



HUMAN



# NITES

SOCIAL SCIENCES

# The influence of society

Márcio Ferrari

Demonstrations in Brasília against the World Cup; studies to find out how democracy works

## A charter component of USP, the FFLCH organized and systematized the practice of research and maintains an intense dialogue with the public

A

s a charter unit of the University of São Paulo (USP), the School of Philosophy, Literature and Human Sciences (FFLCH), established in 1934, has since the beginning spotlighted an investigative spirit backed by sound methodology in a country where research activities were still incipient and disorganized. The curricula in sociology and politics (which became departments under the 1968 university reform that abolished the *catédra* system), even though they still counted among their founders a majority of foreigners —or partly for that very reason—were designed to “discover Brazil” from the scientific and systematic standpoints.

Despite all that has changed in the past 80 years in Brazil and in the possible approaches to research within and outside the university, the investigative tradition and commitment to a permanent dialogue with society remains firm. The Department of Sociology continues to carry out the principal lines of research that Florestan Fernandes and his disciples Fernando Henrique Cardoso and Octavio Ianni were pursuing in the 1950s and 1960s, which included race rela-

tions and the labor union movement. “In those days, people studied the major subjects, employing a macro-sociological approach—racial prejudice, for example, was being ‘discovered’ from the academic standpoint,” says Brasília Sallum, head of the Department of Sociology, who earned his undergraduate degree in 1970. “Today’s researchers specialize; they limit the scope of their projects. The sociological, religious, or workplace aspects of race relations are studied separately.” In political sociology, Sallum says, special attention is paid to the relationship between society and the State, a strategy he himself employed as coordinator of a recent project about the Fernando Collor administration of the early 1990s entitled *Crise política e impeachment* (Political Crisis and Impeachment), soon to be published in book form.

The Political Science Department researches broad fields such as comparative political theory and institutions, according to Fernando Limongi, a professor and former department head who received his undergraduate degree in 1982. “In both areas, our primary focus is

on the functioning of the democratic political system,” Limongi says. “Today we start from a much more empirical standpoint than in the past. But there is one fact that changes everything: we are no longer thinking about the democracy or stable political regime we would like to have. We already have them. Now we want to find out how democracy works and what kind of results we can expect from a democratic government.”

This is the focus adopted in some of the department’s principal projects, such as *Instituições políticas, padrões de interação Executivo-Legislativo e capacidade governativa* (Political institutions, executive-legislative relationships and government performance), Limongi’s own project. He has been studying Brazil’s 25 years of political democracy at the Center for Public Policy Research (NUPP) in an effort coordinated by Professor José Álvaro Moisés, who earned his undergraduate degree in 1970. “The purpose of these studies is to measure the quality of Brazil’s democracy by looking at two aspects: the values that explain the behavior of our society, and the place that institutions occupy—not only in our imaginations, but also in the structure of the period.”

According to Moisés, Limongi’s paper indicates that “from the electoral standpoint, democracy has been strengthened, but we still need to bring representatives and their constituents closer together, “both so that the political system reflects our society (witness the glaring under-representation of women and Afro-Brazilians, for example) and so that transparency is injected into the various political/administrative jurisdictions. “The best example of the absence of such transparency is corruption, a reality that demonstrates that the instruments of control, monitoring, and oversight are not enough to prevent abuses,” Moisés says.

Another example of dialogue and interaction with society is the Center for the Study of Violence (NEV), founded in 1987 and one of the 17 Research, Innovation and Dissemination Centers (RIDCs)

financed by FAPESP. “At first the papers were more like essays that defended hypotheses,” says political scientist Sergio Adorno, coordinator of the NEV and a director of the FFLCH. “The accumulation of empirical studies has enabled us to see that the issue of inequality vis à vis the courts involves the agencies that coordinate public policy.” The questions that inspire the center’s research are playing an increasingly important role in discussions of the future course of Brazil’s democratic institutions. “Violence impedes the full observance of human rights, and talking about human rights means talking about democracy,” Adorno says. From the outset, the NEV has been concerned about creating methodologies that can be used in producing reports for international organizations like the UN, and is in regular contact with similar institutions in other countries.

Both the Political Science Department and the Department of Sociology have experienced politicization. During the 1970s, the entire sociology curriculum was set up to study the course of the bourgeois revolution in Brazil,” says Adorno. The term “bourgeois revolution” does not, however, mean an exclusively Marxist orientation. “Marxism never dominated; the department offered a broad-

er training in sociology and the presence of works by Max Weber was equally as strong.” These days, says Adorno, special attention is being paid to “a line of interpretation that emphasizes actors more than structures; not just the type of organization, but the interactive relationships as well.”

#### ACADEMIC SOUNDNESS

The impacts of other generations of professors and researchers are still very much felt in our department,” says Eunice Ostrensky, who earned her undergraduate degree in philosophy in 1993 and is now a professor in the Political Science Department. “In modern political theory, although the manner of addressing the topics and concepts being discussed has benefited from more recent studies, the interest in venerable authors in the field is the same as inspired the studies by professors Célia Quirino and Oliveiros Ferreira [whose first papers date from the 1950s].

Ferreira, regarded as one of the most original political thinkers in the history of the department and now a professor at the Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo, earned his undergraduate degree in sociology in 1950 and worked as a journalist at *O Estado de S.Paulo* from 1953-2000. He is an example of one of the leading intellectuals who emerged from the departments of sociology and political science of the FFLCH by combining academic rigor with attention to the lay public, refusing to shut himself up in a university office.

## Democratic institutions and violence in Brazil are some of the current topics being studied



Lévi-Strauss visits USP in 1985: one of the founders of modern anthropology



Florestan Fernandes speaks at USP in 1958: educator of generations of sociologists

One of the pioneers at the FFLCH, Roger Bastide, author of the classic *As religiões africanas no Brasil* (1958) (*African Religions in Brazil*), wrote regularly for the São Paulo press about art, religious beliefs, and race relations—fundamental topics in the tradition of the Department of Sociology. Like the great majority of the members of the foreign mission at USP, Bastide did not come to Brazil to impose a cosmopolitan and categorical vision, but rather to investigate. In a review written for *Pesquisa FAPESP*, one of the leading Brazilian sociologists, José de Souza Martins, who graduated from FFLCH in 1964, said his professor “had come from a Europe saturated with reason and was tired of it.” According to Martins, Bastide found Brazil to be “a laboratory for discovering a side of the human condition that reason had hidden and repressed.

There was an entire country to explore and, over time, he not only thought about it but also became committed to making it more modern and less unjust. Even during the period of the military dictatorship, with its effort to inhibit critical intellectual production, demonstrated at its most extreme point in the 1960s when professors were stripped of their political rights, the courses in sociology and political science trained personnel who would later become extremely important figures in the public sphere. Among these were former president Fernando Henrique Cardoso, constituent assembly deputy Florestan

Fernandes, former minister of culture Francisco Weffort (sociologist), São Paulo mayor Fernando Haddad, an associate professor in the Political Science Department, and sociologist Glauco Arbix, a member of the National Council of Technology between 2007 and 2011 and responsible for the 2002 “Letter to the Brazilian people,” that marked the start of the campaign by the Workers Party (PT) candidate for the presidency, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva.

#### ORIGINAL PURPOSE

All this takes us back to the original purpose of the FFLCH and its plans to modernize scientific research in Brazil. The first director of the institution, Theodoro Augusto Ramos, a mathematician from the Polytechnic School (Poli/USP), was put in charge of contracting dozens of professors from France, Italy, Germany, and Portugal. At the time, the school also included units on natural sciences, chemistry, physics, and mathematics. In time, those areas were spun off and the school’s primary focus became the humanities.

Today, it has 11 departments: Classical Letters, Modern Letters, Oriental Letters, Linguistics, Literary Theory, Philosophy, History, Geography, Anthropology, Sociology, and Political Science.

In social sciences and philosophy, the “foreign mission” was almost entirely French—so much so that in the early years, French was the predominant language of the classroom. In sociology, the professors who were imported were either already established in their countries of origin or came here to carry out some internationally recognized work. One of these was Claude Lévi-Strauss.

Even José de Souza Martins, writing in 2011, pointed out the humanistic and multidisciplinary nature of that generation of pioneers. “Claude Lévi-Strauss, founder of the chair in sociology and one of the founders of modern anthropology, was a philosopher by training. His suc-

cessor, Roger Bastide, practiced a sociology that had strong connections with anthropology and psychoanalysis. Florestan Fernandes, who succeeded both of them, earned his master’s and doctoral degrees through research on anthropological subjects (...). The beautiful sociology produced by Antonio Candido was supported by a dialogue with anthropology, history, and literature.”

Antonio Candido is a typical product of the intellectual effervescence introduced into São Paulo by the FFLCH. Now regarded as the leading scholar of Brazilian literature, Candido was “above all, a sociologist,” according to Sergio Adorno. Candido is the author of one of the seminal works on sociology in Brazil, *Os parceiros do rio Bonito* (*The partners of Rio Bonito*), about the São Paulo *caipiras* (backwoodsmen) who had been marginalized—that was the title of his 1954 PhD dissertation.

Despite the heterogeneity of backgrounds and interests, the shared concern was to establish a foundation and

enhance appreciation of the various bodies of knowledge, as observed in relation to the Political Science Department by Álvaro de Vita, who earned his undergraduate degree in 1981 and heads that department. “The three major areas of the department’s research—Brazilian politics, political theory and thought, and international relations—began to take definitive shape back in the 1930s, under the politics chair established by Paul



Frenchman Roger Bastide in 1938: an interest in African religious and race relations in Brazil

Abousse-Bastide. Its central intellectual figure in the 1950s and early 1960s was Lourival Gomes Machado,” de Vita says. “Already present were concerns of a theoretical-methodological nature, with the autonomy of political science in relation to law—and especially to its sister field, sociology. Later generations inherited the same commitments to rigor in the study of politics, whether Brazilian or international, and the theory of political thinking.” ■