

Ideas back to their place: social liberalism meets the other West in the work of José Guilherme Merquior

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to examine José Guilherme Merquior's conceptual framework of 'social liberalism' in the light of the political and social reality of Brazil. This proposal only makes sense insofar as it is understood that Brazil forms a part – albeit with some reservations – of the West. However, the idea of Brazil as a Western country became particularly controversial at a historical time when Latin America was regarded as part of a different (or even opposing) cultural landscape from that which attracted the West, especially among the intellectual mainstream of the Anglo-Saxon countries. On the basis of the assumption that our political culture is not exceptional, Merquior transformed the liberalism which he believed in and upheld, from the prospect of being an ideology of the 'second degree' (a term used by Roberto Schwartz to describe the liberal ideology in the context of 19th Century Brazil), to becoming the most ideal escape route from the Brazilian crisis. If our country belongs to the West, and there having no a priori incompatibility between liberalism and Brazilian political culture, Merquior opens up space for theoretical views of different kinds of liberalism to be replaced by the stance of an engaged spectator.

Keywords

Merquior; social liberalism; the West; Latin America.

José Guilherme Merquior was undoubtedly one of the key thinkers of a generation that flourished as Brazil went through its democratic transition. He was endowed with combative intellectual qualities — a far-reaching erudition and a provocative gift for language — as well as a willingness to stir up controversy. He was also an essayist, career diplomat and inveterate liberal who was often embroiled in academic discussions about Brazilian political thinking. One of the main reasons for this, was the stigma Merquior felt was attached to being a “right-wing intellectual” in his social milieu, without any affiliation to the universities or their dominant ideas (PEREIRA, 2001).

However, when one looks at his work in the domain of political philosophy, a much more complex figure emerges than the polemicist who in the mid 1980s often featured in the newspapers where he provoked (or even upset) the academic *establishment* by announcing the demise of Marxism or supporting a kind of liberalism that was apparently detached from the real world of Brazil. The reactions to Merquior were proportional to the controversies that he stirred up. He was a dilettante who turned political philosophy into an intellectual hobby, as well as being a diplomat who sheltered behind his administrative responsibilities and who in the final years of his short life moved between Mexico City and Paris. He was thus free to carry out a criticism of Marxism and eventually have it printed in the pages of *Folha de S. Paulo*, without being committed to a prolonged skirmish with his intellectual adversaries. Since he did not adhere to the National-Developmentalist Pact of the Brazilian Government, he was able to wrap himself in the flag of liberalism. He opened up a public debate but was prevented by his early death from becoming involved in the world of politics. In the first direct elections he took part in, both as a voter and analyst, he met Fernando Collor de Mello the person who translated his ideas into action. There was a heated argument about this.

The critics of Merquior believed that he was attempting to draw Brazil towards an ideology of “second degree” in the context of the decline of the State – that was exogenous and disconnected from the reality of life in Brazil – and offer this as a panacea for the problems of the country. The incompatibility between liberalism, social reality and Brazilian politics had already been discussed from different perspectives by Schwarz (1992) and Santos (1998). The question was that *social liberalism*, when put forward as the ultimate remedy of Merquior for overcoming the structural difficulties of Brazil (MERQUIOR, 1987b), did not attract the attention it deserved, having already been consigned to the graveyard of “ideas that were out of place” in Brazilian social thinking.

The aim of this study is to assess the ideas of Merquior with regard to *social liberalism* as an approach that is suited to the political and social circumstances of Brazil. This ideological approach only makes practical sense in so far as it regards Brazil as a part of the West (though only to a limited extent). To be sure, it was a particularly sensitive matter to make this assumption at a time when, in the *mainstream* opinion of the Anglo-Saxon intellectual

world in particular, it had become normal to assume that Latin America formed a different cultural pattern (HUNTINGTON, 1996) – or even belonged to a contrary matrix (MORSE, 1988) – from the driving-force of the West.

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Merquior, on the other hand, did not believe that Brazilian or Latin American political culture was anything exceptional. There are already signs of this outlook in his first works where the diplomat stated that “the myth of a non-European identity among Latin Americans is above all a strategy of rejection – rejection of something which there has been a struggle to transform but which they have repeatedly failed to obtain” (MERQUIOR, 1984, p.240). In the opinion of Merquior, this myth justified the legitimacy of ideologies like Marxism being applied to Latin America since they conjure up a world that is fundamentally non-Western.

However, the main conflict with this attitude can be found in the work of Richard Morse, *Prospero's Mirror* (Morse, 1988), which will be explained in greater detail. Morse's book put forward the view that the Ibero-American matrix was completely different from what is regarded by “Anglo-America” as being typically Western/modern. In the view of Merquior, this is a mistaken interpretation. According to this diplomat, we form a part of *another West* – “poorer and more enigmatic; a problematic West but no less Western, as is borne out by the languages, values and beliefs of its societies” (Merquior, 1990, p. 87). On the basis of this consideration, Merquior turns the liberalism, which he believes in and supports, into a potential ideology of “second degree” that provides the most ideal escape route from the Brazilian crisis. In this way, Merquior makes it possible to move on from being a theorist of different kinds of liberalism to becoming an engaged spectator.

This study is divided into four sections. The first of these addresses the arguments put forward in the work by Richard Morse with regard to our cultural and political identity. Following this, the study embarks on polemical issues: this includes the main lines of argument adopted by Simon Schwartzman in his criticism of *Prospero's Mirror* (and the skirmishes with Morse in what amounted to a duel) and in particular, the views of Merquior. This first stage effectively brings to a conclusion the thesis about Latin America – the “other West”. This provides a link with the second section which examines the political thinking of Merquior on the basis of his ideas and controversial views, with prominence being given to his bitter disputes with Francisco de Oliveira and José Arthur Giannotti on the question of Marxism. An attempt is also made to give a brief outline of the liberal side of the diplomat as expressed in three of his works: *O Argumento Liberal* [The Liberal Argument] (1983), *The Social-Liberal Path* (1987) e *Liberalismo – Antigo e Moderno* [Liberalism – Ancient and Modern] (1991).

The third section seeks to give an account of the transition between ideology and the political prospects of social liberalism in Brazil. We get back to *The Social-Liberal Path*, in which Merquior makes clear what requirements there are in Brazil and the obstacles to social-liberal reforms in the era of the New Republic. Some mention is of course made of the way the ideas of social liberalism espoused by Merquior in public debates, overlap with the modernizing discourse of Fernando Collor de Mello, whether as a candidate or as an elected president. In this way the establishment of the ideas of Collor are harmonized with the input provided by the work of Merquior. Finally in the fourth section, an attempt is made to make sense of the impressions and speculations, by bringing together the different arguments raised.

Can Latin America become a civilization on its own? The terms of the debate at the end of the 20th Century

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The first question that should be raised with regard to the thoughts of José Guilherme Merquior, is how he regards – and thus places – Latin America and Brazil in terms of its political traditions and prevailing ideas. As the author himself suggests, “the task of interpreting Latin America remains unfinished” (MERQUIOR, 1990, p. 70), especially in the light of the numerous problems experienced by Latin-American countries, many of which were structural, such as the question of external debt which plagued the economies of the continent in the last quarter of the 20th Century. The dependency theory in sociology, which Fernando Henrique Cardoso and Theotonio dos Santos were exponents of in Brazil, had difficulties in accounting for some of the issues that emerged in that period, particularly when faced with the decline of the economic dream.

Thus the 1980s represented a fertile period for the rebirth of culturalist interpretations of Brazil and its continent, as is made clear by Merquior. Perhaps the most accomplished work – and not for this reason any less controversial – was a study first launched at the beginning of the *lost decade* – “*Prospero’s Mirror*” by the Brazilian specialist Richard Morse (MORSE, 1988). Although it has never been published in its original language, the work became well-known in Latin-American academic circles and was translated into Spanish (in 1982, at the same time as it was originally launched) and Portuguese (1988). Simon Schwartzman rightly praised the book by Morse for its “intelligence, erudition, polished style and sharpness” (Schwartzman 1988). The anthropologist Otávio Velho thought that the work was “warm-hearted and provocative” (Velho 1989). José Guilherme Merquior, with the utmost refinement and sophistication said that, as a result of North-American thought, South America has been endowed with “a new masterpiece of brilliance and scholarship” (MERQUIOR, 1990).

In fact, *Prospero’s Mirror* gave rise to a productive debate about who we are and what kind of message we can offer the modern world.¹ However, in sharp contrast with the excessive praise of the introductions, there were disputes in some of the leading publications of political and social thought in Brazil – *Novos Estudos CEBRAP [Brazilian Center for Analysis and Planning]*, *Estudos Históricos*, and *Presença* – and these entailed a good deal of disagreement with regard to the “exceptionalism” that Morse attributed to the so-called Ibero-American civilization. It is in the wake of this debate that the ideas of Merquior regarding Brazil and liberalism, proved to be a feasible ideology within our society.

First of all, it is important to give a clear outline of Morse’s thesis in his work called “*Prospero’s Mirror*”.² In a reference to the character of Prospero in Shakespeare’s “*The Tempest*” and the appropriation of the character of the Uruguayan essayist and philosopher José Enrique Rodó – who compiled his political ideas in *Ariel* (1900) and *El Mirador de Próspero* [*Prospero’s Mirror*] (1909) –, Morse identified *Prospero* with the people of the United States, whom he believed were victims of the erosion of modern culture and searched in a hall of mirrors for the *singular features* of Iberian culture.

At a moment when Anglo-America may be experiencing a failure of nerve, it seems timely to set before it the historical experience of Ibero-America, not now as a case study in frustrated development, but as the living-out of a civilizational option. (MORSE, 1988, p. 14).

It should be stressed that two civilizations emerged from the same civilizational matrix – which Morse calls the “Western program”, and these were the outcome of political choices which, to some extent, reflect each other’s inverted image. Whereas the Ibero-

American choice was for Thomism and Machiavellism which were drawn together in a particular kind of centralized political culture, the English choice was to follow the scientific-materialist ideas of Bacon and Hobbes (MORSE, 1988, p. 53-66). These choices moulded the respective civilizational frameworks on the basis of this “two-way street” that mirrored the otherness.

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At the end of the 20th Century, the United States *Prosperos*, in the words of Merquior (1990, p. 71), “looked with a feeling of revulsion at the backward but still not disenchanted South”. They hoped to take from it, through the guidance of Morse himself, some kind of moral superiority to Iberian culture, by reversing the civilized/barbarous dichotomy which in the political formation of Latin America had led to the political thinking of the continent being opposed to the Anglo-American model. Ironically, “progress is beginning to accept self-inquiry and experience a strange feeling of backwardness” (MERQUIOR, 1990, p. 71), and find more friendly, playful and even human traits in the cultural features of Iberism than can be displayed by the big brother of the North. This *Prospero*, in the words of Simon Schwartzman, “finds its redemption in gazing at the Latin world, or more precisely, in an almost heroic quest for its lost essence” (SCHWARTZMAN, 1988).

In effect, one of the cornerstones of the essay by Morse is the idea that in the development of science and modern consciousness, the outcome of Anglo-Saxon culture was to push aside Latin America in cultural, political or economic ways. Marginality, which clearly cannot be understood as meaning ‘otherness’ - in so far as it has a mirror image - was not, in principle consciously established by Iberian thinking (MORSE, 1988). At the same time, the author seems to suggest that the cultural decision to opt for *underdevelopment* concerned a choice which was the legacy of a kind of “intractable matrix” of Iberian societies that were ruled by an organic and hierarchical State. In other words, as a result of political choices, the Ibero-American trajectory (in marked contrast to the Anglo-American world) has led to civilizational and cultural benefits which have been enjoyed in the course of history. This represents a *Hispanic path* geared towards “modernity”, that is not necessarily inferior (quite the contrary to judge from the line of argument of the author). However, it allows a different means of access to the “modern” and as a result, offers an alternative way of building a civilization that differs from the classical matrix which originally characterized the “Western program”.

The proposition of an *effervescent holism*, which is a feature of Iberian culture, entered into a collision course with the notions already rooted in the State that were put forward by the classic English political philosophers Hobbes and Locke, who argued that political institutions were basically mechanical and led to a kind of social atomism which could be identified as “modernity”. In Morse’s interpretation of Iberism, the populism of Rousseau undermined liberal-democrat principles and represented an Iberian path that was morally superior, (as stated earlier) to the existential sterility of Anglo-America and was the bearer of a positive message (MERQUIOR, 1990, p. 72). His expectation after all, is that the “blending of Iberian political culture with Rousseauism meets the requirements of the Western humanists more fully than the incorporation of the Marxism of the national Russian tradition or the Anglo-Atlantic mixture of liberalism and democracy” (MORSE, 1988, p. 111). In this way, the compass which guides one towards or away from civilization is reversed,³ and the merits of the choices that steered Ibero-America in past centuries can be recovered.

By examining Rousseauist ideas of justice and a searching for the general will, Morse attempts to deploy a new narrative. This is duly backed up by the revisionist historiography which emerged at the end of the 1970s, in which these elements served as a political means of forming identity and emancipating Latin-Americans from the “modernizing” domination of foreign powers (VIANNA, 1991, p. 146). This narrative, as has been suggested, serves a dual purpose: a) it can act as a lesson for those who for centuries have espoused Western dogmas in a relatively uncritical way, while also subjugating or despising alternative cultural paths and then repenting the fact; b) on the other hand, it should foster a civilizational path that is present and rooted in Ibero-America and against which there has been an internal struggle for a long period of time. This can be welcomed as a more human and more palatable escape route from the dilemmas of modernity.

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A few months after the publication of the Portuguese edition of *Prospero's Mirror*, in 1988, Simon Schwartzman conducted a brief – albeit penetrating – criticism of the work of Morse, in which he pointed in a naively gleeful (and at times insidious) way to the *Hispanic virtues*, as representing its serious failing. He criticized it for being “a book that is profoundly mistaken in its views and could be harmful in its implications” (SCHWARTZMAN, 1988). Its mistake was to idealize a set of political choices made by the Spanish as if they were deliberately designed to safeguard the moral and ethical state of their own civilization against the Western forces of modernity. In this respect, there is an optimistic account of the Hispanic loyalty to the longstanding alliance between the State and Catholic Church, which in the depths of the European West was able to ward off the right to forge contracts on an individual basis in the Anglo-Saxon world. By imbuing the “Holy Inquisition” with the principles of Thomism, Spain and Portugal were entrusted with the task of establishing a political order which “transcended individuals and was founded on ethics and religion” – and was hence more “human” – and through the colonial yoke, this would be transposed to the continent of America. In retrospect, rather than being interpreted as a mistake in terms of Iberian civilization, it was a means of restoring it, or in the words of Schwartzman, endowing it “with positive signs”.

Furthermore, Morse's interpretation of Latin America was *harmful* in so far as it welcomed a kind of panacea for the sub-continent based on the prospect of a *glowing future* which suggests (depending on what kind of interpretation one follows) that we should reject the foundations of the Anglo-American liberal societies, such as democratic egalitarianism or advances in techno-scientific knowledge. Finally, as Merquior (1990, p. 72) adds, “Morse ends the historical part of his book under the persuasion that the ‘crypto-Thomist’ matrix of our political culture will continue to prevail”. This to some extent, creates a degree of discomfort when Schwartzman examines this interpretation of Morse's thesis, and attacks the work on the grounds that there are irreconcilable features between the two Americas:

However, in our view, since we have not come near to equalling these achievements [of Anglo-America], perhaps it is not advisable when setting in motion our own cultural revolution, to seek to make direct contact with the masses (as shown in the counterpart from Georges Sorel to Mao, where there was a movement from the cult to the Head). At times, this might involve abandoning our rationalism and social research activities, closing down our universities and post-graduate courses, dismantling our burgeoning industry, tearing apart our fragile democratic systems and destroying our blossoming political parties. Moreover it would mean that all our hopes were placed in a kind of millennialism based on the ideas of Georges Sorel which is beating on our doors and which might be stimulated and given legitimacy (who knows) by the brilliant intuition of

the creative intellectuals of the North with the aim of rediscovering our lost millennial essence (SCHWARTZMAN, 1988).

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Clearly, it must be pointed out that even though the essential features of Schwartzman's argument (1988) are aimed at defining a key issue raised by the work of Morse, the approach outlined above provides us, in the best sense, with a delightful caricature. This feature is noted by the author of *Prospero's Mirror* himself, in a reply published in the following edition of *Novos Estudos*, in which he describes the criticism of his work as a short-sighted view of the cultural issue in Latin America (MORSE, 1989). However, Morse does not fully explore the possible incompatibility between an agenda of modernity – imputed to Anglo-America, as a part of Dewey's concept of "instrumentalism" with regard to the English "choices" (MORSE, 1988, p. 87) – and the, so to speak, cultural traditions of Ibero-America. Much of the response to Schwartzman, as is clear in his rejoinder (SCHWARTZMAN, 1989), removes the original criticism from the context, paints another caricature and thus avoids addressing matters of substance. Hence, Velho (1989, p.94), provides a fitting metaphor for the dialogue between Simon Schwartzman and Richard Morse when he describes it as a joke between two friends who are in conflict because they cannot reach an agreement about who should say sorry first. It is only in the rejoinder mentioned above, that the debate blossoms out in an open and direct way, although the interruption of the dialogue does not allow us to draw any definite conclusions about which ideas were most convincing or even if either of the contestants left the field triumphant.

With regard to the controversy about the theories of Morse, perhaps the most acute criticism is that by Merquior, in his *O Outro Ocidente* [The Other West] (Merquior, 1990; 1991). Whereas Schwartzman is too concerned with simplifying the views of the Brazilianist with regard to the building of Ibero-America (in a supposedly one-way direction) and more importantly, concerning future prospects, Merquior is shown to be very uncomfortable with Morse's conclusion that the continent does not have a liberal-democratic destiny with regard to all its specific civilizational features. This discomfort of the diplomat thus lies in what constitutes the key element in the work of Morse:⁵

The idea that liberal Anglo-French constitutionalism acts as *an obstacle to the restoration of patrimonial authority*, simply because *this constitutionalism was incompatible with Iberian political culture*" (MERQUIOR, 1990, p. 74, italics in the original).

In the view of Merquior, Morse's analysis lacks a flexible account of the Iberian patrimonial State or of a "Philippine" matrix, which survives to this day. Supported by Weber's theory that there is a contradiction between feudalism and "patrimonialism", not only Morse, but both Schwartzman and Faoro, in their specialist analyses of Brazil, regard Iberian political culture as a kind of historical monolith. It is patrimonialist, Thomist and "organicist" in a way "that leads it to refrain from confronting the radical cultural changes that have modernized other regions in political and social terms" (MERQUIOR, 1990, p. 75). The Iberian peninsular was able to keep its pre-modern *ethos*, in the words of the diplomat, by rejecting the two modern "mental revolutions" – religious and scientific – and making them immune to the logical ramifications of utilitarianism and individualism – which to judge from Morse's thesis, turned Anglo-America into a moral "wasteland of extreme modernity" (MERQUIOR, 1990, p. 75). The problem in this case, is the fixed and unchangeable nature of a problematic kind of State, which has features that are inimical to what Merquior advocates (liberalism and democracy), and is not exactly a return to the

supposed “Amerindian essence” that can be found in the criticism of Schwartzman (1988). The notion of a pre-modern State that has crystallized in the real world of Ibero-America, is the point that is opposed to the argument raised by Merquior.

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For this reason, the criticism of Merquior follows the path of politics and involves discussing the ways it can be changed in the Latin-American context (although on an abstract plane). Without entering into the historical issues raised by the author, one must fully appreciate the political problem which *in concrete terms*, is devastating the Ibero-America of today: the progressive denial of legitimacy to the two traditional pillars of the Iberian State: patrimonialism and pre-capitalism. In contrast with what some *neo-liberals*, argue – that the State is the villain, or some *Marxists*, who denounce the capitalist economy, the real enemies of progress, according to Merquior, are the patrimonial (and hence authoritarian) State and the sub-capitalist (and hence underdeveloped) economy (MERQUIOR, 1990, p. 83). Both are ramifications of the aristocratic past which is praised by Morse, but by shutting itself off from the 20th Century, has lost its social and material efficiency. In effect,

A society that is being modernized does not undergo a loss of efficiency but becomes increasingly based on it. The elites and general public become more pragmatic *vis-à-vis* the power and loyalty of both, as society tends to lose its a priori character. The exchange between the right to govern (or to continue to govern) and the capacity to enjoy consumer goods is the rule; no amount of political rhetoric can conceal the lack of efficiency (MERQUIOR, 1990, p. 84).

In view of this, when faced with the cogs and wheels of advanced capitalism – the complexity of the division of labor and degree of sophistication attained by the world economy, which is increasingly becoming more interdependent – there are increasingly tight constraints on the capacity of a heavily-dependent client state and a semi-nationalized and overburdened economy (like those of Ibero-America). “For this reason, we should not be surprised that Third World countries have legitimacy since this is the outcome of the nationalism where they find themselves moribund, in the wake of a process which (if you want) can be traced back to their independence (MERQUIOR, 1990, p. 84).

During the 19th Century, which bore witness to the building of Latin-American States, countless centrifugal forces obstructed the “centralist tradition” of the patrimonial State. The fragility of the State, in the context of what are the only *large countries*, Brazil, Chile, Argentina and Mexico, were fortuitous “islands of stability”. These, to a great extent, ended up by turning the problem of legitimacy (that is of the suitability of a viable model for the relationship between the State and society) into a problem of *identity*.

As a result, our historical search for legitimacy has been converted from the Nation-State, in its more specific meaning, to a question of race and this is progressively acquiring significance as a rhetorical feature of self-interpretation (MERQUIOR, 1990, p. 85). The author proceeds by arguing that once the period of building the State had passed and the Latin-american regimes were established, many of the aspects of identity were increasingly deprived of substance except in the cases when they came to exert some kind of “dubious” psychological purpose.

A non-Western Latin America, when interpreted by the Iberism of Morse, would be nothing more than a myth that was nourished by resentment. Moreover, it would be characterized by the summary rejection of something which in practice Latin-Americans are always striving to obtain – to be part and parcel of the modern, liberal and democratic

West – even though its strength is being systematically weakened. (MERQUIOR, 1990, p. 86). From the standpoint of the author, the difficulty of arriving at modernity, does not necessarily remove us from the Western cultural brand. What Morse labels as Ibero-America is, for Merquior, nothing more than a version of the West, an *alternative West*. It is definitely poorer and heterogeneous and more “enigmatic”, as well as the cause of serious structural problems while conveying language, values and beliefs that are clearly Western. It is not very different, for example, from the countries of Southern Europe which have quite a weak democratic tradition and sluggish economic growth but despite this, “nobody would dare to regard them as less Western” (MERQUIOR, 1990, p. 87). In summary:

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We are not the antithesis of the West and far less an alternative to its culture (...). Speaking seriously, our insistent and peculiar way of desiring modernity simply reflects our affiliation to the West. In effect, we are a modification and original amplitude modulation of Western culture. But this was always true of Iberia: a very peculiar case of the West, although in some ways a kind of aberration. (MERQUIOR, 1990, p. 86, italics in the original).

Ideas about place: social liberalism finds “another West”

What in its broadest sense, is the meaning of Merquior’s thesis with regard to there being *another West*? It is as if – when drawing on the opinion of Roberto Schwarz (1992) that liberal ideas were “out of place” in 19th Century Brazil – that the concept Morse had of Iberian Exceptionalism displaced, in a sudden and inappropriate way, any and every kind of liberal system (and being liberal, thus produced in the Anglo-Saxon realm) and shifted it outside Latin America. *Prospero’s Mirror* opposes two civilizational matrices – one that is “organistic”, “Thomist” and “human”, and is produced within the reactions and adjustments made by the Hispanic world to modernity; the other which is mechanical, “individualistic” and sterile, is the product and reflex of the modern narrative. If this is accepted, these are virtually incompatible and return us to the old problem that ideologies conceived far away – become - when landing on the other side of the mirror – ideas of a “second degree” (RICUPERO, 2008). If Morse were correct in his interpretation, the whole enterprise of Merquior *qua* thinker (and practitioner) of liberalism would fall to the ground. As has already been suggested, the driving-force behind the criticism of the culturalism of *Prospero* by the diplomat, lies in the need to support a more wide-ranging academic/ideological project.

Before anything else, it is worth looking at the path followed by José Guilherme in his political writings. For want of a better term, the philosopher-diplomat – “the most brilliant mind of his time”, according to Sergio Paulo Rouanet (2001) – spent much of his intellectual career demolishing Western Marxism, which he believed to be nothing more than an irrational pathological condition of the West that attempted to demoralize science and discredit reason (MERQUIOR, 1987). The most important of his works that appeared during his life, *O Marxismo Ocidental*, [Western Marxism] aroused the same degree of controversy as that provoked later by the thesis of Richard Morse. In this work, Merquior suggested, in embryonic terms, that the classical liberalism which had been shaped during the 19th century, was the antidote to the “disaster” represented by the obscure way that Western Marxism criticized human reason. What is more, he claimed – and this is borne out in an interview published in the inner pages of the newspaper *Folha de S. Paulo*, on 30th August 1987 – that Marxism, as a theoretical framework, had simply died.⁶

Among the frontal attacks he was subjected to, in the wake of the publication of the Portuguese version of his book, were those inflicted by Francisco de Oliveira, in the same newspaper, *Folha de S. Paulo*, a few weeks later. In seeking to retrieve Marxism from its “unjust” demise, the sociologist accused Merquior of “unashamedly” lying when he asserted that no economists could be found who worked on the concept of surplus value, and criticized him for not having understood the original concept of alienation. Oliveira concluded by insisting that the then Brazilian ambassador in Mexico was a dilettante:

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I think that [Merquior] is a dilettante because he chooses fashionable subjects to obtain publicity. What I mean is that as far as I know, there has been nothing produced by Sr. Merquior, nothing of value contributed and no progress made. He has not put forward anything because he is so skilled in mundane philosophy. (...). And it is very comforting for people like him to keep spraying their victims with a rotating machine gun and to seek comfort in the position that post-modernity refuses to accept any holistic theory or any globalizing theory⁷

These provocative comments by Francisco de Oliveira led Merquior to challenge him in the same newspaper to a public debate about Marxism, which was set for 19th September – two days after the publication of the interview in *Folha* – on the grounds that the sociologist was “philosophically incompetent”. Four days later, Oliveira refused to enter into a combat with the diplomat, “claiming that he was not going to pay any attention to the ‘exhibitionism’ of José Guilherme Merquior.”⁸ During the intervening period of this intellectual dispute, there was a degree of curiosity about this matter and the illustrated color supplement of the *Folha de S. Paulo* was printed with a photo of the then senator Fernando Henrique Cardoso who, in a critical self-reflection, demanded a revision of Marxism: “[a] the revision of Marxism must be put into effect and CEBRAP [Brazilian Center of Analysis and Planning] has never faced up to this question from a strictly theoretical standpoint.”⁹

It was in the heart of the Brazilian Center of Analysis and Planning, or more precisely in its magazine *Novos Estudos*, which was published again in the heat of the debate, that the controversy sparked off in the *Folha* became an academic matter. The President of CEBRAP, at that time, José Arthur Giannotti, published in that periodical an impressive criticism of Merquior’s interpretation of Marxism, by seeking to strike a balance between the state-of-the-art of philosophical studies in Brazil. In contrast with the interaction verging on caricature between Francisco de Oliveira (from the CEBRAP department) and José Guilherme in the pages of the newspaper, Giannotti looked at the matter in greater depth, both from an interpretive or methodological standpoint and as a criticism of Western Marxism. He thought that Merquior’s comments were those of an essayist who suffered from a kind of *literary rhetoric* which was not compatible with genuinely academic philosophy (GIANNOTTI, 1987). The diplomat’s reply was couched in more polite terms than those that had sparked off the previous controversy but were equally caustic and appeared in the following edition of *Novos Estudos*. In this, Merquior devised a means of separating Giannotti’s criticism into three different areas and patiently rebutted the charges made, many of which as he said were on an interpretive plane and linked to authors like Habermas and Hegel. However, he partly accepted some of the points raised (MERQUIOR, 1987).

Both in face of (and beyond) the controversies about Western Marxism and its apparent denial of reason, the stumbling-block of the political thought of Merquior did not lie in its criticism of the thinking of the left but on the contrary, in its emphatic support of

liberalism. His first work appeared in 1983 and was entirely devoted to the subject of the *The Liberal Argument*. In this essay, the diplomat had already argued that of the three significant political ideologies – conservatism, socialism and liberalism – only the liberal ideas led to what were strictly speaking, democratic ideals of “depth and seriousness” and sought to give meaning to the government of the people (MERQUIOR, 1983). In the view of the author, the superiority of the liberal argument, as borne out by its extension of power to the people, lies in its capacity to limit its scope and thus avoid its abuse:

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The heart of the liberal argument is in the old lesson of Montesquieu: it is not enough to decide about the social basis of power – it is equally important to determine what kind of government it is and to ensure that even though power is endowed with legitimacy by its social origins, it does not become illegitimate through the arbitrary nature of its use. At the core of the liberal position, there is always an innate degree of distrust of power and its inherent propensity to violence. For this reason, the first liberal principle is constitutionalism which is a recognition of the constant need to put constraints on the phenomenon of power. The liberal world is a “nomocratic” order i.e. a society placed under the dominion of law, where all power must be experienced as authority and not as violence (MERQUIOR, 1983).

His ideological affiliation appears in the pages of *O Marxismo Ocidental* [Western Marxism] which is interspersed with the politico-philosophic conflicts that took place in the last months of 1987. In that same year, Merquior also published a short essay in the *Bulletin of Latin American Research*. In this he attempted to forge a relationship between the dimension of liberal thought which had flourished in both the political theory and practice of South America (*social-liberalism*), and the reality of Brazil in the dawning of the New Republic (MERQUIOR, 1987b). On an academic plane, this involved the first *extramural study* of the author which transcended the philosophic debate and sought to address the problem in a concrete way; moreover it set out by making a transition to democracy in Brazil.

The essay with the title *The Social-Liberal Path* also provided a unique opportunity to explore in depth something which might be a *feasible* and *desirable* liberalism for the circumstances in Brazil. According to the author, *social-liberalism* (or social liberalism) was “able to conceive modern freedom as a complex equilibrium between liberty and justice, as well as individual autonomy and collective rights” (MERQUIOR, 1987b, p. 273). In the light of this, equality should be pursued not as an end in itself but as a flexible tool to provide equal opportunities and as a result, broaden the enjoyment of individual freedom.

However, at this stage, Merquior decided not to trace social liberalism back to its intellectual origins. He was content to say that the concept is quite well known – or rather, *anything but unfamiliar* – in British social thinking. On the other hand, he gives the impression (at least to a less attentive reader), that the idea is suited to South-American political practices, (as already stated). In effect, it took the essayist several more years to unravel and explore the origins of social liberalism beyond the discussion which had been put forward less forcefully on previous occasions (MERQUIOR, 1983; 1987b). It was only with the (posthumous) publication of what can be regarded as his magnum opus, *Liberalismo, Antigo e Moderno* [Liberalism, Ancient and Modern] (1991), that Merquior fulfilled his ambition of reconstituting the genealogy of social liberalism.

In fact the book is not confined to the question of social-liberalism – which by the end of his life, Merquior had transformed into a kind of political banner. It is broadly devoted to a discussion and summary of a huge array of “liberalisms”. Their origins are not confined to the Anglo-Saxon dimension,¹⁰ and take into account various *obstacles* to freedom, as well

as a range of *concepts* of freedom found throughout history (MERQUIOR, 1991, p. 221). In the opinion of Celso Lafer, the work represents the “most balanced and mature” study in the intellectual career of that diplomat – who despite personally overseeing its publication, died at the early age of 49, in January 1991.

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It is in *Liberalismo, Antigo e Moderno* [Liberalism, Ancient and Modern] that Merquior brings together his ideological anxieties and academic interests. In the Introduction to the English edition, published shortly after the Portuguese version, the author makes clear how his aims overlap: “This is a liberal book about liberalism written for those who believe that liberalism, when understood correctly, resists any kind of calumny” (MERQUIOR, 1991, p. 1). Now if liberalism, in the accepted sense of Merquior, is *universal*, and a political and social matrix, it can cater for the needs of any society. Since it is immune to any routine condemnation, it does not make sense (going back to the expression used by Schwarz) to regard it as an ideology of “second degree”, where there is a wish for its concepts to bear fruit.

In view of this, an analysis of the multiple facets of liberalism, leads us to two quick observations with regard to its epistemological status: in the first place, liberalism is not a one-sided phenomenon or circumscribed by the civilizational Anglo-Saxon tradition where it acts as a patron of modernity (and is victimized by it, in the view of Morse). Since it is a universal phenomenon, the factors that provided aggregated value might, as the author makes clear, derive from a wide range of traditions and schools of thought. In the second place, and equally important, liberalism is not compatible with alternative civilizational paths to that which created Anglo-America. After all, the liberal ideology would not be strange to any kind of people at any time. Of course, in this case, Merquior highlights the fact that what is being considered is classical liberal thought (and a summary of economic, political and civic liberties), and not interpretations which are often distorted, like for example, neo-liberalism which benefits the *laissez faire* economy to the detriment of other aspects of individual liberty or the search for equality (MERQUIOR, 1991, p. 223).

Let us return to the other West. To some extent, this notion leads us to the essence of what we are arguing in this Paper. There can be no doubt that, despite being conceptually opaque, liberalism owes its origins to Western thought and was only thought of in the final decades of the 20th Century in terms of being a universal ideology. If the West can be identified with liberalism in its most general outlines – while taking account of the qualification that there is an alternative West conjured up by Merquior (the *other*) – it can be asked if it is necessary to define what *type* of liberalism can be identified with this particular part of the Western world. Put in another way, *social liberalism* was the liberal format that was to be thought and practised in the *other West*. In both cases the adjectives have not blurred the sense of the original term but rather, invited a new way of regarding them.

Nonetheless, social liberalism is not simply a formulation of the Iberian civilizational matrix, since in the criticisms ranging from Merquior to Richard Morse, this notion ceases to make sense. To be precise, the origins of this set of ideas can be traced back to the beginning of the 20th Century to “two Hobs”, John Hobson and Leonard Hobhouse, both British and contributors of ideas about classical liberalism (MERQUIOR, 1991, p. 161). The former supported so-called “redistributive taxation”, by advocating a social reform that entailed increasing consumption and extending social justice at the same time,

whereas the latter a “spiritual evolutionist”, was in favor of an organic society which with the support of welfare agencies, “provide most of its members with ‘a full equality of rights’ with ample opportunities for individual self-development” (MERQUIOR, 1991, p. 162). Both cases draw attention to a distinction made by Raymond Aron (*apud* MERQUIOR, 1987b, p. 273) which was outlined retrospectively, as a summary of liberal advances made in the 20th Century: *droits-libertés*, or the rights attached to traditional civil liberties and *droits-créances*, or the rights regarded as “credits”, which correspond to modern social rights. In summary:

What Aron wants to prove is that, in our time, the rule of law cannot possibly relieve the State of its responsibilities; the “nomocracy” of Hayek has to provide space for the inevitable social duties and to provide an infrastructure that is linked to the modern State (MERQUIOR, 1991, p. 199).

Aron’s argument which is reproduced by Merquior, found particularly fertile ground for Latin America at the end of the 1980s. It should be underlined once more that the main problem of Ibero-America was the decline of the legitimacy of a political culture, which as a result of its Hispanic “choices” (now marked with negative signs), combined patrimonialism with underdevelopment, authoritarianism and poverty. In this climate, social liberalism was a formula for the continent that could overcome its structural shortcomings and cease to need the adjective *other* in constituting an ideological relationship with the West.

Social liberalism comes down to earth in the political world: Merquior, Collor and the liberal experiment in Brazil

The case of Brazil will be a useful means for us, as it was for Merquior, to throw light on social-liberal thinking. It should be stressed that this set of ideas (even in the mid 1980s) goes against the spirit that excited the Republic, whether at the end of the period of military government or at the time of the first democratic government for two decades. The old maxim that “the cake should be made larger” so that it can be shared later, became a kind of social mantra in the years of the “economic miracle” and was perpetuated even in adverse conditions. While being lost in the almost heroic attempts to handle the debt crisis and struggle against hyperinflation, which characterized the years of democratic awakening in Brazil, it was the search for economic growth which seemed to drive the public policies in the presidencies of Figueiredo and Sarney. To some extent, the existence of a practically hegemonic “epicentre” which operated the levers of the economy during the 1980s, reflected this consensus – at times tacit, at times made explicit – with regard to the economic direction of the economy. Some real achievements can be attributed to this large political center, such as the case of the economic measures introduced by the government in the “Plano Cruzado” in 1986, as well as several subsequent setbacks and the collapse of the system as a reflex of a model of the State (SALLUM JÚNIOR, 1996).

In every case, the *zeitgeist* of a long period of national-developmentist policies in Brazil, to some extent inspired by the authors from CEPAL, [Economic Commission for Latin America], began to be replaced by others within more liberal contours. It is worth noting that social liberalism in some ways did not represent an adherence to the principles of *neo-liberalism*, much vaunted within the dimensions of the Anglo-Saxon world. Its set of beliefs, as is borne out by the main person who formulated them, suggests a search for *growth-cum-help*. In other words, what is advocated is the preception that help – understood here as the guarantee of the basic standards of social equality but mainly equality of opportunity – should not be deferred on behalf of growth, but rather,

should be committed to economic growth on the basis of an irresponsible distributivism. “If a modern society aspires to both freedom and efficiency”, the author states, “at the end of the day, social justice ends by being a feature of social efficiency” (MERQUIOR, 1987b, p. 275).

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It can be seen that social-liberal ideas based on a binomial setting for social justice and efficiency, seek refuge in sectors of national politics and are especially represented by a generation of politicians that have gravitated from the “epicentre” – as reflected in parties such as the PMDB, PFL and later, parts of the PSDB – although their ideas were not converted into public policies in a consistent way (MERQUIOR, 1987b). The “developmentalist” State, a model that appeared in Brazil in the 1930s in the heart of an authoritarian and populist regime, represented a paradigm which in some ways, summarized the rationale of Iberian patrimonialism and adjusted it to the requirements of industrialization. It enjoyed full legitimacy so long as it achieved success in the face of *distributive* needs and adapted its strategies (and haphazardly changed its protagonists) in accordance with political expediency and economic requirements. Moreover, even when confronted with a structural crisis in the economy – such as the twin problems of the external debt and inflation - its survival was more a question of inertia than conscious choices at that stage of the struggle. For this reason, even though social liberalism found supporters in Brazil, even in government channels, the New Republic (at least at first) did not offer any input for its development.

In the light of a significant loss of legitimacy for “national-developmentalism”, especially in the modern economic sectors (SALLUM JÚNIOR, 1996; VELASCO e CRUZ, 1997), the only means of putting an end to this inertia was by making a complete break. And the elections of 1989, provided the setting for a more radical change to occur. After all, it was the first time in nothing less than thirty years that Brazilians (by now, it should be said, rather tired of developmentalist remedies) could give a new shape to the political order. As a result of the polarization and political disintegration witnessed in the presidential election, the ideas of social liberalism ended by finding their best expression in the candidature of Fernando Collor de Mello. In his government program which was set out throughout the campaign and formalized in the book *Brasil: um Projeto de Reconstrução Nacional*, [Brazil: a National Reconstruction Plan] there were already signs of social-liberal tendencies:

Modernity can be identified with standards of social justice, political freedom and an equitable distribution of income and a dignified life for everybody. Modernity means the creation of a new kind of citizenship and ethics of coexistence. We know what the instruments of change are: the reform of the State which should be devoted to essential responsibilities in the areas of health, education, and building an infrastructure. The liberation of the economy from the failings of clientelism, subsidies and administrative registry departments so that the market can be reorganized and entrepreneurial competitiveness be extended internationally (...) (COLLOR DE MELLO, 1991, p. 11).

To what extent this identity between the rhetoric displayed and the ideas of social liberalism designed for the benefit of truth, was established deliberately, is not widely known. What is known is that the first contact between Collor and Merquior took place in the period immediately after the election or more specifically, in a trip made by the President-elect in January 1990. Merquior, at that time, served as the Permanent Representative of Brazil at UNESCO. The ex-president records that during a conversation

which covered several ideological and pragmatic questions, Merquior characterized him as a “social-liberal”, owing to the view of the world he had displayed during the campaign. “We spoke about forming a Party which would be the PSOL [Liberal-Social Party], and was the Party we put together. Later Heloísa Helena made use of the acronym...” (COLLOR DE MELLO, 2011).

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Although the first contact had been made after the election, in the intervening period between the two stages of the election, there was a clear convergence of opinion and closeness of outlook between Merquior and Collor. The diplomat had a weekly column in the newspaper *O Globo*, under the heading “A Vida das Ideias” [The Life of Ideas], in which in the heat of the electoral debate, he openly supported:

The structural reform of the state, which was regarded as the only possible way of reversing the pattern of chronic crisis that Brazil was undergoing, was at certain times appropriated from the writings of the ‘two Hobs’ and from Keynes himself (ALMEIDA, 2008, p. 5).

On 3rd December 1989, Merquior published the article “Five National Failings”, in which he conducted a diagnosis of the structural problems of Brazil that centred around five key points: (i) extreme inequality in income distribution; (ii) the prominence given by current policies to urban issues which is an obstacle to land policies aimed at a diversified agriculture that is able to generate employment in rural areas and lessen the degree of urban marginality; (iii) a fiscal structure that is doubly distorted and where indirect and multi-stage taxes prevail; (iv) the culture of inflation, the outcome both of a deficit in the collection of tax revenues and a civic deficit; (v) a misguided view of the social role of the State.

The remedies put forward by Merquior, in the face of the circumstances of the Brazilian State were as follows: (i) policies that combine egalitarian concerns with a guarantee of high levels of productivity which are essential for a real improvement in salaries and the purchasing power of the general public; (ii) introducing tax reforms that relieve the burden on companies and consumers and impose a surtax on the most wealthy members of society; (iii) returning to a balance between imports and exports; (iv) a reduction of “welfare expenditure” by the State through the civil service, that is introducing administrative reforms (MERQUIOR *apud* ALMEIDA, 2008, p. 5).

It is evident that in this set of ideas, Merquior does not only display a strong liberal tendency, but also makes a criticism of the “developmentalist” model of the State, as being “very inefficient as a governing and driving-force of the economy”. The author proceeds by arguing about the much vaunted “social” State, (which is connected with the rationale of patrimonialist practices, as can be observed in his writings).

In reality, it reproduces privileges while at the same time curbing the dynamics of growth by fuelling rampant inflation and interminably being harassed with the notary proceedings and demands of special interest groups (MERQUIOR *apud* ALMEIDA, 2008, p. 6).

Merquior concludes by urging reforms in the heart of the State that approximate to the ideal of social liberalism:

Shrinking the State – which contrary to the views of conservative liberalism does not mean abolishing it or reducing it to a mere cypher – is imperative given the current need for the structural reforms suggested by a diagnosis of our social failings. This is because it is only by shrinking the State that its responsibilities can be redefined in favor of social planning without statism. (MERQUIOR *apud* ALMEIDA, 2008, p. 6).

In the electoral scene, the rhetoric was very similar. As well as this social inclination with regard to liberal alternatives, what was in favor of the candidate Fernando Collor was the resounding failure of the Sarney government, both in terms of its main figures and also the nature of its democratic *political plan*. The first government of the New Republic had disappointed any expectation that the country could be modernized (again in the sense attributed to Merquior of a “modern society”). This allowed the then candidate Collor to make a criticism of an exogenous model – which meant going outside the *politics as usual* attitude which had already been roundly condemned by the public. The new government assumed that it had the capacity as an *outsider*, to undertake the kind of liberal reforms regarded as necessary. Indeed, it is no mere coincidence that the two candidates who had reached the second phase of the electoral contest, appeared as being “anti-politics” and that each was accompanied by an ideology that sought to overcome the ill-fated overlapping of patrimonialism and underdevelopment by setting out from different ends of the spectrum.

Furthermore, in the course of the election, there was a noticeable disintegration of the social-liberal discourse since the political sectors of the old “epicentre” were practically all divided and launched their own candidatures with specific party commitments. Many of them ended up by abandoning (at least in their speeches) the notions of freedom/efficiency to ensure they received the support of the political or social sectors for whom these terms had no appeal. In the second phase of the election, when there was an eminently political question which related, among other things to Collor’s inability to forge alliances *in the political arena* (and the hostility to him that stemmed from this) many sectors of the center-left culminated in abandoning any of the sympathy that had been nurtured by social liberalism, as a means of ensuring political support for the candidate of the PT [Workers’ Party], Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva. The veto of Mário Covas of any possible deal between the PSDB and Collor’s government on two different occasions – before the inauguration and a little before the *impeachment* – was symptomatic of this. Notwithstanding this, these same political groups which in Congress mainly belonged to the PMDB and in particular the PSDB, finally agreed, on certain occasions, to endorse President Collor’s policies in certain areas such as economic reforms.

A final word regarding the relationship between Collor and Merquior. The diplomat was responsible for providing the President-elect with the main ideological features of the government, which were set out in concrete terms in the inaugural address (partly written by Merquior) and included in the initial government reforms. The President himself admitted this: “he [Merquior] helped me a lot and gave great assistance in the inaugural speech as well as in drawing up this package [of reforms], in a more sophisticated way” (COLLOR DE MELLO, 2011). If what was being said about social liberalism, (one of the personal banners of Merquior), is compared with the official speeches of Collor, especially in the early stages of the government, there is a clear influence that is worth underlining. For example, it can be noted that in the inaugural address delivered to the National Congress on 15th March, Collor set out his government priorities. These were *almost entirely* linked to plans which had been prepared by Merquior for at least the three previous years: democracy, citizenship, State reforms economic modernization and social debt (COLLOR DE MELLO, 1990, p. 11). There is a clear correspondence between the previous ideas of Merquior, which were expressed in public debates during the election and the subsequent rhetoric of the President-elect:

I conducted a government which relied on austerity, together with efficiency, as the hallmark

of the State's activities and a reason for pride in the operations of the federal government. The number one goal of my first year in Office was not just to contain inflation but to eradicate it (...) it was a question of a combat on which everything else hinged: the resumption of investment, the consolidation of growth, the achievement of higher levels of social progress and the strengthening of democracy (COLLOR DE MELLO, 1990, p. 13-14).

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This brief extract highlights three factors that converge with the causes supported by José Guilherme Merquior. In the first place, there was *liberalism* - that is the notion that without economic freedom, most forms of liberty would not be possible, in particular those that are political. This is the term employed by Roberto Campos, in his preface to the book *Liberalismo - Antigo e Moderno*, [Liberalism - Ancient and Modern] to describe the ideological tendencies of Merquior. In the second place, was the need for reforms to improve efficiency. Even though it did not seem to be a term of great political or electoral appeal, *efficiency* was a key expression in the first speeches of President Collor (and in the longer version of his National Reconstruction Plan). It was lifted from the previous debate and became one of the main planks of social liberalism. Finally, it was believed that *democracy* exists to affirm a feature of the New Republic that had to be preserved even if it meant destroying the previous pact of the "developmentalist" State - which was in some ways identified with the Sarney government. It is worth remembering that a classical liberal or *liberalist*, cannot tolerate any infringement of political freedom even if it is undermined on the grounds that this will ensure the success of the liberal economy. (CAMPOS, 1991, p. 13).

The only remaining issue among the priorities of the agenda of social liberalism is social justice, which means reducing inequality (or bringing about greater equality) by fostering economic freedom and carrying out distributive policies. Another extract from the inaugural address is illustrative of this and can serve as a means of bringing this discussion to a close. When touching on the question of State reforms, in terms of basic responsibilities, the President expressed the following thoughts:

I believe that it is basically up to private initiative, and not the State, to create wealth and boost the economy. The State is responsible for planning by adopting interventionist policies and establishing justice *in the broadest and most substantive meaning of the term (...)*. [The State] must provide access to housing, food, health, education and public transport to all those who depend on it to achieve and maintain a dignified existence, where there are equal opportunities - *because what is not simply justice can be understood as a social dynamic of freedom by everybody and for everybody* (COLLOR DE MELLO, 1991, p. 15, our italics).

In general terms, what has been examined in this section is quite symbolic. As can be seen, it represents a fortuitous overlapping of the ideas of Merquior, which had been nurtured, refined and debated for several years and the rhetoric of Collor, as a candidate and as a President-elect. It is not the purpose of this study to explore to what extent this discourse of social liberalism has been lost as the result of changes of government or whether it has been abandoned or even rediscovered at a later date. What is certain, is that there have been more and better interpretations of these interwoven ideas. However, we end with the suggestion that if in reality Merquior "was unable to allow his ideas to be followed through in political activism, since he was circumscribed by his diplomatic responsibilities" (CAMPOS, 1991, p. 13), he certainly found in Collor a bridge to the world of politics even though this was destroyed some time later.

Final Considerations

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Apart from an inclination for polemical issues, which almost always defined his ideas in debates, José Guilherme Merquior had other distinguishing features which tended to pass unnoticed. This study seeks to identify three of them. In the first place, a strong attachment to the West [*ocidentalismo*] can be attributed to the diplomat, in view of his interpretation of the place of Latin America in the world. It should be stressed that the use of this term here does not involve any value judgement, nor is it intended to make any explicit reference to the broader debate in the arena of Latin American political and social debate. On the contrary, *ocidentalismo* purely and simply describes the perception that Latin America – and Brazil of course is included in the argument – is a part of the Western world. However natural this statement might seem to many, it was highly controversial, as is borne out by the warm reaction (for good or ill) that Richard Morse's book, *Prospero's Mirror*, excited among Brazilian intellectuals.

For this reason, it was not possible to treat the idea of a completely Western Latin America as a hard fact. Reviving a debate about the work of Morse was essential so that we could examine the minutiae of a convoluted argument that involves either refuting or espousing these Latin-American hallmarks. The controversy sets the tone of the debate but it is in Merquior that we find its main ramifications for the purposes of this study. The assumption that Ibero-America is another West, is not merely a figure of speech but a fundamental observation that gives shape and meaning to the evolution of liberal ideas in the continent, and in Brazil in particular. Finally, it only makes sense to carry the liberal standard as Merquior did so well, if it in fact belongs to political culture and the social relations of the societies in which it seeks to be applied. Identifying Latin America as a part of the West makes this movement possible.

In the second place, Merquior is one of the most important liberal thinkers in our history. His key works not only offer an extensive, complete and passionately involved reading of different kinds of liberalism throughout history but also pose the question of the value of intervening in support of a particular brand of liberalism (or *social liberalism*) - an issue discussed in public debates in Brazil. The controversies that appeared in the dialogue with Francisco de Oliveira, José Arthur Giannotti and the ideas of the policymakers of CEBRAP for example, more broadly reflect the liberal aspirations of José Guilherme (at that time) and his conviction that liberalism would, once and for all, be a means of escaping from the Brazilian crisis of the 1980s.

But not any kind of liberalism will do, as we have seen. Social liberalism, which Merquior was already writing about at the beginning of that decade, was perfectly tuned to the requirements of an impoverished West that was devoid of social justice and economic development at a time when radical reforms were taking place in the State. The problem with the situation in Brazil, which is natural given the fact that it borders on the other countries in the region, is that owing to our historical evolution, almost the entire political class has been committed to a State "developmentalist" model which was conceived in the 1930s and was relatively successful for half a century afterwards. Even when moribund, in the 1980s this model served to form an alliance between the interests of key economic sectors, the middle class, the main political parties and even the armed forces – and it led the government to undertake certain commitments such as the imposition of trading restrictions on computer goods, and giving support to companies suffering a decline in development.

In the light of this, Collor gave shape to a possible form of social liberalism since his speeches displayed an aversion to policies that addressed the need for structural reforms aimed at a liberal State (and to some extent, his government paid the price for his intransigence). It is in the period when Collor was a candidate that we can observe the third characteristic of Merquior - *political engagement*, - where he displayed a profound interest in converting his ideas into action. Thus the drawing together of Fernando Collor and Merquior, involved the translation to the political field of what the diplomat believed could be a possible remedy for the problems of Brazil and Merquior's main ideas remained the subject of public debate for some time.

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At the end of the day, neither Collor nor Merquior fully managed to carry out their ideas. The former who was driving a car that was out of control and was mistaken in the *timing* of practically all of his reforms, was removed from power in September 1992, after the institution of impeachment proceedings against him. The latter took part in the ideological conceptions of the new government, but never acted as a decision-maker. Although he had been offered the Foreign Ministry, which was eventually occupied by Francisco Rezek, who was a close friend of his, some speculate that his name had been vetoed at the behest of Ambassador Marcos Coimbra, Collor's brother-in-law and a leading policymaker in his government. However, Merquior died an early death on 7th January 1991, and thus was unable to follow the fate of what supposedly represented his ideas.

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Notes

1. These are the terms that Morse (1988) employed when forming his argument, as noted by Merquior (1990).
2. "I seek to consider South America not as a victim, patient or 'problem', but as a mirror image in which Anglo-America will be able to recognize its *own* infirmities and 'problems'. As is known, a mirror reflects an inverted image. Although both the North and South American continents are nourished from the sources of Western civilization that are familiar to both, their specific heritage corresponds to an obverse and a reverse. Thus, the metaphor of the mirror seems to me to be appropriate in this case" (MORSE, 1988, p. 13).
3. See, for this benchmark, the essay by Bomeny (2008).

4. The version in English was originally published in the magazine *Presença*, and was translated as “The Other West: on the historical position of Latin America” and appeared in the periodical *International Sociology*, in 1991. 361
5. It should be noted that this was not originally taken at random from *Prospero’s Mirror*, but rather from the essay *The Heritage of Latin-America*, published by Morse in 1964 (MERQUIOR, 1990, p. 73).
6. “[Marxism] is an obsolete theory. It is a theory – I will not say in its death pangs but simply dead” (*Folha de S. Paulo*, 30/08/1987). Available at: <www.acervo.folha.com.br>. Accessed on: 12th November 2015.
7. *Folha de S. Paulo*, caderno *Ilustrada*, 17/09/1987, p. A-29. Available at: <www.acervo.folha.com.br>. Accessed on: 12th November 2015.
8. *Folha de S. Paulo*, caderno *Ilustrada*, 21/09/1987, p. A-27. Available at: <www.acervo.folha.com.br>. Accessed on 12th November, 2015.
9. *Folha de S. Paulo*, caderno *Ilustrada*, 22/09/1987, p. A-29. Available at: <www.acervo.folha.com.br>. Accessed on: 12th November 2015.
10. “Liberal ideas have been extended to include thinkers as diverse in their background and objectives as De Tocqueville, John Stuart Mill, Dewey and Keynes, and in our time, Hayek and Rawls, not to mention their ‘illustrious predecessors’, such as Locke, Montesquieu and Adam Smith” (MERQUIOR, 1991, p. 15).

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