

VI. THE STRUGGLES OF THE LEFT AND DEMOCRACY IN BRASIL

Political Struggles, University and Teaching History: the History Course of the National Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Brazil (FNFi/UB)

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There has been an increasing number of debates on the social role of historians, on the extent to which university history must be in tune with the social demands, and on how the academic community must avoid its isolation and its omission vis-à-vis the commitment to transpose its knowledge to the public at large, and to basic education. These issues have raised several other questions, inasmuch as the institutions and social actors oftentimes seek to legitimize their points of view through history. Could the social demands put at risk the autonomy of history as a scientific discipline? Could the pressure exerted by the memory-duty pose serious problems for the professional practices of the historian?

These challenges manifest especially in the study of the history of the present time, which for a long time was the object of resistance and interdictions, but now is present in the order of the day in Brazil, due to the creation of the National Truth Commission, aimed at ascertaining crimes against the human rights, not only as an object of academic research, but also as a challenging theme for historians, from the ethical and political standpoints.

In this context, the historians that work with the history of the present time are called upon to face the challenge and use the opportunity to expand and legitimize their field of studies, but they

ought also to guard themselves against improper pressure by the social demands and by the mandatory character of the memory duty.

This article's proposal of focusing the political struggles in the history course of the FNFi/UB (1958-1968) and the disputes that took place there, awakens a strong interest and offers theoretical and methodological possibilities for facing the challenges of grasping the trajectory of this discipline's field and its professionalization-process in a moment of great transformations, as well as the issues that characterize the history of the present time. Dealing with the events and actors who took part of this history is an opportunity to exercise our critical capacity to evaluate interpretations marked by traumatic memories, police sources, and periodicals that were starkly committed with polarized and radical ideological positions. Therefore, this paper is guided by the orientation of analyzing the political clashes and the repression that hit the scholars and students of the FNFi, seeking to produce an analysis that may secure the scientific nature of this sensible history.

To attain this aim, we refer to a diversified set of sources in order to retrieve events of this recent past marked by emotion and subjectivity. An important starting point for the research was an interview with Maria Yeda Linhares in 1994, which provided the first script that guided other interviews in the subsequent years with former students and professors. Despite being produced in different contexts with different objectives, the interviews have a common axis that focuses the trajectory of the interviewees, their family origins, vocational training, their choice of selecting the area of history, the teaching-activities at the FNFi, and their experience as students of that school. The selection of the interviewees had a clear-cut objective: to obtain testimonies of former students and professors of different generations that could recover several events and moments of the history course of the FNFi.

Along with the oral-memory sources, the collection of the FNFi itself also provided materials that helped us know the structure of the courses and the curriculum programs. Although in a too fragmented and dispersed way, these documents allowed us to locate more precisely events, names and dates. The bulletins of the Center of History Studies ("Centro de Estudos de História") were especially valuable for the purpose of mapping the political and

historiographical conflicts on the agenda of the history course in the years 1958-1963. And lastly, also the archives of the Department of Political and Social Order (DOPS) had a great importance, as it was possible to find in them the dossiers of the professors and students, and in particular one specific dossier dedicated to the FNFi. This collection, which is at once rich and dangerous, demands an extreme caution by the researcher, as it gathers information that allow us to clarify, confront and question the data of the oral reports. To make this research circuit complete, articles of large newspapers of Rio de Janeiro, such as *O Globo*, *Jornal do Brasil* and *O Jornal*, allowed a better comprehension of the political struggles that took place back then, and of the importance of the FNFi in the media.

Political struggles in the a historiographical field: the 1950s

The National School of Philosophy (Faculdade Nacional de Filosofia) and, in particular, the history course, underwent great transformations in the turn of the 1950s. The project of the School of Philosophy was created in 1939 linked to the University of Brazil (Universidade do Brasil), aiming at the consolidation of a model-university that could act as a standard for the other universities that would come to exist, and had the primary objective of preparing candidates to the regular teaching activities ("magistério do ensino secundário") and to the pedagogical secondary course ("normal"). The FNFi was organized into four fundamental sections: Philosophy, Sciences, Linguistics, and Pedagogy. There was presumably a special additional section of Didactics. History and geography, among other courses, were linked to the Section of Sciences. The training activities in history and geography were unified into one single course aimed essentially at teaching. The course of history and geography would only be dismembered starting in 1955.

The FNFi was founded during the Estado Novo ("New State") regime, marked by authoritarian ideas, and was starkly influenced by Catholics. Thus, the institutionalization of the history course of the FNFi was starkly influenced by the conception of a political history — a dominating one at the time — aimed at reinforcing the links of the Brazilian identity by emphasizing the national

unity and the role of the great heroes as constructors of the nation (FERREIRA 2012a).

Starting in 1955, there was the separation of the course of history and geography in two different departments. This modification opened spaces for an additional oxygenation of the history course, with a change in the curriculum and the introduction of new subjects. Along with these changes, a newer generation of professors started to occupy positions. Maria Yedda Linhares, a new young teacher, took part in the public competition for the chair of modern and contemporary history, and Eulália Lobo took over a position in the chair in History of the Americas. New assistant professors also started to be incorporated to several subjects.

A historiographical clash: Nelson Werneck versus Hélio Viana

The scenario introduced in the late 1950s was marked by a process of radicalization of the social movements, creating a polarization between left and right. It was a political context of stark mobilization against communism, and against the Cuban Revolution. These dominant issues in the international scenario promoted an intense polarization and confrontation between the Western capitalist countries and the communist countries, and led to an internal exacerbation of the conflicting ideological positions.

Especially in the turn into the 1960s, this process of changes was deepened through the political radicalization and polarization that took place in the country. The divergences ranged all the way from the conception of history and the desired course model, to the ideological position in regard to the striking political events of the Goulart administration, such as the Agrarian Reform program, the Revolt of the Sergeants, the independent foreign policy, and the Central Station's Rally, only to mention a few points (FERREIRA 2008a).

All debates involved by these themes had an intense repercussion in the FNFi, and, in particular, in the history course. If in the previous years, different conceptions of history and divergent views on the format of the courses and on the relations between teaching and research were already outlined, the new scenario of intense debates on the place of the university and the uses of history-teaching as

an instrument of social transformation increasingly led to a split between students and teachers, and among the teachers themselves (FERREIRA 2011).

The chair of history of Brazil, occupied by Hélio Viana, had a conservative posture. Its orientation was aimed at political history and, especially, to diplomatic history. Colonial Brazil received a special attention and the republic-themes were totally left to a secondary place; the historiographical approach was marked by an over-appreciation of the events and main figures, while the economic dimension was not dealt with — according to the testimonies of ex-students of many generations — and were profoundly tedious, exclusively expository with minute factual accounts, and without any bibliographical indication. The exams were based on the contents presented at the classroom, thus demanding merely a good memorizing capacity. There was no stimulus to research whatsoever, either with sources or with bibliography (FALCON 2009).

While Hélio Viana transmitted a history of Brazil turned into the distant past, with an emphasis on the political history, especially in appreciation of the process of construction of the national unity and highlighting the role of the main figures of the national pantheon, the chair of modern and contemporary history started to add focus to more recent periods, with themes on the history of Africa and de-colonization, and started serving as a space of debate and criticism, while training teachers on research, which was not common in the other chairs of the course (FALCON 2001).

The students were becoming increasingly identified with the left-wing forces, and longed for a course that could incorporate the production of the Higher Institute of Brazilian Studies (ISEB), along with new theme areas such as contemporary history of Africa, the decolonization process and the social struggles in Brazil.

In this context, in August 1958, the Center of History Studies (Centro de Estudos de História) was created, and further on, the journal *Boletim de História* ("History Bulletin", 1958-1963). Founded by an initiative of the students of the history course, the center counted with the stimulus and the support of the school's direction and of many professors. However, from 1958 to 1963, there were changes in the strategy of the publication: from a didactical orientation to secondary-school teachers, it moved into

a criticism of the university course itself, along with a perception of its limits in the training of history professionals, and social critique (PEREIRA 1998).

While a restructuring of the left-wing organizations was starting to take shape, new orientations and new groups with more radical political tendencies emerged in the country. The penetration of the Communist Party in the students' milieu, although dominant, began to raise criticisms and to stimulate the approximation with other left-wing orientations. The increasing mobilization of the workers, both in the cities and in the countryside, demanding not only salary improvements, but also changes in the unequal structure of the society, was a source of stimulus so that the university students could become more effectively engaged in the social struggles.

The position defended by the students who were engaged in the social struggles of the present and committed to the necessity of comprehending the contemporary world from a Brazilian perspective led to a posture according to which history should become involved in the current problems, and historical knowledge should present explanations and possible solutions for them (BOLETIM DE HISTÓRIA 1962; 1963).

If history teaching should be reviewed, then also the training of history professionals ought to undergo modifications. The didactical books would have to pay more attention to the study of Brazil's recent history. The testimony of Celso Uchoa Cavalcanti, director of the Center of History Studies in 1962, clearly expresses the wishes of those young university students: "For my generation, for us left-wingers, there were three history authors: Caio Prado Jr., Nelson Werneck Sodré and Celso Furtado. The rest was not important. Capistrano merely existed. (CAVALCANTI 2012, p. 10).

With this perspective, the students of the history course linked to the Center of History Studies rejected the teachings that were given in most of the subjects offered in the course (with the exception of the chair of modern and contemporary history), and they were becoming involved with the ISEB and started to make plans, under the guidance of Nelson Werneck, to produce a collection of didactical books that received the name *História Nova* ("New History").

Once again, the testimony of Pedro Celso Uchoa Cavalcanti retrieves aspects of this memory:

The ISEB had a course that was a confrontation with the Higher War School (Escola Superior de Guerra). Sodré taught on Mondays: every Monday, early in the morning, I went there to attend the lessons. [...] Well, I attended this course by Sodré, [...] asking questions at the end of the class. He felt an interest for me. At the end of the course, he called me to his desk and asked if I wished to become his assistant at the ISEB (CAVALCANTI 2012, p. 10).

After this first contact with Nelson Werneck, the next step was the organization of a history course for the students of the FNFi. Continuing his narrative, Pedro Celso (2012) declares: "I also managed to have Sodré teaching a course on Brazilian history for fellows of mine, still in college. In this course, there were 13, 15 people, such as Rubens César and others. It was at the ISEB, but it was a private course. It was a favor that he was doing us".

As a further result of this course, the New History project was accomplished, with its focus of criticizing the existing didactical books, and presenting a history of Brazil based on the contributions of works by Werneck Sodré himself, by Caio Prado, and by Celso Furtado. Under the guidance of Nelson Werneck, the production of the collection of didactical books started with the purpose of taking another vision of history to the basic education, a vision in which the economic dimension and the class struggles played a key role. Thus, even though professors with a leftist position, such as Maria Yeda, disagreed from Nelson Werneck Sodré's conception of history, the penetration of his ideas and of the Marxist theses gained space in the FNFi, in an open confrontation with the views that had been transmitted in the course of decades by Hélio Viana.

The intensification of the engagement of the students and also of the professors in the political clashes that took place in the final years of the Goulart government, on the reform of the university in a general way, of the history course, and of the uses of history teaching as an instrument of social transformation, resulted in an

increasingly stark split between students and professors, and among the professors themselves.

The FNFi at the target: the CPI of the UNE

The events of 1963 were especially important in this process, as they led to an increase in the radicalization and a deepening in the political dissent at the FNFi. In the words of Arthur Poerner from 1960 to 1964, the FNFi was a sort of an “advanced echelon of the students’ movement”, and was seen as the most politicized Brazilian university (POERNER 2004, p. 188). Since 1961, with the end of Parliamentarianism and with Goulart’s resuming of the presidential powers, the left-wing forces felt victorious and were advancing their claims, as the struggles for the basic reforms won a new dimension and the social movements were intensifying their claims. In this context, in the second semester of 1963, there were new elections scheduled to take place for the direction of the FNFi.

The director at the time, professor Eremildo Viana, had been elected twice, and many students wished for a renewal of the direction. However, according to the oral testimonies of erstwhile professors and students, and to the news issued by the press, the master desired to remain in the position and was working to reach such objective. In response, the students’ directorate mobilized the students and decreed a strike that paralyzed the entire school. According to *O Jornal* on September 25, 1963,

The students of the National School of Philosophy await the solution promised by Paulo de Tarso, Minister of Education, on the selection of a new director for the School. [...] The students affirm that the substitution of the late professor Nilton Campos, through the triple list of candidates still figuring the professors Djacir Menezes and Eremildo Viana, by professor Kingston is illegal, as there has been no specific call for a new election (*O JORNAL* 25/09/1963, p. 11).

These accounts express the conflicts that took place in that moment and the capacity of the students to press the Ministry of

Education towards their objectives, intensifying the tension between professors and students.

In parallel to it, in the national scene, a Parliamentary Inquiry Committee (Comissão Parlamentar de Inquérito, or CPI) was formed at the House of Representatives to investigate a communist infiltration in the National Students Union (União Nacional dos Estudantes, UNE) and the improper use of public resources by the organization to promote political agitations. By following the CPI, it is possible for us to see a reproduction of the political clashes that marked the entire Brazilian society at the time. On the one hand, the right-wing forces were calling for a CPI and convoking deponents to substantiate the proof of a communist infiltration in the UNE. On the other, the left-wing parliamentarians worked to neutralize the moves of Raimundo Padilha, president of the CPI, to incriminate the students.

The FNFi, focus of the students’ agitation, was under the lens of investigations and its director Eremildo Viana was convoked to testify at the CPI. Eremildo’s testimony, which was published in an abridged form in *O Jornal*, already indicated the position that the FNFi director had started to adopt. If during several years, Eremildo negotiated with the left-wing students and supported the creation of the Center of History Studies and of the *Boletim de História*, by providing resources for the publication, his path, as well as the paths of many others, started to take the opposite direction as the students’ movement became more radical.

Under the title “UNE has extra funds to agitate the students’ class” (“UNE tem verba de sobra para agitar a classe estudantil”), the testimony was thus depicted by *O Jornal* on September 25, 1963:

Professor Eremildo Viana stated that on account of the fact that the UNE has substantial funds, it carries out programs that trouble the student life of the country, instead of providing services to the School in the cultural field. [...] Eremildo agrees with the fact that there is the necessity of reforms in the political and social structures, but not by means of disorder, anarchy and break of hierarchy, [...].

Several episodes of indiscipline and subversion of the order are narrated by professor Eremildo, and denouncements are

made about the linkage of the students to the Communist Party. [...]

[According to the deponent,] another organization that plots against the social order is the IESB, where students who have been expelled from the School on account of immorality, and who did not get to conclude their courses, are now professors.

Eremildo recounted old and current episodes [...] and confirmed by bringing back to the fore an administrative enquiry that took place years before, on bacchanalia that had been verified in the School's building, including the names of the students [...]. [He also said] that the University Council has the extract and the report of the inquiry. But he did not present any solution (O JORNAL 25/09/1963, p. 5).

The statements of Eremildo at the so-called CPI of the UNE already indicated his change of course in the direction of the forces opposed to the Goulart government. They also evince the prevailing mood at the FNFi, with denouncements against students and professors on account of their political positions, and moral accusations in the attempt to incriminate and demoralize the accused, by committing them with acts that were taken as indecorous.

In the months that followed, the process of political radicalization became worse, and increasingly placed the professors and students of the FNFi in opposite fields. In the first months of 1964, in spite of the resistance of the Congress to move forward in the approval of the basic reforms, Goulart decided to implement the Agrarian Reform, through a strategy of mobilizing the population to press the Parliament. On March 13, 1964, the Central Station Rally was a watershed in this process. Evidently, students and many professors of the FNFi took active part in these final moments of the Goulart government, in the belief that the socialist revolution was about to come. The outcome of this history is known. On March 31, the military coup decreed the end of the Goulart government, leading to a fierce repression against the left-wing forces.

At the FNFi and in the history course, the episodes that followed were traumatic and intensely conditioned the memory of the subsequent decades. At the very first moments, Eremildo Viana,

aided by military troops, occupied Radio MEC, which was directed by Maria Yedda Linhares, under the pretext that there was a focus of agitation at the radio, and that firearms had been stored at its facilities for subversive acts. In the following weeks, Maria Yedda was removed and Eremildo Viana started to occupy her seat. This episode left deep marks in the course of history, and on its students and professors, who began to see Eremildo as the responsible for the entire process of repression that followed.

In the next months, several Military Police Enquiries (Inquéritos Policiais Militares, IPMs) were initiated to investigate the communist infiltration at the FNFi, and professors were accused and arrested, while students were expelled. According to the dossiers produced by the security bodies, the FNFi was hosting a communist cell that gathered several professors. The amassed information of these dossiers retrieve events and persons who were active at the FNFi starting in 1958, and one of the highlighted figures in Eremildo's denouncements, but also mentioned in other accounts, is Maria Yeda Linhares.

According to these documentation, which had the goal of making a historical account of leftist actions at the FNFi by gathering documents related to several moments, Maria Yedda Linhares was described as a "fanatic communist", "dangerous", and "a propagandist of extremist ideas"; she was accused of "having invited two known communists to be her instructors.

In the eyes of the security bodies, since the FNFi and some of its professors had become a den of communists and dangerous extremists, it would then be a preferential target of repression. The witch-hunt was on, and once again, individual episodes of the past, which involved students and resulted in administrative inquiries to investigate acts considered indecorous, were activated to incriminate and demoralize professors, who were accused of omission and of taking part in immoral activities in the School facilities.

The Investigations Committee of the University of Brazil

Specifically in order to hit this space of opposition and debates, an Investigations Committee was created at the University of Brazil in May 1964, in Rio de Janeiro, to ascertain the communist infiltration at the FNFi.

According to the documentation filed at the DOPS, which also added the news that were published by the press, in spite of the alleged existence of a communist cell operating at the FNFi, the committee did not find important elements to prove the accusations made against the so-called FNFi communists, such as Viera Pinto, and Maria Yedda Linhares.

In his testimony filed at the DOPS documentation, Eremildo Viana declares that "the committee was created to demoralize him, to accuse him of being a whistleblower of school students and professors, and of lacking administrative honesty".

The clashes between Eremildo Viana and general Nóbrega regarding the ascertained results by the UB committee were daily transmitted by the mass press of Rio, indicating the role of importance that the FNFi occupied in the political scene of the country at that moment, and how there were still spaces of fight, and of some guarantee of defense for the oppositions vis-à-vis the arbitrariness of the newly-founded military regime.

In this context, the activities of the FNFi were in large measure paralyzed, and the teaching activities became seriously jeopardized. Only starting in 1965, the rhythm of FNFi became regular once again, under the new bases of a dictatorial regime.

If, in the post-1964 period, there were still conditions for resistance in the rubble of the FNFi, which was already dismembered in different institutes, after 1968 the "lead years" would set in for real. With the enactment of Institutional Act 5 (AI-5) in December 1968, many professors were expelled by cassation and Decree 477 was applied to several students.

The history course would face, for several years, an atmosphere of denouncement and persecution that dramatically jeopardized its activities.

The testimony of Nara Saletto, who entered the history course in 1973, provides an idea of the overall mood at the newly-created Institute of Philosophy and Social Sciences:

As I am saying, the early days of the IFCS were terrible. There were spies in the staff, who would enter the classrooms at the

pretext of minor hair-splittings, and followed the steps of the professors everywhere, even in the elevators! I was not able to have conversations with the students, or even invite them to go to my house. Of course, they went, but no one should know: it was not well-seen; it was a sinful thing [laughs]. Vigilance extended itself from the corridors to the cafeteria, and thanks mainly to the students themselves, little by little the atmosphere became lighter (FERREIRA 2010).

In the 1970s, the project of creating a postgraduate course in history was reactivated based on a new orientation and under the leadership of Eremildo Viana, but the difficulties in order to consolidate it were quite considerable. The new course was only in conditions to graduate its students after the election of Eulália Lobo as coordinator of the postgraduate program in 1982. But until then, many steps had to be taken.

The political opening that started with the government of Geisel (1974-1979) and the progress in the amnesty strives brought new times for the IFCS and for the history course, with the full reintegration of the professors who had been expelled by cassation in 1979.

A final highlight is that the debates and the developments after the events that occurred in the decade examined by this study (1958-1968) are fundamental for grasping the succeeding movements that took place in the less than peaceful territory in which the university history courses flourished.

The importance and the study possibilities on the memories of traumatic events and the repression unleashed at the FNFi/IFCS deserve an equal highlight. An analysis of the testimonies of the students and professors, which were collected for the present research, allows us to point out to some important elements.

As we know, oral testimonies are memories that represent different versions of the past and express contradictory recollections, forgotten events, distortions and conflicts, and cannot be taken as "true" or "objective" accounts of the narrated facts; yet, and precisely due to this reason, they allow us to assess a richer material and the information that is seldom found in other sources. The obtained accounts are greatly relevant as keys and as starting points for mapping the questions to be researched in a tangle of

dispersed and fragmented documents. Besides filling gaps that the written documents cannot reach, the oral accounts have been safe and rich paths for clarifying the disputes and conflicts of memory, and also for providing us with clues for comprehending the constructed versions on the trajectory of the courses. The central focus of the testimonies was concentrated on the political struggles, particularly in the period from 1950 to 1964, more than in the contents of the courses themselves, considering that most of the interviewees entered the university starting in 1957 and 1958, and that their experience, therefore, was starkly marked by the years of political radicalization in Brazil, starting in the JK government, until Jango's fall with the Military Coup of 1964. What can be noticed is that the engagement of the students and professors in the transformation projects of Brazil, although in different ways and with different political orientations, has intensely conditioned the memories on the history course, casting positive facts into oblivion and highlighting the repression and the traumas prompted by the Military Coup.

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