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- 1 Political dynasties and the handover of political power between relatives are not a recent phenomenon. On the contrary, these logics have been present in different political institutions since the constitution of the modern political apparatus. Although it has been neglected by scholars, one can see that within the last decade, the study of political dynasties and family power in modern democracies has been getting much more attention than ever before.
- 2 Within this scientific context, the book presented by Ricardo Costa de Oliveira is a much-needed investigation that describes to perfection some of the major elements behind the reproduction of political power and State elites in Brazil. The impact of this contribution should not only be measured regarding its importance to the study of Brazilian politics and political sociology, but also regarding Latin American studies on this subject. Only a few sociological studies focus on the construction of political dynasties in Latin America, which remains understudied compared to other regions.
- 3 The description of this *Teia do Nepotismo* (Web of Nepotism) is highly relevant when addressing the reality experienced within the democratic, political and economic institutions of the State of Parana. As described in the introduction, one of the

determining factors of the study of this particular region is the traditional and paternalist power structure upon which the modern state has been built. In order to justify this, the author has mobilized a significant number of public records, legislative and judicial texts, as well as property documents connecting different families to the political and economic structure without limiting himself to a simple illustration of this family web. This data assists Professor Oliveira in his research into the social and economic dynamics of that reproduction of family power.

- 4 The main point and argument of the book is that “family still matters” (*“familia ainda importa”*), and that it is at the heart of most of the major public institutions in the State of Parana. All three powers, the executive, legislative and judicial, have had members of one of the 62 Brazilian families of the State of Parana occupy positions within their ranks and thus perpetuate this genealogical tradition. Inside the logic of the reproduction of power by members of the same family, we should specify that the cases studied in this book depict a series of underlying non-linear processes. Different types of documents, political positions and self-serving relationships illustrate the diverse types of political cronyism and the different strategies used by the main political families to ensure their continued presence within public institutions. However, it is important to underscore that within this logic of diffuse cronyism, appointments and positions have been extended throughout the entire State apparatus and not just limited to the major administrative centers, nor local executive functions.
- 5 Although the number of socioeconomic and political factors intervening in each one of the political institutions cannot be perfectly depicted in this brief review, it is important to emphasize three major factors contributing to these dynastic logics that can also be situated in light of a postcolonial perspective on power. First, we can mention the structural importance of relatively fragile political institutions that, since the constitution of the State of Parana in 1853, has been reproducing clientelism with the oligarchic flaws already present during the colonial era. For instance, we can mention the Vasconcelos family and the role played by Zacarias de Gois (first President of the State of Parana) and his brother, João Antonio de Vasconcelos (Chief Justice of the Supreme Court in 1880).
- 6 The other two factors can, and normally should be, described together. Social inequalities and the development of a certain degree of political clientelism over time have also influenced and determined the way this political behaviour has become rooted within the political structure. For these factors, the author mentions the significant role played by the municipalities in the construction of a hierarchical political structure and clientelist relationships developed among oligarchic families that forged the constitution of the Brazilian state. The power detained by the families occupying executive functions in those municipalities helped to make the presence of their relatives widespread throughout the rest of the political institutions and to reinforce their social and political benefits.
- 7 Although the case studied by Professor Oliveira illustrates in a representative way the social and political structures of the State of Parana, it is important to realize that this particular situation is also common in other Latin American countries as the logics connecting big landlords¹, clientelism and local politics has been highlighted in other studies (Felstiner 1976; Rossi 2009; Castilho 2012; Oliveira 2015).² But which are the elements allowing this configuration in these post-colonial states? Oliveira perfectly describes the highly hierarchical structure within the provincial government and its

links with the colonial organisation. According to the author's perspective, the Portuguese colonial organization allowed the reproduction of a highly structured oligarchic community that assumed the power once the links with the colonial authorities were broken. The constitution of the State of Parana in 1853 under Imperial rule inaugurated a transition in which local and oligarchic families would ensure the production of several products, like the *yerba mate*, in exchange for political autonomy. This new political organization of the region allowed for the prosperity of these families and their highly integrated participation in administrative functions. The logic of cronyism that followed this period of oligarchic dominance induced the perpetuity of this class through the reproduction of social clubs and economic exchange organizations within the Brazilian system.

- 8 One of the main difficulties when analyzing these dynastic structures of power is how the links between actors can be identified without limiting the analysis to a genealogical approach? To avoid the pitfalls of unidimensional analysis, the research done by Professor Oliveira shows not only the number of political positions detained by given family members (county prefects, senators, deputies, Federal Court judges, etc.), but also the properties, social links and other economic organizations (newspapers, media conglomerates, CEOs at public corporations like Petrobras, etc.) that assured the construction and reproduction of this family political apparatus. Furthermore, the breadth and depth of these connections within the political apparatus allowed not only to constantly relocate family members in executive and legislative positions, but also in local and national judicial sectors, a significant consideration when analysing the logics and patterns driving the separation of powers and the democratic institutions attached to them.
- 9 As mentioned in the first part of this review, the case of the provincial deputy, Anibal Khury, and the path that allowed him to consolidate his and his family's position within the State government, is an clear example of these dynamics. With a truly in-depth study of the logic of resource management of this political actor, Oliveira shows that the logic of reproduction of social inequalities can be connected to different economic activities and their place within local communities. For most of the actors involved, the development of their positioning begins at a local level, with executive powers obtained due to local economic development resulting in increased relative power over local populations. Asserting economic influence allowed oligarchic families to gain sufficient leverage to occupy the political scene, and to increase their participation in determining the socioeconomic logics of those communities. By doing this, the Khury family has long maintained the direction of executive posts, but also extended their influence to other political institutions. For instance, we can mention the important role the Khury/Curi family played in founding the new Partido do Movimento Brasileiro, and the multiplication of legislative offices they hold in both the regional and federal chambers.
- 10 The importance of this kind of analysis is twofold. First, it provides an important description of the way political power is being managed in some regions of Brazil and second, it reveals the roots of such behaviour at a time when the study of kinship politics is a subject of interest in Latin America. To this purpose, family connections and politics in the State of Parana can be seen as an archetype upon which to develop more research.

- 11 Moreover, we should not neglect the book's academic contribution in terms of categories, variables and structural elements analyzed. The distribution of lands, the heritage of the imperial and colonial rule, and the oligarchic constitution of local power are conceptual factors that should be applied to other cases, even to cross-regional studies on the concentration of power, autocracies and political dynasties. While other academics might denounce some features of this volume as "purely journalistic work," it would be impossible to deny the value of the methodology presented in the book and the conceptual structures that fit with many other Latin American countries. Indeed, despite an increasing number of research and studies about dynastic power in modern States and their roots, the analysis of Latin American countries is scarce and has not been developed intensively.³ Thus, I consider this book a "must read" for the study of the nature of modern political power and the logic of the reproducibility of dynastic models in countries with a post-colonial past. Whether future readers are interested in the Brazilian logic of power, or in the impact of the colonial period on the construction of the modern State, the book will highlight a good number of conceptual tools to develop political sociology and similar research on the logics of reproduction in kinship politics.⁴

NOTES

1. While Professor Oliveira indicates more than sixty rich families that have ensured their continuity in power in political, social and economic spheres, it is outstanding to note the link made between regional economic production and political representation in the State of Parana. Examples illustrating this link include the Khury family and the Requião family, both of which have been present in the political structure since the beginnings of the State of Parana, a factor that helped them to consolidate their economic and political power within a gamut of public institutions.

2. M. L. FELSTINER, "Kinship Politics in the Chilean Independence Movement," *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 56 (1), 1976, pp. 58-80; M. ROSSI, *Political Dynasties: Evidence from a Natural Experiment in Argentina*, (Buenos Aires: Universidad de San Andres), 2009; A. L. CASTILHO, *Partido da Terra* (Curitiba: Editora Contexto), 2012; R. C. DE OLIVEIRA, "Famílias políticas, desigualdade e estratificação social no Brasil contemporâneo," paper, XVII Congresso Brasileiro de Sociologia, 2015, Porto Alegre.

3. M. ROSSI, *Political Dynasties: Evidence from a Natural Experiment in Argentina*, *op. cit.*

4. *Ibid*; A. L. CASTILHO, *Partido da Terra*, *op. cit.*