Foreword

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Wandering through Regenstein Library at the University of Chicago in early 2019, we faced the book *The Varieties of Social Imagination* (2017) by Barbara Celarent. The book surpasses the boundaries of knowledge and languages in bringing together thirty-six “thought-provoking” and informative essays on other texts from different parts of the globe (Turkey, China, South Africa, India, Brazil, Mexico, Nairobi, Peru, among others). All of these texts had something in common: they were written by authors of the past, who dove into sociological imagination to decipher human societies. As an impressionist picture, the book invites the reader to a thoughtful and adventurous journey through a nonlinear writing style and opened methodological approaches. Reading the Preface of the editor, Andrew Abbott, we got a sense of who could be the mysterious author, Barbara Celarent. The words, writing style, and outstanding erudition of the texts remind us of the brilliant texts of Professor Andrew Abbott, such as *Time matters: theory and method* (2001) and *Processual Sociology* (2016).

At the turn of the first pages of the Table of Contents, we got open-eyed. There were three texts on three different Brazilian authors: Gilberto Freyre, Euclides da Cunha, and Heleieth Saffioti. If one pursues a bachelor’s degree in Social Sciences at a Brazilian University, Gilberto Freyre and Euclides da Cunha will undoubtedly be studied in disciplines of “Introduction to Brazilian Thought”. Both authors will be further explored across the papers of this issue; they wrote important books on the national identity and the nation formation. Because of that, they are widely known by foreign Brazilianists. The name of Heleieth Saffioti, however, amazed us. She was a pioneer in gender studies in Brazil in the 1960s. She wrote many sociological papers, texts, and essays on gender, patriarchy, and violence. The presence of her work in the book pointed out that *Varieties of Social Imagination* went beyond the traditional readings not only on Brazilian contributions but also on the other thirty-three texts. The book encourages all human scientists to discover a manifold of worldwide authors who tried to provide an account of their social reality in a much freer way than the actual Sociology does.

As we showed in the book *Sociology in Brazil: A brief institutional and intellectual history* (2019), during the first half of the twentieth century, sociology in Brazil

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followed the tendency of every discipline which undergoes a process of “scientification” and “institutionalization.” Over the years, it tried to drift away from the literary writing style, insightful arguments, and loose methodological approaches. Nevertheless, the first interpretations of the Brazilian reality in the early twentieth century emerged as essays that represented precisely the opposite of what the discipline aimed to deny. Why did sociology, as a whole, try to marginalize the sociological imaginations and sociological essays? How vital could the essays be for approaching the social reality from other perspectives? How must we, as sociologists, revisit and produce essays? *Varieties of Social Imaginations* raised these questions in our minds. Professor Abbott’s erudite interest leads us to think about the tribute Brazilian sociology has been paying to the essayist tradition over the years. After a kind invitation from Professor Andrew Abbott, we started to organize this issue as a way to present the Brazilian essayist tradition for an English-speaking audience. After careful and dedicated editorial work by Professor Lawrence Nichols, the nine original papers discuss how social imagination was crucial to draw interpretations of the Brazilian nation formation; who were the leading authors and their legacies, and why Brazilian sociology still considers these seminal works inside the sociological debate.

We may divide this issue into three main “sections.” The first encompasses articles on the essay as a writing and thinking style. It discusses the relations between sociology (as a science) and Essayism (as a sociological imagination) by focusing more on the form than on the content of the Brazilian essays. The section opens with “Essayism as a Sociological Research Tradition in Brazil: A Definition of Essay and Essayism for Sociology,” by Veridiana Domingos Cordeiro and Hugo Neri (University of São Paulo) as a path to debate essay as a writing and thinking style that paved a “sociological tradition” (in Randall Collins parlance, 1994) within Brazilian sociology. Intermingling literary style and historical arguments, Brazilian essayism emerged in the early twentieth century on the brink of the new sociology. The article stresses the relation between science and essay, as a way to show how German sociology (especially Max Weber, Norbert Elias and Georg Simmel regarding modernization and national ethos) have a relationship with the Brazilian essays.

“Disoriented Time and Social Knowledge: The Historical Essay in Brazil, c. 1870–1940,” by Fernando Nicolazzi (Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul) focuses on historical essays “as a discursive modality to deal with issues of temporal order” at the turn of the twentieth century. The historical essays deal with the new Republic’s controversies where progress was the target, although “they were already late,” as Joaquim Nabuco argues.

To close this section, André Botelho (Federal University of Rio de Janeiro) discusses the essays from the 1920s to the 1940s and their influence and impact on Social Sciences in “The Sociological Invention of Brazil: Essays and the Social Sciences.” Botelho presents the construction of the “modernist essay,” which disrupts the previous canon. The article also considers the importance of this phase of essayism up to the present day for the Brazilian sociology of culture.

The second section brings together articles that analyze and explore the work of Gilberto Freyre, Sergio Buarque de Holanda, and Caio Prado, Junior. In “Essayism and Sociology in Brazil: Notes on Colonization, Slavery, and Nation,” Mariana Chaguri (University of Campinas), presents these three leading essayists. She teases out key topics across their works, which also generally harbored other classical essays. By

comparing them, Chaguri further draws comparisons on their convergences and divergences regarding their theoretical choices and interpretative conclusions.

By narrowing down on this topic, Maria Arminda Arruda Nascimento (University of São Paulo), in her article, “The Modern Essay in Brazil,” approaches these three authors considering their “historical significance” in two aspects. First, they emerged intertwined with the “modernist art and the socio-political problem of the country’s modernization.” Second, they became an inevitable reference to the whole Brazilian sociology; even as it tried to “deny” the essayist tradition in the 1970s.

“Three Times of *The Masters and the Slaves*,” by Helga Gavhya (Federal University of Rio de Janeiro) and Marcelo Diana (Federal Institute of Santa Catarina) shows how the reception and critique of *The Masters and the Slaves* by Gilberto Freyre played out across the decades. The “three periods” mentioned by the title regard the periods the authors analyze: in the 1930s, in the 1950s and 1960s and the 2000s. Freyre has been read across generations, and each historical context furnished different accounts on his work.

The third section refers to articles on the transnational relations involved in essayism. Alejandro Raul Blanco (National University of Quilmes) and Luiz Carlos Jackson (University of São Paulo) in “Transnationality in Latin America: The Conditions for the Production of the Book, *Dependency and Development in Latin America: A Sociological Interpretation Essay*,” examine the conditions of the production of this influential book, and also its reception. Fernando Henrique Cardoso and Enzo Falleto wrote the book in the late 1960s amidst an intellectual and institutional endeavor between Brazil and Chile. The book has an economic account of the Latin American development written in the light of ECLAC’s establishment (Economic Commission for the Latin America and the Caribbean).

Heloisa Pontes (University of Campinas) brings out an exciting contribution to the gender relations involved in essayism in her article, “The Gender of Essay: Gilda de Mello e Souza and Victoria Ocampo.” The author discusses the work and biographical trajectories of the Argentinian essayist Victoria Ocampo and the Brazilian essayist Gilda de Mello e Souza. With different writing purposes (Gilda produced academic essays, while Victoria produced literary essays) but similar expressive forms, both women faced the challenges and gender inequalities in their fields.

The issue ends with the valuable contribution of Filipe Carreira da Silva (University of Cambridge) and Manuel Villaverde Cabral (University of Lisboa) in their article, “The Politics of the Essay: Lusotropicalism as Ideology and Theory.” The article highlights the importance of the essay for the development of the social theory (especially miscegenation and socio-cultural assimilation and hybridity) by retracing the work of the Brazilian Gilberto Freyre, the Portuguese Jorge Dias, and the Portuguese António Sérgio.

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