LOGICS OF ACTION IN THE BRAZILIAN BUREAUCRACY: THE CASE OF THE INCRA

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In order to assess the most prevalent logics of action in the Brazilian land agency, INCRA, we focus on the administrative processes of development and education partnerships, management reports, control bodies, documents of many superintendencies, and ethnography of bureaucracy in two of the 30 superintendencies. Were build typologies and evaluate the actions, discourses, and loyalty chains of strategic groups in the dispute arena. As a result of the overlapping of non-universalistic logics of action – like neo-patrimonialism, clientelism, team spirit – with universalistic logics, we observe a low delivery of goods and services to society. Despite a discourse emphasizing a lack of personnel and resources, the settlement titling, an institutional priority that doesn't need a lot of resources to be completed, shows the management difficulties. In order to change this situation, a better understanding of the action logics that inform them is necessary. This article tries to bring to light the hidden mechanisms of bureaucratic practice.

Keywords: bureaucracy, clientelism, team spirit, public service, neo-patrimonialism

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LÓGICAS DE AÇÃO NA BUROCRACIA BRASILEIRA: O CASO DO INCRA

Para avaliar as lógicas de atuação mais predominantes no órgão fundiário brasileiro, INCRA, tomamos como objeto os processos administrativos de parcerias de desenvolvimento e educação, relatórios de gestão, documentos de órgãos de controle de diversas superintendências e etnografia da burocracia em duas das 30 superintendências. Foram construídas tipologias e avaliadas as ações, discursos e cadeias de lealdade de grupos estratégicos na arena de disputa. Como resultado do entrelaçamento de lógicas de ação não universalistas – como o neopatrimonialismo, o clientelismo, o espírito de corpo – com as lógicas universalistas, observamos uma baixa entrega de bens e serviços à sociedade. Apesar do discurso de falta de pessoal e recursos, a titulação de assentamentos, prioridade da instituição e que não precisa de muitos recursos para ser feita, mostra as dificuldades de gestão. Para mudar essa situação, é necessário um melhor entendimento das lógicas de ação que os informam. Este artigo tenta trazer à luz os mecanismos ocultos da prática burocrática.

Palavras-chave: burocracia, clientelismo, espírito de corpo, serviço público, neopatrimonialismo

LÓGICAS DE ACCIÓN EN LA BUROCRACIA BRASILEÑA: EL CASO DEL INCRA

Con el fin de evaluar las lógicas operativas más prevalentes en la agencia brasileña de tierras, INCRA, tomamos como objeto los procesos administrativos de alianzas de desarrollo y educación, informes de gestión, documentos de los órganos de control de varias superintendencias y etnografía de la burocracia en dos de las 30 superintendencias. Se construyeron tipologías y se evaluaron las acciones, discursos y cadenas de lealtad de grupos estratégicos en la arena de la disputa. Como resultado del entrelazamiento de lógicas de acción no universalistas -como el neopatrimonialismo, el clientelismo, la esprit de corps- con lógicas universalistas, se observa una baja entrega de bienes y servicios a la sociedad. A pesar del discurso de falta de personal y recursos, la titulación de asentamientos, una prioridad para la institución y que no necesita muchos recursos para realizarse, muestra las dificultades de gestión. Para cambiar esta situación, es necesaria una mejor comprensión de la lógica de acción que los informa. Este artículo intenta sacar a la luz los mecanismos ocultos de la práctica burocrática.

Palabras-clave: burocracia, clientelismo, espíritu de cuerpo, servicio público, neopatrimonialismo

1. INTRODUCTION

Around the world, bureaucracy grows and becomes more diversified, but at the same time, it faces increasing scarcity of resources, questioning from the general public, and external control (Peters, 1999). In Latin America, Zuvanic *et al* (2010) attribute the weakness of the public service to the low professionalization and lack of stability of its bureaucracy. In the rankings built, Brazil is seen as a positive exception, reaching a "Weberian ideal," with qualified bureaucracy recruited in a meritocratic, autonomous manner and submitted to clear strategies for managing personal performance, with internal variations.

The historical intricacies that forged the Brazilian State have numerous interpretations (Touraine, 1989; Bresser-Pereira, 2007). Based on ethnography at the National Institute of Colonization and Agrarian Reform (INCRA), we try to demonstrate why we partially diverge from the statement that Brazil is an exception. In fact, the recruitment of bureaucracy tends to occur in a meritocratic way and the stability of the server is guaranteed. However, we agree with Ramos *et al* (2018), in a comparative study of Brazilian and Uruguayan bureaucracy: planning, monitoring, performance analysis and its consequences tend to work only *pro forma*. In our case, this situation results in a low delivery of public goods and services to society.

Created in 1970, INCRA is a federal autarchy with 30 superintendencies spread across all 26 States. Responsible for the Brazilian territory management, which ultimately materialized in: 1) the creation of rural settlements (small farms from the expropriation and division of the big and unproductive farms). As one of the most unequal countries of Planet, the struggle for land was intensified in the 1980s due to economic and political factors, like the new Federal Constitution of 1988. But the settlements virtually only occurred between 1995 and 2011; 2) land regularization (provision of documents to squatters of public lands) and 3) in registration and certification of rural properties.

Under its responsibility are one million settled families (25% of Brazilian rural family farming) and a large part (the public and federal fraction) of Legal Amazon[1], which covers two thirds of the national territory. By now (2021), INCRA is concentrated in titration to give the property rights to the farmers which are crucial to credit access and domain security.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The notion of bureaucratic capacity, while the possibility of implementing a policy without external or personalist influence, combined with the political autonomy of the institution, is used to assess governance and, with it, build a ranking of public institutions, with several examples in Latin America (Polga-Hecimovich & Trelles, 2016).

[1] A group of states, defined by law, that shelter the Amazon forest. In that place there is environment restrictions.

Applied in Brazil (Bersch *et al,* 2013), capacity was estimated with variables that indicated specialization, salary and autonomy, with respect to the influence of political parties, measured by the proportion of commissioned positions and party-affiliated servants. Both were correlated with proxy variables for governance: cases of corruption in the press and number of dismissals. The Brazilian reality was dual: islands of excellence coexist in a "sea of subWeberian agencies," with gradations.

Auditing 287 Brazilian federal public bodies, the Federal Court of Accounts[2] (TCU, 2018) measured the degree of exposure to the risk of fraud and corruption, where INCRA was positioned at the maximum level of risk, with the indication of directors being a central variable.

In a global typology about the political/bureaucratic relationship (Dasandi & Esteve, 2017), Brazil would occupy a situation characterized by high separation from spheres, but low autonomy from bureaucracy and with high political interference in public actions, considered to be far from an "ideal Weberian." It is noteworthy that relations of patronage and patrimonialism, in that classification, were included in another characterization, other than the Brazilian one.

The importance of big data is not disregarded, but it is necessary to go further. In the Bersch *et al* (2013) capacity ranking, INCRA occupies an intermediate position and has low autonomy, since, apparently, it would have many leaders affiliated with political parties, being, in general, in a middle position. Would the delivery of goods and services to society follow the ranking?

Work in administration and political science can be complemented by anthropological analysis, clarifying the understanding of the logics of action underway in each factual situation and its consequences. Likewise, avoiding the tautological use of the notion of capacity (Gomide, Pereira, & Machado, 2018), the excessive generalization in the proposals of good governance (Grindle, 2010) and considering the difficulty of evaluating and measuring autonomy, capacity and governance (Fukuyama, 2013).

As we will try to show, there is a strong link between union and social movements by the ruling elite of the Brazilian Federal Executive where the choice of leaders occurs in a network of broader relations, not only partisan, but with a focus on loyalty, including in patronage relations, that replaces meritocracy.

Polga-Hecimovich and Trelles (2016) analyzed more than 15 thousand publications on bureaucracy in Latin America, between 2000 and 2015. They concluded that there was a relative theoretical and methodological insufficiency, whose embryonic stage in the field of studies would be characterized by the great attention spent on conceptualizing and measuring state and bureaucratic capacity, autonomy and control. They pointed to a lack of dialogue between the disciplines, an excessive focus on reform proposals to the detriment of understanding the bureaucracy, in addition to the difficulty of relating bureaucratic capacity to results in public policies. The scarcity of anthropological studies on bureaucracy was found in other reviews on the area (Hoag & Hull, 2017; Heyman, 2012; Bierschenk, 2018).

[2] Responsible for the accounting, financial, budgetary, operational and equity inspection of public bodies.

If the State is structured around public policies (Jobert & Muller, 1989), an immersion allows us to critically evaluate management reports, control and administrative processes, considering that not everything that is thought and done is written and that "everywhere there are things that are not said and are not done in front of a stranger" (Bourdieu, 2013: 24).

We understand public action as a device for delivering public goods, or reforming it (Olivier de Sardan, 2014), avoiding the excessive focus, typically Foucauldian, on coercion and discipline of a "diabolical" state (*diabolus in machina*) at the service of the dominant, that is, of the non-universal. A kind of functionalism of the worst, an inverted sign of the typical functionalism, which sees the State as an instrument of consensus (Bourdieu, 2014).

The State is better understood as something close to an administrative and bureaucratic field[3], a subsector of the power field (Bourdieu, 2014), composed of politicians and bureaucrats relating to non-state entities in a given mediation space, stage of struggles where the bureaucrats' strategies of action and room for maneuver must be situated (Funder, 2019). It seeks to overcome the typically functionalist question (including the Marxist one, which emphasizes the economic and ideological function of the State, as the notion of apparatus) where state functions conform an *a priori*. Thus, it is worth asking what the State and its agents actually do (or fail to do). The analysis takes into account their interactions, through which social structures are revealed (or concealed) (Bourdieu, 2014).

Taking state actions as the result of the intertwining of different action logics allows us to abandon the monocausal explanations (Olivier de Sardan, 2014; Blundo, 2014; Bierschenk, 2018) and contest a common explanation for the Brazilian problems through an alleged "inheritance Iberian."

As one of the most unequal countries of Planet, the struggle for land was intensified in the 1980s due to economic and political factors, like the new Federal Constitution of 1988. But the settlements virtually only occurred between 1995 and 2011. evaluation in their nature, intensity and combinations. It is an equation with many variables, the weight of which depends on different contexts. The result, with the exception of two dozen countries (in the nature or intensity of the processes[4]), is a low efficiency of government actions.

Logics refers to categories of thinking, perception and construction of reality, whose strength lies in the orchestration of the unconscious, mental structures, making them difficult to change (Bourdieu, 2014). More precisely, and in an interactionist sense, the concept involves strategy, action, practices and routines; while governance refers to "institutional arrangements organizing the delivery of collective public goods and services, according to specific rules (formal and practical) and with specific forms of authority" (Olivier de Sardan, 2014: 76).

[3] The expression "field" is only a reference. In peripheral countries, the greater importance of external consecration criteria, the strong heteronomy of the spheres and, especially, a vulnerability in relation to the political sphere make the concept difficult to apply (CORADINI, 2003).

[4] In central countries, deviations from a Weberian ideal would be smaller and more camouflaged (GRAZIANO, 1975; Olivier de Sardan, 2014).

Each typical arrangement features a mode of governance. To define different modes, it is necessary to consider the different combinations of them, in a plural analysis. Among them, the bureaucratic mode of governance is the closest to our reality. Our object is to describe how it manifests itself here, what logics inform it, how they combine and translate into norms and what results they generate.

In addition to the meaning attributed by Weber (1971) to bureaucracy, we take it as a heterogeneous group, operating in an arena, where strategic groups compete for resources and narratives, as a double focus on the interface between bureaucrats and clients and in the intra-bureaucratic relationship (Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan, 2019). According to Crozier (1981: 7):

> (…) A complex set of intertwined and interdependent games, through which individuals, with often very different opportunities for success, seek to maximize their benefits, respecting the unwritten rules of the game that the environment imposes on them, systematically taking advantage of all its advantages and trying to minimize those of others.

The bureaucrat's room for maneuver consists of navigating between official, social (both explicit) and practical (implicit, informal) norms in each specific context, that is, it is the selection of a limited series of regulated options that must be described (Olivier de Sardan, 2015). Practical rules are used in an exploratory way at the same time that they work as an agency-friendly concept, so that it is possible, with fieldwork, to build different typologies to explain the different logics of action.

We avoid a posture of moral and political adherence to an anti-hegemonic ideal and to the "marginal" populations or their would-be representatives, which is not uncommon in anthropology. The focus is not on margins, but on its mainstream, ascertaining how the institution's central actions operate. It is worth considering Geertz (1997: 88): "The trick is not to get involved by any type of internal spiritual empathy with your informants." And we deal symmetrically with our "native," the bureaucrat, away from what was called "ideological populism," where research becomes a political project. On the contrary, we employ a "methodological populism" that requires researcher attention to all groups and strategies, regardless of their sympathies (Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan, 2019).

3. METHOD

The period of analysis is from 2003 to 2020. This choice was due to two factors: there is little data from the previous period on the internet and the entry of this author as a server (having worked in two States) occurred only in 2004[5]. In addition to the ethnographic analysis,

[5] Like INCRA's agronomist, I have been working with technical assistance and titration and researching settlements

during two years we read the management reports (on the internet, started in 2009), documents of the control bodies and administrative processes that deal with partnerships, created until June 2019, in the Electronic System of Information (SEI). The two main objects were actions in settlements – diagnostics, productive projects, etc. – (the majority, managed by Head office); and the Education Program for Agrarian Reform (PRONERA), created in 1998. This program funds through partnerships (agreements and cooperation) with universities and political organizations to conduct formal courses (technical and superior of many subjects) for settlers.

The documentary analysis and the trajectory of bureaucratic processes, "following the paper" is seen by Heyman (2012) as an interesting methodological insight, an expedient adopted in Mello (2016; 2020).

The choice of partnerships as one of the entry points of the study was due to the fact that a considerable part of the budget was allocated to them, to the detriment of INCRA's more prosaic actions, such as land demarcation, land regularization, technical assistance, infrastructure, occupational supervision etc. Consider a small margin of maneuver in the budget, as much of it is made up of inescapable expenses (wages being the largest). On this margin, a large part of the internal disputes occurs in this true arena of struggles that is the public service. Some results of the partnerships are presented in the defense of the group of former INCRA leaders in a process in which they were condemned by TCU.

Not all processes are in SEI, but the sample was reasonable: 32 partnerships dealing with settlement development, worth 68 million[6], and 30 PRONERA partnerships, worth 7.5 million. The ethnographic analysis allowed to characterize the main logics and practical norms, as well as to establish an exploratory typology of the servants based on the logics and their hierarchical and functional position.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Management reports provide an overview of the institution's spending from three groups: Personnel, Expropriation and Others (funding, outsourcing, partnerships, agrarian reform credits, etc.). From 2009 to 2019, the total annual values decrease from 600 million to 400 million, although they increase in personnel expenses from 140 million to 200 million. The end of expropriations of land[7] did not offset the decrease in the category Others, from 330 million to 185 million. In numbers, the end of agrarian reform (since was its main mission) and the institution's growing unimportance. While the lack of resources for daily rates and fuel became routine, the partnerships, from 2008 to 2018, had an average annual expenditure of 40 million.

on its own.

[6] All values in American dollar. On November 8, 2020, 1 dollar = 5.4 reais.

[7] The end of expropriations has some reasons. The most important is the scarcity of improductive land because the high development of agriculture. INCRA can not expropriate productive land.

TCU (2019) condemned eight former INCRA officers for "irregularities resulting from the regulatory and administrative weaknesses of the Autarchy", related to the omission and direction in the beneficiary selection and occupational supervision processes, in addition to negligence in correcting the inconsistencies of the System and Information on Agrarian Reform Projects (SIPRA), where the settlers are registered. TCU complains about the lack of universalistic criteria, of privileging "social movements" and of not fulfilling basic tasks.

The former leaders appealed, through the Attorney General's Office (AGU), arguing that the accusations were generic, did not consider the normative improvements and the proposals of (in their view, successful) information systems, through partnerships. And they pointed out:

> (…) *Budget and personnel limitations*, the institutional culture of an autarchy with almost 50 years of existence (...) *the conduct and attitude of the managers and servants of the regional superintendencies* (...) determined the result considered as harmful (AGU, 2019: 92-93, emphasis added).

They emphasized that the main irregularity they had pointed out, the registration in the government's social programs of part of the families having been made in municipalities other than the settlements, did not make sense, since, for the most part, they were contiguous. And they pointed to the confusion made in the criteria for selecting and maintaining families, when it was understood as irregular settlers who became civil servants or businessmen. Two evident TCU exaggerations.

Finally, a personal report by some former INCRA's chairmen (2003-2015) accuses the TCU of having used criteria more favorable to the former president who succeeded the convicts, even though he ran into the same problems: the trial would have been political. The situation is ongoing, but it can be said that the logic of action studied does not affect only INCRA, which does not eliminate the need to examine the arguments of the ex-leaders. The fact is that the control bodies expose government insufficiency.

The creation of new agrarian reform settlements has greatly decreased since 2011. In technical assistance, the institution's best moment had 40% of families attended (AGU, 2019). The demarcation and occupational supervision of the lots in the settlements, which should take place in the hundreds of thousands per year, due to the requirement of the control bodies, do not exceed 20 thousand per year. The titling of the settlements, for a demand of 800 thousand lots, was of approximately 15 thousand per year in the last five years (2017-2021), a very insufficient number.

The institution delivers little to society, nothing different from the majority of the Brazilian public service. The goals, programmed and accomplished, are presented in all management reports without a critical appraisal and an appropriate comparison term, where the general demand of the Nation is never quantified, inducing the reader to a condescending evaluation. Low delivery is justified by the lack of resources, personnel and the excessive demand of control bodies.

Regarding budgetary and personnel limitations, the titling is illuminating. Since the title is a "paper", after the georeferencing of the property (the most expensive stage of the process, which has

already been completed in many places), its issue requires little investment. Low delivery results from bad management. The same occurs with occupational supervision, issuing concessions and other internal tasks. In the case of the construction of roads and housing, credits and technical assistance, with no financial resources, no dice, even though the same bad management.

If the low delivery of titles were not enough, several regulations starting in 2019 greatly increased the useless work in titling, such as mandating overly detailed reports. An example of ritualism, while prioritizing the means at the expense of the ends (Crozier, 1981), which shows the discretion resulting from self-protection.

The assignment of positions to party groups has served as a proxy for "non-Weberian" relations in above mentioned works. Contrary to expectations, a large part of INCRA's managers belongs to civil servants (there is a legal requirement for the majority to be so) not affiliated. However, historically, they responded to external consecration criteria, revealing an INCRA more heteronomous than the rankings suggest. Heteronomy is dependent on its position within the administrative field, which Bourdieu (2014) called "the left hand of the State." For structural reasons, this is where we find the highest prevalence of hyper-politicized speeches and positions, while a "process at the end of which the principle of vision and political division tends to override all others" (Bourdieu, 2017: 240). If is also where we find non-universalist logics.

The expulsion processes of the settlers are frequent and oblige the bureaucrat, especially at the street level (LIPSKY, 1980), to take a difficult position. When INCRA punishes someone for common "irregularities" (misconduct, homelessness, etc.) and fails to similarly treat neighbors in similar situations, simple misunderstanding or misinformation and moral classificatory processes must be considered, which, taking in account the inexistence of a radical separation between decision-makers and operators (Bernstein & Mertz, 2011), reflects their relative autonomy: without planning and internal control, there is a lack of reprisal.

However, it is not uncommon for a clientelistic logic to induce the civil servant to act in accordance with the interests of local political organizations. The expression "we only give to those who deserve it," repeated by leaders of the Movement of Landless Rural Workers (MST) – the main political organization in Brazil for agrarian reform, with an assumed Leninist orientation – reveals not only the prominence of political judgments (disguised as moral) in the delivery of public goods, but also of the logic that informs it, where such leaders appear in the eyes of the settlers (and, sometimes, of the bureaucrats themselves) as the grantees of these (in that sense, personalistic) goods and services.

The prioritization of agents linked to political organizations, from the selection of beneficiaries to the titling, is commonplace (there are variations in the country), revealing a practical rule that, even if not written and not dictated, informs the conduct of civil servants (Mello, 2016). The drama of the bureaucrat who works in the settlements or with the agrarian reform political organizations is that the configuration as a whole within the institution impels

them to adhere to clientelist logic or, at least, obedience to the political organization that hegemonizes the mediation space and decisively influenced INCRA's internal hierarchy.

The daily rate worked as a bargaining chip: in one case, a period without trips was enough to soften the more combative spirits who dared to contest the current *doxa* (where the political organizations give the cards). The threat of isolation (and even death) is another possibility, let us say, more forceful, when the sector change does not work, triggered by the established *esprit de corps*. Adherence to the field *modus operandi* has benefits: reduced workload and stress (which is not small), passed on to local leaders who, with this, accumulate symbolic power in front of their "base."

Classification systems and the results from bureaucratic actions, when privileging certain groups, can generate, maintain, or expand socioeconomic inequalities, an issue already explored in studies of rural settlements (Mello, 2016) and in other contexts of bureaucracy (Pires, Lotta, & Torres Júnior, 2018).

Conceptual discussion about clientelism, patronage, with its possible prefixes and suffixes, does not fit here. We take as patron-client relationships entities that relate through asymmetric reciprocity. In a context of mediation, the relationship can be transformed into brokerage (Boissevain, 1987). Due to its prevalence, we maintained it as a specific logic, although, in the context of public administration, it should be understood as a modality of neopatrimonialism (Olivier de Sardan, 2014).

In the (extinct) productive, social and environmental technical assistance program, the transfer of INCRA resources to political organizations or public agencies almost never had monitoring and evaluation of results. The clientelist logic, operated strongly in this program, hampered the INCRA's leaders and preventing the evaluation of services' quality. The political organization could veto the leaders in the occupation of the positions through informal and direct command at the top of the INCRA hierarchy. When we managed to define that the technical assistance (from MST) would be evaluated anonymously by the settlers, the MST stepped forward and threatened them that they would not gain houses from a government program brokered by INCRA (a settler revealed this to me years later). This was only possible because INCRA guaranteed the MST's monopoly in this action and the partnership with engaged bureaucrats undermines the credibility of the process. As a result, technical assistance was well evaluated, even where it did not appear (I've heard this countless times in decades of field research in two States). In another situation, a colleague was threatened with death by an MST leader over a report on deforestation. The INCRA's boss did nothing.

The digital citizenship room, a digital interface for beneficiaries to obtain services from INCRA (AGU, 2019), a universalist innovation, was compromised due to SIPRA, bad internet, and the fact that the direct contact of settlers with INCRA (in this case, virtual) is deprecated by the political organizations that carry out the agrarian reform brokerage.

Ethnography also reveals the specificities of INCRA in the Brazilian spoil system, a scheme of cooptation and recruitment as a kind of substitute for management (Coradini, 2018). The leaders of the superintendencies are chosen by the correlation of local forces, influenced by the political organizations of agrarian reform, associations of civil servants and parties, depending on the State, in different combinations, but unified by non-universalist logics. The argument of the former INCRA leaders is understood when they pass the responsibility for administrative failures to the superintendents. Behind the formal hierarchy, other logics condition administrative results, regardless of good ideas and intentions. An ex-president said: "every command that went down was relativized."

The *esprit de corps* (Bourdieu, 2014) or caste (Crozier, 1981) which, in Brazilian common sense, is defined as corporatism, can be considered as a more ubiquitous logic than clientelism. It forms a strategy for the defense of bureaucrats aimed at specific forms of self-interest (Helal & Neves, 2010).

Corporatism properly concerns the relationship of the State with interest groups, centralized by it (Peters, 1999; Lanzaro & Schmitter, 1998). The concept of neo-corporativism was made necessary by the commitment of the former to fascism or state control, which, many times, no longer corresponds to the reality of free groups.

Sabourin (2020) argues that situations involving political organizations and occupying positions in the Ministries would be configured as neo-corporatist, in the sense of Jobert and Muller (1989). We understand that there is an articulation of this logic with clientelism, because in each step of a chain of relationships, apparently group, personalism, and diadicity are retained (Boissevain, 1987).

The self-protection subgroups are manifested in the form of cliques: based on instrumental friendship, they have the function of making unpredictable situations more predictable and ensuring a more peaceful existence between superiors and inferiors within a hierarchy (Wolf, 2003), because "every institution conquers part of the time and interest of its participants and gives them something of a world; in short, every institution has tendencies to 'close'" (Goffman, 1974: 16). Thus, the *esprit de corps*, prevalent at INCRA and its union organizations, tends to keep the environment free from major internal constraints. In practice, there is no charge for goals, nor punishment through performance appraisals, true practical norms. When they happen, in rare cases, they concern other situations.

As for the neo-patrimonial logic, the prefix neo differentiates it from the "oriental system" described by Weber (1971), patrimonialism. Currently, it is an adaptation that coexists with universalist logic, of the official norm. In INCRA, neo-patrimonialism finds its effects in the private use of public goods, including equipment, training opportunities, and information control. The most striking situation is the control of partnerships and their results, like the systems developed to store data on settlements.

The partnerships demonstrate the effort to bring groups together within the bureaucracy and others within Universities and political organizations. Actions within the settlements, more or less related to rural extension, showed a *modus operandi* and specific results. A small number of strategically positioned agents formulate and monitor millionaire partnerships. These were often processed in record time, due to the management of interested agents, "with the process under the arm," with unconditional approvals of the projects and reports. The justification presented for them, in general, is lack of expertise at INCRA.

Objectively, there is expertise: Of 4,700 civil servants, 45% have a college degree (including close to 550 agronomists) and have had a long time in the profession. Second, sometimes, at the Universities, the coordinators of the partnerships had no experience and training in the areas, while there were no technical criteria for hiring the personnel involved, often with a militant trajectory.

The results were, as a rule, scattered, punctual (often favoring small groups), overlapping with technical assistance actions, with INCRA's internal systems, inaccessible to servants and questionable from a technical point of view. In particular, due to an excessive emphasis on pseudo-scientific themes, such as "agroecology", expression has become a true password for accessing INCRA's resources, present in almost all partnerships. There was a scarcity of numbers on production and income and the absence of impact analysis.

In the PRONERA, despite formally having selection notices, a normative vacuum generates a wide margin of maneuver for public agents in the selection of course proposals to be funded. The winning institutions were repeated and the proposals were approved peremptorily. The selection criteria for students were secondary. Apart from exceptions, the issue ended with the assumption that "communities" would choose, that is, political organizations, in an opacity of procedures never questioned at INCRA, with the exception of some prosecutors.

In our sample (32 partnerships), student dropout was estimated at 28%. The theme, when not denied, is presented as a personal one. Courses, their quality, curriculum, and suitability are never called into question. Despite the importance of education for settlers and the leader's emancipatory discourses (like an optimistic view of Meek, 2014), PRONERA ended up becoming, at least as a trend, a fundraising device for political organizations that deal with agrarian reform and its supporters in Universities, at the same time promoting the accumulation of political capital for certain groups of bureaucrats.

Combined with these logics, we find familial and even religious logics, manifested in the hiring of outsourced workers, allocated based on personalized relationships. Personal influence on hiring bureaucracy training companies is also facilitated, given that they are unenforceable bidding processes, without competition.

INCRA's internal systems have operational problems. Both the TCU and the Federal Comptroller General (CGU) recommended a solution for many years, culminating in the condemnation episode. INCRA is also under pressure from the courts, prosecutors and the press. In

view of its relative inoperability, after 25 years of existence, a former leader stated: "social movements love SIPRA, they can do whatever they want." So can the workers, including inaction. The barriers of the Land Management System (SIGEF) and the lack of equipment are also used to justify the low delivery of services, even if they cost a small fraction of the expenses with partnerships.

Considering the differences in nature and intensity of the processes, neo-patrimonialism/clientelism can evolve into corruption (Muir & Gupta, 2018; Fukuyama, 2013), which can be attested at INCRA by the large number of civil servants arrested in the last decades.

The Brazilian public service is the scene of an intertwining of action logics, where the universalist is more prevalent in the speeches, as if theatricalized (Bourdieu, 2014), than in practice. The result for the population is the poor service provided. Internally, it generates an environment that does not stand out for merit and for the achievement of actions, whose reflexes occur even in the personal sphere, often in the form of depression, absenteeism and in what Crozier (1981) called withdrawal: in the face of lack expectation of reward for the effort made, commitment is reduced.

A vacancy for training civil servants sometimes works as a prebend, distributed to a select clientele by a colleague, who acts as a patron, in exchange for reputation, a crucial symbolic resource to guarantee the support of the same clientele in maintaining their position, a cycle that closes with the absence of charge: a friendly and condescending boss with absenteeism (a practical norm). Neo-patrimonialism/clientelism and *esprit de corps* overlapped.

The practical rule resulting from this last process is broken in certain situations: First, by the attacks of the control bodies, media and Justice, forcing the institution to consider universalist principles. Second, when there is an immediate interest from political organizations working on agrarian reform, whose influence even occurs in the elaboration of the institution's internal rules. Third, when internal personal sweeps motivate the leaders to exercise power over certain agents in performance evaluations (with repercussions on remuneration) or through physical isolation. It is symptomatic that they tend to be precisely those who, more oriented to a universalist logic, have tension with colleagues and leaders, demonstrating that the break of this true practical rule that refers to the non-collection of universalist dictates, triggers persecutory processes, à la Kafka.

INCRA's bureaucracy can be thought of by its professional categories or in a typical emic classification (new and old). Both are not fruitful in that, unlike the cases studied by Crozier (1981), here, seniority is not the determining factor for professional advancement, nor are professional identities (Touraine, 1989). To clarify the actions of the strategic groups, we have chosen three ideal types, each one more intensely focused on some specific logic, even though they tend to combine, in practice. It is not about types of people, but people engaged in types of activities (Bernstein & Mertz, 2011) and logics of action.

a) Groups that assumed positions of power, mainly from 2003 onwards. Although there are universalist propositions, clientelist relations promote the construction of a very existence

of INCRA's sociodicy and its relationship with political organizations in favor of agrarian reform, "agroecology" and a certain collectivism. Hyper-politicization is also manifested in the opposition to the titling. Although very desired by the settlers, titling is opposed by the MST because with property rights, settlers need no longer obey.

The *esprit de corps* references the relationship with the bureaucracy in general. Strikes, almost yearly, are the rituals in which social hierarchies are ratified by reaffirming the political capital of the leaders. If, even in a situation of classic bureaucracy, where the fundamental rule is equality, such as those investigated by Crozier (1981), the groups aim to maintain their privileged position, in our empirical view, such a strategy is much more central.

Without plastering the categories (there is a transit and exchange of functions between street and middle-level bureaucrats), part of its members revolves around the so-called middle-level bureaucracy, in a trajectory of ascension in the INCRA hierarchy, beyond of the electoral cycle. With the discursive hyper-politicization eased by the circumstances of a right-wing government, several agents of this group consolidated themselves in strategic positions in four governments, indicating that their ascension had the strength of a network of personal relationships, based on the cliques, referring to a larger external network with political organizations, parties and university groups, where the central element is political capital. This allowed them to occupy a key position in the partnerships and in the commissions that elaborate the internal rules. The lack of meritocratic criteria for the composition of these commissions generates flawed norms, weakening the management, as pointed out by TCU.

b) The majority group, composed of, shall we say, common servants, is more oriented towards a neo-patrimonial logic that, as a rule, manifests itself in different levels of absenteeism and inaction. It relates to the leading group through the logic of self-protection and even clientelism, when the cliques present elements of the patron-client relationship. The appointment of staff members to management positions does not indicate the end of clientelistic relations, neither external nor internal.

In this group, we find the middle-level, technical, and street-level bureaucrats. Despite the adaptive trend promoted by the structural strength of the subfield in question (the organizational culture), it is possible to think of positive responses in productivity, in the case of new management mechanisms that guide them.

c) The third group, in which I might be situated, is a minority and, due to the groups' individual and collective trajectories (as in other groups, as it is not a moral issue), it tends toward a universalist logic, although this may be accompanied by elements of ritualism, not being immune to the criticism of the ruling group because of that. It is possible that such agents have less aptitude for the accumulation of political and social capital, which are essential for the rise in the hierarchy. More marked by cultural capital, they tend to adjust their strategies and expectations in another direction.

Occupying a dominated position in this arena, this group expresses itself critically regarding the work efficiency and absenteeism and elaborate propositions (generally not considered). Its heretical position generates tension, which, for many, resulted in poor evaluation, forced transfers and moral harassment.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The preponderance of non-universalist logics of action made planning, monitoring, and evaluation efforts irrelevant, the consequence of which was the low delivery of goods and services. Regardless of the schooling of the staff and managers, outsider leaders enter a "minefield" and, to the extent that they are not charged for goals, they tend to opt for self-protection, keeping teams untouched, weak planning, and lowered goals.

The problem is, above all, sociological: even if the civil servants enter the public service in a meritocratic way, the internal logic is imposed, as if in an "orchestration without conductor" (Bourdieu, 2013: 97). Our empirical data suggests that the meritocratic advances in the INCRA, with positions held by the most competent, detected in the Brazilian bureaucracy (Cavalcante, Lotta, & Oliveira, 2018) may be more apparent than real.

Given the high degree of heteronomy of INCRA and the Brazilian spoils system itself, political capital (Bourdieu, 2011), embodied in management positions, is the main "fighting weapon," relegating any type of cultural and school capital to the background. The leaders are appointed (or, at least, not vetoed) by political parties or political organizations. However, it is necessary to consider the "verdict of the laity" (Bourdieu, 2011), in this case, the common servants. In effect, the *esprit de corps*, materialized in the cliques (which remained practically intact during the studied period), allows a heteronomous relationship to take on an autonomous aspect.

INCRA's relatively low wages are due to the devaluation of agrarian issues in the country that has one of the strongest agricultural systems in the world and no need of reform. And the insistence in agrarian reform reveals a process of *alodoxy*, where the schemes applied to perceive the social world and apprehend its position in it are the product of the previous state of the system (Bourdieu, 2017). In losing "the trolley of history," INCRA unionism has now been imprisoned in defense of an outdated agrarian reform and "agroecology."

The capacity of public agencies is also related, in addition to training, investment, and salaries, with the implementation of an organizational culture that strives for dedication to work and flexibility in responding to customer demands, as demonstrated by Tendler (1998) when analyzing successful experiences in a poor state of Brazil. Action strategies, based on a universalist logic, have supplanted long-established clientelist circuits, improving performance.

Bourdieu (2014) suggested that when public workers began to boast about their competence and not their loyalty, we would be faced with a change of logic, of personal dependence and of the model of domestic relations to a principle of autonomous authority.

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