

Working Paper No. 99, 2016

Millionaires, the Established, Outsiders and the Precariat
Social Structure and Political Crisis in Brazil

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Working Paper Series



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Costa, Sérgio 2016: "Millionaires, the Established, Outsiders and the Precariat: Social Structure and Political Crisis in Brazil", **desiguALdades.net Working Paper Series 99**, Berlin: **desiguALdades.net** International Research Network on Interdependent Inequalities in Latin America.

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Abstract

The present paper draws on works that combine Marxist and Weberian traditions of social structure analysis to interpret the contemporary Brazilian political crisis as a distributive conflict involving four classes or strata (precariat, outsiders, established, millionaires), defined using five determinant vectors of social inequality: wealth, position, knowledge, selective association and existential rights. The four classes or strata considered saw their wealth, their existential rights, and their knowledge grow in the period between 2003 and 2013. However, in this period, the precariat and the outsiders ascended significantly in their social position, while the established lost social position to the extent that their power to exclude outsiders from social spaces formerly reserved for their own usage diminished. The same logic applies to selective associations with regard to gender and race, since during the Workers' Party (PT) administrations there was a decrease in the power of men and whites to discriminate against women and blacks. This loss of position in the hierarchies of class, gender and race fed the resentment of the established against the PT government even in times when, in terms of wealth, they experienced an ascendant trajectory. Starting in 2014, the picture changed. The exacerbation of the economic crisis caused all of the strata, especially the outsiders, to lose wealth. The established, though less threatened by the outsiders (the most affected by the crisis), also experienced social decline as the recession advanced. Finally, the millionaires who had until then been gaining at all of the levels of inequality with the PT governments, lost at least part of their selective associations as the investigations into corruption advanced. It is precisely when the millionaires began to lose that effective changes in favor of the removal of the president began to occur.

Keywords: class analysis | political crisis | distributive conflict | impeachment | Brazil

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1. Introduction

In an article written during one of the most acute moments of the current Brazilian crisis in 2016, University of London economist Saad-Filho (2016: n.p.) described Brazil's situation as a "dreamland for social scientists [and] the nightmare for everyone else." He was right. On the one hand, the crisis led to weaker institutions, lower formal employment and higher household debt. The GDP annual growth rate fell from 7.6% in 2010 to 0.1% in 2014 and contracted 3.8% in 2015. On the other hand, the crisis fueled the curiosity of social scientists. They wanted to uncover the political polarization of a country that, notwithstanding its violent past, had experienced all major transitions – including independence, the abolition of slavery and proclamation of the republic in the 19th century, as well as democratic transitions in the 20th century – not through revolution, but through agreements between elites. According to the terms of public discourse in Brazil, poverty can be reduced as long as the gains of the wealthy are not affected, so how is it possible that the country is divided between two irreconcilable blocks, one supporting and the other opposing the government led by the Worker's Party (PT)?

This essay¹ is an attempt to explain this paradoxical situation by resorting to class analysis. Initially, I recover some of the central arguments supporting the timeliness of the concept of classes under late capitalism. I subsequently seek to understand recent changes in the Brazilian social structure, and then interpret the contemporary Brazilian political crisis as an expression of distributive conflicts.

2. Classes and Strata Matter: Reconciling Marx and Weber

Starting in the 1940s, the study of social stratification from a functionalist perspective became hegemonic in the field of sociological studies on social inequality, at least in the Anglo-Saxon world. According to this perspective, inequality is functional and necessary for societies, to the extent that those who engage in socially relevant activities and/or have a higher level of "training or talent" should be rewarded with more resources (Daves and Moore 1944: 243). Although they share a staunch opposition to this functionalist reading, inequality research following the Weberian tradition and the Marxist tradition evolved independently from each other in the post-war period. Only recently, efforts to bring those two traditions together have become more visible.

In their many variants, Marxist approaches share at least two common premises, namely: (1) they consider that the capital/work relation structures social classes to the

1 Iasmin Goes and Clay Johnson have translated the original text of this paper from Portuguese into English, including all quotations.

extent that those with the means of production are the owning or dominant class and those who sell their labor power form the working or dominated class; (2) they establish a necessary logical link between belonging to a structural class and cultural and political choices. This means that if the working class does not display the cultural and political behavior corresponding with its structural condition, this is due to ideological deviations (Wright 1985).

Approaches based on Weber share the Marxist claim that social classes are a shaping principle of the social structure of modern societies. However, they disagree with Marxists when questioning the necessary link between class – understood as class situation, that is, as the material insertion in the social structure – and forms of action and behavior, both in the cultural and political level. Thus, the Weberian tradition rejects any political determinism stemming from class situation or position. In the words of Weber himself, people belonging to the same class may, under certain circumstances, act politically in favor of their common interests as a community of interests, “but it does not have to be so; in any way, a class is not a community [Gemeinschaft] and to treat classes as a conceptual synonym for communities leads to distortions” (Weber 1956 [1922]: 533). On the other hand, in the sense that a class is defined by a group of people sharing a “specific determinant of their vital chances” (Weber 1956 [1922]: 531), namely, the place occupied in the hierarchies of wealth distribution, rather than whether or not they own the means of production, the positions possible in the social structure reproduce themselves beyond the owning and the working class conceived in Marxism.

In addition, as shown by Parkin (1972, 1974), there is another reason for the multitude of structural positions in Weber’s model, namely, the variety of strategies of social closure in class formation:

By social closure, Weber means the process by which social collectivities seek to maximize rewards by restricting access to rewards and opportunities to a limited circle of eligible individuals. This entails the singling out of certain identifiable social or physical attributes as the justificatory basis of exclusion (Parkin 1974: 3).

To the extent that strategies of social closure go beyond the struggle to own the means of production, the existing class positions are also broadened. Following this reasoning, the distinction between strata and classes is no longer relevant. That is, it makes no analytical difference whether we refer to classes or strata, provided class or stratum are used as categories that define comprehensive positions in the social

structure with their respective strategies of social closure, and not just income groups, as functionalist stratification studies do.

The links between power asymmetries and social inequalities, as outlined by Weber, are also present in the work of Norbert Elias. The model of an established-outsider figuration, developed by Elias and Scotson (1994 [1965]), deserves here particular attention. It was based on the study of discrimination and stigmatization processes of new residents in a small English suburban town named Winston Parva. As shown by the two authors, in this figuration, that is, in this web of interdependencies, established residents use all possible means – from defamation to the construction of access barriers – to jettison newcomers from social spaces as well as to prevent their use of public and symbolic goods available in the community. According to the authors, the exclusionary practices within this figuration were not cultural or physical marks that differentiated the established group from the outsider group, but rather the power asymmetries that allowed the established group to give meaning to apparent traits, such that self-ascribed marks were decoded as symbols of superiority and instruments that legitimized advantages and privileges. In opposition, inferiority marks were assigned to outsiders to legitimize the barring of their access to socially valued goods and spaces:

Thus one encountered in this small community what appeared to be an universal regularity of any established-outsider figuration: The established group attributed to its members superior human characteristics; it excluded all members of the other group from non-occupational social contact with its own members; the taboo on such contacts was kept alive by means of social control such as praise-gossip about those who observed it and the threat of blame-gossip against suspected offenders (Elias and Scotson 1994 [1965]: xvi).

Among the contributions that sought to reconcile the Marxist and Weberian traditions to understand the role of classes in constituting the inequalities that shape contemporary societies, it is worth highlighting the work of Reinhard Kreckel (1992 in particular) and Göran Therborn (2013 in particular). In his quest to build a political sociology of social inequality, Kreckel first reinterprets Weber and Marx, showing that there is a widespread misunderstanding in the reception of Weber when it comes to the three terms appearing in Part Two, Chapter 8, Section 6 of *Economy and Society* dedicated to the study of Political Communities. Section 6 was originally titled “*Machtverteilung innerhalb der Gemeinschaft: Klassen, Stände, Parteien*” (Power Distribution within the Community: Classes, Estates of the Realm, Parties) and is wrongly understood as the material (classes), symbolic (status groups) and power (parties) dimensions of the

existing inequalities.² As convincingly shown by Kreckel (1992: 57-63, 69-70), class does indeed correspond to the structural-material dimension of inequalities. However, *Stände* in Weber's work do not concern the symbolic dimension, but rather the extent of interactions, relationships and social networking among peers, something close to Pierre Bourdieu's (1979) notion of social capital. And parties, in turn, cannot correspond to the power dimension. After all, power is not *one* single dimension of inequality in Weber's reading, but a transversal category that permeates all other dimensions.

Kreckel understands that the sociological interpretation is always "a difficult balance between generalizing and historicizing" (Kreckel 1992: 76). Accordingly, he aims to adapt and expand to a contemporary context the sources or vectors of social inequality identified by Marx and Weber, respectively the market or capitalist economy and the "exclusivity" of relationships and loyalties". Thus, to meet the analytical needs of late capitalism, Kreckel adds two new dimensions of inequality, hierarchy and knowledge, establishing a matrix with four vectors that produce vertical inequalities in contemporary societies:

- (1) Material wealth, including property, means of production, income and other assets that can be converted into the general equivalent: money;
- (2) Positions in hierarchical organization, including ranks occupied by individuals in organizations on the job market or other spheres of social life, which, following the "meritocratic ideology", are linked to different levels of prestige, power and compensation;
- (3) Symbolic knowledge, understood as socially valued knowledge. It is a diffuse category that expresses skills valued and required in contemporary capitalism. Overall, the general equivalents to this dimension are degrees and titles; and
- (4) Selective association: this dimension is translated into different degrees of group belonging (ethnic, gender, regional, etc.), usually informally established, and that guarantee benefits and privileges to its members.

To give this analytical matrix its proper historical sense, Kreckel applies it to the study of German society (indeed, to 1980s West Germany), in order to analyze: (1) to what

2 This also happens in Chapter 4, "Stände und Klassen", mistakenly translated into English as "Status Groups and Classes". The Spanish translation, published in Mexico by Fondo de Cultura Económica for the first time in 1944, is faithful to the original and translates *Stände* as *estamentos* (i.e. estates). Nevertheless, the contemporary reception of Weber in Brazil was heavily influenced by the American literature and often commits the mistake of translating *Stände* as *grupos de status* (i.e. status groups).

extent the differences relating to the four features outlined above (money, rank, degrees and membership) lead to the formation of “real social classes” (Kreckel 1992: 150); and (2) how specific forces correlate to maintain or alter a “specific system of social inequality” (Kreckel 1992: 150).

Kreckel answers both questions by building a force field model, according to which effective inequality is the result of distributional disputes among three corporate actors: state, capital and wage labor, through the institutions and organizations that represent them. Around this core, interest groups represent specific forces and social movements. Finally, “on the outskirts of the force field is the socially structured population that reflects the social conditions of inequality for everyday life, from values and potentials for action defined according to their stratum, environment or specific condition” (Kreckel 1992: 161).

Unlike Kreckel, Therborn (2013) is not concerned with developing a systematic theory of class or inequality. Still, writing over twenty years after publication of Kreckel’s classic book, the Swedish author draws attention to overseen or underdeveloped aspects, allowing for a completion of Kreckel’s political sociology of inequality in at least three fundamental ways that serve our goals in this essay:

- (1) By distinguishing between three dimensions of inequality, namely, vital inequality, existential inequality, and resource inequality. Vital and resource inequality can be subsumed under the category of wealth inequality in terms of Kreckel, but existential inequality seems to be a dimension of its own that Kreckel fails to cover. To Therborn, this is the “unequal allocation of personhood, i.e., of autonomy, dignity, degrees of freedom, and of rights to respect and self-development” (Therborn 2013: 49).
- (2) By considering the global dimension of inequalities: Therborn draws attention to the fact that the nation, that is, the nation-state, alongside capitalism and families, has become one of the institutions buttressing the reproduction of inequalities:

Under post-1990 globalization, however, national cohesion and equality have been dumped for national attractiveness of foreign capital, in China and Vietnam as well as in Argentina, Eastern Europe and elsewhere. In this way, nations have become territories of cheap bodies, pimped by their elites to foreign capital, and as such almost unprecedented generators of inequality. [...] Nations and national boundaries [...] provide the national pimp governments with their exorbitant rents, and they constitute major barriers of exclusion to poor migrants (Therborn 2013: 175).

Therborn does not deny that nation-states also may, in some periods and cases, exercise their historically assigned role of controlling the influence of capitalism on generating social inequalities and imploding social solidarity ties. After all, nation-states foster ownership ties, taxes as well as social and labor rights. Nevertheless, national states competing to attract capital and investors have recently increased inequalities and compressed both social and labor rights.³

- (3) Middleclassization: Therborn draws attention to an important development in the global dynamics of social classes: The decline – at least on a discursive level – in the importance of the working class as a collective subject and in the generalization of discourses on the middle class. This obviously has nothing to do with the hypothesis of structural leveling of global inequalities, which are increasing. In truth, these are ideological discourses that – according to Therborn – go in two different directions: the suffering and “larmoyant” tone of the American upper middle class, which has supposedly been “left behind the soaring oligarchy of current financial capitalism” (Therborn 2013: 178); and the discourse of the middle classes in the Global South which, inflated by international agencies and business consultancies, goes against the former, being “jubilant, telling about the arrival or the imminent coming of the Messiah, in the shape of consuming middle class” (Therborn 2013: 178).

3. Social Structure and Distributive Disputes in Brazil

3.1 Classes and Social Inequality in Contemporary Brazil

Most of the categories that make up the political sociology of social inequality developed by Kreckel can be usefully applied to analyze the Brazilian social structure and the transformations it underwent in recent years.

First, the four vectors or dimensions of social inequalities – namely, material wealth, positions in hierarchical organizations, symbolic knowledge and selective association – are also central in the formation of Brazilian social stratification. However, one must expand the category of the position in hierarchical organizations, as defined by Kreckel, to also consider social spaces organized hierarchically, but which do not constitute an organization itself. This includes leisure spaces (recreational clubs, concert halls, etc.) or even purchases and services (shopping malls, airports) in which discretionary criteria

³ The distinct dimensions in which national citizenship works as social closure, in the sense of reproducing inequalities between members of different national states, are developed *comme il faut* by Boatcă (2015: 177).

for access (economic or informal) are applicable.⁴ Attending these spaces represents an important dimension of the class experience in Brazil. As a consequence, preventing new aspirants to such spaces to accede is a particular form of social closure.

Furthermore, it is worth adding a fifth vector of inequality ignored by Kreckel, possibly due to its in comparison with Brazil lower empirical significance in Germany: existential inequality. This can be measured as the difference in ensuring existential rights, namely the right to respect and self-development, as defined by Therborn above. The significant percentage of the economically active population working in the informal sector without any labor guarantees, the systematic violation of civil rights by state and private actors, and unequal access to justice justify addressing the existential hierarchies as a separate dimension of the existing inequalities in Brazil.⁵

Once this addition is made, the positions occupied in the hierarchy of possession of or access to each of these five features determine the classes and strata in the Brazilian social structure, at least in general terms.⁶ They also define fairly clear groups, based on ethno-racial categories and gender.⁷ As will be seen below, this statement does not imply a total overlap of strata arising from the five vectors. Nevertheless, the trend

4 These spaces reflect and reproduce social hierarchies in a multitude of ways: through an architecture that often hinders the access of the carless or ensures more comfort and agility in service to those willing to spend more; through overt surveillance of “intruders”, defined by appearance, ethno-racial criteria, etc. Several case studies based on ethnography or discourse analysis show how these hierarchies operate, as is the case of research conducted in Belo Horizonte: “The results demonstrate the symbolic sense of a mall as a space of social segregation that should implicitly be restricted to a specific portion of society to be considered a valued, safe space with social distinction” (Nascimento et al. 2015: 260).

5 Strictly speaking, one would have to include a sixth vector of inequality – the ecological dimension (see Dietz 2014). The expanded production of commodities created new environmental risks and damages to the rural population, while the dramatic increase in the number of cars and motorcycles circulating in the cities deteriorated the quality of urban life, affecting different social classes and strata unequally. The present essay does not take this sixth dimension into account, given the difficulties in estimating its impact on the social structure.

6 Following the consolidated and prestigious tradition of studies on milieus in Germany (e.g.: Vestler 2001), Kreckel draws attention to the need to also consider milieus and macro-milieus as aggregates of social structure. Though the research on milieus can be meaningful and useful in examining individualization processes, the importance of milieus is secondary when it comes to the analysis of vertical structuring processes in unequal societies like Brazil.

7 Part of the literature on social inequalities distinguishes between vertical inequality, like the one concerning the distribution of population by classes or strata, and horizontal inequality, referring to the inequality between groups organized by gender or sex, ethnicity, race or other relevant variable (Stewart 2000, 2010). However, inequalities between men and women, on the one hand, and blacks and whites, on the other, are so sharp, lasting and widespread in Brazilian society that I consider it more appropriate to adopt three complementary levels or lines of vertical social asymmetries: classes or strata, sex or gender, and race or skin color (Guimarães 2002). Regional inequalities between residents in rural and urban areas are equally expressive. Nevertheless, these inequalities cannot be integrated as an additional variable into the analysis of the national social structure since they do not represent structural but spatial categories.

towards their convergence is undeniable, such that they define a vertical system of social structuring that is reasonably consistent and convergent with regard to the different dimensions of inequality. Thus, the stratum with the least material resources occupies the lowest positions in hierarchically organized organizations and spaces. These individuals are also those who hold less symbolic knowledge, who have less access to powerful selective associations and whose existential rights are less protected.

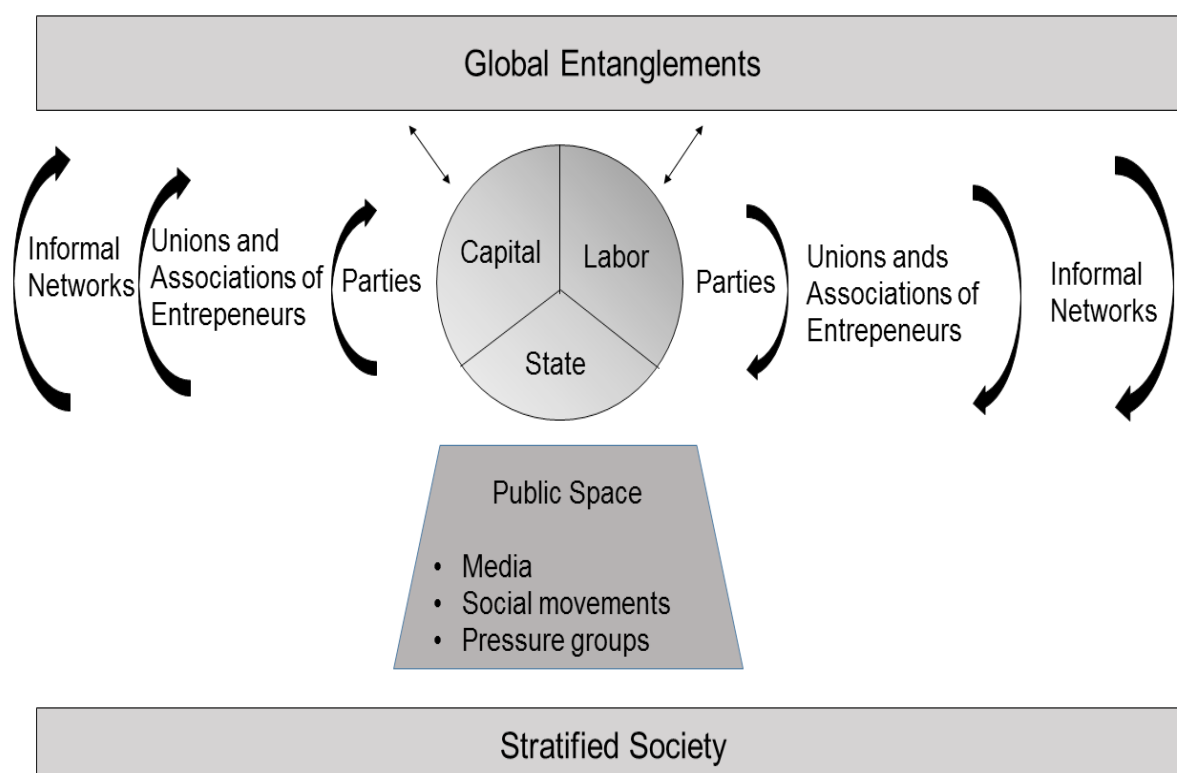
The concrete mechanisms and dynamics leading to both the perpetuation and the displacements or transformations in this system of vertical inequalities in contemporary Brazil are certainly quite different from those identified by Kreckel in his study of 1980s West Germany, marked by a comprehensive and protective social welfare state. Nevertheless, the abstract description of the distributional disputes in German society, as offered by Kreckel, also applies to the Brazilian case. This means that in Brazil, too, these disputes take place in a force field comprising three corporate hubs: state, capital and labor. Institutionally, political parties are the main actors behind distributional negotiations. Legally established interest groups, such as business associations or trade unions, also participate in these disputes. Also relevant are informal networks among representatives of the three corporate hubs, highlighting the links between actors linked to capital and state. However, Kreckel does not consider informal channels in his model. In case of Brazil (to a great extent also in Germany), these channels are essential in the reproduction the system of inequalities and constitute a central mechanism for the strategies of social closure adopted by the wealthiest.

There are two further important additions to Kreckel's model. The first is the role of social movements, which – according to Kreckel – also interferes in disputes between the three corporate hubs whenever they have distributional demands. In this regard, the author's model is dated and is far behind the current state of the art in the studies on social movements and public space. A wide range of investigations, both conceptual and specific to Latin America (Habermas 1992, Avritzer and Costa 2004), showed that concrete actors (such as social movements, non-governmental organizations, pressure groups, mass media, etc.) as well as the formation of public opinion and political will at the level of the public sphere are key to the legitimization of inequality or of the struggle for equality. This means that public debates do not merely influence the choices and preferences of voters, they also articulate themselves with the decision-making bodies in the corporate field, guiding and legitimizing decisions, including those with distributive impact.

The second addendum concerns the role of the international context in distributional disputes between the three hubs: capital, labor and the state. The topic is certainly vast and involves discussing the inclusion of a country in the world economy, since – for example – there is evidence of a positive correlation between the production and export of primary goods and inequality levels (see Korzeniewicz and Moran 2009). It also involves analyzing various external linkages and flows, from the international transfer of profits and immigrants’ remittances to cooperation agreements and international treaties concerning social or cultural rights. The latter may impact the social structure at the national level by inhibiting race or gender discrimination, for instance. Based on Therborn’s observations, as shown above, we must also consider that states alter established distributive parameters to create internal conditions that are more conducive to attracting foreign investment. Through instruments such as tax breaks, suppression of labor rights or grants and special rights to investors, states can foster the concentration of wealth and entitlements in a given country.

The diagram below presents the model developed by Kreckel, incorporating the restrictions and additions discussed previously.

Figure 1: Social Structure in Brazil



Source: Own elaboration, starting from Kreckel (1992)

3.2 Recent Changes in the Brazilian Social Structure

On 1 January 2003, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, a migrant from the Brazilian Northeast and former metalworker in São Bernardo do Campo (in the industrial area of São Paulo), was sworn in as the president of Brazil. His first term gave rise to a power system André Singer (2012) termed *Lulism*, implying a double strategy that maintained an orthodox economic policy with high interest rates, floating exchange rate and balanced public budget while strongly expanding social disbursements and raising the minimum wage in real terms proportional to the country's economic growth. This strategy ensures gains for both the rich, who were exempt from tax increases or confiscation of goods or assets, and for the poor, who would benefit from cash transfer programs as well as from the expected economic growth that would yield them new economic opportunities. From the political-institutional point of view, this power system was supported by the coalitions between Workers' Party (PT), created during social struggles against the military dictatorship (1964-1985), and several conservative parties. To form a parliamentary majority, the PT initially paid deputies and senators directly for their support, in a practice that became known as *mensalão*, literally a big monthly allowance. However, the practice was reported in 2005 and the ministers in charge of operating the scheme were at first exonerated and later punished. The alternative, then, was to construct a parliamentary majority by using tools that are widespread in Brazilian politics, namely, by handing over ministries and offices to allied politicians and political parties. (Nobre 2013, Anderson 2013) These positions are strategic not only to place allies, but also to control the concession of contracts with the government and other advantages, which are used as a bargaining chip to extract illicit payments from beneficiary companies. These payments, in turn, go to party funds or into the pocket of the involved politicians. Hence these positions are known in emic vocabulary of Brazilian politicians as *fabriquinhas*, i.e. little factories (Franco 2016: 2).

This unconventional power system proved extremely successful, ensuring Lula's re-election in 2006; the election of his chosen successor, then-unknown Dilma Rousseff, in 2010; and her re-election in 2014 (even though the signs of *Lulism's* exhaustion were evident from 2013 onwards). Between 2003 and 2013, Brazil's GDP grew 64% and the percentage of the population living in poverty was halved, according to measurements based on monthly income. In addition, social spending grew significantly, the minimum wage increased by 75% in real terms and millions of new formal jobs were created every year (Bielschowsky 2014, Pochman 2014). These changes led the Brazilian government itself as well as international organizations (like the World Bank 2013)

and even researchers (Neri 2008)⁸ to celebrate the new or emerging Brazilian middle class, in a very similar manner to the messianic pathos described by Therborn, as shown above. In due course, some Brazilian social scientists criticized the rushed enthusiasm about the new middle class, pointing at the conceptual limits of Neri's and other works that followed a similar line of argument. For example, Souza (2013, 2015) properly recovers the variable of social and cultural capital, as developed by Bourdieu, to understand the class divisions in Brazil. Nevertheless, he dilutes the analytical strength of his argument by operating with categories like "rabble" or "fighters", which are more representative of political-moral profiles than of positions in the social structure. Similarly, the author identifies positions in the academic debate employing qualifications such as "foolish" or "manipulated by the elite", both of which are more appropriate in moral judgments and in certain forms of political struggle than in the sobriety of different theoretical interpretations and positions found within the sophisticated debate about social inequalities in Brazil.

In contrast, the critique of the "new middle class" thesis, stemming from authors like Xavier Sobrinho (2011), Scalon/Salata (2012), Quadros et al. (2013) and Pochmann (2014), adds indicators other than income to the study of social structure, thereby providing important resources to understand the changes in the Brazilian social pyramid in the years preceding the political crisis that started in 2013. These studies and others that will be mentioned in due course, in addition to statistical information, provide evidence of the profound changes in the Brazilian social structure, between 2003 and 2013 as well as ever since.⁹

To analyze these changes, we go back to the five vectors of inequality highlighted above, namely wealth, symbolic knowledge, positions in hierarchical organizations,

8 In a later work, Neri (2012) seeks to reply, at least implicitly, to the critique of the conceptual limits of his model, emphasizing the need to incorporate "symbolic aspects of the middle class" (Neri 2012: 79). Nevertheless, he resorts to the same analytical matrix adopted previously. Based on the income criterion, societies are divided into classes A to E. As a result, the middle class is the intermediate statistical group C.

9 A significant part of the secondary sources consulted uses not individuals, but families as the unit of analysis to study the changes in the social structure. This captures the role of families in the reproduction of social inequality in the terms mentioned above. At the same time, the information on families tends to overlook the gender gap. In addition to demographic censuses (which have the disadvantage of being decennial and having long processing times), studies on inequality in Brazil basically rely on information collected by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics through the annual National Household Survey (Pesquisas Nacionais de Amostra por Domício, PNAD) and the micro-census POF (Pesquisas de Orçamento Familiar, or Household Budget Survey), whose results have so far been released for two periods, 2002-2003 and 2008-2009. More recently, the database of the Brazilian Revenue Service, which brings together all income tax returns, has been used in studies on inequality and tax progressivity (Castro 2014). The tax data are mainly indicated to measure the concentration of income at the top of the social pyramid, which appears to be underestimated in household samples.

selective association and existential rights. The aim of this exercise is not a detailed study of the Brazilian social structure through precise quantification of the mobility of different groups. The central goal is to identify trends in structural shifts which, according to the adopted hypothesis, led to the current crisis. Therefore, there is no concern here in naming classes or social strata that cover the entire Brazilian population, but only those whose upward or downward mobility may help explain the crisis. According to this logic, it is particularly interesting to follow the movements of four strata: the precariat, the outsiders, the established (middle class) and the millionaires.

3.2.1 The Precariat

Nancy Fraser suggests adopting the expression “transnational precariat” in place of “the global poor” to refer to the segment of the global population subjected to different forms of exclusion which “arise from the convergence of multiscale processes, as when global economic structures intersect with local status hierarchies and national political structures” (Fraser 2010: 370). In focusing on Brazilian social structures, this paper adopts the expression precariat to refer to the part of the population that occupies the most inferior positions in Brazilian social hierarchies. In reference to the debate on scales of inequality and of justice, it is warned that these positions, even when they are understood in their national dimension, reflect the entanglements between the local, national and global as well as interpenetrations between different hierarchies, especially those of class, gender and race/ethnicity.

The Brazilian precariat, in the sense adopted here, corresponds to the segment of the population which lives at or below the poverty line and which either lives from social aid and other social transfers and/or occupies the positions least valued on the labor market, which includes strong participation in domestic labor. When we consider incomes, we observe that the size of the precariat was significantly reduced in the past decade. According to the data from the CEPAL (2016: 18), 30% of Brazilian households or 37.5% of the population were poor or indigent in 2001, falling respectively to 14.1% and 16.5% in 2013. The poor population continued to decline in 2014, although the aggravation of the economic crisis ever since could reverse this tendency since the number of unemployed in this group has increased significantly (Barufi 2016).

As far as the knowledge vector is concerned, if one considers the variable years of schooling, there has been a substantial increase in the situation of those considered poor and very poor in the official statistics: Between 2003 and 2013, the mean period of schooling for the poorest 40% of the population increased an average of 1.5 years, reaching 5.9 in 2014, while the richest 20% added close to one year more of schooling in the same period, averaging 10.8 years (IBGE 2014). The caveat should be added,

however, that the variable years of schooling can be illusory inasmuch as the extremely heterogeneous quality of education received during schooling for the richest who attend, in general, private primary and secondary schools, as opposed to the poorest who are enrolled in public schools; this quality gap is decisive for reproducing social hierarchies (Quadros 2008).

With regard to selective associations, there is no reason to believe that the precariat as such created new forms of special access to goods or socially coveted spaces in the period under consideration. Nevertheless, if we view the data on poverty, we can see that its reduction was slightly higher among the black population and women (IPEA 2015), which might indicate a fall in the impact of the selective associations of whites and men on inequality.

Regarding existential rights, the expansion of social programs such as cash transfers and housing programs, besides the increase in the level of formalization of labor relations, even in less qualified jobs on the labor market, represents a considerable broadening of the existential rights of the poorest in the period until 2013.

3.2.2 The Outsiders

The denomination of outsiders is of course not a self-attribution. It fits in the context of the established-outsider figuration described above and expresses the dynamic activated when formerly poor groups experience upward social mobility and increment their level of income and consumption, going on to dispute social spaces and consumer goods previously reserved for the established middle class. The reactions of the established cover the entire spectrum of privilege protection described by Elias and Scotson for the case of Winston Parva: public praise to those who accept the old hierarchy, mocking and public stigmatization of the “invaders” by means of jokes, pejorative nicknames, etc.

From the point of view of wealth, the increase in income and consumption capacity in the last decade is impressive in case of the outsiders¹⁰, that is, those who passed from the condition of poverty to become the “new middle class”. According to measurements carried out by Neri (2012: 27), no fewer than 39.6 million made this journey between 2003 and 2011. The consumer power of this contingent explains, to a great extent, the enormous expansion of durable consumer goods observed in the last decade. The case of automotive vehicles is emblematic: Between 2001 and 2012, the number of automobiles in circulation in Brazil more than doubled from 24.5 million to 50.2 million,

10 The potential to consume is largely fed by the extension of loans with real interest rates much higher than international parameters, which leads to increasing indebtedness among families (Lavinias 2016).

while the number of motorcycles nearly quintupled, jumping from 4.5 million to 19.9 million (Observatório das Metrópoles 2013).¹¹ Yet, from 2014 on, the economic gains obtained by the outsiders remain more threatened than those in the remaining groups considered here, as the recent rise in dismissals affects this group particularly heavily (Barufi 2016).¹²

With regard to knowledge measured by schooling, there is evidence that the outsiders benefitted substantially from the vertiginous expansion of higher education since 2003, when the number of enrollments in institutions of higher education in Brazil jumped from 3.9 million to 7.3 million (MEC 2014: 26). The expansion of the university attendance of outsiders is due to, *inter alia*, the quota system introduced at the public universities and programs such as PROUNI and FIES, which offer grants or loans so that pupils with less purchasing power study at private institutions (MEC 2014). This does not necessarily imply a greater average increase in schooling among outsiders than among other groups, nor does it imply that schooling guarantees higher positions on the labor market. This is shown by studies that examine the stratification not by income, but rather by the composition of professional groups. In this way, in a study on the three occupational groups that form the middle class, including small business owners, professionals and administrators and routine non-manual workers, Scalon and Salata (2012) conclude that significant proportional growth of the Brazilian middle class in the past decade cannot be confirmed. The only group that grew is routine non-manual workers, where newcomers could be employed in the middle class. However, this is a category which – in the words of the authors – is “fairly heterogeneous and [which] incorporates occupations with low prestige, autonomy in employment, stability and income, even though they are white collar” (Scalon and Scalata 2012: 397, for conceptual clarification see also the pioneering article, Scalon 1998).

Nevertheless, if we consider the positions in hierarchical social spaces as exclusive areas of leisure, consumption and the provision of services, it is evident that the increase in the outsiders’ consumer power shifts their position into these areas formerly

11 While more or less equal percentages of different income quintiles (between nearly 20% and 25%) own motorcycles, ownership of automobiles is much more unequal: 14% of the poorest 20% and 80.6% of the richest 20% owned a car in 2013 (IBGE 2014).

12 With the data used here, it is not possible to adequately evaluate these losses, only to indicate trends, seeing as Barufi’s estimates (2016) are based on the classification of 5 income groups, A to E. Class C incorporates both the outsiders and a part of the established in the division suggested here. For the sake of orientation, the distribution of the range of monthly family income utilized by Barufi, with values in reais from November 2015, are reproduced here:

Class A: more than R\$ 9954

Class B: from R\$ 6585 to R\$ 9954

Class C: from R\$ 1646 to R\$ 6585

Class D: from R\$ 995 to R\$ 1646

Class E: less than R\$ 995

dominated by the established. With their loss of purchasing power since the beginning of the current crisis, however, this achievement of social status is threatened.

With respect to selective association, there is no evidence, as in the case of the precariat, that the outsiders managed to create organizations capable of guaranteeing them any privilege in the periods analyzed. Yet the reduction of gender and racial disparities in this segment highlight a reduction of power in the selective associations linked to gender and ethno-racial discrimination.

3.2.3 The Established

The reference to the established middle class operates here as a counterpart of the outsiders in the context of an interdependent web as defined by Elias (2004). It is not the case here of whether to define a precise income interval for the group of the established, seeing as this is not the principal criterion used for its definition as a class or stratum in this text. Nonetheless, in the sense of evaluating the dislocations in the social structure based on the five vectors of inequality selected, and resorting to the model of the five income classes A to E, we can affirm that this group corresponds to those that already found themselves in class C in 2003, in addition to the members of the classes A and B, excluding the millionaires, as analyzed further on. In this heterogeneous group, it is to be expected that the disputes in the context of the figuration established-outsider will be more intense the closer the established are to these outsiders in the social structure. From the point of view of wealth, if one takes into account the income variables, one sees that this group saw significant absolute gains in the period between 2003 and 2011 (Neri 2012). From 2011 up to 2014, there was a rise in the number of Brazilians that belong to classes A, B, and C, with their share in the total income also increasing. Since then, however, there has been a fall in their share in the total income and the number of Brazilians belonging to these groups (Barufi 2016). Regarding property and other assets, taking into account tax returns, there was a clear rise in the wealth of the middle and high-income groups, at least in the years 2006, 2009 and 2012, according to information from Castro (2014).

With regard to schooling, the average number of years in school for the richest 40% grew by nearly a year between 2003 and 2013, reaching 9.4 years in 2014, a little behind the years of schooling added among the poorest. Particularly relevant is the growing participation of the poorest among the university population and the resulting decline in participation among the richest in this group. In 2004, the richest 20% of the population corresponded to 54.5% of the enrollments in public institutions and 68.4% in private ones. In 2014, the enrollment of this group in these institutions was 36.4% and 40.9%, respectively (IBGE 2014).

There is no evidence that the established descended to inferior positions on the labor market, at least not in the period 2002 to 2009 analyzed by Scalon and Salata (2012), seeing as the ascent of the poorest to the highest white collar positions was not yet guaranteed in the majority of the years studied. Nevertheless, the loss of the positions of the established is evident in at least two contexts. The first, as referred to above, regards socially segmented spaces such as shopping malls, airports, leisure spaces, etc. in which the growing presence of outsiders has provoked reactions of repulse and rejection on the part of the established.¹³

The second loss of position for the established concerns a specific labor relation, that of domestic workers employed by nearly 7% of the employed population in Brazil. Between 2003 and 2013, the proportion of domestic workers with more than one job increased significantly and the proportion of them residing at their workplace became negligible. The income of domestic workers, even among those who only had one job, practically doubled in the period, and there was a slight increase in workers with a formal work contract (IPEA 2015). This implies the gradual disappearance of the model of exclusive domestic worker who is permanently at the disposition of the employer, without a clearly defined contract or working schedule. No longer able to count on the comprehensive provision of service at an extremely low cost, the middle stratum loses its social position and must undergoes important revisions of family arrangements based on the externalization of the costs of gender inequality. A 2015 law equalized the labor rights of domestic workers vis-à-vis other workers, which implies additional monthly costs of 7% for the employer. This additional cost associated with the valorization of the minimum wage represents an additional barrier for the middle stratum (Almeida 2015).

Regarding the selective association, it seems reasonable to consider that, in the entire period, there was a reduction of the relative efficacy of those instruments which the established have at their disposal for their strategies of social closure. After all, even though rejected and ridiculed, outsiders made one major achievement in the access to social spaces – that of universities and shopping centers – that the established understood as being for their exclusive use. Finally, existential rights were not expanded, but they were not explicitly reduced in the period analyzed either. It is true that the perceptions concerning one's own autonomy and development are negatively

13 One case of “blame gossip” that can be seen as anecdotal yet which became paradigmatic for the public repercussion it received in social and mass media occurred in 2014. A university professor posted on her Facebook profile a photo of a man (who, as it later turned out, was a public prosecutor) dressed in a tank-top and Bermuda shorts in the terminal of the Santos Dumont Airport in Rio de Janeiro with the caption: “Airport or bus station?” Among many other posts that shared the indignation of the professor appeared: “The glamour of flying is definitely gone.” “This is only a sample of what I’ve seen in Brazil.” (Toledo 2014: 2)

affected by the restrictions on attending exclusive spaces or employing domestic workers without any sort of contract or guarantee. However, this is a matter of losing privileges, not rights per se.

3.2.4 The Millionaires

There is surely a certain sociological arbitrariness to treating the richest 1% of a given population as a specific class or stratum among four considered groups. However, the importance they are acquiring in international debates on inequality, and the extraordinary percentage of wealth appropriated by them in Brazil, beyond their stronger resistance to crises, justify treating them as a group apart in the Brazilian stratification. Based on the data from income tax returns, Medeiros et al. (2015) conclude that the proportion of income appropriated by the richest 1% – namely, those who earned more than 203,100.00 reais a year in 2005 and since then rose again – recently reached 25% of the total income of all Brazilians. Also starting from the the income tax returns, Milá (2015) conducted a longitudinal study on the evolution of the income of the richest 1%, concluding that this fell between 1987 and 2005, yet rose again. However, it is reasonable to suppose that they are recently losing income in absolute terms, given the current downturn of the economy and the reduction of profits. The concentration of wealth, for its part, is even greater and more persistent. Castro (2014: 103) calculates the Gini coefficient for property and other assets at 0.860 in 2006 and 0.849 in 2012. In a total of around 25.6 million tax returns filed in Brazil in 2012, little more than 400 thousand filers, that is, 1.5% of the total amount, declared a property value over 1.5 million reais. These millionaires, corresponding to 0.2% of the total population, concentrated about 47% of all of the declared wealth (Castro 414: 103).

Based not on the income statements but on the PNAD household surveys (see IPEA 2015), we know that the proportion of blacks among the richest 1% rose from 9.6% to 14.9% between 2003 to 2013. Among the richest 1%, we find entrepreneurs who employ others, but also rentiers as well as public employees and private companies in addition to pensioners. Based on the variations of schooling of the richest 20%, the group which millionaires belong to, one can assume that there was an increase in years of schooling in all of the period, although this has remained slightly lower than the average rise of schooling among the whole Brazilian population.

With regard to positions in hierarchical organizations, there are indications of shifts among the different sectors of the economy given the loss of industrial productivity, the gains of agribusiness in the past decade and the increment of financial gains. Nonetheless, the richest 1% maintain their prestigious positions in the economy. Even the loss of positions that affect the stability in hierarchical social spaces does

not directly reach the millionaires, given the great social and even spatial distance that separates them from the outsiders. Nor do the variations of the domestic labor market affect them, since their average monthly income reaches almost 100 times the minimum wage.

With relation to the selective association, the current investigations into corruption brought to the surface informal agreements and criminal networks among politicians, parties and large entrepreneurs, especially those in the construction industry (Anderson 2016). This type of selective association constituted an effective strategy of social closure for the millionaires, guaranteeing a restricted group of the population privileged access to public funds. It is expected that investigations will at least reduce this type of selective association and its impact on social inequalities. Finally, regarding existential rights, there are no factors that indicate any reduction in their full validity for millionaires during the entire period studied.

The table below summarizes the shifts in the Brazilian social structure in accordance with has been described up to now:

Figure 2. Moves in Brazilian Social Structure, and 2003-2013 and 2014-16

	Wealth		Rank in social hierarchies		Knowledge		Selective Association		Existential rights	
	2003-13	2014-16	2003-13	2014-16	2003-13	2014-16	2003-13	2014-16	2003-13	2014-16
Precariat	↑	↓	→	→	↑	↑	→	→	↑	↓
Outsiders	↑	↓	↑	↓	↑	↑	→	→	↑	↓
Established	↑	↓	↓	↓	↑	→	↓	↓	→	→
Millionaires	↑	↓	→	→	→	→	→	↓	→	→

Legend: ↑: upward mobility; ↓: downward mobility; →: Stability

Source: own elaboration

4. Capital, Labor, State and the Crisis in Brazil

The movements observed in the Brazilian social structure correspond to shifts in the force field among state, capital and labor which, in turn, reflect relations of dependency and interdependency with the global context. These interdependencies concern, firstly, financial flows such as foreign investments, remissions of profit abroad or remittances of immigrants or other profits obtained by Brazilian companies abroad. These flows

affect the amount to be apportioned, in turn affecting the social distribution among the hubs capital, labor and state, as well as among the different social classes or strata. Another important component of these interdependencies is the Brazilian insertion in transnational production chains that were modified substantially in the period, given the retraction of industrial activity (Pochmann 2013). The growing specialization in commodity exports ensured that the persistent fall of the international price of raw materials since 2010 dragged the economy into a recession and altered the parameters of the internal distribution of income and wealth. Beside this, global moves observed in some sectors of the economy, such as the extensive subcontracting in the banking sector, dramatically modify the margin of maneuver of distributive negotiations at the national level, as Sproll (2013) shows.

At the political level, on the one hand, the amicable rhetoric concerning both national and foreign capital adopted by the Brazilian government in all of the period implied restrictions to economic policy and to the adoption of more radical redistributive measures, so as to maintain the so-called confidence of the markets. On the other hand, international law conventions ratified by the Brazilian government and even the transnationalization of social movements observed in this period influenced the national distributive game in favor of less privileged strata and groups, as in the case of women and blacks (Costa 2015).

If we consider the distribution of resources among the hubs capital, labor, and state, there was an increase in the participation of the state in the general distribution of income in the period considered. Tributary revenue went from 31.4% of the GNP in 2003 to 33.5% in 2014 (Ministério do Planejamento 2015). When we observe the composition of the tributary load, however, the asymmetries of power among the three corporative hubs are fairly evident. In contrast to countries with a better income distribution that tax capital gain up to 42%, Brazil exempts profits and dividends from income tax. Levies on income, representing 26.5% of the total, and on the consumption of goods and services, representing 49.7%, formed the bulk of tax collection. (Castro 2014: 25, data from 2012). That is, if it is true that the PT governments augmented expenditures on social policies to combat poverty, there were no shifts as far as revenue was concerned: The model continued to be based on regressive indirect taxes, i.e. taxes which promote the concentration of income. In the period studied here, there was no organized movement whatsoever nor any systematic discussion in the Brazilian public space regarding the distributive consequences of this tributary structure, even though cash transfer programs (like Bolsa Família), which have had a negligible effect on income distribution, were a topic permanently discussed in all instances of the public space.

Lula was elected president in 2002 with a government program which emphasized the fight against inequality (PT 2002). His votes were well distributed throughout the national territory and among the different income groups, with impressive results in larger cities and among better educated groups, the historical electoral bases of the PT. Starting with his reelection in 2006, a tendency was initiated that deepened with the election of Dilma Rousseff in 2010 and her reelection in 2014. From then on, Lula's main electoral base and later that of his successor Rousseff began shifting more and more toward poorer groups, moving from the southeast toward the northeast of the country and from larger cities to smaller ones (Braig et al. 2015). The party's discourse was also modified. While the redistribution of wealth did not disappear completely from the electoral programs, the focus did shift toward expanding the possibilities of consumption, the individual social mobility and the middle class. This appears succinctly in Dilma Rousseff's government program presented in the electoral campaign in 2014:

In the first three administrations, the presidents, together with their allied parties, made the political decision to recognize rights of which, up to then, the immense majority of the population had been denied: residence, nourishment, study, access to health services, basic sanitation, one's own home, employment and a minimum level of income to have a dignified life. By changing the living conditions of this enormous contingent of people, they were brought to the public sphere, conscious of their rights. These are the ones who entered the labor market better trained than the former workforce; who managed to get to college as the first in their nuclear families; who pressured the public authorities with demands for more and better quality services. [...]. For Brazilian citizens, what is necessary for the future changed because the level of demands changed: They no longer want the bare minimum to live, but the maximum possible so that they maintain their power of consumption and can wave at their children, who have better lives than theirs" (PT 2014, underlining deleted).

Lula's – and, with more emphasis, Rousseff's – adherence to the discourse praising the "new middle class" became evident not only during electoral periods. It came to integrate daily public declarations by these governments and even marked decisions made by the Presidency of the Republic which, by means of the Secretary of Strategic Affairs, created a "Commission for the Definition of the Middle Class in Brazil" in 2011. In its final report, the Commission (2012: 7) sought to establish what is understood as "a definition which is conceptually solid, practical and easily understood by this group so that the quality of life of the new middle class can be continually monitored and its presence and aspirations incorporated into the design, implementation and operationalization of public policies."

Next to the political dedication to a new middle class, the commitment to fighting racial and gender discrimination is explicit in the discourse used by the presidents and in many of their government actions. In this way, special secretaries with the status of ministries were created in 2003, the first year of Lula's government, to concentrate on policies in favor of women and the promotion of racial equality (Costa 2015).

At the political level, this set of discourses and actions are seen as a threat to the established characterized above. The losses are not economic, since the established increased their income and wealth in the period of 2003 to 2013. They faced losses of position in hierarchical contexts and a loss of efficacy of their selective associations to guarantee their strategies of social closure. Early on, some of the media began vocalizing the fear of the established, constructing the discourse of the "larmoyant" established middle class in opposition to the "jubilant" "new middle class" (the outsiders), using Therborn's terminology discussed above. The magazine *Veja* and particularly its columnist Reinaldo Azevedo long ago became the voice of the established middle class, which is has been supposedly abandoned by the state, becoming a "victim" of the "gender ideology" and the "stupidity" of the racial quotas defended by the Workers' Party:

Nowadays, the middle class is the real 'black' of Brazil: It pays abusive taxes, it does not use our terrible public services and is forced to assume its health, education and security costs alone [...]. Let me remind you: Nobody protects the middle class, neither the state nor NGOs, churches ... nothing (Azevedo 2007: 106).

This kind of discourse, which combines defending the class position of the established with discrediting the fight against gender and racial discrimination, has been crystallizing with time into an anti-PT discourse. In the end, the party and many of its representatives, among them their most important leader, Lula, embody the invasion of the outsiders with their presence in social and political spaces formerly reserved for the established. Although the larmoyant discSource of the established has accompanied the entire period in which the PT has occupied the government, their power to mobilize and articulate more representative portions of society remained latent as long as the Brazilian economy was growing at accelerated levels and the precariat, the outsiders and the millionaires saw their material and social condition improve. Intellectuals of the left and social movements remained equally marginal as they raised their voices to oppose the PT, objecting to the limits of the adopted redistributive policy and the excesses of the hardly sustainable economic model with its harmful consequences for the environment, the traditional populations and the quality of life in the cities.

However, these critical discourses gained public resonance in the second half of Dilma Rousseff's first mandate and, starting in June 2013, fed a series of public protests with marches and demonstrations in various Brazilian cities. The protests started with a movement for free public transport for students, therefore as a left-wing movement interested in extending the welfare state, but ended up growing and incorporating more general frustration with Dilma Rousseff's government. Little by little, more right-wing movements of the political spectrum started to convoke and direct demonstrations which, despite adopting a generalized tone of critique of institutionalized politics, are becoming more and more distinctly a protest against the government and the Workers' Party in general.¹⁴

In the parliamentary context, the PT never managed to hold even one fifth of the seats in Congress, despite having the most numerous fraction. This forced the party to establish alliances with the remaining parties. After the failure of the strategy of direct purchase of the loyalty of parliamentarians in 2005, the PT began – as mentioned above – to give ministries and positions to politicians and allied parties, who in turn administered directly their criminal associations with private initiatives. The PMDB became the most important allied party and was represented by Vice President Michel Temer when Dilma Rousseff won the elections in 2010 and 2014. In its own way, the model functioned fairly well until 2015, when a sweeping action against corruption in Brazilian politics was initiated, combining the forces of the judicial branch and the federal police. Besides impeding or at least limiting the access of politicians and parties to the channels for the generation of illicit resources that were lining their pockets, the attack generated panic among the politicians and entrepreneurs involved, due to the fear of being discovered and arrested, as has indeed happened in various cases. The investigations dismantled the bases upon which Dilma Rousseff's parliamentary majority rested and, starting in 2015, a movement started to take form which sought to remove her from office. In May of 2016, the president was, initially, suspended for six months from her functions. Vice President Michel Temer assumed the role as head of government.

In the context of public space, important changes also occurred. From the end of 2015 on, in view of the worsening economic crisis, business groups led by the Federation of Industries of the State of São Paulo (Federação das Indústrias do Estado de São Paulo - FIESP) entered into a political dispute in favor of deposing the president. At the same time, as the possibility of impeachment became more and more imminent,

14 The initiator of the majority of the protests in the period was the Free Brazil Movement (Movimento Brasil Livre), whose program is based on the defense of deregulation and generalized privatization in all sectors and services, from education to prisons. The movement also defends the "end of the social function of property. Private property cannot be relativized" (Movimento Brasil Livre 2015).

social movements and intellectuals who, in previous years, had distanced themselves from the PT, rearticulated themselves to organize a reaction to what they saw as a parliamentary coup d'état against a president who was legitimately elected by popular vote. In this way, public protests began to alternate between those who, starting in 2013, were organizing demonstrations against the PT, and those who went out on the street to support the president. The average level of schooling and income of the demonstrators both in favor of and against the impeachment were much higher than the Brazilian average, indicating that the precariat and a large part of the outsiders were absent from the demonstrations (Alonso 2016). It comes as no surprise that more educated groups are the ones opposing the attempts to end the hegemony of the left. They are acting as advocates of social justice, to the extent that they foresaw that distributive changes will be even more unfavorable for the poorest, women, and blacks in a government commanded by President Rousseff's adversaries.

5. Conclusion

When defining social classes based on a multidimensional perspective, contributions that seek to reconcile Marxist and Weberian traditions in the analysis of social structure are indispensable to comprehending distributive conflicts in contemporary societies. By shifting to works that combine these two analytical traditions, the present text sought to study the contemporary Brazilian political crisis as a distributive conflict involving four classes or strata (precariat, outsiders, established, millionaires), defined using five determinant vectors of social inequality: wealth, position, knowledge, selective association and existential rights. The definition of these classes or strata considered the social trajectory traversed by each group since 2003 rather than the position occupied in the social structure at a particular moment.

Generally speaking, the four classes or strata considered saw their wealth and their knowledge grow in the period between 2003 and 2013. Their existential rights increased or at least remained stable in this period. With relation to position and selective association, the movement observed between 2003 and 2013 is fairly discrete for the different classes: While the precariat and outsiders ascended significantly in their social position, the established lost social position to the extent that their power to exclude outsiders from social spaces formerly reserved for their own usage diminished. The same logic applies to selective associations with regard to gender and race. Even though gender and ethno-racial equality are far from being achieved in Brazil, between 2003 and 2013, there was a decrease in the power of men and whites to discriminate against women and blacks. This loss of position in the hierarchies of class, gender and race fed the resentment of the established against the PT government even in times when, in terms of wealth, they experienced an ascendant trajectory.

Starting in 2014, the picture changed. The exacerbation of the economic crisis caused all of the groups, especially the outsiders, to lose income. The reduction of vacancies on the formal market produced a loss of existential rights, particularly for the precariat and outsiders. The established, though less threatened by the outsiders (the most affected by the crisis), also experienced social decline as the recession advanced. Finally, the millionaires who had until then been gaining at all of the levels of inequality with the PT governments, lost at least part of their selective associations as the investigations into corruption advanced and their criminal networks with the state and politicians were dismantled. It is precisely when the millionaires began to lose that the representative associations such as the FIESP entered into the political dispute in the public space. It is also at this moment that the effective changes in favor of the removal of the president began to occur. The impression that remains is that the established, given the resonance of their positions and opinions in the mass media, constitute a decisive actor in the formation of public opinion. Nevertheless, the formation of political will, in the sense of the agglutination of decisions with a binding effect, still depends on the dispositions of the millionaires. When they understood that their capital interests were threatened and their privileged channels of access to the state were obstructed, they joined the political fight unfolding in the public sphere, deciding the game in their favor. This was at least the partial result of the dispute among capital, state and labor at the end of July 2016.

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