

**THE PHENOMENON OF THE PRIMITIVE ACCUMULATION OF CAPITAL IN COLONY BRAZIL: APPROXIMATIONS AND DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE APPROACHES BY CAIO PRADO JÚNIOR AND FERNANDO A. NOVAIS**

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***EL FENÓMENO DE LA ACUMULACIÓN PRIMITIVA DE CAPITAL EN EL BRASIL COLONIA: SIMILITUDES Y DIFERENCIAS ENTRE LOS ENFOQUES DE CAIO PRADO JÚNIOR Y FERNANDO A. NOVAIS***

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**ABSTRACT:** In ‘*Formação do Brasil Contemporâneo*’, Caio Prado Júnior indicates that the brazilian colonial history carries a certain linearity or succession of events that overlap with the others and reveal the *sense of the colonization*. This sense is related to the establishment of a large commercial enterprise in the american colonies with the purpose of supplying the european economy with the agricultural products found in the New World, which were of extremely limited access to the europeans before. Posteriorly, this contribution by Caio Prado Júnior would be complemented by Fernando A. Novais in the book ‘*Portugal e Brasil na Crise do Antigo Sistema Colonial (1777-1808)*’ (1978), in which the historian records that the colonization is not restricted to this large exporting commercial enterprise, but it also constitutes an initiative that reveals one of the fundamental facets of the development of capitalism in the XVIII-XIX century: the phenomenon of the *primitive accumulation* of capital.

**KEYWORDS:** Caio Prado Júnior. Fernando Novais. Colonial economy. Primitive accumulation of capital.

**RESUMO:** Em *Formação do Brasil Contemporâneo*, Caio Prado Júnior (1907-1990) indica que a história colonial brasileira porta determinada linearidade ou sucessão de eventos que se sobrepõem aos demais e revelam o sentido da colonização. Esse sentido está relacionado ao estabelecimento de ampla empresa mercantil nas colônias americanas com a finalidade de abastecer a economia europeia dos gêneros agrícolas existentes no Novo Mundo, antes de acesso extremamente limitado aos europeus. Posteriormente, essa contribuição de Caio Prado Júnior viria a ser complementada por Fernando A. Novais no livro *Portugal e Brasil na Crise do Antigo Sistema Colonial (1777-1808)*, em que o historiador registra que a colonização não se restringia a tal grande empreendimento comercial exportador, mas constitui também iniciativa que revela uma das facetas fundamentais do desenvolvimento do capitalismo no século XVIII-XIX: o fenômeno da *acumulação primitiva do capital*.

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**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Caio Prado Júnior. Fernando Novais. Economia colonial. Acumulação primitiva do capital.

**RESUMEN:** En ‘Formación del Brasil Contemporáneo’, Caio Prado Júnior (1907-1990) indica que la historia colonial brasileña lleva una cierta linealidad o sucesión de eventos que se superponen con los demás y revelan el sentido de la colonización. Ese sentido está relacionado con el establecimiento de una gran empresa comercial en las colonias americanas con el fin de abastecer la economía europea de los géneros agrícolas existentes en el Nuevo Mundo, que anteriormente tenían acceso extremadamente limitado a los europeos. Luego, esta contribución de Caio Prado Júnior sería complementada por Fernando A. Novais en el libro ‘Portugal y Brasil em la Crisis del Antiguo Sistema Colonial (1777-1808)’ (1978), en el que el historiador registra que la colonización no estaba restringida a esta gran empresa comercial exportadora, pero también constituye una iniciativa que revela una de las facetas fundamentales del desarrollo del capitalismo en el siglo XVIII-XIX: el fenómeno de la acumulación primitiva del capital.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Caio Prado Júnior. Fernando Novais. Economia colonial. Acumulación primitiva del capital.

## Introduction

Caio Prado Júnior (1907-1990) and Fernando Antônio Novais (1933-present) developed a complementary contribution on Brazilian historiography regarding the colonial economy. In “*Formação do Brasil Contemporâneo*” (Formation of Contemporary Brazil), a book published in 1942, Caio Prado Júnior expressed through the theory of the *Sense of Colonization* the idea that the development of the historical process in Brazil contains a *sense*, a “master line” of historical events that, once found, makes the other events tangential to it and represents the path to which the historical, economic and social development of Brazil converges. This sense is related to the establishment of large agricultural production aimed at supplying the European economy with products from the tropics.

This decisive contribution is later complemented by Fernando Antônio Novais. The author resumes the theoretical contribution made by Caio Prado in his doctoral thesis defended in 1973, entitled “*Portugal e Brasil na Crise do Antigo Sistema Colonial (1777-1808)*” (Portugal and Brazil in the Crisis of the Old Colonial System (1777-1808)). According to Novais, Caio Prado Júnior established important theoretical reflections on the historical process of Lusitanian colonization in America, but this did not end with the assumption that colonization was only a merchant company made to supply the needs of the European economy. Colonization would be part of a broader set, located in the phenomenon of “primitive capital

accumulation”, a concept developed by Karl Marx when referring to the way in which the transition from European feudalism to modern capitalism took place.

Thus, the research has the general objective of investigating the relations established between the Brazilian colonial economy and the phenomenon called “primitive accumulation of capital” using the analyzes developed by Caio Prado Júnior and Fernando Antônio Novais, with the help of other researchers who had the colonial economy and the phenomenon of “primitive accumulation of capital” as an object of study.

### **The origins of “primitive capital accumulation” in Europe**

The “primitive accumulation of capital” is a socioeconomic phenomenon that dates back to Europe in the 15th-18th centuries, a context marked by the bourgeois revolutions that shaped all the political, economic and social events of the time. Those revolutions, it can be said, brought about the *sense of colonization* in constant manner in the methodological concept developed by Caio Prado Júnior. That meaning can be found in bourgeois revolutions, and a phenomenon peculiar to it is the *primitive accumulation of capital*.

At first, it can be seen that polarization, in which, on the one hand, the holders of the means of production, and on the other, workers 'free as birds' (however, neither slaves nor peasants) sell their labor power, it is the basic condition for the existence of capitalism. Thus, the “primitive accumulation of capital” expresses the separation between producer and means of production, and has the name 'primitive' because it is related to the prehistoric anecdote that Marx outlines by analogy with the “original sin” of Theology: in this case, the situation of "original sin" goes back to the initial existence of an elite that accumulated wealth to the detriment of the equal distribution of material goods between individuals and groups (SINGER, 1996).

The beginning of the capitalist system is due to the end of the feudal system, leading the producer to suffer a double historical movement in which he frees himself from the bondage to the feudal lord and the corporations and becomes a wage worker, freeing himself from the coercion of third parties. However, he is also forced to "sell himself": separated from the means of production, individuals are forced to sell their own labor power. The prevalence of capitalism, therefore, results from a victorious struggle against feudal lords and their “revolting exploitation” that imposed obstacles to the free “exploitation of man by man” (SINGER, 1996).

This unequal form of distribution of social wealth constitutes what is most striking in the history of the “primitive accumulation of capital”, that is, the sudden and violent

expropriation of large masses of workers - mainly of the peasants - of their means of subsistence, being transformed into wage workers, or 'proletarians'. However, this transformation took place under some peculiarities according to each place where it occurred.

### **Violent expropriations in England and Scotland during the 14th-18th centuries**

Already in the 14th century, serfdom began to decline in England: there were several peasants who worked independently and used their free time to exercise the social function that would become that of the proletarians. In the 15th century, this picture was consolidated, and the English terrain was divided into several landlords “speckled” with peasant farms. In fact, at that time, the power of the feudal lord was not measured by his income, but by the number of economically autonomous peasants he had working on his land. However, this is not yet the beginning, or the basis of the capitalist mode of production.

The end of the feudal system was also, after all, due to the violent expropriation of the peasants' lands. The feudal lords expelled the peasants from their lands, turning them into proletarians, driven by the increase in the manufacture and demand for wool that became the main product of cultivation of crops. Motivated by the growing profit provided by the textile industry, the former feudal lords used the land from which they expelled the peasants to raise sheep, creating a large mass of wage workers. In the process, all the old dwellings of the peasants were destroyed.

Thus, in general, there is the emergence of the 'primitive accumulation of capital', on which Singer (1996) makes a brief historical reconstruction whose synthesis, with regard to the proletarianization of the peasantry at the time and their new situation, is as follows: before, therefore, he kept chickens, pigs, sheep etc. on his piece of land, for the subsistence of himself and his family; now that he has been expropriated from his farm, he is forced to go to the cities to work as a newsagent and/or rental worker, to buy on the market the things he needs to live, a process that has favored the growth of cities and in which Marx recognizes a strong contradiction, since, at the same time that the small owner, or tenant, is “promoted” to this condition, it becomes more difficult to make a living by living in it.

Finally, Singer (1996) evokes Marx's description of the constitution of the “last great expropriation process of landowners”: the “*Clearing of Estates*” (or “whitening, cleaning properties”). To explain such a process, Marx uses the example of Scotland, where the aforementioned process had a peculiarly large and systematic character.

In “High Scotland”, the Celts organized themselves into clans, and each of these clans owned their respective land. The head of the clan was only the owner of the soil, just as the Queen of England is the owner of the English soil. When the English government succeeded in suppressing the wars promoted by the clans and their incursions into the plains of "Lower Scotland", the owners of the clans took the soil as their private property, and, as they encountered resistance from other members of the clan, expelled them violently.

After the pretender's last uprising - which reflected the revolt of the people of Scotland and England against the exploitation of peasants by the landlords and the expropriation of the small farmers - was defeated, the end of the clan system and a great increase in expelling peasants from their lands followed. This situation intensified afterwards due to measures such as the forced departure of Gaelics expelled from their own land to Glasgow and other industrial cities and the 'clearings' made by the Duchess of Sutherland, which basically consisted of transforming the entire county into sheep pasture, thousands of families living in these lands being expelled and exterminated. Countless people died, and those who survived were allocated small portions of land on the seafront, which were soon leased by the "great men" of the clans to London fish traders.

This suffering imposed on the Highlands continues as an “agricultural necessity”, just like the devastation of forests in America and Australia. Anyway, all of this led to the following scenario:

[...] the usurper transformation carried out with unscrupulous terrorism of feudal and clan property into modern private property were one of many other "idyllic" methods of primitive accumulation. They conquered the field for capitalist agriculture, incorporated the land base for capital and created for urban industry the necessary offer of a proletariat “free as birds” (SINGER, 1996, p. 355, our translation).

### **Caio Prado Júnior and Fernando Antonio Novais: brief comments**

The bibliographic review of the material chosen for the research led to some preliminary considerations about the history of Colonial Brazil and its relationship to the broader phenomenon of “primitive capital accumulation”. One of them is the aforementioned critical proximity with which Fernando Antônio Novais places his contribution on colonial history related to that of Caio Prado Júnior, criticizing his work for being a “halfway through” analysis of the period (MENDES, 2013).

However, Fernando Novais does not fail to consider that his own work descends in direct line with the theory of the *sense of colonization* elaborated by Caio Prado Júnior (2011).

Thus, the theory of the *sense of colonization*, despite being fundamental in the understanding of colonial history, reveals only one side of colonization, the commercial one - and Fernando Antônio Novais criticized this understanding as he went beyond it, having it also as a capitalist. The author establishes the relationship between his contribution and Caio Prado Júnior as follows:

Novais' main procedure for establishing his relationship with Caio Prado is to consider him as a historian of colonization, without relating his 'interpretation' or 'theory' of Brazilian history. Thus, Novais was able to present himself as a historian who deepened the way Caio Prado understood colonization. From then on, he started to point out that the colonization of the modern era constituted an instrument or lever to promote the primitive accumulation of capital in the metropolises, the last step of the transition from feudalism to capitalism [...] (MENDES, 2013, p. 192, our translation).

Still, about this very theory and what it establishes, it can be said that there is a specific time frame, dating from the beginning of the 19th century, and this is a methodologically thought out choice made by Caio Prado Júnior, since this period provided historiographical material referring to two centuries of colonial activity, therefore, sufficient for the author to develop not only the theory of the *sense of colonization*, but also others, such as the idea that Brazil in the 20th century - being, after all, the period in which “Contemporary Brazil” whose historical and economic formation is its object of study in the book - remains, until the moment of its publication, without completing the transition from a colonial economy, that is, turned to interests outside the people who live in the colony, for a national economy geared to the interests of the people and the nation-state:

[...] This option, according to him [Caio Prado], is strategic for a double reason. On the one hand, this moment constitutes a kind of balance of the three centuries of colonizing activity. On the other hand, it allows to capture the first steps of the transformation process of the organism resulting from colonization. This transformation had crossed the eight hundred and still 'dragged on' - the second term used by the author himself - at his time without reaching its end. As stated, contemporary Brazil was characterized by the colonial past, which ended with the 18th century, and by the transformations that had occurred in the coming centuries. [...] Thus, it is evident that Caio Prado values the study of colonial economy from the beginning of the 19th century for two reasons: first, because it presents the characteristics of this economy; second, because it expresses the beginnings of its transformation. Like Jano's head, it would allow us to look back and forward, to the past and the future (MENDES, 2013, p. 193, our translation).

This methodological choice, which focuses on analysis at the beginning of the 19th century, instead of, for example, reflecting in more detail on all colonial activity since the discovery of the territory, is obviously not accidental. It is not, therefore, Caio Prado Júnior's



purpose to write “a kind of history of the colonization of Brazil” (MENDES, 2013), but to capture aspects of the economy and society as he demonstrates that they go back to the sense of colonization, and, for this, the beginning of the 19th century, containing three centuries of colonial activity and being their “synthesis”, not only provides satisfactory vast historiographic material, but also marks the moment when is prepared “[...] our present of the passing days”, a moment of transformations that, however, “[...] continues to this day, and has not yet reached its end” (PRADO JÚNIOR., 2011, p. 6, our translation).

### **Caio Prado Júnior and the 'Sense of Colonization'**

In the first chapter of *Formation of Contemporary Brazil*, Caio Prado Júnior analyzes the colonization of America from the methodological expedient called “theory of the sense of colonization”. This methodology finds that the historical evolution of all people brings with it a sense, a main line of events that allows the researcher to understand the central particularity to be investigated from the period in question, eliminating the tangential occurrences to this main line of historical events.

This main set of events is found in the general and broad observation of the historical succession of the development of a people, which makes its evolution clear and observable from the moment when the details that may interfere in the analysis are placed in the background; in this case, the main occurrence is revealed more clearly. According to Caio Prado Júnior, this must be the method of interpreting the Brazilian reality: turning our attention to a certain advanced period in its history, while considering its past. After all, it is in the past that there is continuity that is the synthesis of the moment chosen for the analysis, its *sense*. Regarding the importance of these past events in Brazilian history, Caio Prado Júnior makes the following considerations:

This takes us, unfortunately, to a relatively distant past that does not directly concern our subject. We cannot, however, dismiss it and we need to reconstruct the whole of our formation by placing it in the broad framework, with its antecedents, of these three centuries of colonizing activity that characterize the history of European countries since the 15th century; activity that integrated a new continent in its orbit [...] Process [this] that would eventually integrate the whole Universe in a new order, which is that of the modern world, in which Europe, or rather, its civilization, it would extend domineering everywhere. All these events are related, and the occupation and settlement of the territory that would constitute Brazil is but an episode, a small detail of that immense picture (PRADO JÚNIOR, 2011, p. 20, our translation).

Then, the author criticizes the “addicted habits of thought” that constitute some approaches of these passages of History, saying that it is common to deal with the fact of colonization itself without considering the initial motivations that would shape the historical movement of the colonizing company, the which involves reflecting on the influence of Portugal's particular previous inclinations to carry it out.

Having made this reservation, and, it can be said, because of it, Caio Prado Júnior starts to analyze maritime expansions in order to observe how they changed the dynamics of commercial power in Europe, since the revolution in the art of navigation that the foregoing transfers the primacy of the commercial routes from the European center to the coast, passing the domain of the activity to the countries that compose it, such as Holland, England and the Iberian Peninsula.

These new commercial leaders, especially the Portuguese, then gain the prerogative to undertake the overseas expansion project that had been prepared for decades. The historical role of the Portuguese ends up pioneering due to its geographical location that offered them the conditions to try to go further than the others when they landed on the African continent and bypass it to reach the Indies, where they would find the spices. The Spanish, English and Dutch followed in their pursuit.

With the exception of a few countries, Europe was all taking advantage of the new trade order in force represented by the Grand Navigations. It is important to note that the benefit obtained from them was, *a priori*, strictly commercial. The intention to populate the new continents came from the moment when commercial companies became more complex and started to demand the territorial establishment of the colonizers in America - it is worth considering, after all, that at the beginning of the Discoveries Europe still had a contingent population affected by a plague that devastated the continent in the previous two centuries, and would have serious difficulties in the face of an eventual massive displacement to the New World.

The settlement of the American continent, especially in the part of temperate climate, was marked mainly by the escape from the troubled European political-religious context, undertaken by the colonists in search of shelter in lands of more similar characteristics to the continent in which they lived and now found threatened by those political-religious conflicts.

Added to this is the economic transformation experienced by England in the middle of the 16th century, in which farming fields were transformed into pastures for sheep raising whose wool would serve to supply the new English textile industry, a process that leads to several migratory currents destined to America, mostly for temperate areas. Likewise, migrants



who went to the subtropical region of North America generally did so without being given the option of going to other regions, and soon sought out temperate regions whenever possible.

About this peculiar type of colonization - the only one of which the Portuguese will not be pioneers - Caio Prado Júnior describes the objectives of the colonizers who undertook it as follows:

[...] What the colonists in this category have in mind is to build a new world, a society that offers guarantees that on the continent of origin they are no longer given. Whether for religious or purely economic reasons (these impulses, in fact, intertwine and overlap), there their livelihood becomes impossible and exceedingly difficult (PRADO JÚNIOR, 2011, p. 27, our translation).

In tropical and subtropical areas, colonization takes a different direction. After all, the physical characteristics of the region made it difficult for European settlers to adapt, given their difference from those found on the continent from which they came. If even in North America, in which there was a selection of a certain type of pioneer colonizer, the *Yankee*, capable of overcoming the difficulties that the place proposed to anyone who came to try to populate it, one would imagine that this would happen even more in tropical America, ponders Prado Júnior (2011). On the other hand, colonization there was very promising for exploration purposes, as there was the possibility of finding abundant commercial genres that were nonexistent, or very rare, in Europe until that moment.

So, human effort was enough to obtain these new resources. However, the European's interest in them was not accompanied by the intention to exploit them by their own hands. For this reason, they aimed only to be entrepreneurs of a highly profitable business, and unwillingly as workers, since their idea was that others would work for them. This divided, to a large extent, those who went to the temperate zone of the New World and those who went to the tropics. For these, only went those who had a sufficient contingent of manpower to carry out their commercial ambitions without much effort. On the other hand, those who could be leaders were favored by agricultural production on the continent, almost always on a large scale and dependent on many workers.

Thus, in the case of the English colonies, colonists were willing to migrate to America to work in the large fields in exchange for the transportation they could not afford. They constituted the labor of the colonies of the New World until their definitive replacement by the slave labor from the 17th century. As for the tropical colonies, including Brazil, this was not due to the fact that the Portuguese population was already very fragile since the 16th century, and one of the reasons for this fragility was precisely the expeditions. In addition, the

Portuguese and Spaniards were able to take advantage of indigenous labor and, finally, the Portuguese already dominated the slavery of blacks, as well as the territories that supplied them, and were pioneers in adopting it in their colonies.

In this way, colonization in the tropics was organized in a different way than in the temperate zone colonies. While the population predominated in these, the flagship of those remained the initial motive for sea expeditions, that is, a large commercial company "[...] more complete than the old *feitoria*, but always with the same character as it" (PRADO JÚNIOR, 2011, p. 31, our translation). This commercial company was focused on the exploitation of natural resources in territories never used before. This is the meaning of tropical colonization, and Brazil is not only a result of this, but has fundamental factors in its economic and social development.

### **Fernando Antônio Novais and the ‘Primitive Accumulation of Capital’ in Colonization**

From the approach of Caio Prado Júnior, made in *Formation of Contemporary Brazil* on the colonization of the New World, the way opens for a new interpretation of the character of the colonial economy, which would be elaborated by Fernando Antônio Novais in his doctoral thesis defended in 1973, entitled *Portugal and Brazil in the Crisis of the Old Colonial System (1777-1808)*. This work is a tributary of Caio Prado's theory as it re-signifies the assumptions it establishes.

The author recognizes the importance of Caio Prado Júnior's interpretation of national history, but notes that it has remained incomplete (MENDES, 2013). According to Fernando Antônio Novais, Caio Prado Júnior established important reflections regarding the *sense of colonization*, however, the analysis of the historical process of Portuguese colonization in America did not end with the assumption that it was only a merchant company that met the needs of the European economy.

Basically, when rethinking the concept of the *sense of colonization*, Fernando Antônio Novais points out that Caio Prado Júnior did not describe colonization in all its economic, political and social developments. Colonization would only be part of a broad context of development of the productive forces that capitalism was experiencing at the time, the phenomenon of “primitive capital accumulation”, which marked the transition from European feudalism to modern capitalism. The theory of the *sense of colonization* reveals only the face of commercial colonization, and Fernando Antônio Novais goes further, assuming it also as capitalist when analyzing the crisis of the *Old Colonial System*.

The Old Regime, after all, began to dissolve from the revolutions of the late 18th and early 19th centuries, beginning with the Industrial Revolution in England and consolidating itself in the French Revolution. The development of this double revolutionary process has also spread throughout the world. This succession of events took Western society as a whole by inaugurating historical contemporaneity and all the institutions that are characteristic of it, and the *Old Colonial System* began to gradually collapse when influenced by the new revolutionary movement. It is in this historical scenario of broad proportions that Brazil emerged as a sovereign nation by profoundly changing its economic and political relations with the former Portuguese metropolis (NOVAIS, 1981).

Thus, the investigation undertaken by Fernando Antônio Novais is the result of an attempt to think of Brazil in the midst of these two contexts: the general and deeper panorama of the dissolution of the *Old Colonial System* that occurred worldwide, and the specific conjuncture in which the Brazil's relationship with Portugal at the same time.

In order to explain how this colonial system came into crisis, Fernando Antônio Novais considered the characteristics that make it possible to distinguish the *Old Colonial System* from the others, since human beings have populated, occupied and appropriated the earth's lands in various ways throughout history.

The form of colonization that was formed in the Modern Period - which occurred between the Discoveries and the Industrial Revolution - was related to the mercantilist system of colonization. This finding is supported by two factors: 1) The legal apparatus referring to European colonization at the time, corresponding to the concrete plan of relations between metropolises and colonies; 2) The principles formulated by the mercantilist theory, which served in a more abstract plan as a guide for the elaboration and execution of these laws.

Although the influence of these abstract thinking schemes in reality was limited, Fernando Antônio Novais considers that the existence of a mercantilist “basic project” was fundamental to inform the colonies' performance, especially with regard to the importance they had for the metropolises. The author outlines “[...] the main lines of doctrine, to situate in it the role of mercantilist colonialism” (NOVAIS, 1981, p. 61), describing it as follows:

In this context, the meaning and position of the colonies is well seen. They must constitute an economic rearguard for the metropolis. Because the mercantilist policy was being practiced by the various modern states in unrestrained competition, it was necessary to reserve certain areas where, by definition, mercantilist norms could be applied; the colonies would guarantee metropolitan self-sufficiency, a fundamental goal of mercantilist policy, thus allowing the colonizing state to advantageously compete with other competitors (NOVAIS, 1981, p. 61-62, our translation).

Thus, there would be a metropolis and a colony as two poles of the same axis, where one functions as a decision center and the other as a subordinate component of these decisions when providing the security of economic competitiveness for the metropolis. This is an outline of how the *Old Colonial System* worked under a mercantilist ideal. However, this is a preliminary and incomplete characterization of the system, being necessary to resort to fundamental aspects of the whole in which the capitalist system of the Modern Era occurs to analyze how the *Old Colonial System* is located in it.

In fact, Fernando Antônio Novais outlines the general aspects of the Modern Era from the perspective of a specific context: the overseas expeditions and the social crisis that led to the formation of national states. This event contributed to making it, to some extent, successful and profitable.

The western European commercial scene was shaken by a social crisis that was ultimately answered by centralizing political power around absolutist monarchical leaders who made the colonial system an unlikely and risky investment. The previous European social organization around medieval shopping centers was unable to carry out the capital accumulation necessary for this.

Thus, colonization can be considered the development of a large commercial company that reorganizes an economic system that included the colonies as new producing centers, and not just spaces for the circulation of goods. Based on these considerations, Fernando Antônio Novais approaches the concept of the *sense of the colonization* of Caio Prado Júnior, attesting it to be true as he complements it starting from his considerations about the Old Regime. After all, the establishment of national states - added to the gradual dissolution of the feudal mode of production, to the development of production in the colonies and to the emergence of a mercantile bourgeoisie - does not only increase the initial objective of colonization, that is, to supply the European economy with agricultural products from the New World, as it promotes the so-called *primitive accumulation of capital*.

In his already mentioned doctoral thesis, Fernando Antônio Novais states that “the starting point for the characterization of the colonial economy is the deeper sense of colonization and the mechanism underlying the metropolis-colony relations” (NOVAIS, 1981, p. 92). The colonial economy reveals a profound process of development of the productive forces: first, the emergence of local production made for the consumption of the people; second, the increase in this production and the adoption of the so-called *plantation* system, which then starts to feed the European economy. This process corresponds to the phenomenon of the *primitive accumulation of capital* developed in Colonial Brazil. In all colonies, the same process

of accelerating the accumulation of capital is set up, which Fernando Antônio Novais summarizes as follows:

As a whole, therefore, it is possible to see the general movement that characterizes the assembly of modern colonization within the mechanisms of the colonial system: initial settlement, with production for local consumption; then, intertwining in the lines of European trade, and therefore in the mechanisms of the European reproductive economy. When they started to produce for the foreign market, they were articulated in the system because the regime of that trade is, as we have already seen, the nerve of the system. Thus, colonization is adjusted to the sense of the colonial system of mercantile capitalism: through the exploitation of overseas areas, the original capitalist accumulation in the European economy was promoted (NOVAIS, 1981, p. 96, our translation).

Since capitalist accumulation was the corollary of overseas expansion and colonization, an intensive acceleration in the pace of exports was required, the purpose of which was to supply the needs of the European market. Under these conditions, capitalist accumulation increasingly lacked forms of compulsory labor, especially slavery. This was, of course, against the mentality of the time, considering that slavery was already considered anachronistic and immoral in the Old World, and one of the main characteristics of the formation of capitalism was the alienation of the worker from the means of production, making him free of any servile bonds, that is, with nothing but his own workforce to sell and make his own living.

So, what explains the large-scale use of compulsory labor in the colonies, if they were an instrument of the *primitive accumulation of capital*, a fundamental stage in the consolidation of capitalism? Regarding this questioning, Fernando Antônio Novais considers that the use of forms of forced labor in the colonies was not at any time optional, since, if wage labor were used instead, workers would have, contrary to what happened in Europe, conditions to become producers and constitute a subsistence economy independent of metropolitan economic needs, contradicting the *sense of colonization*, which was the corollary of the *Old Colonial System*:

[...] Indeed, in the historical conditions in which the colonization of America takes place, the implantation of *compulsory forms of work* was fundamentally due to the *necessary adaptation of the colonizing company to the mechanisms of the Old Colonial System*, tending to promote the primitive capitalist accumulation in the European economy; otherwise, given the abundance of a factor of production (land), the result would be the constitution of European settlements in the Overseas Territory, developing a subsistence economy geared to their own consumption, without effective links with the metropolitan dynamic centers. This, however, was outside the expansionist impulses of European mercantile capitalism, it did not respond to its needs (NOVAIS, 1981, p. 102).

In other words, the maintenance of various forms of compulsory labor during the colonization of America was, ultimately, a manifestation of the phenomenon of “primitive accumulation of capital” adapted to the social and geographic context here, since its emergence in Europe took place under conditions that, although very different from those that took place in America, were of vital importance for the colonizing company, and, as such, could not have their continuity compromised by an eventual deviation from their original objectives.

### Final considerations

The works of Caio Prado Júnior and Fernando Antônio Novais provide important theoretical references for the analysis of various aspects of the colonial economy and society. Both produced interpretations of Brazil that influence the current academic debate regarding the economic and social situation of Portuguese colonization in America. This research goes back, in fact, to the theory of the *sense of colonization* elaborated by Caio Prado Júnior in *Formation of Contemporary Brazil* and its relation with the interpretation that Fernando Novais develops in *Portugal and Brazil in the Crisis of the Old Colonial System (1777-1808)*. In summary, Fernando Novais states that the theory of Caio Prado Júnior reveals more than what its author saw in his analysis, having a relation to the development of the newly established mode of production in most of the world from the bourgeois revolutions through the called *primitive accumulation of capital*.

This joint and complementary interpretation (in a way that one is incomplete without the other) developed by Caio Prado Júnior and Fernando Antônio Novais is of paramount importance for Brazilian historiography, even because it is the root of the notion that is very commonly learned about the colonial economy at school when the first contacts were made with this theme. The theoretical strength in which it encases itself, in fact, credit it as indispensable information in the formation of young people who are aware and able to citizenship (although its importance is not unanimous, or, paradigmatic, in the academic sphere, of which one has an example in the approach the so-called 'Escola do Rio', focused on the domestic and subsistence economy developed in parts of Brazilian territory during the colonial period to the detriment of the emphasis given by the most classic and well-known authors of Brazilian historiography - Caio Prado Júnior, Gilberto Freyre and Sérgio Buarque de Holanda)<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> See Silva (2014).



Finally, it is worth highlighting the current status of the works *Formation of Contemporary Brazil* and *Portugal and Brazil in the Crisis of the Old Colonial System (1777-1808)*, considering the economic situation already widely debated regarding the process of deindustrialization and expansion of the tertiary sector of the Brazilian economy, in which, basically, Brazilian industrial activity has retreated for successive decades, under perspectives such as job creation and participation in GDP, among others used in the economic literature to measure Brazilian industrial participation in the economy during the last decades, whereas new foreign technologies increasingly invade the daily life of society, as the so-called 'uberization' and increasing automation of labor relations (ALMEIDA, 2018), at the same time as Brazil moves away from the necessary preparation to absorb the changes that the contemporary world imposes on everyone and everything with industrial revolutions that followed the first - and from that are originated various externalities such as legal insecurity for workers, increased unemployment, among others. The first Industrial Revolution is included, by the way, among the main historical and economic events that influenced the changes dealt with by Caio Prado Júnior (2011) and Fernando Antônio Novais (1981).

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