



Social movements in Brazil: from virtue to vice

The social movements of Brazil: from virtue to addiction

Ronaldo Brito Memory¹

SUMMARY

This article aims to analyze the evolution of social movements in Brazil, examining how such mobilizations transition between virtuous practices of social engagement and demonstrations that may present aspects of conflict or deviation from objectives, characterized as institutional or social vices. The research will be conducted through a literature review, considering academic works, scientific articles, and documents.

Historical studies addressing the formation, development, and impacts of social movements in the Brazilian context will be discussed. Political, cultural, and economic aspects that influence the actions of these groups will be discussed, as well as their contributions to the consolidation of citizenship, democracy, and social justice. The aim is to identify patterns of virtuous action, such as the defense of rights and social inclusion, and situations in which social movements can be instrumentalized for questionable or conflicting ends, reflecting structural tensions in society. The study's conclusion will reinforce the importance of a critical understanding of social movements as dynamic phenomena, capable of generating positive change, but also subject to practices that can compromise their original objectives.

Keywords: social movements, Brazil, citizenship, social engagement, social conflict.

ABSTRACT

This article aims to analyze the evolution of social movements in Brazil, examining how such mobilizations transition between virtuous practices of social engagement and demonstrations that may present aspects of conflict or deviation from objectives, characterized as institutional or social vices. The research will be conducted through a literature review, considering academic works, scientific articles, and historical documents that address the formation, development, and impacts of social movements in the Brazilian context. The political, cultural, and economic aspects that influence the actions of these groups will be discussed, as well as their contributions to the consolidation of citizenship, democracy, and social justice.

The aim is to identify patterns of virtuous action, such as the defense of rights and social inclusion, and situations in which social movements can be instrumentalized for questionable or conflicting ends, reflecting structural tensions in society. The conclusion of the study will reinforce the importance of a critical understanding of social movements as dynamic phenomena, capable of generating positive change, but also subject to practices that can compromise their original objectives.

Keywords: social movements, Brazil, citizenship, social engagement, social conflict.

1 INTRODUCTION

Social movements in Brazil represent one of the most important forms significant mobilization of society in favor of rights, justice and transformation social. Throughout the country's history, these collective organizations emerged in response to different political, economic and cultural contexts, playing roles fundamental in the fight for social inclusion, citizenship and democratization. Since the



first popular demonstrations to contemporary movements, it is observed that such mobilizations oscillate between virtuous actions — when they promote changes positive social moments — and moments of addiction, characterized by internal conflicts, political instrumentalization or deviations from original objectives.

Understanding these movements requires a critical analysis of their origins, structures, strategies and impacts on society, allowing to identify both their contributions and their limitations. The literature points out that, although the movements social mechanisms of pressure and social participation, their effectiveness depends on the organization, the coherence of its demands and the ability to engage different sectors of the population.

This article seeks to investigate the trajectory of social movements in Brazil, emphasizing the contrast between virtue and vice, in order to understand how these organizations influence the social, political, and cultural dynamics of the country. The research aims to offer a broad view of the factors that favor success and risks associated with deviant practices, highlighting the importance of an analysis critical to strengthen the transformative role of these movements.

2. DEVELOPMENT

2.1 BRIEF CONTEXTUALIZATION OF SOCIAL MOVEMENTS BRAZILIANS

Around the 60s and 70s, popular and social movements spread in Brazil. For Pinsky (2003, p. 568), “popular movements were characterized by a scope limited to issues located in the practical life of the community”.

The strength of the workers' movement and popular movements (such as the classes dominant) determines the strategy of popular groups. “If the situation is favorable to popular mobilization and expansion of struggles, the strategy can be more offensive; if the moment is unfavorable and marked by a retraction of popular forces, the strategy is defensive” (FALEIROS, 1985, p. 82).

From the late 1970s onwards, the trade union movement and organizations student movements gained strength. Metalworkers' strikes paralyzed the industries of São Paulo, soon followed by bank workers' strikes. The “miracle” crisis economic” was the trigger for these movements, the fight against high prices shook the foundations of the dictatorship. At the same time, groups linked to specific issues emerged: women, indigenous peoples, black people and homosexuals (PINSKY, 2003).

It was in the 1980s that social movements included more groups



broad sectors of society. Ecological movements emerged, transcending the division politics between right and left and also the movement in defense of the rights of consumer. In the 1990s, a type of organization that did not exist before emerged in Brazil until then, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to designate the entities of the civil society, in reference to any social movement (PINSKY, 2003).

The question of the leading role of social movements in Brazil, from the 1990s onwards 1990, begins to lose political visibility in the urban scene. From then on, three moments: 1990-1995; 1995 to 2000; and from the beginning of this new century until today current ones, which diagnose a crisis in urban popular social movements, in first five years of the 1990s, in the sense that they reduced some of their power of direct pressure that they had achieved in the 1980s. At that time, the country was leaving of a stage of conquest of constitutional rights, which needed to be regulated. At the same time, the federal government began to implement or deepen, at all levels, neoliberal policies, which have generated unemployment, increase in poverty and urban and rural violence (GOHN, 2005).

The State, faced with such a reality, closes the doors to negotiation because concessions requested are not acceptable to the state of capital accumulation that he aims. This strategy can delegitimize the ruling class if it defends (speech) democracy and participation. The State then finds itself placed in a situation of clear defense of capital accumulation or its legitimacy (FALEIROS, 1985).

In this context, people are also beginning to talk about a crisis in "social movements" "urban movements," this did not represent their disappearance or weakening as sociopolitical actors, but rather an internal and external rearticulation of their role in society. Transformations in the political context also lead to the emergence or strengthening of other social actors, such as NGOs and other third-sector organizations. Thus, popular movements become allies or even compete with such organized groups to demand social needs from public authorities (GOHN, 2003).

Despite the weakening of social movements and the rearticulation of the role of these in society, it is essential that we consider their great relevance in Brazilian democratic process, through its actions aimed at the demands of rights, until then, not available to citizens. In this way, the struggles triggered in civil society, are absolutely essential in a process of effective social transformation, on the path to human emancipation.

Social movements in Brazil represent complex historical phenomena,

that reflect the dynamics between civil society, State and market, oscillating between actions virtuous moments of social transformation and moments of vice, marked by deviations from objectives or political instrumentalization. Since the beginning of the country's formation, social movements were established as spaces for collective mobilization to claim rights, social equity and citizenship, seeking to influence decisions policies and promote structural changes in society (AVRITZER, 1994; GOHN, 2003).

According to Gohn (2005), social movements play a central role in construction of Brazilian citizenship, articulating collective demands, fostering political participation and strengthening the role of civil society. They arise as responses to inequalities and restrictions imposed by the State or the system economic, highlighting the population's ability to organize itself and create networks of solidarity that amplify their voice in the public sphere. On the other hand, Duriguetto (2005) warns of the risks of collective action becoming fragmented or co-opted, transforming into movements with a character of addiction, in which private interests can override collective demands.

Communication and the formation of social identities are essential elements for the functioning of social movements. Correia (2001) emphasizes that the media and the media shape perceptions, disseminate agendas and influence the construction of collective identities, which can both strengthen social virtue and contribute to addiction by propagating fragmented or politically biased messages manipulated. The challenge, therefore, lies in ensuring that social movements maintain coherence in their objectives and legitimacy in conducting their actions.

Historically, social movements in Brazil have gone through phases of intense mobilization and protagonism, as in periods of struggle for redemocratization, agrarian reforms and civil rights, alternating with moments of stagnation or disarticulation. Paoli (1995) highlights that the institutionalization of some demands social, through laws and public policies, can reduce the radicality of movement, but it can also weaken its pressure capacity, highlighting the tension between virtue and vice. In this sense, Faleiros (1985) observes that the relationship between professional knowledge and institutional power directly influence the effectiveness of mobilizations, making it necessary for movements to articulate technical knowledge and capacity for political action.

Reflection on virtue and vice in Brazilian social movements allows

understand that its effectiveness depends on factors such as internal organization, clarity of objectives, mobilization of civil society and dialogue with state institutions. Nogueira (2004) reinforces that a State focused on civil society must recognize the role of these movements, encouraging democratic participation without co-opting or weakening collective action. Pinsky and Pinsky (2003) complement, highlighting that the history of citizenship in Brazil is deeply marked by the action of groups that, throughout time, fought for social inclusion and the construction of rights, showing that social movements can be instruments of virtue when oriented towards good collective, but subject to defects when diverted from their original purposes.

Therefore, social movements in Brazil must be understood as dynamic spaces, capable of generating significant changes in society, but which require constant critical reflection on their objectives, methods and impacts. The alternation between virtue and vice shows that social participation is fundamental for consolidation of democracy, but that its transformative potential depends on organization, transparency and commitment to collective interests.

THE EMERGENCE OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN BRAZIL

In relation to the historical trajectory of civil society in Brazil, here we find, only the last three decades of the 20th century, where the strengthening of this category in the redemocratization movement. But the organization cannot be denied previous to this in the course of Brazilian history.

When contextualizing the emergence of civil society, Avritzer (1994) introduces that the emergence of new social actors in the process of building civil society in Brazil is associated with the rapid modernization process to which the Brazilian authoritarianism. However, it is possible to locate the emergence of civil society Brazilian in the final period of the authoritarian regime and the beginning of the country's redemocratization.

It is understood that since its emergence, civil society has contributed to the construction of the Brazilian democratic process, through social organizations, struggles, associations, movements, etc., constantly seeking recognition for their corporate project in a contradictory reality due to the development of capital and, at the same time, at the same time, for the development of citizenship.

The new actors that have emerged on the political scene need spaces in civil society – their own institutions, to participate in new political pacts that redirect the current political model. The late Betinho already told us: “society

civil society has a central role, power lies in civil society, not in the State. The State is instrument” (SOUZA apud GOHN, 2005, p. 78).

In view of this, the capacity for mobilization, participation and political awareness of civil society, configured in an important reference to the improvement and reaffirmation of the Democratic Rule of Law.

As evidenced in the international debate, Duriguetto (2005) maintains that the the category civil society was commonly used in the Brazilian context from the late 1970s, to express the reactivation of the trade union movement and the action of the so-called “new social movements”, which began to dynamize processes of mobilization of defense, conquest and expansion of civil, political, social and labor.

Furthermore, the author refers to the emergence of several partnership initiatives between the organized civil society and public authorities, driven by state policies, such as the experience of the Participatory Budget in Rio Grande do Sul, in Porto Alegre. With the Participatory Budget, the State itself gradually evolves, beginning to realize the importance of popular participation in political and social decisions.

At the Brazilian level, participatory deliberation practices have been, since the its beginning, linked to the political visibility of new social movements and the redefinition of practices of the labor movement in the 1970s and 1980s. They were understood through a renewed theory of social conflict that pointed to forms of popular participation and plural struggles demanding autonomous representation in process of public goods and formulation of public policies (PAOLI apud SANTOS, 2002).

New democracies must transform themselves into new social movements, sense that the state must become a site of distributive and cultural experimentation. It is in the originality of new forms of institutional experimentation that the emancipatory potentials still present in societies may be contemporary (SANTOS, 2002).

It is possible to point out that the new social movements contemplate a identity in defense of its corporate project. This identity, of a collective, built within the group in a process of interrelations that has been imposing challenges to think about the relationship between the subject and existing institutions.

2.2 THE QUESTION OF PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY AND CIVIL SOCIETY

The 20th century was indeed a century of intense dispute over the issue democratic. For Santos (2002), there would therefore be a tension between capitalism and democracy, a tension that, once resolved in favor of democracy, would place limits to property and would imply distributive gains for social sectors disadvantaged. Marxists, for their part, understood that this solution required the total decharacterization of democracy, since in capitalist societies it was not possible to democratize the fundamental relationship on which material production was based, the relationship between capital and labor. Hence, within the scope of this debate, alternative models of democracy to the liberal model, including: democracy participatory.

It is possible to show that the actors who implemented the experiences of democracy participatory questioned an identity that had been attributed to them externally by a colonial state (authoritarian and discriminatory state). Characterized by the demand for housing rights, rights to public goods distributed locally, rights of participation, recognition of differences, imply, in a certain way, questioning a social and state grammar of exclusion and propose, as an alternative, a more inclusive one (SANTOS, 2002).

It is within the scope of the democratic project that the question of civil society. For Nogueira (2004), this means that we need a perspective that not only values civil society and celebrates its growing protagonism, but also help to politicize it, freeing it from the reductionist shackles of private interests, bringing it closer to the richest and most generous universe of interests general, of hegemony, in a word, of the State.

Throughout the process of reproduction of capitalism, civil society gained body thanks to a modernization that asserted itself, in a very aggressive way, a multitude of private interests. Civil society grew on the basis of this process and found itself confronted with the most diverse stimuli tending to separate it from politics, hand it over to values that are more individualistic than supportive, more competitive than cooperatives. It is clear that the set of changes affected behaviors and political expectations, forcing the opening of spaces for the vocalization of new interests, transformed the patterns of electoral participation and competition



(NOGUEIRA, 2004).

It is understood that sociability is more complex and the State has started to fail in its performance, it is inevitable that a situation will be designed in which the spaces social values are radically valued. For the author cited above, everything leads us to believe that the State will not be able to return to playing the same roles it played before, but at the same time it is not reasonable to imagine that those who intend to drive the future can advance if they place themselves outside the State or without a State.

In view of this, it is relevant to mention that the last two decades of the 20th century, mark the advance of democratization and the progressive valorization of participatory democracy in Brazilian society. For the developmentalist ideal, the solving social problems or combating inflation would require much more authority and decision-making centralization rather than democracy. Before, the conviction was that that participatory processes or, more generally, mechanisms of popular consultation, negotiation and expanded consensus building, would act “against” growth economic, as they would make it difficult to make quick decisions and, therefore, would unduly prolong the time for formulating and implementing policies. Little by little, the prevailing opinion shifted to the opposite side, with the corresponding recognition that participation would not only contain a value in itself, as it would also be particularly relevant in providing sustainability to public policies.

It is important to mention that in the Brazilian case, the authors cited show that the motivation for participation is part of a common heritage of the process of democratization that led to democratic social actors, especially from community movement, disputing the meaning of the term participation, based on the opening of real spaces for participation by political society, emphasizing deliberation at the local level (SANTOS, 2000).

Participatory democracy can only produce its optimal outcomes if have citizens and associations with the political will to experience collective and cooperative dynamics. Conceived as a resource for social transformation, can only advance if its citizens are reached by strong processes of political education, awareness and politicization.



3. CONCLUSION

With the development of this work, we concluded that the movements social groups in Brazil play a fundamental role in the construction of citizenship, in promoting rights and mobilizing society for collective causes. The analysis historical and theoretical evidence has shown that such movements move between moments of virtue

— when they contribute to social inclusion, democratization and justice — and moments of addiction, characterized by internal conflicts, political instrumentalization or deviation from original objectives.

It was observed that the impact of these movements depends directly on organizational strategies, community engagement, and sociopolitical context, reinforcing the need for critical evaluation of their actions and effects. In addition, Furthermore, the research highlighted that understanding patterns of success and deviation is essential to strengthening practices that promote positive social transformations and minimizing risks of manipulation or ineffectiveness.

With the analysis of the historical trajectory of social movements in Brazil, it is observed that these mobilizations presented a development marked by contradictions. On the one hand, they emerged as an expression of social virtue, fighting against poverty, exclusion and inequality, demanding rights, laws and greater participation in political and economic life. On the other hand, at certain times, some movements revealed traces of addiction, manifesting dispersion of objectives, conflicts internal or political instrumentalization, which compromised its effectiveness and weakened collective mobilization.

Historically, social participation has been configured as a form of influence the State, allowing groups, classes and individuals to introduce their ideas and interests at the decision-making center of collective life. Through this participation active, social movements contributed to the formulation of public policies, the strengthening democracy and expanding citizenship, consolidating the presence of civil society in decision-making processes.

Social movements in Brazil transcend the simple reaction to deprivation materials, functioning as mechanisms for creating public spaces discussion, in which civil society can exercise control over power institutionalized and influence public policies. Its relevance is even more evident in contexts of crisis of representation, in which social mobilization allows

strengthen democratic participation and citizen vigilance.

However, it is essential to recognize that not all mobilizations maintain coherence in their objectives. Sometimes social movements deviate from its initial purposes, demonstrating defects that may weaken its action transformative and reduce its capacity to put pressure on political and social actors.

Therefore, Brazilian social movements must be understood as dynamic phenomena, oscillating between virtue and vice. They play a crucial role in identifying social problems, in consolidating collective identity and individual and in promoting significant social transformations. Understanding criticism of these movements is fundamental to strengthening their virtuous function and minimize the risks associated with practices that compromise their effectiveness and legitimacy.

REFERENCES

AVRITZER, Leonardo (org.). **Civil Society and Democratization**. Belo Horizonte: Del Rey, 1994.

CORREIA, F. João Carlos. **Communication and Citizenship: the Media and Identities in Pluralistic Societies**. Portugal: University of Beira Interior. Doctoral Thesis, 2001.

DURIGUETTO, ML **Civil society, public sphere, third sector: the dance of concepts**. Social Service & Society. Juiz de Fora: Cortez, n.81, Mar. 2005.

FALEIROS, Vicente de Paula. **Professional knowledge and institutional power**. São Paulo: Cortez, 1985.

GOHN, Maria da Glória. **The protagonism of civil society: social movements, NGOs and solidarity networks**. São Paulo: Cortez, 2005.

_____. (org.) **Social movements in the early 21st century: old and new social actors**. 2nd ed. Rio de Janeiro: Vozes, 2004.

_____. **History of social movements and struggles: the construction of Brazilian citizenship**. 2nd ed. São Paulo: Loyola, 2003.

NOGUEIRA, Marco Aurélio. **A State for civil society: ethical and politicians of democratic management**. São Paulo: Cortez, 2004.

PAOLI, Maria Célia. Social Movements in Brazil: In Search of a Political Statute. In: Hellmann, Michaela (ed.). **Social Movements and Democracy in Brazil: "Without Us, There's No Way."** São Paulo: Marca Zero, 1995.

PINSKY, Jaime; PINSKY, Carla Bassanezi (orgs.). **History of citizenship**. São Paulo: Contexto, 2003.