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IRRATIONALITY AS A PROJECT AND THE DESTRUCTION OF THE CONSTITUTIONAL STATE: MACHADO DE ASSIS AND HIS BRAZILIAN METAPHOR FOR THE POST-DEMOCRATIC STATE

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ABSTRACT: This paper is a study of Machado de Assis's literature, in order to understand the crisis of modernity and the development of the Brazilian State towards a critical point of its democratic institutions. Based on the novella *O Alienista* (translated to English as *The Alienist* or *The Psychiatrist*), the purpose is to analyze how the political discourse accentuates the polarization between “friends and enemies”, bringing consequences to the Brazilian Constitutional State. The central concern is to identify possible situations that put democracy at risk. The methodology used is phenomenological-hermeneutic, with methods of historic and monographic procedures, and a research technique with indirect documentation. The conclusion is that Brazil currently lives a context of post-democracy.

KEYWORDS: crisis; democracy; Constitutional State; Machado de Assis; modernity.

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“Madness, the object of my studies, was until now an island lost in the ocean of reason; I begin to suspect that it is actually a continent”

(Machado de Assis, *O Alienista...*)

1 INTRODUCTION

In 1882, the book *Papéis Avulsos* (translates to “*Single Papers*”) was published, including the narrative named *O Alienista* (translated to English as *The Alienist* or *The Psychiatrist*), by one of the most important authors of Brazilian Literature, Machado de Assis. The famous narrative introduces the leading character Simão Bacamarte, whose story has inspired several studies and debates in the most diverse knowledge areas, due to the depth of the discussions this narrative brings. Therefore, it is necessary to reinforce the geniality and sensibility of the author, especially considering that his work inspires crucial discussions to present days as strongly as it did in the nineteenth century.

For this paper, the fate of Simão Bacamarte is the basis for understanding the crisis of modernity and the process that has led the Brazilian State toward a critical point regarding its democratic institutions. So, the purpose is to analyze *O Alienista* to answer the following question: to what extent does the political speech that accentuates the polarization between “friends and enemies” affect the Brazilian Constitutional State? It is clear that there is a social crisis, if not visible, certainly latent, whose effects can be perceived in the dynamics of the Brazilian politics. The central concern of this approach dwells in the possibility of the Brazilian democracy itself being at risk.

In order to accomplish the purpose and deliver the investigation, this research was conducted under a methodology with phenomenological-hermeneutic approach, taking the research object based on its way of “being in the world” – that is, without seeking for a supposed quiddity –, in which it is inserted according to the observer’s parameters. For the research’s procedures, the historical and monographic methods were used. The former is justified by the need to recall elements from the past in order to essentially understand the

present, and the latter, because the analysis is inserted in a very specific scope, with no pretention of reaching a wider scope. As for the research techniques, indirect documentation is hereby used, via bibliographic research. Finally, the option to interdisciplinary developing the study with Literature is due to the fact that this paper uses the story *O Alienista*, by Machado de Assis, in order to counter-argument the conservative bias of the Law with the sensibility of Literature³.

The structure of this paper comprises two sections. Initially, the foundations of modern rationality and the succession of developments that allow for the criticism of its assumptions are presented, revealing the irrationality of modernity itself. In the second part of the study, the intention is to evaluate the effects of these paradigm disturbances for the Constitutional State model and for the Brazilian democracy.

2 MODERNITY AND ITS CRISES BETWEEN REASON AND INSANITY

Doctor Simão Bacamarte fully delves into the study and the practice of medicine, with emphasis on the psychic aspect of humankind. He then discovers that madness was much more common than he had previously supposed, as he ends up confining all the inhabitants of the city as inmates at Casa Verde, his lunatic asylum. He even confines his own wife, and, in the end, comes to the conclusion that all the other people were sane except for himself, who should stay there.

He realizes that he possessed mental and moral balance, with no addictions or vices, and the very difficulty of understanding his superiority

³ On that, the methodological option for the research is supported by the observation that “in contrast to the traditional dogmatic, scientific and conventionalist bias of Law, as well as its normative and repressive character, literature – which is characterized by its creative and playful aspect, for the flexibility and constant renewal of language, for the effects of humanization and empathy that it is capable of producing, due to its polyphonic nature, its openness to plurisignification and to multiple interpretation possibilities – constitutes an important resource both to improve reading skills and to develop the comprehension and interpretation skills for the reading of texts, which is essential to the legal practice, as well as to promote the expansion of the jurists’ comprehension horizon and, therefore, their reflection on legal and social phenomena. Due to that, Law and Literature scholars have defended the idea that the link between the two areas allow the improvement of the legal and civic education – the main starting point of the Law and Literature movement – by favoring, through literary works, a deeper, more complex and enlightening view of human reality, the world and social relations” (Karam, 2017, p. 828-829, translated).

was proof of his best virtue, modesty, as he explained to the council gathered to check his mental health. He decides that he was abnormal, as the only valuable person, so he confines himself alone into Casa Verde.

This iconic character by Machado de Assis, *The Alienist / O Alienista* (1882), whose name is the title of the story (even though some specialists dispute that), makes it possible to bring to literature the labyrinthic and difficult challenge of the boundaries between reason and insanity. This has been, to a certain extent, the focus of an intense debate on the modernity crisis as a defining paradigm of the Modern State and its legal-political institutions⁴.

In order to understand modernity without getting lost (since, obviously, in these boundaries, it cannot be exhausted), one key element for its characterization and definition is hereby taken as reference: reason. Reason has been used as a standard for every political and social aspect, forging the structures and behaviors necessary for progress, which was the “time of modernity”, finding in the individual a form of host, able to dominate nature and take control of the present and the future under their command.

This has an evident impact on modern civilization: it concerns science and technology, calculation and precision, which reflect the expansion of technical and scientific domains to increasingly diverse sectors of life and society. Still, the most important thing to emphasize is that reason is based on itself and on a concept of truth that is not apprehended in other terms, such as the economic or political ones. Reason is, therefore, a non-social foundation of social life, unlike religion or customs, typically defined in social terms (Touraine, 2007, p. 86-87).

The modern subject, therefore, is destined to dominate the world, to give order to the succession of events. Nature does not condition them, as

⁴ “Legal institutions and norms do not exist excluded from the narratives that define them and give them meaning. The law is inscribed in the context of discourses that produce meanings and, therefore, cannot be understood only as a prescription to be obeyed, but constitutes a *habitus*, the ground of life in which men are inserted. Thus, History, Literature and Law are intertwined in a normative dimension shaped by material reality and the imaginary, which allows the expansion of the legal rationale” (Luz Segundo, 2017, p. 171).

it is the human being who dominates it, in the construction of an “artificial world” that is made possible by the appropriation of techniques. Theory, thus, “became the apology of what exists as a product of the very ‘scientific representation’ that institutes the order of relations. Theory became the self-legitimation of technique according to the criterion of result effectiveness” (Barcellona, 1992, p. 16, translated).

It just so happens, however, that these newly acquired knowledges and abilities compose the same foundations of a growing destructive capacity of humankind, which has been seen for many years as “the cost of progress”. The belief in the myth of progressively improving “tends to focus, above all, on the growth of productive capacity and not so much on the effects of this productive growth onto people in the real, existing social system” (Capella, 1993, p. 22, translated).

Despite having been hidden for so long, this other side does exist. So much so that modernity can be described as a two-sided phenomenon, like Janus, according to Bauman’s definition⁵. The development of modern social institutions and their worldwide expansion provided opportunities for a safe and rewarding existence for human beings that had never been achieved by any kind of pre-modern system. However, the mask that hid its dark side was pulled off by the events of the past centuries (Giddens, 1990, p. 7).

Hence the horror that closely manifest in the collective memory of the Holocaust. It is the corrosive suspicion that this tragic episode “may have been more than an aberration, more than a deviation from the

⁵ To develop this argument, the author says that a few years ago, a journalist from *Le Monde* interviewed some victims captured in the Holocaust. “One of the most interesting things he discovered was an unusually high incidence of divorces among couples who went through the agony of the hostage experience together. Intrigued, he probed the divorcees to discover the reasons for their decision. Most respondents told him that they had never thought about divorce before the hostage. During the terrifying episode, however, they ‘opened their eyes’ and ‘saw their partner in a new light’. Habitually good husbands ‘turned out to be’ selfish creatures, concerned exclusively with their own stomachs; dynamic men of business exhibited disgusting cowardice, ‘experienced men’ and illustrated ones collapsed and did little more than regret their impending doom. The journalist wondered which of the two incarnations these forms of Janus [ancient double-faced Roman god] seemed capable of were the real ones and what were the masked ones. He concluded that the question was poorly worded. None was ‘truer’ than the others. But the other was always present, although usually invisible. The most fascinating aspect of this discovery, however, is that had it not been for the horrible hostage, the ‘other face’ would probably have remained hidden” (Bauman, 1998, p. 24-25, translated).

otherwise straight path of progress, more than a cancerous tumor in the otherwise healthy body of civilized society”. In the end, the suspicion is that “the Holocaust was not an antithesis of modern civilization and all that it represents” – or what it is thought to represent, but that it may simply have revealed the other side, a reverse of the same modern society whose most familiar face is visible. It turns out that these two faces, as with Janus, are comfortably and perfectly attached to the same body. The most terrifying thing is that there is a possibility that “the two sides can no longer exist without each other, like the back and the reverse side of a coin” (Bauman, 1998, p. 26, translated).

Morin has a similar position, as he concludes that barbarism is an aspect of great civilizations that can never be suppressed, as “[...] it is not only an element that comes together with a civilization, it is one of its parts. Civilization produces barbarism, and, above all, it produces conquest and domination” (2009, p. 16-17, translated).

Thus, progress, which is the motto of modernity, the driving force of the social organism, whether from an institutional or a personal point of view, shows weakness, precisely on the moral plane, as it dooms public life to barbarism and allows humankind the capacity for instantaneous and gradual genocide, from which it can be inferred that “progress is fundamentally an omnidirectional material capacity: also in the direction of barbarism and extermination” (Capella, 1993, p. 23, translated).

This progress is notably planned, meticulously calculated, as it is the cause and the consequence of reason, the “dogma” of modernity – a cult of the Enlightenment, from the 18th century, especially in Europe, when extolling the power of reason and placing their hopes for the progress of humankind.

As a final result, the Enlightenment rationale, dissenting from an extreme religious context, defends an unpleasant reason that reshapes the ideas of providence, without, however, removing them. Then, “one type of certainty (divine law) was replaced by another (the certainty of our senses, of empirical observation), and divine providence was replaced by providential progress” (Giddens, 1990, p. 48, translated).

Hence, the typically modern conceptions of progress and reason are consolidated as inseparable elements, as links in the same solid chain that separates (or attempts to separate) the past from the present. However, on the ethical plane, this correlation does not have the same effects as in other domains, such as the scientific one (with technological advances, the emergence of critical thinking), the economic one (navigation, capitalism) and the political one (secular state, rationalization of power).

That is because within the moral sphere dwells an instrumental rationality that converts the effectiveness of the results into an almost religious dogma, in such a way that the primacy of effectiveness, in the name of technical reason, ends up emptying itself concreteness (Julios-Campuzano, 2000, p. 139-140, translated).

As for the State and the Law, this priority becoming an almost absolute postulate produces certain effects of action and (con)formation until today. At this point, the Holocaust is also exemplary, as it is the event that took reason and effectiveness to the ultimate consequences.

This must be understood with caution, – as Bauman does – because the Holocaust itself was not determined by the modern bureaucracy or the culture of instrumental rationality that it summarizes, nor will this set of factors always result in genocide or other catastrophic phenomena. However, the key issue is that the precepts of instrumental rationality are simply incapable of hindering such phenomena, as there is nothing in these rules that makes the methods of “social planning” used in the Holocaust inappropriate, or which classifies as irrational the actions that led to those results. This context and everything that gives it meaning allows society to be taken as an object of administration, as that “nature” to be “controlled”, “dominated” and “improved” by the human being. This was precisely the atmosphere in which the idea of the Holocaust could be conceived, developed and carried out. It was the whole idea of instrumental rationality and its modern, bureaucratic form of

institutionalization that made the Holocaust's "solutions" not only seem possible, but eminently "reasonable"⁶.

Tragically and ironically, as with Simão Bacamarte, whose reason led to madness (like the face of Janus), reason was the main dogma of modernity, and due to its (lack of) success, by becoming excessive, it brought crisis. With this observation, there is not much more than recalling the previous idea, that the Holocaust can be seen as the climax of modern reason.

In the case of Simão Bacamarte, he justified his sanity with the perfect balance of moral and mental capabilities. Modernity justified reason because it hid its own crisis. So we must bear in mind that "a crisis is [...] a crisis of meaning and consequently of the value of all things. It is the whole meaning of the past world, especially in its modern form, that is being called into question." It is what modernity goes through, a whole new debate about its significance and contribution to anthropogenesis. Currently, we are experiencing a cultural crisis that is a crisis against reason, against illustration, against modernity, to sum it all up in one word. "The criticism of instrumental reason developed by modernity leads to a criticism of modernity as such, and, ultimately, a criticism of reason itself, which is seen as an instrument of repression" (Oliveira, 2001, p. 7, translated).

In Habermas's description, from "Hegel and Marx to Nietzsche and Heidegger, from Bataille and Lacan to Foucault and Derrida", modernity has been accused, based on subjective reason, of "denouncing and

⁶ The author reinforces his argument stating that the decision for the extermination of Jews "was not conceived as the singular vision of a hallucinated monster", but from purely rational calculations. Once the objective was established, Germany free of Jews, emigration was the first attempt at a practical solution to achieve Hitler's goal. With the expansion of German domination, this alternative was winding down. It was then considered to send the Jews to Madagascar, then a colony of France, at that time defeated, but the enormous distance, the volume of space that would be needed on ships and the British naval presence on the high seas motivated the archiving of the project, which had been architected for at least a year. Of course, many other factors were involved in this decision, the result of which is known to all: the goal of getting rid of the Jews ended up finding physical extermination as the most effective means of accomplishment. Having defined this, the rest was reduced to state bureaucracy, planning, budgets and projection of the most appropriate technology and equipment. (Bauman, 1998, p. 35-37, translated).

undermining all open forms of repression and exploitation, humiliation and alienation, [only] in order to implant in their place the undisputed domination of rationality itself”. Rising itself to be absolute, modern reason simply replaces the instruments of repression and control, with the aggravating factor of creating, in the form of overlapping domination, a frightening (self) immunity (1989, p. 74-75, translated).

But how has the whole Occident let itself be overwhelmingly seduced by such an abstract promise? Wallerstein points out that “[...] the proclamation of the virtues of rationality was an expression of its optimism and served to fuel everyone else’s optimism.” Grounded in the faith in the possibility of social improvement – it should be said, unattached to the individual’s moral aspect, for which a high price was paid –, modernity found itself hindered by its stubbornly temporal trait: whatever was promised could not take long times to come true – and until today it has not come true. Its pursuit has been remarkably materialistic, the pre-announced improvement was basically economic; even those ideas enshrined in the concept of freedom were ultimately translated into material benefits (2002, p. 173-175, translated).

Besides that, despite the centrality of individuals in the modern world, an accentuated collectivist aspect has substituted it, since it has “[...] produced the first genuinely collectivist geo-culture in history, in the sense that it produced the first genuinely concrete egalitarian social vision.” These were just promises that never came true, but the material comforts were not supposed to be for a few, they should be for everyone and, therefore, equal – “all previous philosophies assumed the inevitability of hierarchies and, therefore, rejected secular collectivism.” Both ideologies, the materialistic one and the collectivist one, when inspected together, help decipher some of the dilemmas that afflict the current historical system – the capitalist world and economy – and explain some of the damage towards the concept of rationality nowadays. The capitalism of modernity also contains the great contradiction of its promises (of a materialistic and collectivist nature), since they are absolutely incompatible with the incessant accumulation of capital, the

focus point of that system: “capitalism represents the material reward for some, but for this to happen, there can never be a material reward for everyone” (Wallerstein, 2002, p. 173-175, translated).

The effects of this process of profound changes are not limited to capitalism, they are visible in all aspects of life. The most likely future is a threat to the socially constructed reality in modernity. “As a consequence of the decline of traditional ideologies, of the value systems related to them and of the model of knowing and participating in the world [...]”, people found themselves downgraded in the meaning of their lives. It is “the warning signal against a ‘market euphoria’ that trembles the world [...]: the people of stray bonds, magnetized by the significant emptiness of their bodies without qualities, condemned to their own self-destructive impulses.” We have been experiencing the previously foreseen imminence of a global catastrophe of existence, the catastrophe of civilization forms, environmental imbalances that endanger the continuity of life. There seems to be no support, as individual and collective relationships progressively deteriorate amid behaviors solely motivated by vanity, amplifying the emptiness of a culture that is watching solidarity, along with various animal and plant species, disappear (Warat, 2004, p. 371-372).

It does not take that much effort to understand the abyss between the promises of modern reason and what it has really managed to achieve. In fact, it is not just about failure, but also about an excess of actions that triggered unimaginable events and left so devastating consequences that even irrationality itself would not have developed.

In present times, what is left of reason? We have been moving towards inequality as the norm in the 21st century, similarly to what was happening in the late 19th century and on the eve of the First World War – the wars of the 20th century served only as a blank slate by abruptly reducing the profit of capital, creating the illusion of a structural overcoming of this fundamental contradiction of capitalism. Actually, if the rate of production growth and income is exceeded by the rate of profit, “as it happened in the 19th century and it seems likely to happen again in the 21st century, capitalism automatically produces unsustainable

inequalities [...]” (Piketty, 2014, p. 9; p. 556, translated). In a world with the capacity to produce enough food for everyone, about 821 million people go hungry while food becomes the object of speculation or waste ([UN] ONU, 2018).

Perhaps such concrete and current examples were not necessary to question modern (un)reason. It would be enough to read Adorno acknowledging that “the degeneration has already occurred. To expect it for the future, after Auschwitz and Hiroshima had happened, is part of the poor consolation that it is still possible to expect something worse” (1995, p. 214, translated).

Due to this state of crisis, thus, the criticism on modernity gets even stronger. Whether for those who consider modernity as an unfinished project that can still be saved, or for those who believe that the current time is a transition, a farewell to modernity, or even for those who envision its bankruptcy and view the contemporary context as its overcoming, all these conceptions, from criticism to the extremes of a new era, pass through the dilemmatic idea of postmodernity.

The emphasis of the following topic, however, concerns a specific modern-state model and one of its main achievements, the Constitutional State and democracy, respectively. As the elements studied indicate, however, this model does not go unharmed to the causes and symptoms of this crisis.

3 REASON AND INSANITY IN ITAGUAÍ: THE BRAZILIAN METAPHOR FOR THE POST-DEMOCRATIC STATE

Considering what the theoretical construction developed so far indicates, “crisis” seems to be the motto in the debates and efforts to describe the present context and institutions. Having a crisis that is inserted in the core of modernity, in fact, it is no surprise that there is also a shock felt in the political-legal organization structures, forged in that same space-time paradigm.

However, there is something uncomfortable in this continuity with of the various recent crises (economic, state, representative, civilizing, environmental, ideological, and an almost endless list of “crises”).

According to Casara, the term “crisis” designated, in medicine, the decisive moment for the patient, when the disease was at such a point that there were only two choices left, cure or death. Thus, “the crisis presents itself as a difficult situation or moment that could modify, extinguish or even regenerate a historical, physical, spiritual or political process”. It is, therefore, an exceptionality – a sine qua non for the description of this process – which is decisive for the continuity or not of whatever is “in crisis” (2018, p. 9-10, translated).

This same confusion between rule and exceptionality is well portrayed by Machado de Assis with Simão Bacamarte’s perceptions of sanity and madness. The character is so deeply involved with the desire to identify and cure madness that, at a given moment, his obsession, even if it has a scientific purpose, makes madness, which was once the exception (“... until now, a lost island in the ocean of reason...”), come to be seen as a rule (“... I begin to suspect that it is actually a continent...”). And then, “the horror has become stronger. It was not known who was healthy or who was crazy” (Assis, 1994, p.15, translated). In fact, all of it was craziness.

If the (new) rule is the exception, what is consolidated, in fact, is a rupture – although it might not be immediately visible. As it happened in Itaguaí, as it happens today in relation to the idea of crisis, “if the ‘crisis’ is permanent, if this ‘crisis’ cannot pass, it is no crisis anymore, but the new reality [...]” As the remembrance and attachment to elements of the previous reality end up blurring the perception of the new real, a reassuring illusion is created, that everything continues as it always had been, while, concretely, the crisis “stopped portraying a moment of uncertainty, provisional, emergency or extraordinary”, becoming “used to hide a political option for maneuvers and actions justified by the false urgency or a falsely extraordinary aspect of the moment” (Casara, 2018, p. 13, translated).

In the context of the Constitutional State, this conformation gives meaning to what has been called “post-democracy”⁷. This term is usually

⁷ In a similar context, another term that has generated interesting debates and reflections is “post-truth”. To deepen the discussion, see Cárcova (2018).

credited to the sociological and political scientist Colin Crouch, who places it somewhere beyond the dichotomy “democracy vs. non-democracy”, that is, a new stage that, even though it is led by political elites who have learned to manipulate and guide people’s needs, does not exactly configure a situation of non-democracy (2005, p. 27-28).

Other important authors have also advised of ongoing changes and the risks to democracy. Ferrajoli, for example, criticizes a process of “unconstitutionalization of the political system”, and even though he writes based on the Italian reality, his analysis also corresponds to what has been experienced in other countries, such as Brazil. The process described by the Italian jurist comprises, among other aspects, a passive agreement to a wide range of violations of the text and the spirit of the Constitution. This “deconstruction” process is not restricted to the political system, but also has repercussions on the social and cultural spheres, as it eliminates constitutional values from citizens’ consciousness (through indifference, disbelief or due to the change in the concept of democracy in the collective imagination). Amidst all this, there is a serious and determining fact: a democracy can break even without explicit blows, as long as its basic principles are violated and challenged without generating revolt or opposition (Ferrajoli, 2011).

In *How Democracies Die*, actually, Levitsky and Ziblatt detail numerous examples to prove that contemporary democracies are not ousted by violent ruptures or unexpected breaks, but are rusted from within, in a slow process of weakening democratic institutions and the rise of authoritarianism that often begins at the polls (2018, p. 16-19).

In short, it can be said that in this post-democratic stage “there is the full (formal) functioning of democratic institutions (elections, freedom of expression, etc.), but in which the democratic dynamics progressively disappear”. According to Casara’s observation, however, the concept of post-democracy originally refers to the countries of the global North, which have achieved a model of Social Welfare State and whose reality in terms fundamental rights is very different from the countries of the global

South, where this rupture of the Democratic State ends up being even more drastic (2018, p. 23-24, translated).

Based on the narrative of *O Alienista*⁸, the same trail of gradual deterioration of organic structures can be observed: the euphoria with which *Casa Verde* was installed, the satisfaction with the first treated and healed patients, the first questions to the hospitalization practices – which were not spoken out, since there was a technical and scientific justification for all of them. It all stands until the moment chaos appears, with the loss of control over the structure itself, the inability to react in relation to the new strategy of power and domination.

And there is another element in which life imitates the art of Machado de Assis, being decisive both for the understanding of the literary work and for the concept of the Post-Democratic State: polarization, the dichotomous view of things; in Itaguaí, there are the crazy and they sane⁹; in the political conjuncture of current governments, there is the friend vs. enemy situation¹⁰.

This Division motivated by political reasons has increased in Brazil over the last few years, especially after the remarkable events of “June 2013” – not really a product of them. Slowly, mainly through mediatic discourses of “fighting corruption”, increased by conservative digital groups externally financed, every discussion has become encapsulated by a certain worldview that could only conceive two possibilities: pro or against the government, which destroyed the critical potentialities of “June 2013” (Mendes, 2018). In fact, the circumscription became even

⁸ Particularly necessary, at this point, recalling how “[...] literature can contribute to the strengthening of pluralism, directly contributing to the concretization of democracy. Good literature always leads us to understand the world through the broad spectrum arising from its multiple and diverse characters and plots” (Ribeiro, 2019, p. 481, translated).

⁹ “To understand the human spirit is a vast shell, my aim, Mr. Soares, is to see if I can extract the pearl, which is the reason; in other words, let us definitively demarcate the limits of reason and madness. Reason is the perfect balance of all faculties; out of it, there is insanity, insanity and just insanity” (Assis, 1994, p. 10, translated)

¹⁰ In this sense, reference is made to Carl Schmitt’s search for the definition of the concept of politician, whose elementary criterion lies precisely in the differentiation between friend and enemy. According to the author, “the differentiation between friend and enemy has the purpose of characterizing the extreme degree of intensity of a union or separation, of an association or disfellowshipping, which can exist in theory and in practice, without the need of all those moral, aesthetic, economic or other differences” (2008, p. 27-28, translated).

more alienatingly polarized in the 2018 elections, which allowed the only variation of being against or for a specific candidate, well below any political platforms that, in general, had little divergence regarding the neoliberal agenda of the government.

Closely prior to the second round of the Brazilian elections, the then presidential candidate Jair Bolsonaro caused controversy and agitation when he said, referring to his political opponents: *“Let’s wipe the red bandits of Brazil off the map”*. In addition, *“This group, if they want to stay here, they will have to put themselves under the law of all of us. Either go away or go to jail”*. To close that speech, Bolsonaro describes himself and his supporters as *“the real Brazil”* (Mendonça; Gortázar, 2018, translated). These excerpts are part of a speech reproduced by countless media channels, with strong repercussion at the time and received by supporters with enthusiasm and euphoria, and by the opposition, as expected, with rejection and concern.

This speech is symptomatic and representative of the polarization that occurred in families, groups of friends and colleagues, but also among complete strangers who were able to start *“hating each other”*, especially, mediated by the main *“battlefield”* of this whole dispute: the internet and social networks (Galego, 2018) (and this warfare spirit generated conflicts in the physical world, even causing deaths¹¹).

In another speech, also during the presidential campaign period, Bolsonaro was speaking on a sound car when he took the tripod from a camera to simulate a rifle while declaring to an enthusiastic crowd that applauded him: *“Let’s get shoot all those labor-party people out of Acre, huh? As they like Venezuela so much, these bastards should move there. Except there isn’t even mortadella to eat there, huh, guys. They’ll have to eat grass”* (Ribeiro, 2018, translated).

¹¹ One of these situations, taken as an example for the great commotion and repercussion generated, was the murder of the Capoeira Master known as Moa do Katendê, who was killed after stating to oppose the then presidential candidate Jair Bolsonaro (G1, 2018).

Evidently, these events are only examples, as the causes and consequences of this polarizing culture are far deeper and more complex, and cannot be reduced to a single political person or a single set of controversial declarations. That is, the election of a person with this profile, who represents such a reckless worldview, is not due to chance or isolated factors, but reveals structural dysfunctions of Brazilian society as a whole, which, for some reason (and this is an extremely delicate and relevant point), corroborated a project and an ideology that go far beyond the person of Bolsonaro.

Actually, there have been those who classified these episodes and statements as part of a political strategy that, once successful and guaranteeing Bolsonaro's election, would be mitigated in favor of a government that supposedly would have no interest in keeping an opposition between "friends and enemies" throughout the country. However, the behavior of the President of the Republic has actually proven to contribute to the consolidation of a society that identifies itself from the dividing line between "us vs. the others", "supporters vs. opponents", or "friends vs. enemies"¹².

Once this "us vs. them" opposition is fully developed, the next step is to undermine the enemy¹³. And one of the resources applied for this purpose in Brazilian politics is precisely the association with mental illness, with the irrationality of the other who refuses or who is unable to see clearly. It is a strategy that had previously been announced by the new conservative right, because, "faced with the dangers represented by the reduction of social exclusion and inequality, it would be necessary to build

¹² On his Twitter account, the President even mocked the criticism received for his political nominations in the following terms: "I apologize to the majority of the press for not being able to put enemies to work in my government!!" (Revista Forum, 2019, translated).

¹³ Again, it is relevant to read Carl Schmitt's: "The political enemy does not have to be morally bad, nor does he need to be aesthetically ugly; he does not have to show himself as an economic competitor and perhaps it may even seem advantageous to do business with him. He is precisely the other, the unknown and, for this essence, it is enough that he is, in a particularly intense sense, something existentially different and unknown, so that, in the extreme case, conflicts with him are possible, which cannot be decided neither through a general normalization undertaken in advance, nor through the judgment of a third party who is 'not involved' and, therefore, 'impartial'. [...] In psychological reality, the enemy is easily treated as bad and ugly, because all differentiation, most often, naturally, with politics as the strongest and most intense differentiation and grouping, is based on other valuable differentiations." (2008, p. 28-29, translated).

a reaction represented by discursive exclusion and a new rhetoric of difference”. Hence, it gets impossible and useless to argue with the left or the right, because everyone who thinks differently is portrayed as sick, as someone who needs to be corrected for their deviant and morally unworthy posture; that is, the “enemy” has been reduced to an idea of irrationality (Dunker, 2017, p. 279).

See that all this “irrationality” – like all the “madness” of Itaguaí – is not intrinsic to individuals, nor has it been “unveiled” in recent years, but it is socially produced¹⁴ to answer the political needs of segregation. Well, Simão Bacamarte is responsible for producing this sense of madness, creating crazy people where there had never been crazy people, because he himself dictates the norms to include or exclude people from this label in the “continent of madness” (Gomes, 1994, p. 151, translated). Sanity and insanity are determined based on their metrics, which no one can dispute and, thus, this situation allows the stabilization of a tyrant dressed with scientific legitimacy.

Recently, the psychoanalyst and professor of the Department of Clinical Psychology at the Institute of Psychology of the University of São Paulo, Christian Dunker, in an interview with journalist Leonardo Sakamoto, analyzed a sequence of unusual speeches by the President of the Republic, who promised “to get rid of the poop in Brazil” – referring to the communists (during that week, it is worth contextualizing, the President had resorted to several eschatological allusions). Dunker’s conclusions allow to elucidate exactly the connections intended by this paper when linking the Constitutional State to *O Alienista*, by Machado de Assis.

¹⁴ To reinforce this statement, Dino del Pino’s conclusions are useful: “Are people from Itaguaí afraid of madness itself? This is not what I see, because the idea of madness that drawn in the story is imprecise, fluid and without a persuasive foundation, not even rational, because it oscillates between scientifically inconsistent poles: sometimes it is confused with the imbalance of mental faculties, other times with the excessive balance, and then with absolute perfection. Therefore, the focus of tension, far from being mad, is fear. Fear and anguish are the factors that act as effective agents of social control in Itaguaí: fear of seclusion, fear of social segregation, fear of arbitrary imprisonment” (2015, p. 170, translated).

When asked about the type of speech used by the President, Dunker made a series of interesting observations. However, regarding the purposes of the present investigation, the most interesting idea is what the psychoanalyst describes as “a cissiparity process”, in which “you start finding out who your true allies are until you discover that your true allies can be reduced to he and his children or he and himself”. In the history of political philosophy, Dunker recalls that this process accounts for the development of lonely tyrants. Leaders like this end up depriving themselves of good advisers and “retreat to a paranoid logic – in which the enemies extend more and more and the friends have to show more and more loyalty” (Sakamoto, 2019, translated).

It is clear that both the “paranoia” of the enemy and of madness lead to a similar outcome. The consequences, however, are diverse. The seriousness of the speech about the enemy lies in the escalation of hatred and violence that it indorses. For Dunker, the voluntary executioners of the Nazi regime did not just appear overnight, affected by a collective and instantaneous psychopathy. These people, in general, were “banal state employees”¹⁵ in search of conformity, adequacy and obedience, or, in other words, “people who felt irrelevant, but who could replace that irrelevance with a great collective project if they obeyed the correct speech” (2017, p. 281, translated).

This is one of the greatest dangers of an exclusive and violent discourse: people who are mobilized by this type of expression end up being led to “guess the master’s will by producing an escalation of institutionalized violence”. So, the universal is suspended by the division between categories like “good and bad”, “crazy and normal” (Dunker, 2017, p. 281).

In the current context of the Brazilian State, in fact, it is difficult to find any kind of debate without the violent tone of the disagreement

¹⁵ “In other words, the voluntary executioners were not really *indecent* people, but excessively oriented towards what they thought *decency* was at the moment. Moving from clinical categories and psychological or psychiatric disciplines to moral categories such as *decency* and *indecent* is not an accident. This goes back to an old and erroneous belief that mental disorders imply cognitive downgrade (expressions like *idiot* and *imbecile* were born in psychiatric alienism) or deviations of character that agree on dubious morals. Nothing more incorrect and nothing more prejudiced.” (Dunker, 2017, p. 281, translated)

between ideological biases that are not even properly understood by most of its supporters and opponents. It became almost impossible to determine a common agenda, a dialogue in favor of a plural construction effectively aiming at collective interests. There are only those who live in *Casa Verde* and outside of *Casa Verde* and the world is reduced to this possibility. And so it is no longer known who is crazy and who is not, because whoever is locked up feels as or more liberated than those who are outside. In the end, therefore, only *Casa Verde* itself really remains.

“By silencing the other, making them irrational, crazy and despicable, we ‘normalize’ ourselves. Adhering to one of the two sides on which the world has simplified itself, we resign from work and from the uncertainty of having to choose, as mere individuals, endowed with indecisive souls, in the midst of an unknown geography. And so we forget that the universal that constituted us is exactly that division, which gradually makes us capable of madness.”

(Christian Dunker, *Reinvenção da intimidade*)

4 CONCLUSION

This study was based on the story *O Alienista*, by Machado de Assis, in order to answer the following question: how does the political discourse that increases the polarization between “friends and enemies” develop consequences to the Brazilian Constitutional State? It started from the assumption of the existence of a social division in the present national political dynamics and, thus, it sought to identify possible effects and, above all, dangers for the Brazilian democracy.

The first analysis was historical, so that it became possible to visualize the development of this moment, described as a modernity crisis. It was found that the cult of rationality overlooked an obscure face of destruction and barbarism that remained as the legacy of an era with such optimistic promises.

These problems in the foundations of the Modern State, from which comes the model of Constitutional State, have been aggravated by the way politics are conducted in contemporary democracies, with countless examples and studies highlighting new forms of democracy breaches with no need for coups or severe violations. Such new forms end up proving to

be much more dangerous, because their subtlety and silent arrival manage to take over the organic and social structures little by little, without drastic ruptures and, thus, without suffering the rejection or the hard opposition they should.

Even though it is not exactly a Brazilian specificity, the research chose this scope for the investigation and, in order to reach that, some recent episodes were analyzed. They might point out, in Brazilian democracy, symptoms and signs of this type of threat, confirming with concern that enough evidence is already present in the political and social structure to characterize a post-democratic stage in the Brazilian State.

The main characteristic is the polarized discourse that reduces everything to a logic of confrontation between “friends and enemies”. This type of reasoning thwarts cohesion and even dialogue about issues that are necessarily common (for example, protection of the environment, the construction of a free, just and solidary society, in which there is no prejudice or discrimination, among so many other important objectives set by the 1988 Federal Constitution itself).

Besides that, this type of discourse, so predominant in Brazil now, produces an escalation of violence that generates fighting and death. Serious events of disrespect for democratic constitutional foundations have been happening, and they not seem to be facing enough resistance.

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