

Gramsci and the enigma of hegemony in the political thinking of Francisco de Oliveira

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Abstract

This paper proposes the investigation of the uses of Gramsci by Francisco de Oliveira (1933-2019), especially the concepts of hegemony and passive revolution. We initiate with the general hypothesis that the Gramscian thought had been remarkably portrayed in the works of Oliveira since mid-1970s, although diffusely, as a manner of incorporating the political dimension in his sociological and economic studies of social classes, the bourgeois hegemony, and the regional issues in Brazil. The specific problem we intend to discuss, however, arose in the 1990s, when Oliveira's hypotheses started questioning the efficacy of the Gramscian conceptual framework, particularly his notion of hegemony.

Keywords

Francisco de Oliveira (1933-2019) - criticism and interpretation; Brazil - Politics and Culture; Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937); neoliberalismo.

Gramsci e o enigma da hegemonia no pensamento político de Francisco de Oliveira

Resumo

Propõe-se investigar os usos de Gramsci realizados por Francisco de Oliveira (1933-2019), sobretudo dos conceitos de hegemonia e de revolução passiva. Parte-se da hipótese geral de que o pensamento gramsciano tenha marcado presença na obra de Oliveira desde meados dos anos 1970, ainda que de maneira difusa, como forma de incorporar a dimensão política em seus estudos sociológicos e econômicos sobre as classes sociais, a hegemonia burguesa e a questão regional no Brasil. O problema específico que se buscará abordar, contudo, surgiu a partir dos anos 1990, quando as hipóteses de Oliveira começaram a pôr em xeque a eficácia do aparato conceitual gramsciano, em especial sua noção de hegemonia.

Palavras-chave

Francisco de Oliveira (1933-2019) - crítica e interpretação; Brasil - Política e Cultura; Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937); neoliberalismo.

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1. Introduction

Ruy Braga called the effort in the collection organized by him, Francisco de Oliveira (1933-2019) and Cibeles Rizek, “Hegemonia às avessas*”, (Braga, 2010, p. 14), a “Gramscian odyssey”. The title of the collection itself alludes to Antonio Gramsci’s ideas, indicating a deep engagement with his concepts. The chapters examine the Lula administrations’ experience and reflect upon the significance of the 2008 financial crisis for the future of capitalism. Francisco de Oliveira² initially presented the provocative notion encapsulated in the title, which gained traction when defined as a starting point for discussions at Centro de Estudos dos Direitos da Cidadania (CENEDIC) [Center of Studies on Citizens’ Rights] at the University of São Paulo (USP) in 2008. This dialogue eventually culminated in the publication of the book two years later. The deliberate invocation of Gramscian terms in framing this challenge reflects Oliveira’s scholarly affinity for the Italian thinker, whom he often referred to as the “little great Sardinian.”

Despite the frequent reliance on Gramscian thinking by the sociologist in formulating comprehensive analyses of contemporary and historical issues, both in his political interventions and historical interpretations, this aspect has received little attention³. Literature has highlighted the influence of figures like the French philosopher Jacques Rancière, and members of the “Frankfurt School”⁴, such as Adorno, in Oliveira’s works. These references were protagonists in Oliveira’s reflections throughout the 1990s, with considerable prominence. The “introverted” focus of his approach has also been noted⁵, characterized by a constant dialogue with national and Latin American authors and theories. Particularly notable are his dialogues with figures like Celso Furtado and the theory of underdevelopment, Caio Prado Jr., Florestan Fernandes and Fernando Henrique Cardoso on his theories of dependence, in addition to his colleagues from CEBRAP [Brazilian Center of Analysis and Planning]—Octavio Ianni, Paul Singer, Roberto Schwarz, among others. Despite the evident presence of Gramscian concepts in

* T.N. In free translation, “Hegemony in reverse.”

² A first version of the paper “Hegemonia às avessas” was published in *Piauí*, Rio de Janeiro/ São Paulo, n. Jan. 4, 2007.

³ In addition to the self-reflection proposed by Braga in the introduction of “Hegemonia às avessas,” noteworthy exceptions include Maria Elisa Cevalco’s chapter titled “Reverse Hegemony?” (2020) and the reference to Alvaro Bianchi in “O Brasil dos Gramscianos” [The Brazil of Gramscian scholars] (2020a, pp. 315-317).

⁴ See, for example: Maar, Wolfgang Leo, “A teoria crítica da sociedade brasileira de Francisco de Oliveira” [“The critical theory of Brazilian Society by Francisco de Oliveira”]; Cohn, Gabriel, “Contemporaneidade tensa” [“Tense Contemporaneity”] and Mello e Silva, Leonardo, “Chico de Oliveira, sociólogo” [“Chico de Oliveira, sociologist”], part of the collection *Francisco de Oliveira: a tarefa da crítica* (2006) [“Francisco de Oliveira, the task of criticism”]; Szwako, José see “Os sentidos da democracia: crítica, aposta e perplexidade na produção do CENEDIC” [The meanings of democracy: criticism, investment and the perplexity of CENEDIC’s production], *Lua Nova*, n. 78, 2009 and “A tarefa da crítica ou Frankfurt nos trópicos” [“The task of criticism or tropical Frankfurt”], *Revista Fevereiro*, n. September 6, 2013; Mendes, Flávio da Silva, “O ovo do Ornitorrinco: a trajetória de Francisco de Oliveira” [The egg of the Platypus: the trajectory of Francisco de Oliveira], Department of Sociology [Doctoral Dissertation], Universidade Estadual de Campinas, 2015.

⁵ Term suggested by Mello e Silva, Leonardo, “Chico de Oliveira, sociólogo” [Chico de Oliveira, sociologist] (2006).

Oliveira's thought and his engagement with prominent Brazilian scholars such as Carlos Nelson Coutinho and Luiz Werneck Vianna, no study has focused on this aspect of his work.

Therefore, this paper aims to display the significance of Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) in Francisco de Oliveira's political thinking, focusing particularly on his utilization of the concepts of "hegemony" and "passive revolution". However, the specific issue we seek to investigate emerged in the 1990s when Oliveira's ideas began to challenge the applicability of the Gramscian conceptual framework, notably his notion of hegemony. Oliveira's analysis on the administrations of Fernando Collor de Mello and Fernando Henrique Cardoso showcased a fluctuation in perspective, creating a genuine enigma regarding hegemonic implications of the new era established by neoliberalism. Attempting to solve this riddle, Oliveira oscillated between recognizing a hegemonic dimension within the neoliberal project—whose outlines in Brazil were shaped under the leadership of Fernando Henrique Cardoso (FHC), its *condottiere*—and relinquishing his own concept of hegemony. This shift signaled a displacement towards the notions of "totalitarianism" and "apartheid".

Throughout the 1990s, Oliveira grappled with a complex theoretical and political dilemma. It transcended the typical binary of hegemony's impossibility, as seen in instances of passive revolution, or its feasibility, given the comprehensive dissemination of dominant values, like monetary stability (Oliveira, 1998 [1997], p. 201). In that specific context, a crucial distinction risked rendering the concept of hegemony inadequate: neoliberalism, Oliveira argued, had abandoned the project of universalizing bourgeois values (Ibid., p. 202). In Brazil, this shift entailed nothing short of the dismantling of the constellation of meanings created by the contradictory process of "passive revolution," openly embracing a "totalitarian façade" (Ibid., p. 203). Warning of the dangers, Oliveira foresaw in 2002 a globalization devoid of social subjects and individual autonomy— a scenario akin to "Auschwitz beyond Auschwitz: without cremation ovens, eradicating not bodies, but any possibility of human contact". (Ibid., p. 96)

In that same year, the enigma of hegemony would reach new levels of complexity with the advent of Lula and the Workers' Party (PT) taking office. Would we witness a resurgence of hegemonic conflict? Would the Gramscian perspective find renewed relevance? It is noteworthy that Oliveira, who had founded the PT in the early 1980s, oscillated in attributing a hegemonic character to right-wing governments. However, during the Lula administrations, he never entertained the notion of characterizing them as "counterhegemonic". Counterintuitively, the sociologist abandoned the concept without further hesitation. In 2003, the first year of Lula's administration, Oliveira published a noteworthy interpretative essay on Brazil, proposing a novel term for the country's peculiar mode of capitalist development: *The Platypus*. Using the platypus as a metaphor, Oliveira illustrated the Brazilian reality—a bizarre creature where underdevelopment had been transcended, facilitating the country's full integration into the modern world, yet without mitigating the vast social inequalities. This truncated

evolution, although successful in terms of accumulation, resulted in one of most unequal capitalist societies in the world (Oliveira, 2003b, p. 143).

Regarding the enigma of hegemony, Oliveira was resolute: “hegemony, in the Gramscian formula, is elaborated in the superstructure. In its specific conditions, *the platypus is not ‘conscious’*, it only replicates the superstructure” (Ibid., p.149-150, *emphasis added*). Here, Oliveira primarily drew upon two sources to explain his preference for the concept of “superstructural replication” as an alternative to hegemony. Firstly, he referenced the work of Juarez Guimarães (2001), who diagnosed a crisis in Brazilian neoliberalism and posited that Lula’s election in 2002 could be interpreted as a “republican ethical-political moment of refounding of society” (Ibid., p. 149). Secondly, Oliveira invoked the insights of Ridley Scott, director of the feature film *Blade Runner*, who purportedly anticipated this phenomenon theoretically.

In a controversy with Guimarães, Oliveira asserted the inexistence of an “ethical-political” moment within the platypus. Although he did not directly quote it, the sociologist’s remarks appeared to echo Gramsci’s paragraph on the “relationships between structure and superstructures”, delineating three distinct moments. The first moment is “strictly connected to the structure”; the second involves the “relationship among the ‘political forces’” and the third pertains to the “relationship among military forces” (C 4, § 38, p. 457-60).⁶ Hegemony, Gramsci argued, thrives in the second moment, characterized by “the clash of previously germinated ideologies, until only one, or a particular combination, predominates, asserts itself, and permeates the entire domain, shaping not only economic and political realms but also intellectual and moral spheres on a non-corporate but universal level of hegemony” (C 4, § 38, p. 457-458).

In contrast to Guimarães, Oliveira maintained that there was no fertile ground for the emergence of new hegemonies in platypus-Brazil. There lacked a cohesive cultural diffusion project aimed extensively at spreading a “moral-intellectual unity” capable of challenging the neoliberal paradigm. The ideological clash was prevented by the “replication” of superstructures. Gramsci, did not fathom the possibility of a new superstructure emerging from an existing one, “except perhaps as an inheritance of inertia and passiveness” (C 6, § 64, p. 733). Perhaps the key to Oliveira’s terminology stemmed from the replicants depicted in “Blade Runner” – “a group of genetically engineered human beings” designed to fulfill specific tasks in line with the needs of neoliberal capitalist rationality (Harvey, 1989 [2014]). In this dystopian reality, dissent and ideological clashes found no space, nor did hegemony.

A few years later, Oliveira remained resolute in his convictions. He advocated for an ongoing “epistemological revolution” for which appropriate theoretical tools were lacking.⁷ Consequently, the sociologist introduced a new perspective: beneath the

⁶ The critical edition of the Prison Notebooks, organized by Valentino Gerratana and published in 1975 in Italy, will be used. Citations will be made as follows: C. “X” for the Notebook number, § “Y” for the paragraph, and p. “Z” for the page in the aforementioned edition.

⁷ André Singer previously underscored the “concern” that Oliveira had identified, as mentioned in the introduction to the book *Os sentidos do lulismo* (2012, p. 39) [in free translation, “The meanings of Lulism”]. I

surface appearances characterizing the Lula administrations, the element of “force” seemed to have vanished from the equation of “force + consent”. Thus, he proposed the emergence of a new form of social domination that inverted the traditional Gramscian terms, suitable and functional for the era of globalized capitalism. This concept was termed “hegemony in reverse” (Oliveira, 2010 [2007], p. 24).

Contrary to analyses that consider Lula’s election as a beacon of hope, Oliveira began to perceive it as the nullification of left-wing movements in Brazil (ibid., p. 25). This shift raises questions as to what prompted Oliveira, a prominent figure within the Workers’ Party, to adopt such a radical critical stance, one that immediately undermined his prior commitment to politics and the insights of Antonio Gramsci’s thinking the contemporary world. What alterations did Oliveira make to the concept of hegemony in light of his translation? To explore possible answers to these questions, our approach will first involve situating Gramscian concepts within the Italian context from which Gramsci drew inspiration and then tracing their journey to Brazil through the arguments of Francisco de Oliveira. We will contextualize this process to analyze Oliveira’s hypotheses, positions, and theoretical responses against the backdrop of the transformations unfold in Brazilian and global history and politics.

2. The Gramscian formula and the centrality of politics

From its early mention in the *Prison Notebooks*^{*}, Gramsci outlined the fundamental principles of the concept of hegemony, on a note about the *Risorgimento* (1848-1871). There were two modes through which a class could assert its dominance: firstly, as the “leading” [*dirigente*] among allied classes and, secondly, as “dominant” over adversarial classes (C 1, § 44, p. 40).

He emphasized that prior to attaining a position of power, a class could – and should – act as the “leader”, and upon reaching power, it would transition into the role of dominant while still retaining its “leadership” status (C 1, § 44, p. 41). Therefore, Gramsci asserted that it was not only feasible but imperative for a class “to exercise ‘political hegemony’ even before going to government”, and it would not be necessary to “count solely on the power and material force which such a position gives in order to exercise political leadership or hegemony” (C 1, § 44, p. 41).

In a subsequent revision a few years later, a second version of the note reinforced this argument: “the supremacy of a group is manifested in two manners, as “domination” and as ‘intellectual and moral leadership’ (C 19, § 24, p. 2010). Here, the term “political hegemony” was replaced by “hegemonic activity” and “effective leadership” (C 19, § 24, p. 2011). This change signaled that while hegemonic activity and

would like to express my gratitude to Singer for bringing attention to this issue during our conversation, which encouraged me to explore it further at the start of 2021.

* T.N. The original name of Gramsci’s work is “*Quaderni del carcere*,” officially translated into English with the title “Prison Notebooks.” In the original version of the paper, the authors used the title in Portuguese “*Cadernos do Cárcere*.”

effective leadership over the allied groups might begin prior to gaining power, they would only be fully realized once the leading groups arrive to the State (Bianchi, 2020b, p. 48). This way, the notion of understanding hegemony solely in a cultural context was rejected. Gramsci's reflections consistently centered on politics, despite his use of other expressions such as "cultural hegemony" and "intellectual hegemony" (Ibid., p. 48).

In "normal" circumstances, there would be an organic balance between leadership and domination, consensus and coercion. However, this equilibrium is disrupted in situations of an "authority crisis", as stated in the well-known passage: "If the ruling class has lost its consensus, i.e. is no longer 'leading' but only 'dominant', exercising coercive force alone, this means precisely that the great masses have become detached from their traditional ideologies, and no longer believe what they used to believe previously, etc. *The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear*" (C 3, § 34, p. 52, *emphasis added*).

The concept of "authority crisis" or "hegemony crisis", as explained by Gramsci, would be explored in a subsequent paragraph. Considering the post-war trajectory of European parliamentary parties (Bianchi, 2020c), this paragraph is dedicated to situations where the relationship between representatives and the represented is dissolved: "At a certain point of historical life, social groups become detached from their traditional parties. These traditional parties, with their specific organization methods and personnel, no longer represent and lead them as expressions of their class or a fraction of a class" (C 13, § 23, p. 1603).

The crisis disrupted the usual functioning of the parliamentary regime, where "political democracy tends to make rulers and ruled coincide (in the sense of governing with the consent of the ruled)" (C 12, § 12, p. 1547). According to Gramsci, once this relationship is fractured, the immediate circumstances become "delicate and dangerous," as the field is susceptible to "resolutions involving force, actions of obscure powers represented by providential or charismatic figures" (C 13, § 23, p. 1603). In Italy, the post-war crisis of liberal democracy coincided precisely with a *hegemony crisis*. Therefore, Gramsci cautioned against the hazardous directions political crises could take, given the unique circumstances of the Italian crisis amid the ascent of fascism.

The notion of hegemony as an organic balance between coercion and consensus, along with Gramsci's insights into moments of crisis and the emergence of authoritarian movements led by charismatic leaders, stand as significant theoretical contributions. These ideas not only shed light on the Italian context but also offer valuable insights into global politics throughout the 20th and even the 21st century. Another concept that has been widely translated and applied worldwide, particularly in Latin America, is that of "passive revolution".⁸ This concept, intertwined with the notion of hegemony,

⁸ See: *La cola del diablo: Itinerario de Gramsci en América Latina* (Aricó, 2014 [2005]) [in free translation, "The Devil's Tail: Gramsci's Itinerary in Latin America"]; "As categorias de Gramsci e a realidade brasileira" (Coutinho, 1993 [1985]) [in free translation "The categories of Gramsci and the Brazilian reality"], *A revolução passiva: Iberismo e americanismo no Brasil* (Werneck Vianna, 2004) [in free translation, "Passive revolution:

originated from Gramsci's analyses of the *Risorgimento*, where he attempted to explain how the Moderates, with the support of conservative representatives, orchestrated the political course of Italian unification.

The "brilliant solution" to the development of the *Risorgimento* was attributed to the effective leadership of the Moderates, who orchestrated the movement "within the formats and bounds of conventional methods, devoid of 'Terror', as a 'revolution without revolution,' or a 'passive revolution'" (C 19, §24, p.2011). Left-wing partisans, including republicans and democrats, proved incapable of countering the "empirical" approach of the Moderates with an organic governmental program that addressed the fundamental claims of the popular masses, particularly the peasantry (C 19, §24, p.2013). In this sense, Gramsci drew parallels with the French Jacobins, who successfully forged a national bond between the urban and rural areas, intellectuals and the people of the nation (C 19, §24, p.2014). Conversely, the Italian Action Party was assimilated into the Moderates agenda through "transformism,"⁹ relegating the masses of the new State to a status of outcasts (C 19, §26, p.2042). Gramsci emphasized that during the *Risorgimento*, the Italian ruling class skillfully absorbed the elites from rival groups, thus consolidating a comprehensive ruling class that facilitated the country's unification through "passive revolution". This process revealed a struggle for a "war of position" which eventually culminated, over a century later, in a hegemony crisis and the rise of fascism (Cicarelli, 2017, p. 360).

The concepts formulated by the Sardinian Marxist aimed to provide a more nuanced understanding of the Italian unification process and illuminate the political content of the conservative critiques toward the consequent parliamentary regime in Italy.¹⁰ Examining how capitalist modernization was steered by a conservative coalition in the Italian context yields promising analogies with the Brazilian modernization process undertaken by the State, particularly during the dictatorship era. The concepts of "hegemony", "hegemony crisis" and "passive revolution" gained significant traction in the discourse of the Brazilian left during the 1970s and the 1980s.¹¹ These ideas

Iberianism and Americanism in Brazil]. On the translation of the concept in Brazil, I drafted a paper in partnership with Bernardo Ricupero titled: "Revolução Passiva no Brasil: uma ideia fora do lugar?" (Góes; Ricupero, 2014) [in free translation, "Passive Revolution in Brazil: an idea out of place?"]. I analyzed, in my doctoral dissertation, the translation of the concept coined by Vianna in the 1980s in his essay on the journal *Presença*: "*Presença e a renovação frustrada: centralidade democrática e os caminhos da revolução passiva brasileira*" [in free translation, "Presence and frustrated renewal: democratic centrality and the paths of the Brazilian passive revolution"] (Góes, 2020).

⁹ The concept of transformism holds significance within the framework of the "passive revolution": "We can apply to the concept of passive revolution (and it may be documented in the Italian *Risorgimento*) the interpretative criterion of molecular changes, which in reality progressively modify the previous composition of forces and therefore becomes the matrix of new modifications. (...) Thus, this element is the original phase of that phenomenon later called 'transformism'..." (C 15, §11, p. 1767). In essence, transformism refers to an intellectual, moral, and political hegemonic action through which a social group assimilates the elites of enemy groups, leading to their decapitation and annihilation for an often-prolonged period (C 19, §24, p. 63).

¹⁰ Gramsci denounced the reactionary and even despotic content conveyed by these criticisms, which were originally made by the "elitists" but later appropriated by fascism (Bianchi, 2020c).

¹¹ See note 8.

transitioned from Italy to Brazil to analyze the political crisis, which, during that period, was not like that of the early 20th-century Italian parliamentary democracy but of the military regime in Brazil.

The theoretical and political discourse was centered on interpreting the “years of lead”, which facilitated “top-down” modernization in the country, and the ongoing transition to democracy at that time. Francisco de Oliveira, with his extensive political and intellectual trajectory dating back to the 1970s, emerged as a key figure in this dispute.¹²

3. Class struggle and the bourgeois hegemony in Brazil

During this period, Oliveira, already associated with CEBRAP, wrote influential essays that offered interpretations of Brazil’s socio-political landscape. Notably, in 1972,¹³ he elaborated “Crítica à razão dualista,” and in 1977, “Elegia para uma re(li)gião”[♦]. The former text, considered an “inflection point” by Werneck Vianna,¹⁴ introduced the concept of hegemony, – although not explicitly citing the source – incorporating politics into the analysis of the economic status. The essay aimed to challenge prevailing paradigms of Brazilian economy thinking dating back to 1930 when industrialization emerged as the key driver of the system’s dynamics (Oliveira, 2003c [1972], p. 29). Reacting to the theories of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) and dependency theorists, Oliveira focused particularly on the internal dynamics of Brazil’s domination structures within its accumulation processes (Ibid., p. 33).

In contrast to the “classic” bourgeois revolution, following the example of Italian history, the shift in hegemony among Brazil’s dominant classes did not require a complete overhaul of the system. This was primarily due to historical factors that eventually solidified into structural elements (Ibid., p. 63). In essence, from 1930 onwards, Brazil entered into “a prolonged period marked by a coexistence of apparently contradictory policies” whose “deepest political meaning was the definitive transformation of power structures, passing the new bourgeois business-industrial

¹² Oliveira had graduated in social sciences from the Federal University of Pernambuco in 1956, where he was one of the founders of the Student Movement of Pernambuco, affiliated with the Brazilian Socialist Party. In the late 1950s, he worked as an economist at Sudene alongside Celso Furtado. His successful career as a bureaucrat was interrupted by the 1964 coup, when he was arrested for two months and then went into exile in Chile, Guatemala, and Mexico, where he worked as a professor. Upon returning to Brazil in the early 1970s, Oliveira joined CEBRAP, marking the most significant turning point in his intellectual trajectory.

¹³ The essay was first published in the second issue of the journal *Estudos CEBRAP* in 1972, then reissued in the first volume of *Seleções CEBRAP* in 1975 and 1976, turned into a book by Vozes publisher in 1981, and finally reissued by Boitempo in 2003.

[♦] T.N. In free translation “Criticism to the dualist reasoning” and “Elegy for a re(li)gion.”

¹⁴ In an interview conducted in 2010, Werneck Vianna stated that: “A pivotal moment in this group [CEBRAP] is Francisco de Oliveira’s article, ‘Crítica à razão dualista’, which criticizes CEBRAP, criticizes Fernando, and receives approval and recognition from everyone, including Fernando. This moment was particularly important to me. Many aspects of *Liberalismo e sindicato no Brasil* [Liberalism and unions in Brazil] derive directly from Francisco de Oliveira.”

classes to the position of hegemony” (Ibid., p. 64-65). However, this transition unfolded against a backdrop of generally unfavorable external conditions. Therefore, “one of its foundational requirements was preserving conditions for the reproduction of agricultural activities. This approach ensured that landowners remain integrated within the power structure while also securing gains from the expansion of the system” (Ibid., p. 65).

This pact laid the structural groundwork for the expansion of capitalism in Brazil, without requiring the complete dismantling of the old accumulation mode. Consequently, the bourgeois hegemony in the country had specific regional implications witnessed, for instance, by the unique circumstances observed in the Northeast, which serves as the focus of second text. Here, the objective was to understand the region “within a national context hegemonically controlled by the most advanced sectors of capitalist production” (Oliveira, 2008 [1977], p. 142). In this analysis, Oliveira (2008 [1977], p. 145) referenced Gramsci’s thinking, particularly his writings on “A questão meridional”[♦] and “Il Risorgimento”, as offering the most advanced Marxist theories on the regional issue.¹⁵ The Sardinian Marxist’s emphasis, according to Oliveira, was on presenting the *Mezzogiorno* not as a pre-capitalist residue, but as an essential part of the genesis of capitalism in Italy and its weaknesses. This theoretical framework prompted Oliveira to contemplate the conflicting dynamics between Brazil’s North and South. In Brazil, the industrial development of São Paulo spearheaded “a regional division of national labor, supplanting the previous ‘archipelago’ of regional economies, which were primarily shaped by their interactions with foreign countries” (Oliveira, 2008 [1977], p. 199, *emphasis added*). This represented “a project for a unified national State, politically encompassing the reality of a capitalist expansion which *tended* to be hegemonic” (Ibid., p. 200, *emphasis added*).

In addition to the academic publications, such as the versions circulated by the journal *Estudos CEBRAP*, it is important to note Oliveira’s contributions to the alternative press, where he actively opposed to the dictatorship at that time. Both essays were discussed in newspapers like *Opinião* and *Movimento* during the 1970s.¹⁶ While the texts that circulated in the alternative press in the mid-1970s tended to focus more on economic elements, Oliveira’s papers at the turn of the decade were predominantly political. By the 1980s, the sociologist became increasingly engaged with the grassroots movements in Brazilian society, particularly among the working-class segments, whom

♦ T.N. In free translation: “The meridional issue.”

¹⁵ In this text, Oliveira mentioned the Italian edition, especially the one organized thematically by Palmiro Togliatti. The pre-incarceration text on the Meridional Issue, in turn, was mentioned through the book written by the Italian theorist Maria-Antonietta Macciocchi, titled *A favor de Gramsci* [in free translation, “In Favor of Gramsci”], edited and translated by Paz e Terra in 1977. In this same year, the complete text in Portuguese on the *Mezzogiorno* was published in the first edition of the journal *Temas de Ciências Humanas*.

¹⁶ In *Opinião*, Oliveira published a total of eleven articles, between 1972 and 1975; in *Movimento*, twenty articles between 1975 and 1980 (Mendes, 2015). Some of the editions of the newspaper *Movimento* are available as digital copies at Arquivo Público do Estado de São Paulo [Public Archive of the State of São Paulo]. The newspapers *Opinião* and *Movimento* are fully available at the library Florestan Fernandes (FFLCH/USP).

he deeply trusted.¹⁷ This trust was further solidified by his commitment to the party he helped found, the Worker's Party (PT), as highlighted in the introduction of Mário Pedrosa's book about the PT launched in 1980. In this introduction, Oliveira expressed his belief in witnessing "the construction of a party of the masses, forged in the real struggles of the Brazilian working classes, considered a historical necessity (...) that emerges as a significant challenge to incorporate, through the party, *the workers in the political realm, namely, the State*" (Oliveira, 1980a, p.9-10, *emphasis added*). According to Oliveira in 1980, the integration of workers into the "bourgeois institutionality" was crucial for its transcendence, as he warned against "succumbing to *socio-democratic illusions*" (Ibid., *emphasis added*).

In the 1980s, following the closure of the newspaper *Movimento*,¹⁸ a portion of this debate found a platform in the newspaper *Folha de S. Paulo*, where Oliveira contributed, showcasing his involvement with the Worker's Party project.¹⁹ Despite the optimism surrounding the redemocratization and his political engagement, the sociologist adopted a pessimistic stance regarding the trajectory of the economic crisis. Despite heightened dependence and the loss of sovereignty, the internationalization of capitalist economies was regarded as an irrefutable fact (Oliveira, 1980b, p. 4). The pessimistic undertone was further emphasized in an article published the following month, where Oliveira expressed skepticism about the prospects for generating new jobs or improving wages. "The dream is over", said Oliveira (1980c, p. 4).²⁰

Between 1982 and 1984,²¹ the sociologist embarked on a research internship in France where, in his words, "he immersed himself in studying the Welfare State firsthand" (Oliveira, 1984, p.34). Influenced by the prevalent European social-democratic ideology, Oliveira undertook two studies during this period. The first focused on analyzing the class structure in Bahia²², while the second reflected his belief in politics,

¹⁷ In the pages of *Movimento* that announced the end of censorship amidst FIFA's World Cup, Oliveira's confidence on the masses was highlighted in that context: "Regardless of the results of the Brazilian national team during this World Cup in Argentina, either a victory or a failure, I do not believe there will be negative repercussions on the politics of Brazil. Because I believe in *the awareness-raising efforts among the large masses, which does not allow such a rude and shameless manipulation*" (Oliveira, 1978, p. 10, *emphasis added*).

¹⁸ Cf. "O jornal Movimento: a experiência na luta democrática" (Sousa, 2014). [In free translation, "Newspaper Movimento: the experience in the democratic struggle"]

¹⁹ Academic researchers became regular visitors of the pages of magazines and newspapers. In particular, *Folha de S. Paulo* developed an approximation policy with intellectuals inaugurating the Sunday supplement *Folhetim* and reserving the section *Tendências/Debates*. Intellectuals associated with the PT contributed with 416 articles in the newspaper *Folha de São Paulo* between 1978 and 1984, among them Oliveira, with twelve articles. (Almeida, 1997, p. 39 and p. 70).

²⁰ Oliveira added: "there will no longer be the miracle of people from the poorest and oppressed classes undergoing a social transition, even with a continuous increase in the number of universities. And I say this because, for a while, education was used as an element that facilitated this transition. This dream is also over" (Oliveira, 1980c, p. 4).

²¹ The period in which Oliveira stayed in France coincided with the beginning of the first presidential term of the socialist François Mitterrand, inaugurated in May 1981.

²² As explained by Oliveira in his introduction, the book *O elo perdido: classe e identidade de classe na Bahia* [in free translation, "The missing link: class and class identity in Bahia"], published originally in 1987, was a request from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (Unesco), in the framework of a project of the Committee of Economy and Society, of the International Association of Sociology, in Paris, in October 1983.

particularly in forging a new social pact in Brazil based on a concept he termed “converging antagonism” aimed at promoting “Anti-Value Rights”[♦]. Throughout these endeavors, Oliveira consistently emphasized the significance of Gramsci’s insights, particularly in repositioning politics as a crucial dimension within the dynamics of class recognition. Once more, with the guidance of the “little great Sardinian”, Oliveira further refined his understanding of politics as a place that intertwines the objective reality of infrastructure with the subjective representation it engenders (Oliveira, 2003 [1987], p. 18).

The discussion surrounding socio-democracy was intricately linked to reflections on the changing class structure within capitalism. The *missing link* unearthed the origins of a contemporary structure in Brazil characterized by a notable degree of indeterminacy, particularly when compared to the European model. Unlike in developed capitalist countries, the “informal sector” in Brazil was perceived as likely to persist (Ibid., p. 71). The ramifications in the political front were significant. According to the sociologist, the potential for cohesive social groups to construct a shared identity was hindered, compelling the class struggle to seek alternatives within the State apparatus (Oliveira, 1998 [1988], p. 39). Within this context, Oliveira viewed the Welfare as providing stage for conflict, likening it to a game of chess where “the territories of each piece—in this case, each right—are previously mapped and organized in a hierarchy, rather than being an isomorph and isonomous field” (Ibid., p. 39). Adversaries were keenly aware of their territorial boundaries, as indicated by the “*established hierarchy of the queen, rook or knight*”. Oliveira posited that the struggle entailed seeking alternatives to nullify previously entrenched hierarchical positions and the power of fire of the most important pieces (Ibid., p. 39).

The chess analogy serves to illuminate the distinctiveness of constructing the public sphere: it involves “the construction and acknowledgement of otherness, the other, the undefeatable terrain of their rights, through which social relations are structured” (Ibid., p. 39). In contrast, within “badfare States”, the analogy would be akin to playing checkers: “with a single stroke, the government could reduce salaries, increase taxes arbitrarily, confiscate goods—except those belonging to the bourgeoisie” (Ibid., p. 39). The challenge lies in establishing a domain within the public sphere and democracy where the interests of the political subjects could supersede market and capital logics. Here, class relations would no longer seek the obliteration of otherness but rather adapt through compensation mediated by *public funds*. Representative democracy becomes the institutional arena wherein classes and social groups could engage, thus constituting a *public domain*, above the private one (Ibid., p. 41). This achievement of the Welfare State politicizes the relationship between the public fund and each facet of social reproduction. However, the attack of the right on public expenditures, coupled with the

♦ T.N. In Portuguese, “Direitos do Antivalor,” concept introduced by Oliveira in his book “Os Direitos do Antivalor: a economia política da hegemonia imperfeita” [in free translation, “The Anti-Value Rights: the political economy of the imperfect hegemony.”]

crisis at the end of the 1980s, threatened to undermine the very foundations of modern democracy, potentially transforming it into “a democracy of interests” (Ibid., p. 47).

In contrast to countries with developed capitalism, neoliberalism in Brazil emerged not as a response to socio-democracy and the Welfare State, but rather as a reaction against the still-incipient expansion of the public sphere and citizens’ rights. The class conflict was then encapsulated into a renewed pattern of authoritarianism and exclusion clashing with the potential for democratic progress, a dynamic that became apparent during Brazil’s first direct presidential election in 1989. Oliveira viewed this electoral contest as unprecedented, representing a transformation from a regime crisis to a *hegemony crisis* catalyzed by Lula’s surge in the second round of the elections (Oliveira, 1992, p. 21). This moment marked the beginning of a shift in Oliveira’s mindset. The sociologist began proposing a new hypothesis for interpreting social domination under neoliberalism, suggesting that it could no longer be understood as a hegemonic process.

4. Neoliberalism in Brazil: “beyond hegemony, below democracy”

The arrival of neoliberalism marked the end of the era of hegemony (Oliveira, 1993a, p. 54). However, reflecting upon the election and reelection of Fernando Henrique Cardoso five years later, Oliveira seemed to contradict himself. Unlike Collor, whose presidency was deemed an “unforeseen burst”, FHC’s leadership represented a long-term project, characterized by extensive social deliberation and the figure of the president as the “*condottiere* in the truest sense”. The exceptional nature of his persona became a key element of hegemony (Oliveira, 1998 [1995], p. 178). FHC’s reelection continued to be perceived as part of the political strategy pursued by a group with hegemonic claims. Once more, Oliveira ventured to define the phenomenon: “there is domination and hegemony. It is possible to dominate politically and economically, but hegemony occurs only when the dominated adopts your way of thinking” (Oliveira, 1998, p. 162).

In 1995, after twenty-five years of collaboration, Oliveira left CEBRAP and contributed to the creation of Núcleo de Estudos dos Direitos da Cidadania (NEDIC) [Study Group on Citizens’ Rights]. His involvement with CENEDIC marked the beginning of the final phase of his intellectual journey (Braga, 2019). Initially, the name of the center reflected a degree of optimism regarding Brazil’s political and democratic potential. However, throughout the 1990s, Oliveira moved away from this stance, and the *optimism of the will* seemed to give way to the *pessimism of the intellect*. Even the notion of a potentially “modern” capitalist arrangement in the country, rooted in interclass negotiation, as evidenced by the experience with the so-called “Automakers’ Agreement”²³, came under scrutiny.

²³ Oliveira said of the “Automakers’ Agreement”: “The Agreement, precisely because of the previous history that made it possible, is an extremely new and innovative form of capital-labor relations in Brazil. (...) To sum up, it reveals a capacity for strategic behavior, shaped, almost imposed, by the strong restrictions of the situation, but designed to have structural effects” (Oliveira, 1993b, p. 3).

The international seminar with which NEDIC inaugurated its first event at USP, in the first semester of 1997, aimed to explore construction processes of a globalized economy and the internal conflicts it entails for the trajectory of democracy (Paoli, 2000 [1997], p.11). Oliveira, in his contribution, began to characterize the neoliberal transformation as having totalitarian implications. The radical incompatibility between bourgeois domination and democracy was not a novelty in Brazil; rather, it was a fundamental aspect of Brazilian society. Despite the slow and incomplete democratization efforts driven primarily by the dominated classes, progress was successively interrupted by a series of violent interventions, including two dictatorships and several failed coups, until the enactment of the Constitution of 1988 (Oliveira, 2000 [1997], p. 59 e 62). However, the unravelling of democracy would not be gradual.

The endeavor to dismantle the politics foundations established by the dominated classes unfolded in an intense and accelerated manner. Oliveira proposed the notion of a State transitioning from an “illusory community” to “a mere arena of private interests devoid of universalization” (Ibid., p. 69). In other words, there emerged a situation where the veneer of private interests was no longer necessary, “*indicative of the extent of domination or, more broadly, the subjective reality experienced by the bourgeoisie*” (Ibid., p. 69, *emphasis added*). While not solely attributed to FHC’s administration, it was during his tenure that the proliferation of the “official ideology” with its “deadly symbolic load” reached extraordinary proportions (Ibid., p. 74). The Brazilian neoliberal monster, “akin to Frankenstein”, amalgamated “pieces of socio-democrats, old and new oligarchs from the Northeast, right-wing populists, and left-wing defectors”. Oliveira defended that its real face was that of totalitarianism (Ibid., p. 81).

The paradox lies in the fact that politics was emptied at a time of potential expansion of “citizens participation” and democratic representation, as suggested by the 2002 elections. The dilemma was efficiently summarized in the title of one of Oliveira’s texts dedicated to the subject: “O Enigma de Lula: Ruptura ou Continuidade?♦”. According to Oliveira, Lula’s election seemed poised not only to mark the end of the “FHC Era” but also to signify the conclusion of the “long cycle of the Brazilian ‘passive’ way” (Oliveira, 2005, p. 96). The notion, “derived from Gramsci, of course”, but explicitly articulated, states: “it is about contextualizing capitalist expansion in peripheral regions paradoxically devoid of market mechanisms, relying instead on authoritarian State coercion” (Ibid., p. 96). The “complexities of the situation” were defined in the heat of the moment, in a text published shortly after Lula’s initial victory, titled “Entre São Bernardo e a Avenida Paulista?♦♦” (Oliveira, 2002b, p. A11). Despite his affiliation with the PT, Oliveira began voicing criticisms of the orthodox, “not to mention *tucana*♦♦”, economic policies outlined by Lula in his government plan. Nevertheless, he retained hope that the PT government could transcend neoliberalism or even “cross the threshold

♦ T.N. In free translation, “The Enigma of Lula: Rupture or Continuity?”

♦♦ T.N. In free translation, “Between São Bernardo and Avenida Paulista?”

♦♦ T.N. The toucan is the symbol of the political party PSDB (Social Party Democracy Brazil) and is often used as a nickname for the party and the politicians affiliated to the party.

of socialism, fostering an anticompetition sociability, a culture of politics with universalizing tendencies" (Ibid., p. A11). However, disillusionment soon followed, leading to Oliveira's departure from the party and his diagnosis of "the absence of hegemony". (Oliveira, 2005, p. 98).

In *O Ornitorrinco**, Oliveira introduced a controversial and counterintuitive hypothesis, as noted by Roberto Schwarz (2003, p. 14), suggesting that the changes in the forms of domination brought about by neoliberalism also reshaped the class structure. Initially, he argued that the foundation of class representation crumbled, leading to the decline of the political power traditionally derived from it, thereby eliminating any prospect of breaking away from Brazil's long-standing "passive way".²⁴ However, this was not the most pressing issue. According to Oliveira, the upper echelons of the former proletariat have become pension funds administrators, a consequence of the "final blossoming of the Brazilian welfare state, largely organized by state-owned corporations" (Oliveira, 2003c, p. 146). The conundrum arose from workers' newfound interests in the profitability of such funds, which were simultaneously financing the restructuring of production, leading to increased unemployment (Ibid., p. 146). Despite hopes for a resurgence of hegemonic conflict under the newly inaugurated Lula Government, Oliveira asserted that the Brazil-platypus lacked an ethical-political moment and conscious action, thus rendering hegemony unattainable.

In the same year that *O Ornitorrinco* was published, Oliveira participated in an event organized by CLACSO in Cuba, during which he proposed a perspective that viewed all Latin America as economies belonging to the "family of platypuses". This characterization depicted them as part of a lineage defined by a "ludicrous combination of high incomes, ostentatious consumption, accumulation of capital driven by the molecular-digital revolution, extreme poverty, modern peasantry, and overwhelming financial capital, alongside technical-scientific incapacity" (Oliveira, 2005 [2003], p.117). What, then, was the path forward in this context? Oliveira's response pointed to a deadlock. The intensification of social tensions, resulting from the shattering of class relations, had reached an unprecedented level, which would require a political leap of such magnitude that the very implosion of class relations made it imperative not to delay (Ibid., p. 114). According to Oliveira, institutional politics was turning upside down, as the conditions and constraints imposed by globalization rendered traditional democratic and republican institutions "useless", with national authorities increasingly overshadowed by central banks.

* T.N. In free translation, "The Platypus."

²⁴ From the hypothesis of the Brazilian "passive way", Oliveira created further ahead the category of the "Brazilian way" to explain the national character - "the origin of the Brazilian way, as the cordiality theorized by Sérgio Buarque, is explained by the incompleteness of capital market relations" (Oliveira, 2018 [2012], p. 144). Although the matrix of this ideology lay in the prolonged period of slavery, this would not explain the informality and the habits that followed. Further analysing the hypothesis of passive Revolution, Oliveira stated that through the "Brazilian way" the Brazilian ruling class would have circumvented the Jacobin solutions.

5. Lulism and the “hegemony in reverse”

In the essay “Política numa era da indeterminação[♦]”, developed between 2001 and 2005 as part of another cycle promoted by CENEDIC, the sociologist aimed to explain the deadlock further. Drawing on Rancière, he clarified the concept of politics he employed: “Those engaged in politics distinguish themselves by minimally leading the movements of others, of their adversaries, by minimally imposing on them an agenda of issues around which conflict unfolds” (Oliveira, 2007b, p. 15). The essence of this invention, therefore, lies in the ability to keep the other within the confines of the constructed field, providing stability to the political arena by maintaining the agenda of issues. Oliveira then translated this notion into Gramscian terms: “Gramsci would term this capacity hegemony, referring precisely to a culture that renders the proposed issues unavoidable, compelling the adversary to engage with the invented languages, situations, institutions and cultures, which consequently become the dominant culture” (Ibid., p. 16).

If the period comprised between 1964 and 1990 was regarded as an era of political innovations, the subsequent period revealed that these innovations had not been powerful enough to facilitate a qualitative leap (Santos, 2007, p. 292). Thus, the “Era of Indeterminacy” was inaugurated with the “financialization of capital”, concurrent with the “explosion of the foreign debt” and the “diminishment of the centrality of labor” resulting from the Third Industrial Revolution. These factors engendered, and continue to engender, the very unpredictability of politics. “Instead of a bourgeois hegemony sustained by the ‘virtues’ of the market, permanent State coercion is required, without which the entire structure collapses” (Oliveira, 2007b, p. 35). Once again, Oliveira translated the problem into Gramscian terms: “in the formula of consensus plus coercion, *the role of coercion remains paramount*, leaving no room for Tocquevillian ‘well-understood interests’, and the republic does not emerge from the ‘virtue’ of the market” (Ibid., p. 36, *emphasis added*).

In another paper, the sociologist continued attempting to understand Lula’s conduct in office, drawing a comparison with Lenin’s approach. The victory of the Workers’ Party was seen as a “virtuality” arising from a “situation of indeterminacy” (Oliveira, 2007c, p. 261). This period marked a suspension in the relationship between economy and politics, particularly in terms of class dynamics and representation. However, unlike Lenin, who perceived and exploited the failures of the existing power structure to propel the movement towards socialist revolution, Lula worked to rebuild the political system, which had been destabilized by the whirlwind of deregulation under FHC and globalization (Ibid., p. 266). While PT leaders sought to reconstruct the political and economic framework amidst crisis, it remained uncertain whether the exceptional period had truly come to an end.

According to Oliveira, the process of financialization within capitalism established a novel relationship between the State and the market, overseen by a new social class

♦ T.N. In free translation, “Politics in an era of indeterminacy.”

lacking true sovereignty. Instead, this class negotiated with financial capital for access to public funds. On the other hand, Oliveira emphasized the decomposition of the working classes. A notable aspect of this evolution was *political exclusion*. In the sociologist's perspective, "lulism-petism" failed to prioritize the agendas and demands of the working class, instead fostering what he termed an "emerging populism" (Ibid., p. 285).²⁵ Consequently, discussing hegemony became inappropriate, as there was no longer a moral compass guiding society. According to Oliveira, what we were experiencing was, in fact, a "hegemony in reverse".

A product of Oliveira engagement in the latest debate cycle at CENEDIC was a formulation derived from what he termed a "Gramscian provocation", characteristic of the globalization era. In his view, the nation that pioneered this form of domination was South Africa. In summary, this idea could be encapsulated as follows: "while the dominated classes assumed the 'moral direction' of society, bourgeois domination became more brazen" (Oliveira, 2010 [2007], p. 24). In the case of South Africa, the dominated classes triumphed over apartheid, only for the subsequent government to surrender to neoliberalism. Therefore, according to Oliveira, the liquidation of apartheid perpetuated the myth of popular agency in overcoming a fearsome adversary, all the while sanctioning unfettered exploration by unscrupulous capitalism.

Brazil came close to resembling this scenario. The "Era of invention" not only steered Brazilian society morally towards resistance against dictatorship but also ingrained the notion that poverty and inequality should be in the forefront of the political agenda. In this context, Bolsa Família could be likened to the defeat of apartheid, and Lula's election appeared to challenge class biases and inequality barriers. However, the myth surrounding Lula's persona led to the depoliticization of poverty and inequality, recasting them as purely administrative issues. Moreover, during his first term, the president co-opted social movements and civil society organizations, diminishing their influence and agenda. In essence, Lula's victory marginalized left-wing movements in the country, giving rise to a new phenomenon – "hegemony in reverse".

However, Oliveira clarifies that Lula's presidency did not evoke revolutionary expectations from his voters but rather intense reformist aspirations. These included "advancements in the socialization of politics, a broader participation in decision-making by the masses, significant income redistribution in an obscenely unequal country, and comprehensive political and governance reforms to eradicate entrenched

²⁵ Other authors, such as the political scientist André Singer, who would assume the direction of CENEDIC a few years later, would disagree with Oliveira about the phenomenon. Contrary to the hypothesis of the exclusion of politics, the political scientist believed that Lulism had stirred "a nuclear conflict in Brazil, one that pits 'included' against 'excluded'" (Singer, 2012, 40-43). In collaboration with Leonardo Belinelli Brito, I reflected on the points of convergence and divergence between both authors in "Crisis da política contemporânea no Brasil: notas de um debate sobre o lulismo" [in free translation, "Crisis of contemporary politics in Brazil: notes on a debate about Lulism"] (Góes; Brito, 2015). Among the Gramscians, Coutinho would adopt another interpretative path to think about Lulism, as seen in "Hegemonia da pequena política" [in free translation, "Hegemony of petty politics"] (Coutinho, 2010); Werneck Vianna, on the other hand, would persist in interpreting the Lulist period as a "passive revolution" (Werneck Vianna, 2007).

patrimonialism” (Oliveira, 2010, p. 369). However, the outcome diverged from these expectations, yielding the opposite effect. This discrepancy is attributed to what Oliveira terms the “eternal argument of conservative progressists” who argued that effective governance demanded congressional support. Without it, they contended, the country would become ungovernable. “Hence the need for broad alliances or coalitions above and beyond ideological boundaries. Or, more simply, an unrestricted pragmatism” (Ibid., p. 369). According to Oliveira, FHC employed this rationale to justify what he deemed the most significant ideological shift in the country’s history, one profoundly impacted by the longstanding national tradition of “transformism”.

In revisiting his seminal work, Oliveira disputes the notion that Brazil experienced a setback, as proposed in Luiz Werneck Vianna’s thesis of “passive revolution”. Instead, he argues that modernization, although with conservative traits, prevailed. In other words: in the amalgamation of “setback” and “modernization”, it was the latter that instrumentalized the former, not vice versa. He contends that FHC’s ascension to power ushered in a program so radical that even Margaret Thatcher might have hesitated to implement it in her country. Through the manipulation of the stable currency fetish, the PSDB president stripped the Brazilian State of its economic policymaking capacity. Across two terms, the “*tucanos*” orchestrated a *tournant*, leaving their successor imprisoned – with the peculiarity that Lula would have radicalized the failure to comply with a mandate given to him to reverse FHC’s disaster. It would be in this context that “hegemony in reverse” would operate, in which the “Marxist-Gramscian heritage could be the starting point”, but which would no longer be “the point of arrival” (Oliveira, 2010 [2007], p. 27).

6. Final Considerations

Francisco de Oliveira cannot properly be considered a Gramscian, according to the meaning in which specialized studies usually understand it: Oliveira did not take Gramsci’s concepts as an independent object of investigation; instead, he employed them liberally and consistently as heuristic devices in his research. However, within Oliveira’s work, we discern an implicit parallel drawn between Brazil and the Italian context analyzed by Gramsci, facilitated by his utilization of Gramscian concepts – particularly hegemony, alongside the notion of passive revolution. Oliveira’s original interpretations, informed by the Brazilian context, infuse these concepts with a new significance. The inherent tension in the theoretical translation challenge, bridging abstract categories with concrete reality, led Oliveira to reject the concept of hegemony when confronted with a novel form of social domination.

Aligned with Gramsci's perspective, which emphasizes the intimate connection between democracy and hegemony,²⁶ Oliveira's use of the concept appears intrinsically linked to his evolving understanding of politics. Despite the shifting phases in Oliveira's intellectual journey—from his initial support for the Workers' Party (PT) to his critique of socio-democracy and subsequent disillusionment and radical criticism—it can be proposed that Oliveira's interpretation of hegemony revolves around a shared space where class conflicts are acknowledged, potentially creating openings for resistance. Whereas during the dictatorship era, these openings were forcibly closed,²⁷ in the contemporary context, the opposite appears to be true: the suppression of conflict takes on a totalitarian guise through seemingly voluntary consent.²⁸ This suppression, symbolized by exclusion, epitomizes bourgeois domination in its most overt form.

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²⁶ "Among many meanings of democracy, it seems to me that the most realistic and concrete is the connection with the concept of hegemony. In the hegemonic system, there is democracy between the ruling group and the ruled groups to the extent that the development of economy and, consequently, the legislation that expresses this development favor the molecular passage from ruled groups to ruling groups" (C. 8, § 191, p.).

²⁷ "The 1964 Coup D'état and its entire duration were nothing but a desperate effort to annul the political construction executed by the dominated classes in Brazil, at least since the 1930s" (Oliveira, 2000 [1997], p. 64).

²⁸ Paulo Arantes helped clarifying the difficult formula by Oliveira, considered certain, but with uncertain exposure: "dominated groups no longer consent to their own exploration, but the capitalists consent to being politically conducted by the dominated groups, as long as the 'moral direction' exercised paradoxically by the latter does not question the form of capitalist exploration (...)" (Arantes, 2014, p. 349).

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