

The Consolidation of Liberal Democracy in Brazil: Encountering Global, Regional, and Local Representations

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Abstract: The globally expanded international society established a standard of statehood as central criteria for its membership. The end of the Cold War witnessed an ascendant, albeit contested, liberal democracy as a preferred regime in global imaginaries. Within this context, the re-democratization processes experienced in Latin America amid profound international systemic reorientations implied the renegotiation of regional and local social imaginaries, as, for example, in the Brazilian case. In this article, we seek to discuss Brazil's selective and creative adaptation in the space of overlaps between global, regional, and local social imaginaries about the government regime since the 1990s. Through a theoretical-empirical approach based on the discussion about the construction of shared understandings between international and domestic social spaces, we opted for a pragmatic theoretical foundation with the support of the English School of International Relations, critical philosophy, and the sociology of Bourdieu to study the Brazilian case. By focusing on the Fernando Henrique Cardoso government, it is proposed to qualitatively analyse documents from the period that problematize the country's external insertion based on the interaction with the global and the regional social imaginaries about liberal democracy, with the support of a bibliographical review grounded on specialized secondary sources.

Keywords: democracy; Brazil; social imaginary; international society; Latin America.

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The second decade of the new millennium once again witnesses democracy at a crossroads. Authoritarian pressures, renewed forms of violence and an intense flow of unverified information contribute to the growth of instability in the international order within a context of multiple challenges – such as environment, migration, and pandemic. At the same time, this scenario implies the need for a broad and historically informed effort on how changes in international structures constitute and are constituted by the domestic dynamics of states in international society.

In these troubled times, the critical debate on the socio-historical conditions of ideas as deep-rooted as democracy contributes to the adequate appreciation of their circumstances and their development. In an interconnected world, this reflection demands considering the interaction between global, regional, and local symbolic spaces and their role in the international actions of states. Based on the study of the consolidation of democracy in Brazil, the article proposes investigating how the idea of international society membership can serve as a symbolic reference for the constitution of domestic processes. It is argued that Brazilian re-democratisation occurs amidst strong articulation of liberal democracy as a political regime that enables membership in international society in the post-Cold War period. This dynamic unfolds in the ideational flow built from the 1990s international society solidarist scenario, reinforcing dualities typical of the Latin American context and domestic specificities of the Brazilian case that can be read in the country's external discourse.

This theoretical-empirical proposal seeks to analyse the consolidation of Brazilian democracy based on the relationship between global, regional, and local social imaginaries about liberal democracy in the immediate post-Cold War period. The first section discusses liberal democracy as a practice that legitimises membership in the 1990s solidarist international society through a comprehensive and pragmatic approach, based on the English School of International Relations, critical philosophy, and Bourdieu sociology. Next, the research examines the liberal democracy practice in Latin America based on the same period global social imaginary. Finally, we seek to discuss the hypothesized relationship between membership in international society and domestic processes through a case study on the consolidation of democracy in Brazil during the government of Fernando Henrique Cardoso (FHC, 1995-2002), assuming the articulation of liberal democracy as a practice that legitimises membership in international society.

The investigation is guided by documentary analysis of texts related to Brazilian executive authorities and international organisations, and by data collected from qualified secondary sources. The study analyses Brazil's official international discourse from a qualitative perspective, using this data to empirically support the theoretical discussion on how statehood dynamics integrate global, regional, and local imaginaries, thereby shaping membership within the broadly defined international society.

Democracy as a liberal doxa in a globally expanded international society: theoretical-conceptual remarks

Understanding the meaning of democracy at the end of the 20th century and its impact on domestic experiences such as Brazilian re-democratization implies a conjunctural analysis that is attentive to power dynamics that shape what becomes normalized as a condition of social relations between states – the globalised social imaginary. Interstate relations are driven by mutual expectations of behaviour crystallised in the social arrangements in which these actors operate. This framing is enacted through social practices that attribute meaning to these competent performances, arranging them in ordering structures that generate expectations of agency. The sacralisation of this set of practices in interstate social daily life constitutes a space of dispute between socially constructed statements to establish radicalised imaginaries – the doxa, which interacts with similar sacralisation processes within states.

Democracy as a sacralised practice of the globalising social imaginary impacts the domestic constitution of government regimes. Pierre Bourdieu's ([1972] 2013) sociological approach to the construction of doxa, combined with the English School of International Relations and the critical philosophy of Cornelius Castoriadis ([1975] 2005) are a useful analytical framework for debating this issue. Under Bourdieusian terms applied to international relations, social practices can be understood as '(...) socially meaningful patterns of action which, in being performed more or less competently, simultaneously embody, act out, and possibly reify background knowledge and discourse in and on the material world' (Adler and Pouilot 2011: 6). Primary international institutions in the English School are social practices that constitute and sustain international society, by promoting its elementary goals (Bull [1977] 2002). Symbolically, these practices form social imaginaries in multiple spaces – global and local (Castoriadis [1975] 2005). Social imaginaries are ideational dimensions that are constitutive of reality, but cannot be reduced to it; they bring together signifiers considered binding by members of a social group; and ontologically determine the conditions of social existence, like the Bourdieusian habitus.

International society will be understood here as the structure in which social interaction between states is constituted – akin to a board game where interests and identities shared between states are institutionalized (Buzan 2014: xvii). In historical terms, international society is conceptualised by the English School as a social construction that emerged in Europe in the 16th and 17th centuries and expanded globally in the 20th century (Zhang 2011). The belief that states form an international society is related to the fact that they take each other into account when making decisions; this is evident in the intricate patterns of interaction observable in social practices (Dunne 2005). Among the practices notably emphasised in international society, especially since the end of the Cold War, is the liberal democratic regime as a preferred model for statehood (Zhang 2011). To interpret the element that maintains the amalgamation of international society involves, according to solidarists, the moral superiority of practices that guide the patterns of interaction established by the West (Dunne 2005). This approach disregards,

however, the origins of international society established from colonialism, the premise of inequality between people and the violent conquest (Buranelli and Taeuber 2021) that marked the relationship between Europe and ‘the rest of the world.’

This article debates the tensions between global and local social imaginaries about democracy in the Brazilian case considering mechanisms of state action in international society that produce and reproduce social practices. These mechanisms link the local (state) to the global (international society) in three distinct configurations regarding liberal democracy: (1) its articulation as an orthodox social affirmation; (2) its interpellation as an orthodox social statement; (3) and its re-articulation as a heterodox social statement. The final consequence of this mechanism is the formation of a circle of recognition, framing state action and its foreign policy (Pizzorno 2008).

In this conceptual framework, liberal democracy presents itself as a possible primary institution of contemporary international society, emerging as part of the new standard of civilisation reinforced in the immediate post-Cold War solidarist context. In such scenarios, practices that contest established norms within the scope of international society tend to be the subject of widespread disapproval. Historically, the confrontation of non-European civilisational standards with that established and promoted by Europe has challenged the legitimacy of its regimes domestically and internationally (Gong 1984), since the narrative would be that the world is divided between civilised people, who follow the standards of civilisation, and non-civilised or almost civilised entities (Zhang 2011). Historically, force, calculation and persuasion were part of the process of expanding international society (Wendt 1999) and expanding the commitment of states to practices based on standards of civilisation,¹ that is, sometimes forcibly imposed, sometimes accepted reluctantly or even welcomed as a positive change (Gong 1984).

The trajectory of liberal democracy’s radicalisation in the global social imagination dates to the debate on suffrage among liberals in the 19th century, which brings a gradual rapprochement between democracy and liberal ideology as a constitutive binomial of membership and legitimate action in international society at the end of the 20th century. This material and symbolic association unfolds in the same historical context of the constitution of nationalism as a primary international institution. The regime operationalisation as a social practice does not occur in a semiotic vacuum, but within an ideological framework that gives it meaning. The symbolic interpretation of signifiers brought by ideology is an indication of the process of return from doxa to truth (Bourdieu [1972] 2013). It will be thought of here as an imagined unit of context in which intra- and inter-state practices are embedded – an environment of naturalisation of the symbolic (Žižek [1950] 1987).

Slavoj Žižek (1995: 15) understands that liberalism is ‘a doctrine (developed from Locke to Hayek) materialized in rituals and apparatuses (free press, elections, market, etc.) and active in the ‘spontaneous’ (self-) experience of subjects as ‘free individuals.’ Barry Buzan and George Lawson (2015: 103) identify three general characteristics of liberalism as an ideological practice – ‘(...) the individual as the primary site for the articulation of normative claims; the market as the primary site of economic exchange; and representative democracy as the primary site of political authority.’

Thus, regime and ideology maintain separate semiotic existence, but which, at the same time, are combined in the binomial liberal democracy to adjective the regime and enable a solidarist homogenization of the global social imaginary regarding the internal configuration of a state that defines it ontologically. The binomial liberal democracy thus presupposes: (1) effective participation; (2) voting equality in the decisive stage of free elections; (3) enlightened understanding; (4) and agenda control (Dahl [1989] 2012: 171, 172, 176 and 179). While defining power micro-relations in the liberal democratic regime, the procedural aspect stands out, and equality of participation is an instrument for realising the representative principle, and not the other way around. (Schumpeter [1943] 2003: 269)

Understanding how liberal democracy seeks to radicalise itself as an orthodox version of the global social imaginary requires considering the historical process of this search for naturalisation. Democracy and liberalism are historical forms of governance and ideological regimes, which seek to become radicalised in contemporary times as part of the very idea of state. To trace the concept of democracy evolution process demands a radical historicisation, as it is ‘(...) a contingent historical fact, and far from inevitable’ (Hobson 2009: 633). For almost two millennia, democracy was seen as a precarious form of relationship between the state entity and the governed society, while liberalism only rose as an almost unrivalled ideological practice after the post-Cold War and the supposed United State’s unipolar moment.

The promotion of political representation through electoral means and its vernacular association with a democratic government regime in the United States of America (USA) and Western Europe is exemplified in the attempt of a positive association between the values of freedom (liberalism) and equality (democracy). This semiotic proposal does not come without challenges, since ‘the liberal individual is essentially atomistic, while the individual in democracy is more socially directed’ (Hobson 2009: 640). This association is supported by the social affirmation that the liberal adjective allows democracy to be more egalitarian by recognizing the freedom of individual participation in decisions about social life (Platnner 1998: 176).

The liberal adjective triumph for democratic regimes occurred with the end of the Cold War. The failure of alternative readings on equality of political participation led to the victory of liberal democracy, which ‘(...) emerged as dominant, almost by default’ (Hobson 2009: 632). Both in narratives and in political practice, liberal democracy appears as an orthodox imaginary about state qualification as such. The value stops being just democratic equality and starts to radicalise the liberal meaning of its procedures. In the narrative scope, liberal democracy is defended as a more morally evolved regime, associated with capitalism in the economic sphere (Barros 2016: 62; Macmillan 2004: 184).

Within a globally expanded international society based on a social imaginary whose legitimisation of membership is defined in terms of anchoring practices grounded on

political and economic liberalism, understanding state foreign policy demands a critical assessment of the meanings behind the legitimisation of membership. Brazil, in the post-Cold War Latin American context, presents itself as a typical case in which the process of entering the new international order superimposes global, regional and local social imaginaries on statehood. The theoretical framework constructed so far presupposes understanding this interaction empirically, considering the challenges faced by the limited involvement that non-central countries had in the constitution of contemporary international society (Buranelli and Taueber, 2021). They are relegated to a place of translation of how the state entity is imagined globally based on the shared understanding built regionally and locally in a process that integrates domestic dynamics with foreign policy, reflected, in the Brazilian case, in the attempt to amalgamate liberalism and the social dimension.

The next section will analyse the consolidation of statehood and membership in Latin American countries in the reconstruction of their regimes during the last decades of the 20th century until the beginning of the 2000s, after long periods of authoritarian governments. In this scenario, as put by Amado Cervo (2008, p. 91), the regional political elite imagines a *Normal State* as a synthesis of interpellation with the global based on the duality between neoliberal premises and social intervention. Next, it will investigate the case of Brazilian democracy consolidation in the post-Cold War and its interaction with the global world based on its discourse focused on its international insertion.

Between the global and the local: Latin America and the construction of social claims on democracy

In Latin America, the spread of practices related to liberalism – both political and economic – coexists with behaviours that move away from what is hegemonically defined as doxa. Between caudillos, colonels, caciques, dictators and charismatic leaders, Latin American politics is implemented through very peculiar paths – but not necessarily through its own categories, as we observe with the dynamics between membership in international society and the constitution of domestic processes as discussed in the previous section. Latin American regimes trajectory reveals, on the one hand, a strong authoritarian component and, on the other, the liberal inspiration received from Western countries since colonization. This original combination of elements resulted in a region whose fundamental characteristic is duality.

Faced with overflowing domestic specificities, Latin American regional practices on regimes constitute a multifaceted phenomenon, permeated by contradictions. In the 19th century, collective regional movements discussed local political structures, pointing to the importance of democracy (Roget 2009) – therefore, in line with the emergence of this phenomenon in the global social imaginary, and with the theoretical argument about the relevance of such a practice to consolidate the membership of newly independent political entities. Latin America, enchanted by liberalism, but generally distant from its practices, began to see the importance of political participation. Speeches and documents in this regard became part of the regional collection. However, in the local practices,

exclusionary and elitist participation constitutionally supported by texts became the rule (Bethell 2008).

During the Cold War, Latin America became a stage for ideological conflict. Military dictatorships constituted the rule in a context in which, despite liberal speeches in regional forums, their behaviour diverged. To curb communist sentiments, even the most notable actors articulating the liberal doxa – especially the USA (Rapoport and Laufer 2000; Lowenthal 1970; Peceny 1999) – were openly in favour of authoritarian governments. After 1970, Latin America experienced a process of re-democratization based on liberal practices of international society. In 1978, only three of the twenty countries in the region had periodic electoral procedures with broad popular participation: Colombia, Costa Rica and Venezuela. In 1992, the proportion was reversed, with only two countries completely moving away from this model: Haiti and Cuba. These political transformations contributed to the formation of what became known from the studies of Samuel Huntington (1991) as the third wave of democratisation. Then, the most extensive and lasting phase of Latin America's rapprochement with the global social imaginary developed, with the implementation of political and economic reforms aimed at achieving a liberal order of which it was eager to be part.

The international environment acted as a significant factor in domestic change. Analyses indicate that a favourable political climate in the region was the most influential element in its wave of democratization (Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán 2005: 19). Globally, this period was marked by the end of the Cold War, the collapse of socialism, and the rise of the USA as a unipolar power. Consequently, the likelihood of socialist turnarounds diminished, leading to a clear shift in the behaviour of the United States - from supporting military regimes to backing democratic transitions and condemning democratic disruptions. During this time, US foreign policy solidified around democracy promotion (Sedaca and Bouchet 2014). Additionally, the performance of global and regional organisations became a crucial part of the dissemination of orthodox interpretations regarding behaviour and expectations toward other actors.

In the Latin American context, the second wave of regionalism played a significant role in aligning with the global liberal imagination. Regional organisations – Organization of American States (OAS), Central American Integration System (SICA), and Andean Community (CAN) – redesigned their objectives and established democracy as part of their agendas. Furthermore, at the beginning of the 1990s, the Southern Common Market (Mercosur) was created, also moving in this direction. The centrality of the theme varied among the organisations. OAS and Mercosur, which include Brazil as a member, established democratic clauses for participation.

During the Cold War, the actions taken by the OAS regarding the absence of democracy were in a legal limbo. The 1990s began with clear attempts to reverse this situation, evidencing a central role for the Organisation regarding the political regime of its members. A new model of international interaction was established, with less room for political diversity in the region. In normative terms, seeking to condition the behaviours of its members, the OAS established robust norms on democracy promotion, its value to the Organisation, and its liberal content. Thus, the organisation functions as a

secondary institutional apparatus of the post-Cold War international order, articulating the practice of democracy based on liberalism among its members – in this sense, the Santiago Commitment to Democracy and the Renewal of the Inter-American System and Resolution 1080 are the most important documents, both approved in 1991.

In 1992, there was a significant change to its constitutive treaty through the Washington Protocol – the emerging of a hard law instrument showed some consensus on the democracy agenda within the Organisation. With the Protocol, the idea that democracy is inseparable from the political repertoire of its members was embraced, and deviating from it could lead to the suspension of the Organisation. In 2001, the last document that concluded the repertoire of the most relevant norms on democracy by the OAS, the Democratic Charter, was approved, gathering both the meaning of democracy for the Organisation and its mode of action in the event of a democratic rupture by its members (OAS 2003).

In Mercosur, even before its creation, soft law documents asserted the importance of democracy in negotiations between Argentina and Brazil – in this regard, the Iguazu Declaration (1985) and the Act for Brazilian-Argentine Integration (1986). After the formation of the bloc, soft law instruments continued to discuss democracy, such as the Presidential Declaration of Las Leñas (1992) and the Presidential Declaration on Democratic Commitment in Mercosur (1996). The Organisation secured a treaty on democracy in 1998, creating the Ushuaia Protocol on the Democratic Commitment in Mercosur, which establishes mechanisms for reaction in crises. The treaty does not characterize what is understood as democracy for the bloc.

Locally, the end of military dictatorships was marked by negotiated transitions in which the institutionalization of mechanisms of political participation was gradually matured.² Alongside the concern with political openness, the idea that it was necessary to improve capitalist practices spread. Then, the regional imagination about the very idea of the State corroborated the precepts of political and economic liberalism, reinforcing the fact that the global imagination was, at different levels, locally articulated to overcome the political legacy of the military period. In this context, as common characteristics of the new regimes, the holding of periodic and reasonably honest elections in multi-party systems with universal suffrage and the concomitant pursuit of greater integration into the market economy stand out.

The existence of an economic and social crisis in Latin America at the time of democratic transitions was decisive in shaping the political regimes established during the 1980s, known as ‘the lost decade’ (O’Donnell 1994: 64). After the dictatorships, right-wing political currents rose to power in several Latin American countries and were victorious through elections in Brazil, Ecuador, Uruguay, and El Salvador, playing a significant role in political decisions in Peru, Mexico, Chile, and Argentina (Gibson 1996). Newly elected civilian governments in various countries then opted for economic stabilisation plans. These governments gradually implemented liberal reforms, relying on orthodox economic thought that was gaining strength with the idea that it was necessary to overcome the severe losses affecting the region (Ocampo 2005: 17). Pragmatically, the existence of conditions imposed by international financial organisations indicated

the path of neoliberal policies. This was a period of intense presence of the IMF and the World Bank in Latin American countries (Pastor Jr 1997; Williamson 1990).

During the 1990s, the region was one of the focal points for the implementation of neoliberal policies crafted from the Washington Consensus, which can be understood in light of the anchoring between the global social imagination about democracy and locally significant democratic transitions. In this context, the governments executed the so-called 'market reforms' – a structural remodelling aimed at reducing the role of the state in the economy and expanding that of the market, producing greater macroeconomic stability. According to Ocampo (2005: 17), no other developing region in the world undertook such deep economic changes aimed at expanding the market.

The relationship between Latin America and the global liberal imagination during the 1980s and 1990s introduced several practices related to civil and political rights that were incorporated into the regional political repertoire. The return of electoral processes and the belief that the legitimacy of rulers was endorsed by popular choice were widely embraced. Similarly, respect for civil liberties achieved a consensus, although violations occurred soon after re-democratisation – for instance, in Bolivia in the 1980s and in Argentina under Carlos Menem (Smith and Ziegler 2008: 34). However, the continuity and, in some cases, deepening of social inequalities due to the adoption of liberal economic practices in societies now vocal about their demands led to questioning the reforms. The main points of the 'liberal logic' –liberalisation, free trade, deregulation, and privatisation – were blamed for the social problems experienced by much of the population. The perception spread across different countries that the adjustments had been an imperialist manoeuvre by the USA and international financial organisations, favouring domestic and international economic elites, with the burdens borne by the working masses. In the context of local interrogation about the articulation of the global idea of democracy, the rearticulating pressures also highlight the significance of the global social imagination as a counterpoint to local symbolic constructions.

The specificities of the contemporary political path of Latin American countries have led to the coexistence of different patterns of assimilation and re-signification around the globally legitimised liberal ideology. Thus, after characterising the contexts that have conditioned regional politics and its relationship with the liberal imagination, this analysis seeks to specifically examine the dynamics of belonging to democratic reconstruction in Brazil as a result of its external interaction with the global and regional levels. It is believed that Brazil's position in the region carries significant implications for the contours of regional politics, making it a relevant case for understanding the interaction between states and the globally expanded international society.

Overlapping social imaginaries and the outcomes of redemocratisation in Brazil in the 1990s: membership dynamics and legitimisation strategies

The analyses of changes in the Brazilian political regime focus on the two terms of Fernando Henrique Cardoso (FHC) as President of Brazil (1995-2003). FHC's administration coincided with the deepening of liberal orthodoxy post-Cold War, which

profoundly impacted the systemic context of developing countries, prompting them to seek a new foreign policy paradigm (Lima 2010; Lima 1994). This section aims to understand how Brazil responded to the pressure from the global social imagination stemming from its membership relations with the international society through a liberal-democratic ideology. The focus is on the formal aspects of Brazilian institutions and the evolution in the interaction between politics and economy in its conceptualisation of statehood. Methodologically, this section is based on a qualitative analysis of data collected from all of Brazil's annual speeches at the opening of the regular sessions of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) during the study period, which were considered in the context of illustrating the proposed theoretical argument about the relationship between membership in international society and the ideational and praxiological construction of domestic processes through the interaction between global and local social imaginaries. The intention is to comprehend how such changes were signified or reflected in the country's speeches to an international audience.

The Brazilian democratic transition process was characterised by two factors common to the region: on the one hand, the implications of the political liberalisation process initiated even under the dictatorship, and on the other, the economic imbalances inherited from the military period. In this regard, the presidential succession of 1985 was tightly controlled, with the selection of the first civilian incumbent conducted by the Electoral College and, with the support of dissidents from the military government, the opposition ticket secured the Vice Presidency for José Sarney, a politician marked by his ties to the dictatorship (Kinzo 2001). Following the death of Tancredo Neves and Sarney's assumption to the presidency, the New Republic emerged, marred by legitimacy deficits that would mark the third and longest period of Brazilian democratic experience. In 1988, a new constitutional order was inaugurated with the document that became known as the 'Citizen Constitution.' The following year, direct presidential elections were held for the first time since 1960.

The institutionalization of a new form of the Brazilian state, based on a liberal economic and political order, was consolidated from 1990, during FHC's first administration. In this context, Brasília Sallum Jr. and Jefferson Goulart (2016: 116) argue that the contemporary Brazilian state conception has three main pillars: (1) the democratic Constitution of 1988, which extended, universalized, and protected citizenship rights; (2) the 'Real Plan' for monetary stabilisation, launched in 1994, along with a series of liberal reforms enacted during FHC's first administration; and (3) the entry of union leaders and social movements into the state arena, which resulted in the intensification of the inclusion process for the base of the social pyramid.

Despite their temporal distance, these elements are interconnected and have brought the Brazilian state closer to the globally legitimised liberal imagination. The 1988 Constitution established normative guidelines on the liberal-representative political regime. Meanwhile, the 'Real Plan' and the liberalising reforms during the FHC period provided a solution to the problem of monetary stabilisation and redefined the role of the state in the economy, embracing the liberalising and privatising ideology (Sallum Jr. and Goulart 2016: 116; Secches 2018). Brazil's commitment to democracy, reiterated

throughout the FHC period, highlights the valuation of the democratic regime as part of the country's sense of belonging to the international society. The institutional framework consolidated with the 1988 Constitution was positively regarded by the government (Lampreia 2012a: 718), arguing that adherence to democratic rules strengthened and was linked to Brazil's international credentials (Lampreia 2012a: 720). Indeed, the contours of sovereignty are now rationalised as a belief system anchored in values such as

Democracy, development, commerce and economic wealth, rather than the pursuit of hegemony or territorial gains (...). The sovereignty of a country and the ability to meet the needs of its population increasingly depend on good social indicators, political stability, economic competitiveness and scientific and technological progress, rather than on military might. (Lampreia 2012a: 720, translated by us)

In contrast to the dictatorial period, Latin America acquired a new international image with the adoption of democratic regimes (Lampreia 2012d: 785). Similarly, Brazil sought to overcome the image of a 'sick' Latin American state by strengthening the conditions of freedom, information, and legal guarantees that underpin suffrage and the electoral regime (Lampreia 2012e: 805). The strengthening of the democratic regime as a common feature among most Latin American countries became a reflection of the extent of Brazil's commitment and support for liberal democracy as the only possible and legitimate political regime. In 2001, during the inauguration of Chancellor Celso Lafer, FHC affirmed that 'democracy was the number one priority of Brazilian foreign policy in our region' (Moreira 2003: 63, translated by us).

In the same vein, regional integration was seen as a product of Brazil's belief in democracy and economic freedom, which would lead to the consolidation of regional spaces (Lampreia 2012c: 772). The Brazilian foreign office articulated strategies for regionalising international insertion, both in developing countries through Mercosur and in relation to developed nations by approaching the European Union. This approach served as a mechanism to reformulate the foreign policy paradigm and practically execute the reconciliation between the social and liberal agenda (Mello 2000), reflecting the typical duality of the region in the context of anchoring practices between global and local social imaginaries about democracy. At that time, the maintenance of the rule of law, political rights, and a competitive electoral regime was encouraged at the UN and became a condition for countries' participation in regional organisations, indicating the incorporation of these aspects of the liberal-democratic ideology as elements that defined Brazil's participation in regional and multilateral forums (Lampreia 2012e: 805), mirroring the role of these organisations as secondary institutions in the post-Cold War international society.

Practically, during the FHC era, several important treaties were ratified – reflecting the country's alignment with the idea of democracy as indispensable for belonging to the international society, in tune with the regional dynamics discussed in the previous section. In 1995, Brazil ratified the Washington Protocol, which reformed the OAS Charter.

Also in the OAS, Brazil was enthusiastic about the Democratic Charter, considered by then ambassador Valter Moreira as a 'vital [instrument that is articulated with the] improvement of democracy (...), a priority issue for the Brazilian government in the domestic and international spheres' (Moreira 2003: 63, translated by us).

The Brazilian government's commitment to democracy is also evident in its efforts to establish norms to safeguard it within Mercosur. Brazil and Argentina initiated discussions on drafting a democratic clause within the bloc in 1996, following a coup attempt in Paraguay (Trindade 2021: 63). The bloc's active role in this crisis underscored the collective recognition of the value of democracy. Afterwards, the Brazilian Chancellery presented the São Luís Declaration on Democratic Commitment and the Brazilian government drafted a protocol that would introduce a democratic clause into the organisation (Trindade 2021: 65). In 1998, the draft was adopted as the Ushuaia Protocol on the Democratic Commitment of Mercosur, ratified by Brazil in 2002. This emphasises the linkage between local practices of re-democratisation and Brazil's external behaviour in the context of consolidating its membership in the international society through the invocation of globally imagined democracy.

Brazil thus presents itself to the international society as a state committed to democracy, human rights, and political stability (Lampreia 2012a: 718). The end of the Cold War marked a time of articulating the global social imagination and defending neoliberalism, perceived as the Normal State, a 'creation of Latin American political intelligence' (Cervo 2008: 91, translated by us), related to the revival of the liberal ideology that had prevailed in the region until the 1930s when it gave way to the developmentalist state. This paradigm is referenced in the return to the hegemonic orientations of capitalism accepted by Brazil until 1930, filtered through a process of self-review of developmentalism by CEPAL in response to criticisms from the neoliberal and monetarist political elites not only in Brasília but in various Latin American countries (Cervo 2008).

The country's new projection was accompanied by a belief in economic freedom with social justice, advocated by Luiz Felipe Lampreia (2012a: 720). The reconciliation of these two values, in dialogue with both the domestic and international dimensions of Brazilian politics, also reflects the trajectory of then-President FHC as an academic and political agent, who 'positions himself alongside Brazil's insertion in the international system but advocates for the proposal of rules that minimize the negative effects of globalisation, especially for developing economies' (Bentes 2006: 6, translated by us). Celso Lafer (1992: 846, translated by us) notes the liberal-social character of this initiative, centred on proposing that 'the market, not operating in a vacuum, requires an order that manifests itself in a legal and institutional framework. This, in turn, can only result from a political construction process.'

Initially, aligning with the repertoire of economic liberalism, structural reforms and privatisations were rationalized as a political choice necessary to pave the way for the consolidation of stability and growth. This initiative is drawn in the expectation of aligning with the apparent end of disputes over legitimacy in the post-Cold War world around liberal capitalism (Fonseca Jr, 1998), embodied in the idea of a 'Republic of Capital'–democracy limited to elites interested in commercial and financial liberalisation – and a

presidentialist civil authoritarianism in the Brazilian case (Saes, 2001). Simultaneously, the adoption of policies benefiting the poorer and underprivileged layers and the activation of social rights guaranteed in the 1988 Constitution became, in part, linked to the success of economic stabilisation policies (Lampreia 2012a; Lampreia 2012b).

As Maria Regina Soares de Lima (2010) points out, however, Congress became a space for contesting this reconciliation, in which the opposition mobilised civil society demanding accountability for Brazilian foreign policy – as we can observe in the case of the referendum on the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA). Even though part of middle and working classes felt represented by the neoliberal agenda as a way of fighting against a parasitic state, the government found itself pressured by the demands of these sectors to avoid a supposed neoliberal modernisation that would lead to the loss of social rights (Saes 2001). Internally, the political-economic normalisation in the context of global neoliberal pressures appeared to be inevitable, seeking to restrain social forces contrary to austerity practices (Silva 2008). The role of the press during this period was also important and ended up reinforcing the consolidation of a Capital Republic through the intense dissemination of FHC's presidential diplomacy actions in the search for overcoming the international insertion paradigm crisis from the previous period (Nascimento 2005; Saes 2001).

At the UN General Assembly in 1998, the Brazilian discourse resorted to this initiative to articulate its democratic image in tune with the global imaginary and regional duality based on the *Normal State* paradigm (Cervo 2008), asserting that 'since the economic stability achieved since 1994, Brazil has shown renewed dynamism, with the strengthening of our internal market and the prospects of development with social justice' (Lampreia 2012c: 773, translated by us). In this sense, it became a duty to overcome the image of an economically flawed state, in which cycles of economic growth are short and followed by painful contractions and long bouts of inflation (Lampreia 2012d:786). From the confidence in the benefits of globalisation for emerging economies, a path marked by liberalisation, privatisation, and stabilisation was rationalised as another element that would guarantee the country a new projection in the international society (Lampreia, 2012a; Lampreia, 2012b). Brazil set itself the goal of ensuring a higher degree of economic openness, which would accelerate its integration into the world economy based on the belief that it was 'creating more favourable conditions for increased participation in international trade, technology transfer and productive capital flows' (Lampreia 2012a: 718, translated by us). These were positively interpreted as consistent economic policies that allowed countries in the region, as well as Brazil, 'to come out of the eternal dilemmas we were struggling with and led us to overcome long bouts of inflation that imposed so much uncertainty and so much injustice on our citizens' (Lampreia 2012d: 785, translated by us).

Economic reforms and the efforts to consolidate monetary stability became central in the strategy for the Brazilian political actors assimilate the liberal-democratic imaginary during the 1990s. During this period, neoliberalism was seen by a series of developing countries as a viable solution to the economic problems they faced. Thus, it was assimilated through institutions and U.S. influence, implying a series of Brazilian

commercial policy reforms translated into foreign policy practices exemplified by Brazil's active participation in global and regional liberalisation rounds (Castelan, 1994). The Real Plan ensured FHC's electoral success in the first round of the 1994 elections and served as an articulating principle for the centre and right-wing parties alliance that politically supported the reconstruction of the Brazilian state from a perspective that anchored the local political imaginary to the prevailing global neoliberal policies (Sallum Jr. 2003). This ideational construction was based on discursive practices of rationalisation on liberalisation and on privatisation as the best strategic paths to overcome the Brazilian state crisis in the local social imaginary, seeking to anchor it in the international society legitimacy standards.

One of the main legacies of the FHC period was the consolidation of a set of practices – the so-called macroeconomic tripod – that was established in the second term and would guide the general lines of the management of the Brazilian economy from then on. However, economic policy was not a uniform strategy, although it always took the neoliberal prescription as its horizon (Sallum Jr 1999: 31). Despite the good results produced by the Real Plan, its consolidation would encounter important obstacles, especially due to a set of divergences around economic policy throughout FHC's two terms (Werneck 2014: 335).

Even in a context of crisis, belief in democracy and the benefits of Brazilian modernisation continued to be highlighted as fundamental for the legitimisation of the country as a member of the international society (Lampreia 2012d: 770). The discrepancy between the greater integration of economies and the lack of mechanisms of global governance that would make the global financial system more predictable and stable was criticised. In this context, confidence in the relationship between authority and state based on the free market emerges as the country argues that inaction and the lack of such mechanisms could legitimise the return of closed economy models and protectionist practices (Lampreia 2012c: 768). Thus, although not shaken, the belief in the free market was accompanied by a critique of the high degree of volatility of capital movements, which makes cooperation between countries imperative to minimise the costs of financial and commercial interdependence (Lampreia 2012c: 770).

The operationalisation of the interaction between the political and the economic from the free-market had its main expression in the privatisation efforts during FHC's first term. In this sense, the approval of changes in the chapter of Economic Order of the Constitution, in 1995, paved the way for the end of state monopoly in sectors previously widely nationalised (Lampreia 2012c: 340-341). Such policies were positively portrayed in Brazilian external discourse, rationalised and depicted as efforts to build a modern, economically dynamic, and healthy country (Lampreia 2012d: 786). By anchoring stabilisation on more solid bases, Brazil discursively considered itself mature enough to finally embark on a path of modernisation, through broad reforms in fiscal, tax, and social security areas, that would allow it to be in tune with the impulses changing the international dynamics since the 1990s (Lampreia 2012d: 786).

The legal-institutional structure of the state and civil life based upon the rule of law as a belief during FHC's government also has a strong relationship with the liberal-democratic

ideal, and its economic dimension. The approval of the Fiscal Responsibility Law, in 2000, gave ballast to the elements of the macroeconomic tripod (Werneck 2014: 351). A broad framework of regulation was established through the creation of regulatory agencies in sectors affected by privatisation and more partial openings (Ricupero 2017: 617). In the private sector, the reform process of the Civil Code of 1916, implemented in 2002, with significant advances in civil liberties; and advances in the structuring of the offer of educational services in the context of promoting inclusive citizenship in liberal terms.

Alongside competitiveness, technological capability, and economic strength, the improvement in social indicators also became discursively a duty to be performed by the Brazilian state (Lampreia 2012e: 721). By believing in and defending economic freedom with social justice or development based on social equity, Brazilian discourse points to a certain emphasis on the social dimension of citizenship in the state action plan, reflecting the regional duality established in anchoring global and local social imaginaries about democracy. During the period, it is argued that the country achieved important social progress, especially in the areas of health, education, and poverty reduction. However, the persistence of these challenges prompted the rationalisation of social justice as a duty to be pursued by the Brazilian state within the framework of a market economy and integrated into the world economy (Lampreia 2012e: 774). Brazil, like its neighbours, would seek to strengthen citizenship by promoting 'civil liberties and the search for equality of rights between men and women, majorities and minorities, strong and weak' as pillars of debate and state action (Lampreia 2012e: 721, translated by us). Although the emphasis on this dimension is not in contradiction with the liberal-democratic ideal, the promotion of an expanded conception of citizenship as part of the state meant a significant expansion of a liberal idea of statehood.

In practice, there was a tendency to increase social spending, as a reaction to pressures arising from the democratic environment, associated with demands for more legal and material equality, which influenced the form and pace taken by reformism during the FHC period (Sallum Jr 2003). Although the stabilisation agenda could have implied a subordination of the universalist social agenda of 1988 to the fiscal adjustment, the priority given to social programs in the fight against inequality and poverty was not opposed to the federalist agenda of traditional social areas, such as health and education. During this period, Brazilian social protection system took on 'the format of a complex mosaic, by the coexistence of institutional structures originated from the Federal Constitution of 1988 with the innovations of the programs focused on poverty' (Costa 2009: 701, translated by us). Therefore, there was a social orientation that expanded the liberal ideal of citizenship. More broadly, local discursive practices rationalise a new conception for articulating market and state, in which the latter gave way to greater market forces. However, although the reforms brought the country symbolically closer to the articulation between economics and politics as proposed by the practices of the liberal-democratic ideal, even with the strengthening of the liberal model, the state still maintained a significant weight in the economy (Cimini, Santos and Guedes-Neto 2018).

At the turn of the millennium, belonging to the global witnessed the emergence of a more vehement denunciation of globalisation asymmetric character and the mismatch between the rhetoric of the free market and the maintenance of different protectionist practices by central countries (Lampreia 2012e: 802-803). The defence of international society as a social space that should renew its bond to practices founded on equality, fraternity, and solidarity – values that should return to the centre of countries' action strategies – becomes more explicit. In Brazilian discourses, asymmetry is also considered as part of the errors and failures that comprise the trajectory of each society. However, freedom and social equity would be related because 'the deepening of a genuine sense of solidarity, and its realisation in effective policies, will be, increasingly, a condition for the rooting of freedom and democracy, at the internal level of countries' (Lampreia 2012e: 802, translated by us).

Such criticism would become clearer in the post-September 11 context. Thus, beyond a critique of U.S. unilateralism as a response to the threats of transnational terrorism, it was defended that the emphasis on international security themes could not '(...) silence the cooperation agenda and other issues of global interest' (Cardoso [2001] 2012: 817, translated by us). It was argued that the forces of globalisation should bring about a fairer order. It was not a matter of being against the free market on principle or of refusing the universal validity of values such as freedom and human rights. The belief in market laws associated with the universal pretensions of the democratic regime and human rights remains (Cardoso [2001] 2012: 818). However, in tune with an internal emphasis on social policies, the defence of the free market only becomes sustainable to the extent that its practice incorporates a social dimension, leading to more contesting, although not revolutionary, local imaginary around statehood in the new millennium Brazil. In this sense, even having liberal democracy as the main symbolic reference, the relationship between local and global imaginaries during the FHC government evolved from practices that reveal local and regional specificities of Latin American political development, marked by social contradictions and a peripheral position in international society.

Final considerations

The post-Cold War implied the global diffusion of a liberal ideal as the basis for legitimate membership in the international society of the 1990s. Latin American countries emulated the liberal model, as their political opening processes unfolded and as the need for countries to update themselves internally in the light of international trends was imposed. However, this process presented dualities inherent to the regional context, which are replicated in the Brazilian case, despite its trajectory also having particularities. Political democratisation came first, still in the 1980s; while liberalising reforms occurred gradually in the 1990s in response to galloping inflation and economic disorganisation that ended the high rates of Brazilian economic growth that marked the 1970s. Moreover, they were a response to the need for renewal of the country's projection abroad, as it sought to affirm and expand its commitments to the liberal doxa.

Considering the data collected and analysed in the work, it is possible to understand the Brazilian redemocratisation in the light of the theoretical argument that it relates to the interaction between the idea of membership in the international society and local processes of symbolic and praxiological construction. The intimate relationship between the consolidation of Brazilian redemocratisation in the FHC period and the idea of globally articulated liberal democracy in the 1990s is observed. However, the social element added to the liberal ideal as a particularity of Latin American democracies paved the way for a supposedly critical global model assimilation. Brazil oriented itself from a paradigm that sought to reconcile the changes occurring internally with globally prevailing values (Vigevani, Oliveira and Cintra 2003: 36).

The assimilation of practices of the liberal ideal was accompanied by a critique of the asymmetric character of globalisation and an attention to the social dimension, although this attention was partially conditioned by efforts at economic stabilisation. It was recognised that many have remained excluded from the benefits of the globalised economy, bearing only its costs. The same free circulation of capital that can generate investment is also responsible for the speculative attack on national currencies and for balance of payments crises with negative consequences for the continuity of public policies and for the redemption of social debt. These criticisms were in contrast with the neoliberal repertoire, which, in fact, had reinforced the country's vulnerability to external shocks throughout the first term. Simultaneously, they show concern with the external conditions for development. Thus, there was a process of selective and creative adaptation to the global liberal imaginary that was strengthening regionally and globally. The state did not lose all its mechanisms of economic intervention, but, although moderate, the prevalence of economic liberalisation as a response to the crisis is perceived.

However, in the early 2000s, the bases of the FHC government and its government itself were exhausted. The growing discontent with the liberal reforms, coupled with the weak economic performance of the two terms, was one of the causes that would lead to an inflection in Brazilian politics. The second term of FHC failed to transition from the stabilisation agenda to sustained economic growth (Couto and Abrúcio 2003: 283). The energy crisis, which occurred in 2001, imposed a costly rationing policy on the population and the national economy, whose origins were associated with errors in the regulation model established by privatisations and dubious coordination of intersectoral policies. There were difficulties in inducing sustained growth after the start of the second term in the face of external vulnerability, which was associated with the gradual weakening of the political bases that supported the government (Couto and Abrúcio 2003: 287-288), opening space for the legitimisation of alternative political projects. Reflection on the process of articulation and interrogation of liberal democracy in the immediate post-Cold War era thus studied contributes to shedding light on the 2000s, whether in relation to the Brazilian case, or, still, for reflection on the current crisis of liberal democracy and the role of the U.S. as managers of the contemporary international order.

Notes

- 1 For a discussion on the use of persuasion and force to spread liberal democracy throughout the United States, see Peceny (1999).
- 2 The Latin American scene was not composed only of advances in political participation during the period under analysis. The 1990s tend to be considered a setback for Colombia due to the actions of the drug trade and in Peru as a consequence of the authoritarian regime of Alberto Fujimori.

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A consolidação da democracia liberal no Brasil: O encontro de representações globais, regionais e locais

Resumo: A sociedade internacional globalmente expandida estabeleceu um padrão de Estado como critério central para sua adesão. O fim da Guerra Fria testemunhou uma democracia liberal ascendente, embora contestada, como um regime preferido e imaginado globalmente como tal. Nesse contexto, os processos de re-democratização vivenciados na América Latina em meio a profundas reorientações sistêmicas internacionais implicaram a renegociação de imaginários sociais regionais e locais, como, por exemplo, no caso brasileiro. Neste artigo, procuramos discutir a adaptação seletiva e criativa do Brasil no espaço de sobreposições entre os imaginários sociais globais, regionais e locais sobre o regime de governo desde a década de 1990. Por meio de uma abordagem teórico-empírica baseada na discussão sobre a construção de entendimentos compartilhados entre espaços sociais internacionais e domésticos, optamos por uma fundamentação teórica pragmática com o apoio da Escola Inglesa de Relações Internacionais, da filosofia crítica e da sociologia de Bourdieu para estudar o caso brasileiro. Com foco no governo Fernando Henrique Cardoso, propõe-se a análise qualitativa de documentos do período que problematizam a inserção externa do país a partir da interação com o imaginário social global e regional sobre a democracia liberal, com o apoio de uma revisão bibliográfica fundamentada em fontes secundárias especializadas.

Palavras-chave: Democracia; Brasil; Imaginário social; Sociedade internacional; América Latina

Received on 21 October 2022 and approved for publication on 2 May 2024.



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