

Juiz de Fora in the Age of Francisco Valle

The type of society into which Francisco Valle was born in 1869 had its days numbered. In less than twenty years the radical polarity between masters and slaves would be ended, along with all of its consequences. Porto das Flores, the birthplace of the composer, was located along the gravitational axis of southeastern cultural life, as well as of the coffee production, the most important and influential sector of the Brazilian economy at the time. During these two decades, Francisco Valle's intellectual milieu was strongly conditioned by the master-slave opposition, which the rural landowners tried to maintain for as long as they could.

There is no detailed information on the population of Porto das Flores at the beginning of the eighteen-seventies. We know, however, that the municipality of Juiz de Fora, of which it was part, had an area of 2,652 square kilometers, with a population of 38,786, of which 24,418 were free and 14,368 were slaves, that is, about 37%. Between 1872 and 1883, the slave population had increased considerably in Juiz de Fora, which, together with Leopoldina and Mar de Espanha, had the highest concentration of captives in the Zona da Mata up until the abolition on May 13, 1888. This environment was profoundly rural. Even if one thinks of the various transformations that caused Juiz de Fora to become known as the "Manchester of Minas Gerais," the immense majority of the population still lived in the country.

In this respect, it is worth quoting an observation made by Richard Burton, who visited Juiz de Fora in 1867:

*The city is a habitual mixture of misery and splendor. Juiz de Fora consists of a single street, dusty, or muddy, or rather, a road along which palm trees are aligned in pairs. Its only merit is its breadth... the dwellings are low and poor, for the most part "door and window," as they say here. Among them, however, there are large and spacious city houses, with gilded pineapples on the roofs and glass balls on the balconies in the French style, fantastic details, curlicues, birds of clay and lime along the walls, and all the architectural extravagances of Rio de Janeiro.*⁴

In two decades, Juiz de Fora saw its population almost double: it jumped to 74,136 in 1890 and to 91,119 by the turn of the century. Due to this most significant change in the demographic profile, the urban nucleus, still quite small, and restricted to a few streets that are now in the central part of the municipality, witnessed the arrival of a growing number of residents. According to the engineer Carlos Prates, the percentage of the urban population in the municipal district of Juiz de Fora climbed from 80% in 1905 to 85% in the following year.⁵ Even if this estimate is exaggerated, there is no denying that a precocious rural exodus was taking place, one that

⁴ BURTON, Richard. *Viagem do Rio de Janeiro a Morro Velho*. Belo Horizonte: Itatiaia, 1976. p.59-60.

⁵ PRATES, Carlos. *A lavoura e a indústria na zona da Mata*. Belo Horizonte: Imprensa Oficial, 1906. p.17-18.

sprang from the difficulties experienced by the agricultural sector as it restructured itself after the end of slavery, not to mention the demand for labor by the industrial and services sectors. This notwithstanding, until 1940 the majority of the population in the region was still rural.

Valle's own maternal grandfather, Francisco Ribeiro de Magalhães, was an expression of these times. Not that he necessarily figured among the greatest fortunes in the region of Juiz de Fora, but a probate of his assets in 1891 revealed a fortune of more than 103:000\$000 réis. This included a estate in Recreio, situated in the *arraial* of São José do Rio Preto (present-day São José das Três Ilhas), consisting of land (102 *alqueires*, at 16:200\$000 réis), a mansion (8:000\$000 réis), and eight thousand coffee trees (400\$000 réis). But more than half of his wealth came from his supposed activities as a financier.⁶

With the abolition, the prosperous world of the rural landowners began to decline. Suddenly, the captives, converted into employees, were no longer a component of their wealth. The slave quarters became "a string of houses" and the property of Francisco Valle's grandfather was not an exception. This explains the financial difficulties his family was facing at the time.

Another fundamental change began to take place in the last decades of the nineteenth century. The introduction of new machinery or simply of new techniques in agriculture and animal husbandry allowed an increase in production. On the other hand, the restricted availability of new lands for an increasing number of people, combined with the restricted dissemination of these new procedures, disarticulated the forms of production based on family work. The escape, for many, was to transfer to the main city in the region, Juiz de Fora. Urbanization and industrialization thus accelerated. The Juiz de Fora in which Francisco Valle lived his last years, given the size of its urban and rural populations, concentrated a large number of establishments producing consumer goods in general. There were shops making agricultural implements, such as saddles, harnesses, horseshoes, and carriages. Rather than "factories" in the strict sense of the term, there were companies equipped to process rice and coffee, for example, as well as "creameries" (generally manufacturing butter). Finally, there were companies providing urban services: railroads, trolleys, electric lighting, as well as mechanical and printing shops.

However, even more than the process of industrialization, it is urbanization that merits special attention, considering that it was the service sector, as we would now call it, that absorbed most of Juiz de Fora's workforce at the time. The population, in fact, was in an extremely privileged situation with respect to the supply of goods. In 1895, the emporium (*Armazém de Molhados e Mantimentos*) owned by Cristóvão de Andrade, located on Rua Direita, present-day Avenida Rio Branco, offered a wide variety of goods, although it should not be assumed, of course, that they were accessible to everyone. Such was a society in which, still, "*social hierarchy manifested itself first of all through the quality of the food.*"⁷ If, for the less privileged, the diet was restricted to half a dozen products, Juiz de Fora's position as the most important urban center in Minas Gerais allowed it to cater after the wealthy with all sorts of imported products.

This was not the case of São João del-Rei in the same period, or of Ouro Preto, for example. The most important difference was the position of rice as a staple definitively included in the dietary regime of the lowest-income population. It would still take some time for foods presently consumed, such as pasta, to be within their reach: the cheaper type, white or *goela de pato* [a type of pasta in thin strings], was ten times more expensive than the same quantity of corn meal, or five times the same quantity of rice. But for the better-off, it was possible to buy English hams, Portuguese sausages, butter from Brazil and France, Moça brand condensed milk, Brazilian and imported chocolate of the famous brands of Marquis and Menier, top quality cod fish from Porto, and all sorts of imported preserves in tins or glass jars. And even exotic food, like mutton with peas, rabbit with peas, lamb with peas, and Swiss cheeses, as well as a very rich variety of beverages, particularly from Portugal, German, and France, including champagnes and cognacs.

The landowners themselves played the role of patrons of the arts. One of the coffee pioneers in Juiz de Fora, José Inácio Nogueira da Gama (1778-1839), who owned the *fazenda* São Mateus and who was among the wealthiest men in Minas Gerais in the early eighteenth century, would contract theater groups for year-end parties attended by friends and guests from the Rio de Janeiro Court.⁸ In addition to artists from the theater, there were painters whose artwork adorned mansion walls, particularly with portraits of family members. In every

⁶ Arquivo Histórico da Universidade Federal de Juiz de Fora. Inventário de Francisco Ribeiro de Magalhães, caixa 179, doc.24. Noteworthy is the impressive fortune amassed by Manuel Vidal Barbosa Lage, who died in 1888 leaving 1.199.107\$035 réis, 71,15% of which was active debt. See: SARAIVA, Luiz Fernando. Um correr de casas, antigas senzalas: a transição do trabalho escravo para o livre nas fazendas de café, 1870-1900. Rio de Janeiro, 2001. Dissertação (Mestrado): Universidade Federal Fluminense. 200p.

⁷ DUBY, Georges. *L'économie rurale et la vie des campagnes dans l'occident médiéval*. Paris: Aubier Éditions Montaigne, 1962. 2v.

⁸ ESTEVES, Albino de Oliveira. *O teatro em Juiz de Fora: apontamentos*. Juiz de Fora: Pharol, 1910. p.28.

way, the property of Mariano Procópio (1821-1872) personified the artistic standards of the imperial elite. It was the extravagance of this property (now Museu Mariano Procópio) that most caught Burton's attention: "the contrast with nature was quite violent: an Italian garden-villa, in the midst of a virgin forest, shocks by its unpredictability."⁹

Music, of course, was not lacking in the environment in which Francisco Valle grew up; among his grandfather's possessions were a piano and a harmonium. When the American Presbyterian missionary James Cooley Fletcher visited the region, in the eighteen-sixties,

he witnessed at the mansion of the *fazenda* Soledade, owned by José Antônio da Silva Pinto (1785-1870), Baron of Bertioga, near the old gate of the Paraibuna River (in the present-day municipality of Matias Barbosa, about twenty kilometers from Juiz de Fora), an orchestra with violin, flute, and trombone, played by black individuals, as well as an organ and a children's choir. He heard an opera overture, a Latin mass, a *Stabat Mater*, and the march "La Fayette" (probably *Lafayette's March*, composed by Caroline Clark in 1824).¹⁰ It was the Baron of Bertioga himself who had constructed, in 1862, the Theater benefiting the public hospital (Santa Casa de Misericórdia).

Angelo Alves Carrara
(Universidade Federal de Juiz de Fora)

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⁹ BURTON, Richard. *Viagens aos planaltos do Brasil*. São Paulo: Nacional, 1983. p.59-60.
¹⁰ FLETCHER, James Cooley; KIDDER, Daniel Parish. *Brazil and the Brazilians portrayed in historical and descriptive sketches*. 7. ed. Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1867. p.351.