

# Angela de Castro Gomes: intellectual career and paths of the concept of populism

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## Abstract

This article analyzes the critical points made by Angela de Castro Gomes in relation to the concept of populism, published in her work *A invenção do trabalhismo* (The invention of laborism) and in later writings. We seek to grasp how her intellectual experiences in three research institutions – Rio de Janeiro University Research Institute (Instituto Universitário de Pesquisas do Rio de Janeiro [IUPERJ]), Center for Research and Documentation in Contemporary History of Brazil (Centro de Pesquisa e Documentação de História Contemporânea do Brasil [CPDOC]), and Fluminense Federal University (Universidade Federal Fluminense [UFF]) – proved to be key in developing her critiques of the populist interpretation model, especially the studies by Francisco Weffort on the theme. The analysis of this institutional trajectory makes it possible to think about the way in which the experiences of sociability and the exchange of ideas in intellectual institutions matter in the building of academic interpretations. Also, this study discusses the main arguments of Angela de Castro Gomes in defense of the idea of a 'laborist pact' as opposed to the idea of populism, with the aim of highlighting how her analyses contributed to rethinking relations between the State and the working class in Brazil.

**Key words** angela de castro gomes; populism; laborism; intellectual career; institutions.

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## Angela de Castro Gomes: trajetória intelectual e percursos do conceito de populismo

### Resumo

Este artigo analisa as formulações críticas elaboradas por Angela de Castro Gomes em relação ao conceito de populismo, apresentadas em sua obra *A invenção do trabalhismo* e em escritos posteriores. Busca-se compreender como suas experiências intelectuais em três instituições de pesquisa – Instituto Universitário de Pesquisas do Rio de Janeiro (IUPERJ), Centro de Pesquisa e Documentação de História Contemporânea do Brasil (CPDOC) e Universidade Federal Fluminense (UFF) – mostraram-se fundamentais para a elaboração de suas críticas ao modelo de interpretação populista, sobretudo aos trabalhos de Francisco Weffort sobre o tema. A análise dessa trajetória institucional possibilita pensar sobre a maneira pela qual as experiências de sociabilidade e de intercâmbio de ideias em instituições intelectuais importam na formulação de interpretações acadêmicas. Além disso, este estudo discute os principais argumentos de Angela de Castro Gomes em defesa da ideia do “pacto trabalhista” como contraposição à ideia de populismo, com o objetivo de destacar de que maneira suas análises contribuíram para repensar as relações entre Estado e classe trabalhadora no Brasil.

**Palavras-chave** angela de castro gomes; populismo; trabalhismo; trajetória intelectual; instituições.

## Angela de Castro Gomes: trayectoria intelectual y rutas del concepto de populismo

### Resumen

Este artículo analiza las formulaciones críticas hechas por Angela de Castro Gomes en relación con el concepto de populismo, publicadas en su obra *A invenção do trabalhismo* (La invención del laborismo) y en escritos posteriores. Se busca comprender cómo sus experiencias intelectuales en tres instituciones de investigación – Instituto Universitario de Investigación de Río de Janeiro (Instituto Universitário de Pesquisas do Rio de Janeiro [IUPERJ]), Centro de Investigación y Documentación en Historia Contemporánea de Brasil (Centro de Pesquisa e Documentação de História Contemporânea do Brasil [CPDOC]) y Universidad Federal Fluminense (Universidade Federal Fluminense [UFF]) – demostraron ser fundamentales para la elaboración de sus críticas al modelo de interpretación populista, especialmente los estudios de Francisco Weffort sobre el tema. El análisis de esta trayectoria institucional permite pensar la forma en que las experiencias de sociabilidad y el intercambio de ideas en las instituciones intelectuales son importantes en la formulación de las interpretaciones académicas. Además, este estudio discute los principales argumentos de Angela de Castro Gomes en defensa de la idea de un “pacto laborista” en oposición a la idea de populismo, con el objetivo de resaltar cómo sus análisis contribuyeron a repensar las relaciones entre el Estado y la clase trabajadora en Brasil.

**Palabras clave** angela de castro gomes; populismo; laborismo; trayectoria intelectual; instituciones.

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## Angela de Castro Gomes: trajectoire intellectuelle et parcours du concept de populisme

### Résumé

Cet article analyse les formulations critiques élaborées par Angela de Castro Gomes en relation avec le concept de populisme, publiées dans son œuvre *A invenção do trabalhismo* (L'invention du travaillisme) et dans des écrits ultérieurs. Nous cherchons à comprendre comment ses expériences intellectuelles dans trois institutions de recherche – Institut Universitaire de Recherche de Rio de Janeiro (Instituto Universitário de Pesquisas do Rio de Janeiro [IUPERJ]), Centre de Recherche et de Documentation sur l'Histoire Contemporaine du Brésil (Centro de Pesquisa e Documentação de História Contemporânea do Brasil [CPDOC]) et Université Fédérale Fluminense (Universidade Federal Fluminense [UFF]) – se sont révélées fondamentales pour l'élaboration de ses critiques du modèle d'interprétation populiste, notamment les études de Francisco Weffort sur le sujet. L'analyse de cette trajectoire institutionnelle permet de réfléchir à la manière dont les expériences de sociabilité et d'échange d'idées dans les institutions intellectuelles comptent dans la formulation des interprétations académiques. Cette étude examine également les principaux arguments d'Angela de Castro Gomes pour défendre l'idée d'un « pacte travailliste » par opposition à l'idée de populisme, afin de souligner comment leurs analyses ont contribué à repenser les relations entre l'Etat et la classe ouvrière au Brésil.

**Mots-clés** angela de castro gomes; populisme; travaillisme; trajectoire intellectuelle; institutions.

## Introduction

In Brazil, the historiographical literature has considerably grown and expanded in recent years. The consolidation of the graduate system and the expansion in the number of Master's and Doctorate programs have resulted in a diversified intellectual work, covering the most varied research themes and objects. In the midst of this profusion of studies conducted in the last decades, we may identify some historians whose works have already become true 'classics.' Herein, I adopt the term 'classic' to refer to intellectual works that have become unavoidable references to address certain themes. Whether you agree or not with the arguments advocated by these researchers, the reflections proposed by them have become key for discussing certain issues in Brazilian historiography.

Indeed, a historian who wrote 'classic' works in Brazil on certain themes is Angela de Castro Gomes. Although, throughout her intellectual career, she has been working with various research objects, becoming a central reference in different research areas – I highlight, for instance, her works on Brazilian social thought and on intellectuals (Gomes, 1999; Gomes & Hansen, 2016), on the First Brazilian Republic (M. M. Ferreira & Gomes, 1989; Mourão & Gomes, 2014), on historiography (Gomes, 1996b, 2009b), on oral history (Gomes, 2014a), on epistolary writing (Gomes, 2004, 2005; Gomes & Schmidt, 2009), on immigration (Gomes, 2000; Gomes & Mauad, 2006), on Labor Justice (Gomes & Pessanha, 2010; Gomes & Silva, 2013), and on labor analogous to slavery (Gomes, 2008b; Gomes, 2012) –, it is worth stressing that she is the author of a book that has become a 'classic' of Brazilian historiographical literature: *A invenção do trabalhismo* (The invention of laborism) (Gomes, 1988a). This study and other subsequent writings, with contain further discussions and reflections proposed

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in the seminal work, became *sine qua non* approaches to think about the explanatory effectiveness of a category that gained wide space in the academic debate of human sciences, in general, and of Brazilian historiography, in particular, namely: *populism*.

Although the debate on this concept has expanded and diversified over the past few years (Perlatto, 2018; Perlatto & Chaves, 2016) – and, in recent times, it has reappeared with greater prominence, due to the rise of right-wing governments who have been named as ‘populists,’ like Donald Trump, in the United States of America (USA), Viktor Orbán, in Hungary, and Jair Bolsonaro, in Brazil –, there is no doubt that Angela de Castro Gomes’ formulations on populism are still central references for the critical discussion of this concept. Along with other major publications, her studies were crucial both for putting into question simplistic and Manichaeian analyses of the idea of populism and for proposing a more complex interpretation of the relation between the State and the working class in Brazil.

In this article, I think through Angela de Castro Gomes’ critical formulations concerning the concept of populism, taking her intellectual history as an object of analysis. In addition to thinking about how her professional and institutional career makes it possible to reflect more broadly on the development of her critical formulations related to populism as a theme, I am interested in discussing the author’s main objections to this concept, especially highlighting her critiques of formulations about the theme proposed by the political scientist Francisco Weffort.

I assume that following Angela de Castro Gomes’ intellectual path and her critical analyses regarding the concept of populism implies reflecting on her institutional affiliations as a student, professor, and researcher in spaces such as the Rio de Janeiro University Research Institute (Instituto Universitário de Pesquisas do Rio de Janeiro [IUPERJ]), the Center for Research and Documentation in Contemporary History of Brazil (Centro de Pesquisa e Documentação de História Contemporânea do Brasil [CPDOC]), and the Fluminense Federal University (Universidade Federal Fluminense [UFF]). The analysis of this institutional history makes it possible to think about the way how the experiences of sociability and the exchange of ideas in intellectual institutions matter in the making of academic interpretations. Also, this type of approach proposed, concerned with historically investigating the directions of a concept like populism, opens the way for a broader understanding of the intellectual and institutional transformations that have occurred in the academic field of human sciences, in general, and of Brazilian historiography, in particular, over the past few decades.

To carry out this reflection, the article is divided into two parts. In a first moment, I think through the intellectual career of Angela de Castro Gomes, seeking to highlight how the institutional environments where she worked were crucial to develop her critical reflections on the concept of populism and for a more complex formulation on the relations between the State and the working class in Brazil. In the second part, my interest is analyzing in greater detail some of Angela’s contributions to this debate, devoting more attention to her intellectual works on the theme, ranging from her doctoral thesis (Gomes, 1987) to more recent works (Gomes, 2019). Analyzing Angela’s institutional history and the paths of the concept of populism makes it possible not only to grasp the

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work of an intellectual woman whose work has become 'classic,' but to discuss the transformations of major institutional spaces of historiography making in Brazil over the past decades.

## The institutions matter: IUPERJ, CPDOC, AND UFF

We may say, without any rhetorical exaggeration, that *A invenção do trabalhismo* is one of the most important and influential books ever written in Brazilian historiography on republican political history. The work is the result of her doctoral thesis (Gomes, 1987), submitted to the Graduate Program in Political Sociology at the IUPERJ. Angela de Castro Gomes had already received her MA at the institution, concluding her dissertation (Gomes, 1978) under the direction of Renato Raul Boschi, which resulted in the book *Burguesia e trabalho: política e legislação social no Brasil (1917-1937)* (Bourgeoisie and labor: politics and social legislation in Brazil [1917-1937]) (Gomes, 1979), published by the then recently established Editora Campus in a collection directed by Wanderley Guilherme dos Santos, who would later become the director of her doctoral thesis.

Proper understanding of the formulations proposed in *A invenção do trabalhismo* involves grasping the institutional environment of social sciences in which this intellectual work was carried out. As highlighted by Angela de Castro Gomes herself, the IUPERJ, where she studied between 1974 and 1987, provided her, in addition to the tutoring of Renato Raul Boschi and Wanderley Guilherme dos Santos, with readings of classic texts in social sciences and Brazilian social thought, in addition to contact with authors pursuing U.S. political science, like Robert Dahl and Mancur Olson. Added to this there is the possibility of dialogue with various professors, like Cesar Guimarães, Carlos Hasenbalg, Edmundo Campos Coelho, Luiz Antonio Machado, Luiz Werneck Vianna, Amaury de Souza, and José Murilo de Carvalho, the latter three having participated in the assessment board for the thesis that gave rise to the book, which also relied on the participation of Boris Fausto and Leôncio Martins Rodrigues. What is worth noticing in their statements is how Angela always highlights the significance of the interdisciplinary education provided by the IUPERJ so that she could write the books *Burguesia e trabalho* and *A invenção do trabalhismo*, which would become the first thesis to be submitted to the Ph.D. program in the institution (Gomes, 2002)<sup>1</sup>.

In addition to this interdisciplinary intellectual environment at the IUPERJ, it is key to draw attention to the fact that the reflections proposed in *A invenção do trabalhismo* dialogue with two research agendas that gained enormous prominence in the studies of Brazilian social scientists in the 1970s and 1980s: a) authoritarianism; and b) citizenship. In the 1970s, in the context of the dictatorship established in 1964, the theme of authoritarianism began to receive greater attention

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<sup>1</sup> The issue of interdisciplinarity and openness to other subject matters already existed in Angela de Castro Gomes' concerns since her History Undergraduate course at the Fluminense Federal University (UFF), as highlighted in her Memorial: "the course was good, but as I attended the History classes between the years from 1966 to 1969, many things were learned in the classroom and even more outside the classroom, especially in the Academic Directory, where various texts were read and debated. I soon became convinced of the fluidity between discipline boundaries in the area of social sciences, as we faced a diverse literature, almost always without teaching direction" (Gomes, 1995, p. 2).

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from social sciences. Deciphering the country's authoritarian past, based on historical research, was a way of grasping the present and interpreting the new authoritarian period underwent in the 1970s. The 1930 Revolution, in particular, became a major historical moment to be deciphered and understood in a more complex way, in order to analyze the particularities and contradictions of our conservative modernization process.

This research agenda concerned with authoritarianism as a theme may be seen in various studies produced in that context, such as the article "A economia brasileira: crítica à razão dualista" (The Brazilian economy: criticism of dualistic reason) (F. M. C. Oliveira, 1972) and the books *São Paulo e o Estado nacional* (São Paulo and the national State) (Schwartzman, 1975), *Capitalismo e tradicionalismo* (Capitalism and traditionalism) (J. S. Martins, 1975), *A revolução burguesa no Brasil* (The bourgeois revolution in Brazil) (Fernandes, 1975), *Liberalismo e sindicato no Brasil* (Liberalism and union in Brazil) (Vianna, 1976), *Capitalismo autoritário e campesinato* (Authoritarian capitalism and peasantry) (O. G. Velho, 1976), and *Ordem burguesa e liberalismo político no Brasil* (Bourgeois order and political liberalism in Brazil) (Santos, 1978)<sup>2</sup>. Despite the particularities of these studies, they shared the critique of 'dualist' explanations that until then enjoyed hegemony in the interpretations of Brazilian modernization, mainly conducted within institutions such as the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) and the Communist Party of Brazil (Partido Comunista do Brasil [PCB]). The main aim was showing that, instead of a contrast, what happened was a coalition and an articulation between the modern and traditional elites in the 1930s, in the process of consolidation and expansion of capitalism in the country.

Among the works published in the 1970s that analyzed authoritarianism in Brazil and conservative modernization, I especially emphasize the book *Liberalismo e sindicato no Brasil* (Vianna, 1976), because it addresses some topics that are also explored by Angela de Castro Gomes in *A invenção do trabalhismo*, especially the relations between the State and the working class in the consolidation and expansion process of capitalism in the country. It is worth mentioning that, in spite of the fact that this book written by Luiz Werneck Vianna is the result of a doctoral thesis submitted to the University of São Paulo (Universidade de São Paulo [USP]), under the direction of Francisco Weffort, it already allows us to identify tension with some of the more classic formulations about populism proposed by the author, above all those anchored in an excessively negative interpretation of the Vargas experience, which identified in it only elements of authoritarianism, coercion, and manipulation. Later, these aspects were explored and systematized by other authors, and Angela de Castro Gomes stands out.

Although she drew attention to the regressive nature of the Vargas corporatist trade unionism in building relations between the State and workers' associations, Luiz Werneck Vianna (1976)

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<sup>2</sup> In addition to these published works, it is also worth highlighting the importance of doctoral theses submitted to assessment in this context, addressing the theme of authoritarianism, e.g. *Politique et développement économique: structure de pouvoir et système de décision au Brésil (1930-1964)* (Politics and economic development: power structure and decision-making system in Brazil [1930-1964]) (L. Martins, 1973) and *The agrarian roots of conservative modernization in Brazil, 1880-1930* (Reis, 1980).

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pointed out its decisive role in the process of publicizing labor relations, regulating areas previously belonging to the private sphere, until then not covered by the legal system. Thus, in spite of recognizing the recessive nature of Vargasism – mainly because this represents the conformation of a controlled social incorporation process, which interrupted the movement of building an autonomous identity for the subaltern classes, which had been constituted during the First Brazilian Republic and accelerated in the 1920s –, the publicity promoted by the Vargas’ legislation decisively contributed to restrain market’s action on the labor force, leading the communication between capital and labor to started happening through the intermediation of law, a public medium, and not by the private resources held by entrepreneurs and workers. Therefore, the corporate arrangement consisted in a complex construct, in which elements aimed to exercise coercion – mainly through the search for control over trade unions – were combined with elements aimed at the building of consensus, above all through mechanisms aimed at workers’ social protection (Vianna, 1976).

Back in the late 1970s and in the 1980s, the theme of citizenship in Brazil – which is one of the central axes of the reflection proposed by Angela de Castro Gomes in *A invenção do trabalhismo* – was another agenda that started playing a more significant role in the education of social scientists, under the huge influence of the role played by social movements, especially by trade unions, in the struggle for the country’s redemocratization. The concept of citizenship began to appear more explicitly in the bibliography, as already announced since the seminal study by Wanderley Guilherme dos Santos (1979), *Cidadania e justiça. A política social na ordem brasileira* (Citizenship and justice. Social policy in the Brazilian order), where the author proposed the influential concept of ‘regulated citizenship.’ This book, in particular, had a strong influence on the reflections that Angela de Castro Gomes published later in *A invenção do trabalhismo*, above all by highlighting the centrality of social policy and labor rights to shape citizenship in Brazil.

It is worth noticing that Angela de Castro Gomes’ thesis also dialogues with an intellectual and political ‘atmosphere’ in the late 1970s and in the 1980s, *Quando novos personagens entraram em cena* (When new characters came on the scene) (Sader, 1988). In this context, marked by the emergence of the so-called ‘new trade unionism’ and the birth of the Brazilian Workers’ Party (Partido dos Trabalhadores [PT]) and the Unified Workers’ Central (Central Única dos Trabalhadores [CUT]), several social scientists aimed their agendas at issues related to citizenship, at the claims concerning social rights and the theme of workers’ political participation, something which is exemplified by studies like *Por um novo sindicalismo* (For a new trade unionism) (Antunes, 1980), *O ABC da classe operária* (The ABC of the working class) (Ianni, 1980), *São Paulo: o povo em movimento* (São Paulo: the people on the run) (Caldeira & Brant, 1980), *A classe operária e a abertura* (The working class and openness) (Vianna, 1983), *A luta dos loteamentos* (The struggle of subdivisions) (Silva, 1986), and *A tecelagem dos conflitos de classe na “cidade das chaminés”* (The weaving of class conflicts in the “town of chimneys”) (Lopes, 1986).

In this context, the intellectual works on the relation between the State and the working class in Brazil, by Francisco Weffort, had a huge influence on the reflections of social scientists. His

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formulations, written within the Contemporary Culture Studies Center (Centro de Estudos de Cultura Contemporânea [CEDEC]), were anchored in denouncing the heteronomous relations historically established between the State and trade unions in the country and they had as a corollary the defense of the autonomy of social movements in relation to State agencies and the critique of the multi-class alliances established around the State, which prevented workers from building a true class identity (Gomes, 2001a). According to Weffort, who served as PT's General Secretary between 1984 and 1988, the strategy to be adopted by progressive forces – and the PT was the political organization devoted to this project – should be anchored in the defense of a position of workers' autonomy, in order to break with the national-developmental rationale of populist governments and with their political co-option mechanisms, in charge of maintaining the overlapping relations of the State over civil society<sup>3</sup>.

When addressing cross-sectional themes such as authoritarianism, social rights, and citizenship, the work *A invenção do trabalhismo* may be seen as a study related to the intellectual and political environment of that time, as it is directly interested in thinking through workers' political participation. In addition to the institutional environment of the IUPERJ and the dialogue with the intellectual work of social scientists at that circumstance, the fact that, as highlighted in the "Presentation" of the first edition of the book, during the years spent writing her thesis, the author had the opportunity to discuss the preliminary results of her research in the Working Group Brazilian Social Thinking, created within the Brazilian National Association of Graduate Studies and Research in Social Sciences (Associação Nacional de Pós-Graduação e Pesquisa em Ciências Sociais [ANPOCS]). The experience in this institutional space opened possibilities for a broader reflection on authoritarian intellectuals like Oliveira Vianna and Alberto Torres – authors who were also under study in a rather systematic way by social scientists, e.g. the work *Ordem burguesa e liberalismo político no Brasil* (Santos, 1978) –, a reflection that had a huge significance for their analyses on the peculiarities of authoritarianism in Brazil in the 1930s.

In addition to her education at the IUPERJ and the dialogue with the intellectual field of *stricto sensu* social sciences, another major space that had a decisive influence on critical reflections concerning the concept of populism that Angela de Castro Gomes would unfold in *A invenção do trabalhismo* and in later writings was the CPDOC, an institution that the author joined as a researcher in 1976. The CPDOC was created on June 25, 1973, within the Getulio Vargas Foundation (Fundação Getulio Vargas [FGV]), by Celina Vargas do Amaral Peixoto – granddaughter of President Getúlio Vargas – supported by other researchers, like Aspásia Camargo and Alzira Abreu, constituting a center for research, documentation, and memory preservation. Subsequently, the institution was joined by other professionals with an interdisciplinary profile, like Angela de Castro Gomes herself, Lucia Lippi Oliveira, Helena Bomeny, Marieta de Moraes Ferreira, Maria Celina Soares D'Araújo, and Monica Pimenta Veloso, expanding its research and education activities over the years, with direct

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**3** For an analysis of the relation between the concept of populism and the creation of the PT and its transformations in later years, see Perlatto (2016, 2019).

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support by research agencies and foundations like the Ford Foundation and the Funding Authority for Studies and Projects (Financiadora de Estudos e Projetos [FINEP]).

As highlighted by Helena Bomeny (2013, p. 90, our translation), political history was chosen as “a central axis around which a large part of the activities tested there gained muscle, continuity, and systematization.” In addition to Getúlio Vargas’ archive, the CPDOC received and incorporated over the years other private collections of political and intellectual leaders, like Oswaldo Aranha, Cordeiro de Farias, Gustavo Capanema, Lindolfo Collor e Agamenon Magalhães, opening possibilities for the building of research agendas aimed at the study of regional and national political elites<sup>4</sup> and the development of investigations on the most recent history of Brazil<sup>5</sup>. The choices of these work agendas ended up generating distrust on the part of some historians and social scientists who, on the one hand, did not welcome research on more contemporary periods in the country’s history – as the study on the post-1930 period could lead to the loss of a supposed ‘neutrality’ of historians – and, on the other hand, they did not see in a positive way studies carried out on the political and intellectual elites in a country so unequal like Brazil, as if choosing this research agenda meant endorsing the viewpoints of these elites.

In addition to the emphasis on political history, the opening of legitimacy to study more recent history and the possibility of having contact with the collections that belonged to the political and intellectual elites of the Vargas Era, it is worth highlighting two other features of the CPDOC that contributed to create an intellectual environment favorable to the critical formulations about populism that Angela de Castro Gomes proposed in *A invenção do trabalhismo*.

First, it is key to draw attention to the fact that the CPDOC, just like the IUPERJ, has established itself as an intrinsically interdisciplinary institution. Gilberto Velho (2003, p. 17, our translation) emphasizes the interdisciplinary orientation of this center, with its research agendas anchored in “integrative methodologies from various disciplinary traditions.” As pointed out by the author, “the various disciplinary perspectives and traditions intersect and complement each other in the face of complex research objects that require these multiple views, perspectives, and strategies” (G. Velho, 2003, p. 19, our translation). According to Luciana Heymann (2016, p. 543, our translation), “the articulation between historians, sociologists, political scientists, and anthropologists gave a unique feature to the academic making and institutional ethos, profoundly marking many paths and projects.” The research agendas themselves that became a priority for the studies of professors associated with the CPDOC – such as political history and Brazilian social thought – had the identity mark of interdisciplinarity and dialogue between history and social sciences.

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**4** Angela de Castro Gomes (1980) herself organized a book on regional elites, entitled *Regionalismo e centralização política: partidos e constituintes nos anos 1930* (Regionalism and political centralization: parties and constituents in the 1930s), with articles written by Rodrigo Bellingrodt Marques Coelho, Dulce Pandolfi, Maria Helena de Magalhães Castro, Helena Bomeny, and Lúcia Lahmeyer Lobo.

**5** The CPDOC played a major role in consolidating history of the present time as a legitimate field of research in Brazil. On the theme see M. M. Ferreira (2018).

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Second, the CPDOC was a pioneering institution in the development of the so-called *oral history* methodology. Although the first experiences in the field of oral history date back to the mid-1970s, based on courses offered at the FGV by U.S. and Mexican specialists sponsored by the Ford Foundation, it started to gain greater visibility and legitimacy in the 1980s and 1990s, much as a result of the studies conducted within the CPDOC. Despite the initial bias related to having oral testimonies as sources of research, this field gradually expanded and consolidated, above all after the creation, in 1994, of the Brazilian History Association (Associação Brasileira de História [ABO])<sup>6</sup>. As highlighted by Angela de Castro Gomes, the experience with the oral history methodology learned at the CPDOC – “how to organize scripts, have a project, contact the interviewee, do these kinds of things” (Gomes, 2009a, p. 334, our translation) –, with which she had already had more systematic contact when she interviewed 1933-1934 constituent deputies to write the book *Regionalismo e centralização política* (Gomes, 1980), it was crucial for the research with former militants carried out during the writing of her doctoral thesis. These testimonies opened up new possibilities for a rather renewed reflection on the relations between workers and the Vargas State<sup>7</sup>.

A major aspect to highlight in relation to the CPDOC is that it was constituted in the 1970s and 1980s as a central space for conducting research that sought to think of the 1930s and the Vargas Era in a more complex way, being concerned not only with the issues linked to politics, but also with aspects related to culture. In this sense, several studies were produced to analyze not only the repressive aspects of Varguism, but also how it built consensus and gained legitimacy among broad sectors of the population, thus mobilizing symbolic elements and instruments of the cultural apparatus. As an example of this rather renewed research agenda about the Vargas Era, it is worth mentioning the International Seminar promoted by the institution in 1980 on the 50th anniversary of the 1930 Revolution, which brought together researchers from various institutions, resulting in the publication, in 1983, by the Editora UnB, of a 772-page book, entitled *A Revolução de 30: seminário realizado pelo Centro de Pesquisa e Documentação de História Contemporânea do Brasil (CPDOC)* (The 1930 Revolution: seminar held by the Center for Research and Documentation in Contemporary History of Brazil [CPDOC]) (Centro de Pesquisa e Documentação de História Contemporânea do Brasil [CPDOC], 1983)<sup>8</sup>. The publication by the Editora Zahar of the book *Estado Novo: ideologia e poder* (Brazilian New State: ideology and power) (L. L. Oliveira, Velloso, & Gomes, 1982) also stands

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**6** On oral history in Brazil see, among others, M. M. Ferreira (2002) and Gomes (2014a).

**7** In the same year she launched *A invenção do trabalhismo*, Angela de Castro Gomes (1988b) also published, through Editora Zahar, the book *Velhos militantes: depoimentos* (Old militants: testimonies), with statements by activist workers made between 1910 and 1950.

**8** According to Helena Bomeny (2013, p. 96-97, our translation), 3 significant exhibitions were held in the early 1980s based on archives of the CPDOC: the exhibition held at the Funarte Photography Gallery (Galeria de Fotografia da Funarte) in 1980, whose catalog was published by the Editora Nova Fronteira under the title *A Revolução de 30 e seus antecedentes* (The 1930 Revolution and its antecedents) (Fundação Getúlio Vargas, 1980); the exhibition “Revolução de 32: A Fotografia e a Política” (1932 Revolution: Photography and Politics), held in 1982, at the Funarte Photography Gallery; and an exhibition at the Rio de Janeiro Modern Art Museum (Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro [MAM Rio]), in 1983.

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out, where the authors discuss various aspects of the Brazilian New State<sup>9</sup>. In the following years in the 1980s, other studies were published – such as *Getulismo e trabalhismo: tensões e dimensões do Partido Trabalhista Brasileiro* (Getulism and laborism: tensions and dimensions of the Brazilian Labor Party) (Gomes & D’Araujo, 1987) –, highlighting the importance of the CPDOC as an intellectual environment favorable to a more complex and diverse understanding of the Vargas Era.

In addition to the IUPERJ and the CPDOC, another key institution to grasp the reflections proposed by Angela de Castro Gomes was the Department of History of the UFF. Although she joined the institution in 1984, as a professor at the Department of Social Sciences, going to the Department of History only in 1987, it was within the institution that Angela wrote a significant part of her critical reflections on populism. In relation to this aspect, we may see many of the formulations proposed in the book *A invenção do trabalhismo* in dialogue with several historiographic studies produced under that circumstance in the 1970s and 1980s, which had in common a strong dialogue with the intellectual movement of historiographic renewal within that period, marked by critique of the structuralist, totalizing, and quantitative models of explanation, due to the centrality assigned to individuals and the agency dimension, as well as to the greater interest in issues related to culture and to a new look at the subaltern sectors, based on ‘history seen from the bottom’<sup>10</sup>.

*A invenção do trabalhismo*, from this perspective, may be interpreted as an exemplary study of the changes that took place in Brazilian historiography during the 1980s, characterized by appreciation of the ‘agency paradigm’ (Chalhoub & Silva, 2009) and the attention that the so-called ‘excluded from history’ started to receive in research studies – to dialogue with the title of Michelle Perrot’s book, which has a strong influence on historians at that period. Institutions like the São Paulo State University in Campinas (Universidade Estadual de Campinas [Unicamp]) and the UFF, above all, which expanded and consolidated their graduate systems in the 1980s, became central spaces for these new research agendas, with studies aimed at the so-called ‘history seen from the bottom’ – in particular, slaves, freedmen, and urban workers –, in direct dialogue with the international historiography interested in discussing the totalizing explanation models and in appreciating the historical persons’ *action* dimensions<sup>11</sup>. One of the most significant authors in this historiographic renewal movement was Edward P. Thompson, whose reflections – above all those proposed in *The making of the English working class* (Thompson, 1987) – had a prominent influence

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**9** As highlighted by Angela de Castro Gomes in an interview: “We worked together [Lúcia Lippi Oliveira, Monica Pimenta Veloso, and Angela de Castro Gomes], in the very same room. Lúcia and I were doctoral students and Mônica was a master’s student. We gathered chapters of our studies that were under construction and put together a book. We were all working somehow on the Brazilian New State” (L. L. Oliveira, Velloso, & Gomes, 1982, p. 336, our translation).

**10** This historiographical renewal movement had a particularly strong impact on the political history research carried out in Brazil, as highlighted by Angela de Castro Gomes (1996a).

**11** Sidney Chaloub’s master’s dissertation and doctoral thesis – *Trabalho, lar e botequim: vida cotidiana e controle social da classe trabalhadora no Rio de Janeiro da Belle Époque* (Work, home, and tavern: everyday life and social control of the working class in Rio de Janeiro during the Belle Époque) (Chaloub, 1984) and *Visões da liberdade: uma história das últimas décadas de escravidão na Corte* (Visions of freedom: a history of the last decades of slavery in the Court) (Chaloub, 1989) –, submitted, respectively, to the UFF and the Unicamp, are two exemplary studies of this new research agenda of Brazilian historiography in the 1980s.

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on the critical interpretations made by Angela de Castro Gomes in relation to populism in *A invenção do trabalhismo* and in later writings<sup>12</sup>.

In the years following the completion of her doctoral thesis, Angela de Castro Gomes wrote other substantial texts to criticize populism, in direct dialogue with colleagues at the Department of History of the UFF. Exemplary in this sense was the publication of the collection *O populismo e sua história: debate e crítica* (Populism and its history: debate and criticism) (J. Ferreira, 2001). In addition to the dialogues established with J. Ferreira himself<sup>13</sup> – whose reflections in studies like *Trabalhadores do Brasil: o imaginário popular* (Workers in Brazil: the popular imaginary) (J. Ferreira, 1997) were greatly influenced by the book *A invenção do trabalhismo* –, it is worth highlighting her dialogue with Daniel Aarão Reis (1995, p. 15, our translation), with whom she debated “the theme of political parties and electoral practices, at a time when the country was experiencing its first two presidential elections, in 1989 and 1994, after the military regime years.” And it is precisely Daniel Aarão Reis (1995) to whom Angela de Castro Gomes (2001b) thanks for the comments on the preliminary version of the seminal text to criticize populism – “O populismo e as ciências sociais no Brasil: notas sobre a trajetória de um conceito” (Populism and social sciences in Brazil: notes on the paths of a concept) –, which opens the collection *O populismo e sua história: debate e crítica* (Populism and its history: debate and criticism) (J. Ferreira, 2001).

The works by Angela de Castro Gomes that criticize populism had, over the following years, huge affinities with other research agendas within the UFF, above all those interested in interpreting the relation between State and society in Brazil in a more complex way during authoritarian periods, in order to grasp the role of civilians in the building and maintenance of such regimes. Exemplary in this regard were the research carried out by UFF professors, like Denise Rollemberg and Samantha Quadrat, devoted to think about the social construction of authoritarian regimes, in a research agenda very influenced by Daniel Aarão Reis’ works on the 1964 coup d’État and the dictatorship in Brazil. The chapter “Estado Novo: ambiguidades e heranças do autoritarismo no Brasil” (Brazilian New State: ambiguities and legacies of authoritarianism in Brazil), by Angela de Castro Gomes (2011),

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**12** Regarding Thompson’s influence, it is worth reading excerpts from Angela de Castro Gomes’ interview: “I was lucky because, just at that moment, Thompson’s book arrived in Brazil; it was hard, written in english, but it arrived here. Then I devised a course along with Amaury de Souza, it consisted of me, Maria Celina d’Araújo, and him. That was a special course, just to read Thompson” (Gomes, 2009a, p. 331, our translation); “I entered the Ph.D. program in 1981; that took place in 82. But Thompson was barely addressed in the thesis, because it was not easy to be incorporated” (Gomes, 2009a, p. 331, our translation). “I was effectively convinced that any kind of explanation of history and social sciences that does not consider political players, really as players, is inconsistent. For me, the greatest difficulty in approaching populism is exactly this; there are players on one side, and on the other there is mass of maneuver. Thompson is not directly discussing this point, but his approach to the working class is clear and it is crushing” (Gomes, 2009a, p. 332, our translation).

**13** Angela de Castro Gomes and Jorge Ferreira wrote some works together in which the critique of populist interpretation appears prominently, e.g. the books *Jango: as múltiplas faces* (Jango: the multiple faces) (Gomes & Ferreira, 2007) and *1964: o golpe que derrubou um presidente, pôs fim ao regime democrático e instituiu a ditadura no Brasil* (1964: the coup d’État that brought down a president, brought the democratic regime to an end, and instituted the dictatorship in Brazil) (Gomes & Ferreira, 2014), and the article “Brasil, 1945-1964: uma democracia representativa em consolidação” (Brasil, 1945-1964: a representative democracy in consolidation) (Gomes, & Ferreira, 2019).

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published in the collection *A construção social dos regimes autoritários* (The social construction of authoritarian regimes), organized by D. Rollemberg and S. V. Quadrat, is a result of this dialogue to a more complex and multifaceted understanding of the relations between State and society in Brazil.

## The criticism to populism and the ‘laborist pact’

The three institutions discussed in the previous topic – IUPERJ, CPDOC, and UFF – were spaces for sociability, academic discussion, and intellectual work of great relevance in Angela de Castro Gomes’ intellectual career and they had a decisive influence on critical interpretations of the concept of populism, originally proposed in *A invenção do trabalhismo* and improved in later writings. In this section, based on the selection of some texts written by the author along this institutional history, I seek to highlight and analyze the central arguments that structured her critique of Francisco Weffort’s ideas and the populist interpretation model, as well as her formulations around the concept of laborism.

It is worth calling attention to the fact that, although the critique of populism was already strongly present in *A invenção do trabalhismo*, it does not appear as explicitly in this work as in later academic studies. Despite the fact that some of Weffort’s most central studies are mentioned throughout the book – like his doctoral thesis, *Classes populares e política* (Popular classes and politics) (Weffort, 1968), his full-professor thesis, *Sindicato e política* (Trade union and politics) (Weffort, 1972), and his article “Democracia e movimento operário: algumas questões para a história do período 1945-1964” (Democracy and labor movement: some issues for the history of the period 1945-1964) (Weffort, 1978) –, critical references to the author are not so direct, due to the context in which the work was written. As highlighted in a statement by Angela de Castro Gomes, above all due to the fact that Weffort’s formulations have a lot “to do with a struggle within the left-wing, which was not the case for me” and because *A invenção do trabalhismo* is a doctoral thesis, “it would be just ridiculous, as well as inelegant, disrespectful, and stupid on my part” to write a chapter in order to discuss with Weffort. As a result of these factors, she and her research director, Wanderley Guilherme dos Santos, decided “that the word [populism] would not appear in the thesis” (Gomes, 2009a, p. 331, our translation).

Anyway, the analysis contained in *A invenção do trabalhismo*, anchored in the idea of ‘laborist pact,’ already represented a strong critique to the concept of populism and the proposal of a more complex perspective to interpret the relations between the State and the working class in Brazil, especially in the Vargas Era. One of the main merits of Angela’s reflection lies precisely on the proposition of a new periodization to grasp the Brazilian New State, facing it not as a cohesive and homogeneous bloc, but divided into 2 periods: a) from 1937 to 1942, when the elements of coercion and censorship adopted by the Vargas dictatorship might have predominated as a form of domination; and b) from 1942 to 1945, moment of building a “‘new’ Brazilian New State,” when, due to international issues – after the entry of Brazil in World War II, and the alignment of Brazil with

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the USA – and national issues – with the internal crises underwent by the regime –, the government started to reinforce its search for legitimacy by mobilizing symbolic means, like the segment “Falando aos trabalhadores do Brasil” (Speaking to workers in Brazil), on the radio program “Hora do Brasil” (The Brazil Hour), hosted by Alexandre Marcondes Filho, Minister of Labor during the Vargas administration.

The discourse built in this program dialogued with and appropriated various workers’ claims and needs throughout the First Brazilian Republic, giving them new senses and meanings and introducing the actions related to the Brazilian New State’s labor, social security, and trade union legislation as if they were gifts and donations. Symbolic actions like these, which sought to depict social law as a favor – added to other measures deployed by the government from 1942 on, such as initiatives to encourage trade unionization, the creation of trade union taxes, and the implementation of the Decreto-Lei n. 5.452 (Consolidação das Leis do Trabalho [CLT], 1943) –, were crucial in the sense of building a ‘political communication’ between the Vargas State and workers, producing adherence and legitimacy. The complexity of this relationship could not be confused only with the idea of manipulation that structured the populist interpretations of the relation between dominant and dominated persons.

In articles published in the following years, Angela de Castro Gomes developed even more systematically the critical reflections on populism, establishing a more direct dialogue with Francisco Weffort’s works. A central article in this sense is “O populismo e as ciências sociais no Brasil: notas sobre a trajetória de um conceito” (Gomes, 2001b). In this text, Angela rebuilds the path of this concept in Brazil, since the mid-1950s, in order to “identify and outline the main proposals developed to shape the category to the Brazilian experience” (Gomes, 2001b, p. 20, our translation). In addition to historically situating the early rather systematic formulations on the concept – proposed by intellectuals affiliated to the Brazilian Institute of Economics, Sociology, and Politics (Instituto Brasileiro de Economia, Sociologia e Política [IBESP]) and, later, to the Higher Institute of Brazilian Studies (Instituto Superior de Estudos Brasileiros [ISEB]) –, the author analyzes in detail Francisco Weffort’s works, emphasizing that, in spite of possible tensions in the argument, the author’s formulations end up reinforcing the idea of populism as a policy to ‘manipulate’ the masses.

According to Angela de Castro Gomes’ reading of Weffort’s formulations, in the relations established between the State/leader and the workers/people, the State and the leader are conceived as strong and active, while workers are seen as weak and passive, having no “self-propelling ability,” since they are not “organized as a class” (Gomes, 2001b, p. 34-35, our translation). According to the author:

The masses or popular sectors, not being conceived as players/subjects in this political relation, but as recipients/objects to which populist formulations and policies refer, could only be manipulated or co-opted

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(in the case of the leaders), something which means precipitously, if not literally, deceived or at least diverted from a conscious choice (Gomes, 2001b, p. 35, our translation).

In texts published in the following years, Angela de Castro Gomes consolidated her critical reflections regarding Weffort's readings on populist politics. This may be seen in articles like "Estado Novo: ambiguidades e heranças do autoritarismo no Brasil" (Gomes, 2011), "O Estado Novo e o debate sobre populismo no Brasil" (Brazilian New State and the debate about populism in Brazil) (Gomes, 2014b), and "Estado Novo: debatendo nacionalismo, autoritarismo e populismo" (Brazilian New State: debating nationalism, authoritarianism, and populism" (Gomes, 2019). In these texts, Angela resumes her critiques of what she names as "populist model of relations of domination," which sees the people as "deprived of its autonomy and political conscience, when subject to the modern propaganda strategies inherent to charismatic leaders of these urban-industrial mass societies" (Gomes, 2014b, p. 24, our translation).

The author seeks to emphasize that the concept of populism "might be excessively simplistic" in order to grasp the Vargas Era and, more precisely, the Brazilian New State period, insofar as it was "anchored both in the idea of a Machiavellian and all-powerful State apparatus and that of a working class that lacks its own conscience and drive; of a historical subject State and of a working class that is a passive object of State action" (Gomes, 2011, p. 60, our translation). The big problem with the "populist model of interpreting the relations between the rulers and the ruled" could be precisely the mistaken understanding that "those ruled may be and often are virtually devoid of autonomy and conscience, when subject to political strategies inherent to mass society" (Gomes, 2011, p. 60, our translation). In this sense, "everything that was qualified as 'populist' emphasized a dimension of 'manipulation' of the State over 'masses,' even when its ambiguity was recognized" (Gomes, 2011, p. 60, our translation). Putting this perspective into question meant, in dialogue with the bibliography then mobilized by the author – with an emphasis on Edward P. Thompson – acknowledging workers as subjects and appreciating the idea that, in spite of "the State's strength that was upon them," they "also had an active political position" (Gomes, 2011, p. 60, our translation).

The objective proposed by Angela de Castro Gomes is, in a perspective different from the populist reading, thinking of the Vargas State by means of its contradictions, having its complexity as a basis, and reinforcing the rationale of ambiguity. In this interpretation, the idea of manipulation – so central to the formulations of populism – "ceased to have such a unidirectional sense (meaning absolute State power), i.e. postulated as having a constitutive ambiguity," becoming both "a form of State control over the working masses," and "an actual way of meeting their needs" (Gomes, 2011, p. 60, our translation). Even if there was a "masking dimension" in the relations between the Vargas State and workers, the so-called "populist policy" implemented by the Brazilian New State might, in practice, have been "experienced by the working class as a possibility of access to eminently

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social rights” (Gomes, 2011, p. 60, our translation). The consideration of workers as subjects and as State interlocutors resulted in discussing the “dichotomy, quite prevalent, between working class’ autonomy and heteronomy, as a way of designating and explaining the absence of ‘true’ leaders and their ‘lack of consciousness’ or their ‘possible consciousness’” (Gomes, 2011, p. 61, our translation), and implied recognizing a “dialogue between players who have different power resources, but equally capable of appropriating and rereading each other’s political proposals” (Gomes, 2011, p. 61, our translation). “Workers obedience” to the State came to be understood both as “a possibility for effective State controls over their organizations” and “as a political communication channel that opened up for them, establishing a new place as an acknowledged and long-pursued political interlocutor” (Gomes, 2011, p. 65, our translation).

The concept of ‘laborist pact’ proposed by the author was formulated through the critique of the populist interpretation, refusing “the idea of an essentially good working class, but passive or without a ‘true consciousness,’” encompassing a “complex set of interests and beliefs, where workers actively participated, too” (Gomes, 2014b, p. 28, our translation). This ‘pact,’ which was anchored both in the State’s word and action and in the working class’ word and action, should be seen by means of 2 primary dimensions: a) the *symbolic*, which “could be translated by the building of a careful propaganda discourse for the regime, which deeply marked Brazilian political culture from then on” (Gomes, 2011, p. 65, our translation); and b) the *organizational*, which could constitute “the creation of an institutional instrument in which one side is the corporate trade unionism model, and the other, a coupling to a partisan political system” (Gomes, 2011, p. 62, our translation). It may be through this ‘double rationale’ – material and symbolic – that, in spite of the relations between strength and disharmony, the State and the people could recognize each other. Such a dynamics could explain the reasons why workers addressed “the State ‘claiming’ their rights that must be met by businessmen and government authorities” (Gomes, 2011, p. 65, our translation).

Just as other studies that were conducted and published throughout the 1990s and 2000s – e.g. *Trabalhadores do Brasil: o imaginário popular* (J. Ferreira, 1997) and *Multidões em cena: propaganda política no varguismo e no peronismo* (Crowds on the scene: political propaganda in Vargasism and Peronism) (Capelato, 1998) –, Angela de Castro Gomes’ writings on the ‘laborist pact’ were of decisive importance to rethink the relations between the State and the working class in Brazil. Despite the fact that the concept of populism is still mobilized by various authors to analyze certain historical periods, as well as to address contemporary politics, there is no doubt that the critiques of this term proposed by Angela in *A invenção do trabalhismo* and in later studies, contributed substantially to a more complex and nuanced interpretation of the forms of domination in the country. Research studies devoted to the theme have increasingly brought greater capacity for action and autonomy to popular sectors, seeing them as social subjects that, in spite of the power relations, also think, design, and build strategies for claiming, achieving, and safeguarding their rights.

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## Conclusion

One of the main difficulties involved in conducting research studies on intellectuals is the articulation between *text* and *context*. A study devoted to grasping a specific intellectual always runs the risk of being too focused on a substantive analysis of her/his arguments, losing sight of her/his institutional affiliation, the existing sociability networks, the intellectual traditions, the languages, the themes, and the concepts of the time, in addition to the broader political and social context in which the work has been produced. On the other hand, a study of intellectuals may also exaggerate the significance of context, leaving aside both the subjective issues of an intellectual who has produced that work and her/his autonomy as a social subject and the very ideas discussed and proposed by her/him. Finding this balance is one of the biggest challenges for those who study intellectual history.

Despite all the constraints, this article builds a situated interpretation of Angela de Castro Gomes' intellectual career and of her discussions about the concept of populism, in order to think of how the institutions where she has worked in show to be crucial for the emergence of her critiques of the populist model to interpret the relations between the State and the working class. I started from the assumption that the critical arguments about populism proposed by Angela in *A invenção do trabalhismo* and in later writings may be grasped both in dialogue with the political and social issues of her time and having her affiliation to the IUPERJ, the CPDOC, and the UFF as a basis, the three central institutions of her professional career. These institutions have become major spaces for intellectual education, personal sociability, and debate of theories, concepts, and research practices, as well as discussion of ideas, building favorable environments where Angela could conduct a more complex analysis of the relations between State and working class in Brazil, anchored in the idea of 'laborist pact,' which I tried to discuss in greater detail in the second part of this text.

There is still a small number of studies devoted to the analysis of professional careers, institutional spaces, and the intellectual works of historians who played decisive roles for institutionalizing and consolidating the discipline in the country, for renewing historiography making, and for shaping this intellectual field, which has been growing and diversifying over the years<sup>14</sup>. Based on the analysis of Angela de Castro Gomes' critical writings on populism, this article consists in an analytical exercise grounded in this research agenda, in addition to paying a humble tribute to an intellectual woman whose professional career must be constantly acknowledged and appreciated due to its importance for Brazilian historiography.

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**14** The collection organized by the Editora UFMG and the Perseu Abramo Foundation with selections addressing the careers of various intellectuals, like Wanderley Guilherme dos Santos, Silvano Santiago, Maria da Conceição Tavares, Gabriel Cohn, as well as historians like Boris Fausto and Evaldo Cabral de Mello, was a major initiative in this regard. Angela de Castro Gomes (2008a) was the organizer of the volume devoted to Boris Fausto.

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## How to cite this article:

### Norma A – ABNT

PERLATTO, F. Angela de Castro Gomes: intellectual career and paths of the concept of populism. *Conhecer: Debate entre o Público e o Privado*, v. 10, n. 24, p. 98-119, 2020.

### Norma B – APA

Perlatto, F. (2020). Angela de Castro Gomes: intellectual career and paths of the concept of populism. *Conhecer: Debate entre o Público e o Privado*, 10(24), 98-119.

### Norma C – Vancouver

Perlatto F. Angela de Castro Gomes: intellectual career and paths of the concept of populism. *Conhecer: Debate entre o Público e o Privado* [Internet]. 2020 [cited Mar 4, 2020];10(24):98-119. Available from: <https://revistas.uece.br/index.php/revistaconhecer/article/view/2760>