

MODERNIZATIONS, MODERNITIES, AND MODERNISM IN REPUBLICAN BRAZIL IN THE EARLY 20TH CENTURY

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ABSTRACT

This article was written as an opening lecture for the II Encontro de Pensamento Social Brasileiro: 100 years of 1922 and the transformations of modern Brazil. In it, I highlight what I understand to be a political-cultural project of modernization of the country through a “national education,” which was explicit in the 1890s, and remained on the agenda in the following decades. For that, I analyze the contributions of three essential authors – José Veríssimo, Gonzaga Duque, and João Ribeiro – working with three of their books, little known but very representative of the thinking of a good part of the intellectual elites of the First Republic. Seeing themselves as bearers of a mission dedicated to overcoming the country’s “backwardness,” they relativized scientific determinisms (climate and race), defending that public and compulsory education was an effective possibility of nationalizing and modernizing Brazil.

Keywords: Intellectuals, National Education, Modernization

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MODERNIZAÇÕES, MODERNIDADES E MODERNISMOS NO BRASIL REPUBLICANO DE INÍCIO DO SÉCULO XX

RESUMO

Este artigo foi escrito como uma conferência de abertura para o II Encontro de Pensamento Social Brasileiro: 100 anos de 1922 e as transformações do Brasil moderno. Nele, destaco o que entendo ser um projeto político-cultural de modernização do país, através de uma “educação nacional”, e que se explicitou nos anos de 1890, permanecendo em pauta nas décadas seguintes. Para tanto, analiso as contribuições de três importantes autores – José Veríssimo, Gonzaga Duque e João Ribeiro – trabalhando com três de seus livros, pouco conhecidos, mas muito representativos do pensamento de boa parte das elites intelectuais da Primeira República. Vendose como portadores de uma missão dedicada a vencer o “atraso” do país, relativizavam os determinismos cientificistas (clima e raça), defendendo que uma educação pública e obrigatória era uma possibilidade efetiva de nacionalizar e modernizar o Brasil.

Palavras-chave: Intelectuais, Educação nacional, Modernização

MODERNIZACIONES, MODERNIDADES Y MODERNISMOS EN EL BRASIL REPUBLICANO A PRINCIPIOS DEL SIGLO XX

RESUMEN

Este artículo fue escrito como conferencia de apertura del II Encontro de Pensamento Social Brasileiro: 100 años de 1922 y las transformaciones del Brasil moderno. En él, destaco lo que entiendo como un proyecto político-cultural de modernización del país, a través de una “educación nacional”, y que se explicitó en la década de 1890, manteniéndose en la agenda de las décadas siguientes. Para ello, analizo las aportaciones de tres importantes autores –José Veríssimo, Gonzaga Duque y João Ribeiro– trabajando con tres de sus libros, poco conocidos, pero muy representativos del pensamiento de buena parte de las élites intelectuales de la Primera República. Al verse portadores de una misión dedicada a la superación del “atraso” del país, relativizaron los determinismos cientificistas (clima y raza), defendiendo que la educación pública y obligatoria era una posibilidad efectiva de nacionalizar y modernizar Brasil.

Palabras clave: Intelectuales, Educación Nacional, Modernización

MODERNISATIONS, MODERNITÉS ET MODERNISMES DANS LE BRÉSIL RÉPUBLICAIN DU DÉBUT DU XXE SIÈCLE

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article a été écrit comme conférence d’ouverture pour le II Encontro de Pensamento Social Brasileiro : 100 ans de 1922 et les transformations du Brésil moderne. J’y mets en lumière ce que je comprends être un projet politico-culturel de modernisation du pays, à travers une « éducation nationale », et qui s’est explicité dans les années 1890, restant à l’ordre du jour dans les décennies suivantes. Pour cela, j’analyse les contributions de trois auteurs importants - José Veríssimo, Gonzaga Duque et João Ribeiro - travaillant avec trois de leurs livres, peu connus, mais très représentatifs de la pensée de la plupart des élites intellectuelles de la Première République. Se voyant porteurs d’une mission vouée au dépassement du « retard » du pays, ils relativisent les déterminismes scientistes (climat et race), défendant que l’enseignement public et obligatoire a été une possibilité effective de nationalisation et de modernisation du Brésil.

Mots clés: Intelectuels, Education nationale, Modernisation

By listening to and reading fairy tales, children learn that there are certain words with magical powers¹. Words that can transform things and people, granting their wishes and making the world a better place. The problem is that those words are mysterious; the person who says them needs to have a series of qualities and know several rules to use their power efficiently. Therefore, children also learn that there is a dispute around the control of these words, as they can change their meaning depending on the story's plot and the character's actions. For children, if the magic word wants to improve the world when misused or used by the wrong person, it can also create great damage. So, in this context, you must be careful.

Adults, who do not often read fairy tales, often forget this and continue to seek words able to make the world a better place (usually for themselves) by magic. One of them, with definite power in political projects, is modernization. Being modern – agreeing with what is perceived as new in a given time, generally associated with what is good – is always an ambition and a promise. The problem is that we frequently do not pay much attention to the fact that the content of the word modernization does not have a fixed meaning and a pre-defined positive value. Because of this, various ideals of modern competing in the same historical context always exist. Depending on who, when, to whom, and through which means the modernization project takes place, there will be several possible modernities and even contradictions among them. Thus, we should remember the story, not so childish, of 'Alice in Wonderland' when she is lost and asks the cat, "which way I ought to go from here?" to which he answers: "That depends a good deal on where you want to get to."

Aware of the warning given to Alice, we can say that in the history of social groups, among which the nations, there are some periods in which seeking 'the modern' is particularly intense. It is as if the "horizon of expectations" expanded, expressed by projects that can seem like political-institutional changes, economic plans, proposals of broad cultural renovation, and a bit of all that merged. In the case of Brazilian society, one of these moments was the turn of the 19th century and the first decades of the 20th, with *Semana de Arte Moderna* [Modern Art Week], the Centenary of Brazil's Independence, the Tenentism movement, the foundation of the Communist Party, and other events which we are celebrating in 2022, even in this event.

Knowing this and assuming some risks, I propose to displace this sanctified emphasis to highlight what can be understood as a political-cultural project of modernization in the country, which emerged in the 1890s, continuing to be discussed and producing important unfoldings during the following decades. Involving intellectuals from different formations and parts of the country, its main idea was that education was a decisive issue for this modernization in a broader sense. That is, the meaning given to the notion of education (more than instruction) and its association with the notion of 'progress' in that political and linguistic context. These intellectuals were undoubtedly beneficiaries of the illustrated ideal of education as a social reform. However, they advanced when conceiving it as an object of necessary public policies

¹ This text was read on May 2, 2022, as the opening conference at II Encontro de Pensamento Social Brasileiro: 100 anos de 1922 e as transformações do Brasil moderno, organized by Unesp (Marília), Unespar, and UFPR. The conference characteristics were kept.

to overcome the country's "backwardness." Therefore, we cannot consider them only as naïve, guided by an unattainable reformist proposal, which was perceived and pointed out during the First Republic. Undoubtedly, as always, those intellectuals are reflecting on Brazil with constraints and possibilities typical of their historical context. Nonetheless, they are proposing educational policies at a critical moment – the start of the Republic, the definition of citizenship conditions, the first presidential elections – and knowing the educational models of other countries that were producing good results. They also soon perceived the great resistance from the Republican elites to implement policies that increased access to public education, thus starting to systematically criticize the new regime.

Greater and better than them – what is no advantage – we learned that education did not and will not do all that is expected from it. However, despite this, we know that education matters and matters much. Therefore, at a very special moment – the establishment of a Republic- this ideal of education, connected with citizenship, gained power and followers. For these republicans, the regime meant a new political and institutional organization and a starting point to form a nation and a Brazilian people, as the country was finally free from slavery and monarchy. In this context, they made prognostics of "progress" based on a diagnosis that supported a vision of Brazilian history, which considered that only with the abolition and the republic. Consequently, only in the late 19th century we would have had the conditions for "true independence" and, therefore, an effective modernization that had been blocked by those who benefited from a slavery-based and aristocratic society. That is why the issue of Brazilian national identity becomes unavoidable for intellectuals. It was not an option but an imposition for Brazil to exist in the international concert of nations.

This broad cultural project aimed to incorporate a new political actor – the Brazilian people – into citizenship. After all, these people gave the political-legal groundings for the Republic (a regime with no enslaved people or subjects). Nevertheless, they did not consider the new regime a magic word which would solve, by itself, the enormous problems of the country, amongst which education, health, communication, etc. If the republic established the right to vote (following the international practice), it was still restricted to those who could read and write (women were also forbidden to vote). So, the great majority of the people, who were illiterate, were excluded. This data shows the urgent call for public policies in the educational area and its connection with access to political rights. Internationally, republican experiences showed how public and lay schools were understood as a strategic resource for forming future citizens. The school was an institution in which the people, this abstract subject, started to be materialized. Even more, we also know that in such schools, teaching certain subjects – such as Geography, History, and Portuguese – worked as the heart that pulsed the republican national identity.

Thus, the strong bonds that intertwine the ideas of republic, independence, modernization, education, and citizenship are evident during the first decades of the 20th century and why nationalism presides over the political-cultural projects created and implemented by a large part of the republican intellectuals.

After stating this, I believe I have explained my choices for this conference. They were guided by a well-known principle that refers to men and their circumstances. In this case, a white woman, a historian of politics and intellectuals, and a teacher for over fifty years. The circumstances are the elections of this year, 2020, strategic and threatening to the republic, democracy, education, and history teaching as a subject, among other threats. We probably live in one of the worst moments of the republican history in Brazil, in which the 1988 Constitution, built through many fights, has its structures shaken because it protects and promotes – even with flaws- the fundamental rights of the Brazilian population. The school and the university stand out among the institutions under attack, aimed at teachers and students.

The history subject, created and taught by professionals (and their allies), faces denialism and a government project, which wants to sacralize an interpretation that is presumptuous, teleological, Eurocentric, sexist, white, racist, and even theological. An interpretation that appropriates, reduces, and decontextualizes common places from 19th-century historiography and, thus, makes sense for a broad audience, primarily through digital media. This project wants to confront and, if possible, eliminate a historiography that, mainly in the last decades, has been reaffirming and defending a decolonial and multicultural perspective of history, incorporating the demands for the diversity of historical subjects and showing their fights for rights in society.

Undoubtedly, this attack takes place not because the ideals of republic and education are magic words but because they are not. They happen because they are advancing toward democratization and fighting for rights, once more referring to the 1988 Constitutions that established the Brazilian nation as democratic and multicultural. This is the education and the history teaching under risk, one based on scientific and critical reflection, not guided by market and instrumentalist values. Our values are supported by a lineage of education intellectuals, which had Anísio Teixeira in the 1920s and 1930s and Paulo Freire in the 1950s/60s. That is why, with the present restlessness, I want to resume reading a line of cultural projects built in the early moment of the republic, when the issue of national identity was central.

I chose to revise the contributions of three authors who are still not well-known– José Veríssimo, Gonzaga Duque, and João Ribeiro – highlighting three of their books, maybe even less famous. As the intellectuals are always in sociability networks, we should point out that they wrote in the press, then the modern media, besides being teachers and authors. I

wish to remind you how these cultural-political projects were modern and, at the same time, contradictory and unfinished. This is true for almost all intellectuals of that time, who saw themselves as carriers of a quite elitist civilizing mission, even if they aimed to combat the aristocratic privileges and the hierarchies that took over Brazil. Not by chance, their actions have an ambiguous characteristic because they criticized the monarchy's and the republic's evils while reinforcing long-standing prejudices (such as those of race and gender).

These three intellectuals are very different and very similar to each other. Born in the middle of the 19th century, two died in the 1910s, and only João Ribeiro reached the 1930s.

They were intellectuals who wrote about different topics, lived in the federal capital, and participated in a "small intellectual world" shaken by the possibility of a liberal model of the republican national State. For this State, they created educational projects guided by rational and non-religious thought, which stated that the republic was the only regime that could save the country from the "backwardness" to which it had been condemned, not by its weather or race (as preached by the determinisms of the time) but by the Portuguese colonial exploitation, followed by a monarchy that made Brazil the last country in the world to abolish slavery. Therefore, even if they did not wholly abandon the scientific assumptions, they recognized the power of the historical-sociological dimension as a factor in understanding the country's problems. Those who bet in the teaching of history were certain of its "usefulness" for the formation of the people and the elites, as well as the cohesion of the national social group, which needed to recognize itself in a shared past, what was especially necessary in the case of nations with colonial experiences. These three intellectuals were abolitionists and Republicans. They can be understood as men who sought to think of the Brazilian country at their time. First, offering contributions and, later, losing their illusions with the republic's experience in its early years. However, we should remember that this disillusion was more targeted at the regime's elites than with the republic ideal, which passed by the connection between education and citizenship to reach the country's true independence and progress.

I start with José Veríssimo (1857-1916), probably the most famous of the three. I believe he was one of the Republican intellectuals who mostly focused on education as a nationalization and modernization policy for Brazil. His book, *A educação nacional*, published in Pará in 1890, was released as a true manifest. He was a writer, journalist, and folklore researcher. He also ran the *Museu Goeldi*, in which he established initiatives to expand the visiting public, as museums should be more visited because they were vital institutions for national education. In Rio, since 1891, he became a teacher and a principal of *Colégio Pedro II*, one of the most important literature critics at the time, comparable to Silvio Romero and Araripe Junior. A trinity that could consecrate or disgrace an author in various doses.

His book can be considered a classic and had two editions: one from 1890, which circulated less, and another from 1906, more known,² we should remember that the author died in 1916. Between them, there was an increasing optimism and skepticism, which can be seen in the presentation of each edition. In 1890, the text is defined as “the most beautiful work of my obscure life”. Its intention was not “to discuss our public instruction but to show how it is foreign to any higher ideal of education (...), how it does not deserve the name of national education and, at the same time, indicate what it should be”.³ Therefore, the reader should know that the book had a clear normative intention because if Brazil had no public instruction, it had no national education. In the second edition, we see in the new Introduction a sea of disillusion with the regime that created and “de-created” a Ministry of Education and, effectively, did not prioritize a national education project to form its citizens, which the author understood as a priority for the republic. To Veríssimo, despite existing in Brazil a “national character” arisen from miscegenation, language, and religion, we had not developed a “national feeling,” some distinguished that could be able to give an identity to a people, uniting it and, hence, creating the “Brazilians.”

The reasons for such absence were known- the size of the territory, slavery, the lack of population, the difficult communication among the states, and, extremely importantly, the lack of a national education. Not even the political centralization of the Empire had produced results in that issue. In Brazil, until that moment, there were *pernambucanos*, *baianos*, *paulistas*⁴, etc., showing that the national feeling did not emerge from a solid central power, though republican federalism could worsen the lack of bonds between states. Therefore, being Brazilian did not have a political-legal meaning- those born or naturalized in Brazil. Being Brazilian was built through education since childhood, which demanded time and investment. Nobody was born Brazilian; they learned to be Brazilian. Thus, the need for a national education, transmitted by a public and non-religious school, following the example of other countries.

Veríssimo was a patriot without the excesses and indignities that turned the nation into an idol. In his words, patriotism was only a virtue when uninterested and enlightened, as it could be the “last stronghold of the decrepit.”⁵ He had a cosmopolitan view about what was produced and experienced, mainly educationally, in countries such as Germany, France, and, mainly, the United States. His references, particularly in the case of teaching methodologies, were Montessori, Jules Ferry, Pestalozzi, and others. This new pedagogy was guided by modern childhood physiology and psychology, which considered that children were not little adults. They should be educated by age range, each with their interests and abilities, and co-education

² I am working with VERÍSSIMO, José, *A educação nacional*, (Introdução de José Murilo de Carvalho, Rio de Janeiro: Topbooks; Belo Horizonte: Ed. PUC Minas, 2013 (edited from the 1906 book).

³ Idem, p. 74.

⁴ Translation note (T.N.): respectively those from the states of Pernambuco, Bahia, and São Paulo.

⁵ Ibidem, p. 60.

was welcomed. The learning process needed to be pleasant and fearless. The school was the only institution able to offer a republican education because private education, religious or not, ended up becoming a business, not only in Brazil.

In the second edition of his book, besides the new Introduction, he added the chapter “Brazilian women education .”Therefore, he agreed with women’s demand for instruction and recriminated, taking back to the Portuguese origins that they were practically forbidden from accessing school. The chapter is very useful to measure the tensions in the debate about women’s education. Veríssimo – who disagreed “that the embroidery cushion and hoop were the best book for the ladies” – considered that it was enough for women to know just the most essential knowledge about the world.⁶ That was it. He did open a loophole when defending the need to train women to become primary teachers through the multiplication of Normal Schools. Women took advantage of this loophole during and even after the First Republic. However, the reading of this chapter is pedagogical for us to have an idea of the difficulties faced by the gender issue in this area.

For the author, the pathways for national education implied the creation of schools, including Normal ones. Together with them, there should be measures towards a reform of schoolbooks, mainly Geography and History. In the case of Geography, which modernized itself with the German model, becoming the “psychology of earth,” the backwardness was immense, limiting itself to a “bestial memorization .”The History situation was even worse. There was only one book in the country about the History of Brazil – the *História Geral do Brasil* by Visconde de Porto Seguro (Varnhagen), written in another historical situation, during the monarchy, and under a monarchy perspective. Veríssimo is so radication in this point that he even suggests that the Republican government should forbid the use in schools of books from Portugal or translated from other languages to force the production of national school literature written by Brazilians about Brazilian themes, assuming the centrality of national events and figures. He wanted books that built “a republican past” for the history of Brazil and disseminated national school literature. However, to learn geography and history, one needed books and also maps, drawings, and globes, besides museums and libraries, which did not exist. The teaching of these subjects was also not done through tales, chants, and folklore legends, thus, from Brazilian people’s oral tradition, which could be well used in schools. A citizen republic, gathered by a “national feeling” – creating a sense of cohesion and solidarity beyond differences- would be very difficult. At the same time, the Brazilian people did not learn how to read and write. Therefore, the literacy issue was crucial but a starting point because the aim was much more than this: a national education.

The least known among these three intellectuals is Luiz Gonzaga Duque Estrada (1880-1911) or Gonzaga Duque. He was a writer-journalist, a critic of fine arts and fiction, connected to the symbolist movement. His most famous book is *Arte Brasileira*, from 1888, considered by specialists an essential reference in the history of art in Brazil. The author is considered

⁶ Chapter VII, p. 151-185. The quotation is on page 153.

a founding father of fine arts criticism, which could be called modern. He was from Rio de Janeiro, a member of the bohemian group that frequented the bars and cafes in the city in the turn of the 19th to the 20th century, together with Bastos Tigre, Lima Barreto, Coelho Neto, Olavo Bilac, Raul Pederneiras, Medeiros e Albuquerque, Kalixto, and others. All wrote in newspapers and magazines, among which *Fon-Fon* stood out. Created in 1905, it was responsible for an aesthetic and political environment with a symbolist background, which socialized many intellectuals in the First Republic.

Gonzaga Duque was an anti-academic even before the foundation of the *Academia Brasileira de Letras* (ABL- *Brazilian Academy of Letters*), as he opposed the impositions of the recently named *Escola Nacional de Belas Artes* [National School of Fine Arts]. He did not want the leadership of Machado de Assis, or anyone else, and he did not join the ABL. Duque was unsubmitive, like the characters of his romance, *Mocidade Morta*, from 1899, which raised debates about the possibility of a symbolist prose and that, due to its autobiographic character, made me think about another book, *Recordações do Escrivão Isaías Caminha* by Lima Barreto, from 1909. As I mentioned, Gonzaga Duque admired the symbolist movement, becoming a guardian of the work of the great Black poet Cruz e Souza, and advocated for his legacy not to be forgotten, as he considered the poet one of the greatest in Portuguese.

Like other intellectuals of his bohemian group, he was against any rigors and frameworks, artistic or political, from which arises his disaffection for Naturalism and Parnassianism and his admiration for the free rhyme, the rhythm in prose, summing up, for the union between literature and music. If Rio did not have a modernist vanguard or a key moment or a milestone for this aesthetic movement (such as the *São Paulo Modern Week*), for many intellectuals that experienced the city's cultural environment, the symbolism was already quite modern. With its creative sensibility and freedom, the symbolism was a way to touch public emotions and a way out – reminding Alice – to reach the modernisms proposed in the 1920s, at least for some Rio intellectuals, such as Ronald de Carvalho, Ribeiro Couto, and Álvaro Moreira. Eliseu Visconti painted a beautiful portrait of Gonzaga Duque, now at the *Museu de Belas Artes*.

Why am I talking here about Gonzaga Duque? His example shows exactly how this project of Brazil's independence and modernization spread, relying on education and culture, during the Republic's early years. This author shows how very different intellectuals dedicated themselves to this cause and advocated for a history of Brazil that was, in fact, Brazilian, moving away from the known rhymes of the monarchic teaching of Varnhagen's book. Gonzaga Duque wanted to do this when he wrote a schoolbook about the history of Brazil, the first edition from 1898 and the second from 1905. Between these dates, similar to José Veríssimo, he suffered several disappointments with the new regime. The book called *Revoluções Brasileiras*⁷ was used in public schools from the Federal District, Rio de Janeiro, and Paraná.

⁷ DUQUE, Gonzaga. *Revoluções Brasileiras* (organização Francisco Foot Hardman e Vera Lins), São Paulo: Ed. Unesp, Fapesp, 1998. About the author, see LINS, Vera. *Gonzaga Duque, a estratégia do franco-atirador*, Rio de Janeiro, Tempo Brasileiro, 1998.

Revoluções, explains the author in the Note at the first edition, because education so far did not encompass the “successive and bloody wars” that led Brazil and other South-American nations to establish a republic: a people’s government, as should be taught. This was the people’s fight for freedom that should not be unknown. *Revoluções*, because the “Portuguese mannerisms” in which the term is not recurrent – but influenced our speaking habits – should be abandoned. In Brazil, ‘revolutions’ was a usual word in people’s voices, who used it to generically call wars, conspiracies, rebellions, and insurrections. Artur Azevedo, the playwright, in the review of the book in *O Paiz* (October 26, 1898), is cunning: “It is now fashionable to say that our country had always been a type of Abraham bosom, and only after November 15 we have been in conflict with each other. Read what happened in Brazil during D. Pedro II’s ruling on these pages, and may the devil take me if the *sabinadas*, *balaiadas*, *cabanadas*, and *farrapadas* do not comfort you from our present clashes.”⁸

Revoluções Brasileiras continued to follow Von Martius’s advice: it was an epic story full of heroes, mostly white men; the past was an example for the future, in a line of history that guided life. The author uses description and narration, seeking to create a text with dramatic and exciting contours to raise the interest of its young readers. However, as Medeiros e Albuquerque observes in his review in the newspaper *A Notícia* – and he was Gonzaga Duque’s friend – there was a lack of simplicity in the author’s language, though the narration was done with excitement and life.⁹ That is to say, the book was not simply a list of names and dates, typically of kings and nobles, which ended up becoming a “bestial memorization,” in Veríssimo’s words. The author aimed to make “historical summaries” in each chapter to develop a “civic formation” program of republican and humanist content, which rhymed with the words freedom and independence in that linguistic and political context. The book had 18 chapters; the last, unsurprisingly, is on the Proclamation of the Republic, which is kept in the second edition, despite Gonzaga Duque’s disappointment. He died in 1911, before the First War and the *boom* of nationalism it produced. In the end, Duque points out the meaning he attributes to the fights of the Brazilian people – the republic as a regime but, mainly, as an ideal of political and cultural freedom.

The book is a history of Brazil guided for the future as a way to overcome the past, seeking to offer a synthesis of our “evolution,” this time, following a regime of modern historicity. In fact, the heroism in the fight for freedom, which came since the colonial period and (inevitably) led to the republic, will set the tone in the numerous school literature produced during the First Republic, but that far exceeds it, reaching the 1960s.¹⁰ This book, for example, is contemporary to at least two more famous ones: *A História do Brasil ensinada pela biografia de seus heróis*, by Silvio Romero, in 1890 (with a preface by João Ribeiro and nine editions, until 1913) and

⁸ Idem, p. 207.

⁹ Ibidem, p. 211.

¹⁰ A great examples is CORRÊA, Viriato, *História da liberdade no Brasil*, Rio de Janeiro, Ed. Civilização Brasileira, 1962. This book and author were the theme of the samba parade from *Escola de Samba Acadêmicos do Salgueiro*, in the 1967 Carnival.

Festas Nacionais, by Rodrigo Otávio, in 1893 (with a preface by Raul Pompeia), both used in schools.

However, what calls attention in Gonzaga Duque's book is that the history of Brazil – this nation that needed to gain social cohesion through education – was narrated by the enchaining of fights, which he calls revolutions. Therefore, it is a history of secular conflicts, though one of heroic figures, civism, and examples to follow. On it, there are great names, such as D. Pedro I and José Bonifácio, in the Independence episode. However, the greatest heroes of the book had other profiles. They were men like Tiradentes and Frei Caneca, who were treated as criminals and traitors, thus hanged, shot, and, finally, beaten by violent oppression from the metropolis and the monarchy. These were collective events, and these beaten heroes took the Brazilian people “inside” the country's history through a fight between oppression and freedom, gliding towards the idea of a republic. These were the heroes who deserved space in the books of Brazilian history, especially school ones. For this author, what was the first Brazilian revolution? Which one inaugurated the history of these fights for freedom? It was Palmares, with its long history of resistance of black people escaping slavery, led by Zumbi, in the *quilombos* formed. We should note that if the fight of black enslaved people was valued, the book does not mention the fight of Indigenous peoples.

Reading of *Revoluções Brasileiras* reminds us of the book and the anti-hero, *Macunaíma*, by Mário de Andrade, from 1928, one of the masterpieces of modernism; as well as the flag-poem created in 1968, forty years later, by the artist Hélio Oiticica. The flag shows the image of a body with the words: “be a hero, be an outcast¹¹”. I think that Gonzaga Duque, Lima Barreto, Mário de Andrade, and Hélio Oiticica would love to meet each other, at the end of the day, in a corner café in downtown Rio de Janeiro, to talk about literature, arts, Brazilian culture, and revolutions. Why not? They were four unsubmitive intellectuals.

Finally, João Ribeiro was the only one who lived in the 1920s, dying in 1934, after the 1930 Revolution and the 1932 civil war. Originally from Sergipe, he was a journalist, writer, a highly prestigious literary critic, and a teacher at *Colégio Pedro II*. Ribeiro edited the *Almanaque Brasileiro Garnier* and worked toward a reform in the studies on folklore, understanding that ethnographic research should follow a rigorous scientific method encompassing orality, a fundamental vector of cultural transmission in Brazil. He considered folklore an extremely rich and varied popular literature expressed in singing, storytelling, dancing, and feeling. In this popular literature, our language had its most original seed, which was not well known or valued. For him, this was a great mistake. Contrary to Gonzaga Duque, Ribeiro joined the Academia Brasileira de Letras, received by Veríssimo, who praised him as a philologist and historian, as he was also a member of IHGB.

Naturally, for us historians, João Ribeiro is known for his contribution in the area of History of Brazil teaching. His school manual, whose first edition is from 1900, in the fourth

11 T.N.: In the original *Seja marginal. Seja herói*. The word marginal in Portuguese can refer to what/who is in the margins and also a criminal.

centenary of the Portuguese arrival in Brazil, was his passport to the IHGB. It has an edition focused on high school and higher education and another for elementary teaching. On the pantheon of school literature, this book is, without a doubt, a classic, reaching its 17th edition in 1960. Many generations of students and teachers learned from this book. As Gonzaga Duque, João Ribeiro placed the Brazilian people in the Republican history of Brazil, making the country “look at themselves,” as Capistrano de Abreu, the new master of the subject, was teaching.

Here, I wish to explore João Ribeiro as a philologist, the author of grammars used for decades in the Republican school. Language was one of the greatest passions of this writer, who considered it a fighting tool for Brazil’s definite independence and modernization. He advocated for what he called a national language, fully connected to the history and culture of the Brazilian people that, without it, would not exist. After all, language was the ground of the territory of every nation that wished to be independent and sovereign. Without a national language, there were no possible ways, no frontiers. It was the sound, the rhythm, the color, and the feeling of a people. What most demarcated someone’s belonging to a national community, constantly reminding that this was a great challenge for the intellectuals of the first half of the 20th century.

The book I want to highlight is entitled *A língua nacional e outros estudos linguísticos*,¹² and was first published by the publishing company of Monteiro Lobato (Ed. Revista do Brasil) in 1921, a year before the *Semana de Arte Moderna*, among the celebrations of the centenary of Brazilian Independence. Its content resulted from long-standing results, but the fact that ABL had, in 1915, become official in Brazil, the Lusitanian orthographic system also had its power. João Ribeiro was contrary to this measure. He defended that the language was a fantastic triumph to “gather” a people (once more the bond between identity and solidarity). It was an enormous and strategic cultural richness, politically speaking.

Our language was Portuguese, but not from Portugal. Speaking and writing a language differently was not speaking and writing it wrongly. The “Portuguese mannerisms”, which bothered Gonzaga Duque and Veríssimo, displeased João Ribeiro, who praised the “Brazilian mannerisms” arising from our nation formation process. We had a vocabulary and prosody exponentially enriched by the culture of the Indigenous and the black people taken from Africa. The national language of Brazil did not have to “pay tribute” to Portugal, as the North Americans and the Spanish-speakers in the Americas should bend over the impositions of their former metropolises. These claims were absurd as if the American nations were “posthumous” colonies. For this author, it was incredible that, in a politically independent Brazil, we still kept this cultural “handcuff” supported by certain purists who, wishing to “correct” us, were “mutilating” us.

To Ribeiro, our language had typical facts and expressions that marked our ideas and ways of living. Using pronouns and diminutives are good examples to portray what Ribeiro was

12 RIBEIRO, João. *A língua nacional e outros estudos linguísticos*, Petrópolis, Ed. Vozes, 1979.

defending. While the Portuguese would say “– *passe-me o pão*” [pass the bread] imperatively, the Brazilian would say – *me passe o pão* [could you pass me the bread] – with a certain softness. We also like to use diminutives, as in *docinhos*, *dancinhas* etc. And created new words, as in the case of “*semostração*”, meaning to show oneself off (which many people liked to do). Finally, for the philologist, people were “the grandest of classics.” It gave the last word. And gave this word in Brazilian Portuguese, without the need of purists who, if were actually wise, would know this. The spoken language and the literary language were a single language: the national emancipated Portuguese language in America.

Finally, the interview he gave to *Estado de São Paulo* newspaper in 1926 does not surprise us. On it, they commented on another interview, held in 1924, when Prudente de Moraes Neto and Sérgio Buarque de Holanda, editors of the recently-released modernist magazine *Estética*, from Rio de Janeiro, contacted him to talk about Brazilian culture. Quoting J. Ribeiro: “ I learned and taught. And, it was not a minor thing, I also unlearned and renewed some antique principles. (...) The young ones bother the old ones...So do I...They want a new poetry...So do I. They want a national literature...So do I. A *pau-brasil* literature...So do I. Finally, we need to stay here, so as not to fall into an abysm”.¹³

In the beginning of the Republic, these intellectuals were enchanted and disenchanting with the new regime. However, they did not give up their fight for a public and non-religious education, connected with citizenship. In that context, many of them were convinced of the importance of teaching a “patriotic” history of Brazil, which means saying it was a history committed with the fights of the Brazilian people for independence and freedom, against all oppressions. Today, in a completely different context, in which the republican ideals are once again questioned, I also fight for a teaching of history committed with democratic and pluricultural values, an anti-racist, anti-sexist, and anti-homophobic history, in which the fights of the Indigenous peoples are present, together with workers’ fight. Finally, we need to fight, here and now, to strengthen democracy and republic so as not to fall into the abysm. Thank you very much.

13 *Idem*, p. 38.

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