders, it must acquire a social dimension, finding privileged support among the popular classes. In this transmutation we find the secret of the passage from the private to public consciousness, which shows how the philosopher resolved the tension between ideology and democratic life. One can notice Vieira Pinto does not speak of propaganda, but rather of a complete identification between the masses and the development project, insofar as men perceive it as the true form of their own private consciousness.

At this point of the argument, Vieira Pinto relates the transmutation of the private into public to the ongoing process of social and economic democratization in Brazil (idem: 33). Thus, the protests, strikes and public demands are deemed as indicator of a quantitative change (the growth of the people and the economy) which acquires a qualitative dimension (the call for development comes from within the people). Stated otherwise, the ideology of development "is not a truth enunciated about the people, but by the people" (idem: 34).

But what is the material content of this ideology? Vieira Pinto argues that the generality is the project's greatest strength, as it allows to situate concrete data within a perspective of historical process that confers sense to isolated questions and events (idem: 37-38). This is why philosophy has such a central role in the economy of the author's argument, since its general interpretive dimension, a feature of this discipline, is identified with the historical movement that gives rise to national development. This equation, which bears a Hegelian ring, is summed up in the words of the author "the national process is an organic

whole, its movement is but one" (idem: 38)

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The excerpt above seems to shift the argument away from the democratic question. Once again, we are dealing with the "process", the "organic whole" and other concepts that point towards totality *in lieu* of pluralism. However, in the ensuing section the philosopher returns to the connection between the ideology of national development and democracy, by arguing that the translation of national consciousness must not be the work of a clairvoyant elite, but rather the result of democratic process. The passage deserves transcription: "*with credentials to promote national development are only those who were chosen by the masses*, in other words, there cannot be a political solution to Brazilian problems beyond popular vote" (idem: 40). In a remarkable effort to theorize democracy, Vieira Pinto rejects all elite perspectives of democracies. But, what if the "masses" happen to choose charismatic leaders or "improper" interpreters of the national consciousness? Little does it matter, is the philosopher's response: most fundamental is the learning experience provided by the vote and the possibility of self-correction (idem: 42).

The problem of the reconciliation between ideology and democracy is only completed by the introduction of another subject: education. After all, if ideology is not the political propaganda of the elites, but rather a process of immanent transmutation of the consciousness, in operation there must be an external influence capable of accelerating the process yet without undermining its democratic character. Defined as "the humanism of our time, which fundamentally will value the knowledge of the sciences of culture and nature, the possession of techniques of fruitful exploration of the material reality and the arts that express the original sense of Brazilian man" (idem: 44), education is seen by the author as a crucial aspect of the new phase being lived by Brazilians. In other words, intellectuals are not the ones who will enlighten the masses, but rather they will progressively learn in light of their progressive incorporation by the nation's political and economic life.

The thesis of Vieira Pinto admirably synthesizes the tension and the potentialities contained in the modern Brazilian experience. The national question, a classical obsession of the intellectuals who thought the country, was not always analyzed in articulation with the democratic phenomenon. From the Viscount of Uruguay to Oliveira Viana, many are the examples of thinkers who nurtured a strong suspicion over the capacity of the masses to learn on their own. It is no accident then, after the several authoritarian cycles that taint national History, that many ask how can there be a national project in a plural society in which democracy rules and in which achieving collective adhesion without resorting to cohesion is a task doomed to failure. After the 1964 coup, for example, nationalism was justly criticized for its ideological dimension, and its intellectuals (to the right and left) were questioned for supposedly leaving aside class struggle and gravitating towards antidemocratic and/or authoritarian ideations. According to these critiques, it would not be possible to speak "in the name of the Nation" without incurring in the sin of authoritarianism. It is indeed a fact that this Vieira Pinto conference does not entirely answer these questions. However, the author's effort to conjure up a philosophical argument capable of articulating a project of national development with the democratization of Brazilian society, a phenomenon that was not described as a utopia, but rather as a development in progress.

As he wrote the bitter words that serve as the epigraph to this brief commentary, Vieira Pinto translated the feeling of solitude of a generation who dreamed with development *and* democracy, even if the second term of equation were conceived in non-orthodox

fashion. In the mid 1970s, if the first term, on its turn, had not disappeared, it had, however, entered a perverted course faced with the intensification of authoritarianism. The grand development projects carried out by the military regime, such as the Greater Carajás and the Trans Amazonian highway, were erected in a context of disrespect to the rights of local populations and severe environmental damage, typical of the brand of authoritarian-capitalism that seems to have succumbed in the first decade of the 1980s, with the fall of the developmentalist State. However, to a reader in 2013, exposed to a return to developmentalism, the democratic passion of Vieira Pinto sounds all the more relevant than in 1956. After all this passion is the only possibility of providing meaning to the struggle of many Brazilians who today face the contradictions of what Werneck Vianna (2012) termed the "grand bourgeois project" of capitalism.

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Quote this article

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Notes

1. The word "integralist" refers to the members of the Brazilian Integralist Action (*Ação Integralista Brasileira*). Founded in 1932 by Plínio Salgado, the IBA has established itself as a political organization nationwide, inspired by Italian Fascism. Its main features were: nationalism, corporatism, anti-liberalism and anti-communism.
2. The word "isebian" refers to the members of the Higher Institute of Brazilian Studies, founded in 1955.
3. It is important to note that in his classic book published in 1962, Vieira Pinto would explore the passage from "naïve" consciousness to a "critical" consciousness, concepts that do not appear as such in the 1956 conference that is object of the comments of this article.

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