

LUIZ FELIPE ROSA RAMOS

ANTITRUST AND COMPETITION
CONVERGENCE AND DIVERGENCE IN THE TROPICAL MIRROR

PH.D. THESIS (TESE DE DOUTORADO)

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Submitted to the Examination Board of the Graduate Program in Law at the University of São Paulo (USP), in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Ph.D. in Law, in the concentration area of Philosophy and General Theory of Law, under supervision of Prof. Dr. Celso Fernandes Campilongo and co-supervision of Prof. Tobias Werron (University of Bielefeld).

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Para Bia, minha irmã.

“In this manner, they endeavored to endow the market system with economic legitimacy. But, by the same token, they sacrificed the sociological legitimacy (...)” Albert O. Hirschmann, 1982.

“My rules for research: 1. Listen to the Gentiles (...)” Paul Krugman, 2008.

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¹ Adapted from Robert H. Bork, *The Antitrust Paradox: a Policy at War with Itself* (1978; 1993), New York, The Free Press, xv (about Aaron Director).

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ABSTRACT

ROSA RAMOS, L. F. *Antitrust and competition: convergence and divergence in the tropical mirror*. 2019. 279 pages. Thesis (Ph.D. in Law, concentration area: Philosophy and General Theory of Law) – Law School, University of São Paulo, São Paulo, 2019.

The debate on antitrust goals is a rich, century-old dispute that seems to admit more than one approach. This thesis seeks to develop a historical-sociological approach by looking at such debate through the following question: What does it mean to protect competition as an objective of antitrust? In order to address such question, the dissertation recovers, in a first step, historical moments of the discussion and institutionalization of various antitrust goals. Although the focus is on the Brazilian case of society, even international contributions to such debate generally fail to semantically consolidate a concept of competition. It means antitrust agencies have struggled to find, in doctrine, definitions of competition that may be applicable to various decisions. In order to pursue alternative definitions, the dissertation observed how competition has been described by sociological studies. The observation of the encounters and incongruities between such “sociology of competition” and the emerged contributions in antitrust field has intrinsic value, that is, to illuminate the limits and latencies demarcated by antitrust when building its notions of competition. Nevertheless, the scope of the thesis is broadened by a suggestion that an approach capable of coupling sociology of competition and antitrust doctrine potentially offers a legally coherent and socially adequate concept for antitrust competition.

Keywords: antitrust, antitrust goals, competition, sociology of competition, systems theory.

RESUMO

ROSA RAMOS, L. F. *Antitrust and competition: convergence and divergence in the tropical mirror*. 2019. 279 p. Tese (Doutorado em Direito, área de concentração: Filosofia e Teoria Geral do Direito) – Faculdade de Direito, Universidade de São Paulo, São Paulo, 2019.

O debate sobre os objetivos do antitruste é um debate rico e centenário, que parece admitir mais de uma abordagem. Esta tese procura desenvolver uma abordagem histórico-sociológica, observando esse debate a partir da seguinte pergunta: o que significa proteger a concorrência como um objetivo do antitruste? Para endereçar essa questão, são recuperados, em um primeiro passo, momentos históricos da discussão e institucionalização dos diversos objetivos do antitruste. Embora o foco seja o caso brasileiro da sociedade, sugere-se que mesmo contribuições internacionais a esse debate falham, de maneira geral, em consolidar semanticamente um conceito de concorrência. Significa dizer que autoridades antitruste têm tido dificuldade em encontrar, na doutrina, definições de concorrência que possam ser aplicáveis a diversas decisões. A fim de buscar definições alternativas, a tese se dedica a observar como a concorrência foi descrita por trabalhos sociológicos. A observação dos encontros e desencontros dessa “sociologia da concorrência” com as contribuições surgidas no âmbito do antitruste possui valor intrínseco, qual seja, iluminar os limites e latências demarcados pelo antitruste ao construir suas noções de concorrência. Não obstante, em uma ampliação do seu escopo, o trabalho sugere também que uma abordagem capaz de acoplar sociologia da concorrência e doutrina antitruste potencialmente oferece um conceito juridicamente coerente e socialmente adequado para a concorrência do antitruste.

Palavras-chave: Antitruste, objetivos do antitruste, concorrência, sociologia da concorrência, teoria dos sistemas.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

ROSA RAMOS, L. F. *Antitrust and competition: convergence and divergence in the tropical mirror*. 2019. 279 S. Dissertation (Promotion in Rechtswissenschaften, Philosophie und Allgemeine Rechtslehre) – Fakultät für Rechtswissenschaft, Universität São Paulo, São Paulo, 2019.

Die Debatte über die Ziele des Wettbewerbsrechts ist eine reichhaltige, jahrhundertealte Debatte, die mehr als einen Ansatz zulässt. Diese Arbeit entwickelt einen historisch-soziologischen Ansatz, der diese Debatte mit folgender Frage konfrontiert: Was bedeutet es, den Wettbewerb als Ziel des Wettbewerbsrechts zu schützen? Um diese Frage zu beantworten, rekonstruiert die Dissertation in einem ersten Schritt historische Momente der Diskussion und Institutionalisierung verschiedener Ziele des Wettbewerbsrechts. Obwohl der Schwerpunkt auf dem brasilianischen Fall der Gesellschaft liegt, haben auch internationalen Beiträgen zu dieser Debatte das Konzept des Wettbewerbs in der Regel nicht semantisch konsolidiert. Das bedeutet, dass es die Kartellämter schwergefallen ist, in der Lehre Definitionen des Wettbewerbs zu finden, die auf verschiedene Entscheidungen angewendet werden können. Um alternative Definitionsvorschläge zu entwickeln, untersucht die Dissertation sodann, wie der Wettbewerb in der soziologischen Literatur beschrieben wurde. Die Beobachtung von Parallelen und Differenzen zwischen der „Soziologie der Konkurrenz“ und der Literatur zum Wettbewerbsrecht hat einen inneren Wert, d.h. die vom Wettbewerbsrecht abgegrenzten Grenzen und Latenzen beim Aufbau seiner Wettbewerbsvorstellungen zu beleuchten. Dennoch wird der Umfang der Arbeit durch einen Vorschlag erweitert, dass ein Ansatz, der in der Lage ist, die Soziologie der Konkurrenz und mit der Dogmatik des Wettbewerbsrechts zu verknüpfen, potenziell ein rechtlich kohärentes und sozial angemessenes Konzept für den Wettbewerb bietet.

Stichworte: Wettbewerbsrecht, Wettbewerbsrechtliche Ziele, Konkurrenz, Soziologie der Konkurrenz, Systemtheorie.

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INTRODUCTION

In 2016, the Nucleus of Studies on Competition and Society (NECSO-USP) conducted an exploratory research on the perception of competition in the Brazilian case of society. Questionnaires were applied to entrepreneurs, executives and employees related to companies of various sizes in different business sectors. The professionals were asked about their understandings regarding competition, their knowledge on antitrust and the specificities of competition in Brazil. The answers obtained by the group, among which we now pick a few examples, anticipated some of the issues that will be discussed on the present thesis².

Competition came out of the responses as a multifaceted and ambiguous phenomenon. A bakery owner expressed his view on competition as “the other bakeries in the neighborhood that sometimes make a point of coming here to see the price of products and lower a few cents”. “The problem”, he said, “is that some shopkeepers make unfair competition, fighting over cents in the price of some products and selling goods that have nothing to do with their store”. For example, “a clothing store on the street started selling ice cream, which is disloyal to my bakery that also sells ice cream because it sells other food products but does not sell clothes”.

The partner of a medium-sized food retail chain, in turn, described competition as “a much broader concept than mere rivalry between firms”, as it is determined by “the strength of buyers, the strength of suppliers, the potential for new entrants into the [market] sector, and the number of substitute products to this sector”. Competition would be beneficial both for consumers, “because it could create a price war and the consequent collapse of prices”, and firms, which will always have to “maintain the quality of their products and services, so as not to lose market presence”.

The managing partner of a high-income financial consultancy also responded to our questionnaire. In his answer, competition means “the freedom to dispute the market with the main existing players, as long as in an ethical and fair manner”. A firm that “wins the competition” shows that it is “alive” in the market and can become a “reference” in its activity. Nonetheless, in order to “beat its competitors by conquering the market”, there will be need for “investments in the company (in people, method and process)”.

² See <https://necsousp.com/>. Although such responses were used only for internal discussion, they served as a prototype for a further research project whose results were presented at the 23rd International Seminar of the Brazilian Institute for Competition, Consumer and International Trade Studies (IBRAC, 2017).

The level of knowledge regarding antitrust regulation also varied among the responses. The bakery owner had on the counter a placard from a cigarette manufacturer saying that it “supports competition” – an obligation resulting from an antitrust investigation – but he does not know what competition compliance policies “are about”. The partner of the food retail chain argued that law has an important role in the “merger of two companies that can greatly alter competition in a sector, even turning it into a monopoly”, but his business does not have formal policies for competition compliance either. The partner of the financial consultancy said that his company “follows the rules required by regulatory agencies (...), in addition to internal policies of good practices” that maintain “excellent internal relationship and enormous credibility with customers”.

With regards to the specificities of competition in Brazil, the bakery owner alleged that “small shopkeepers already have a lot of competition to face” and do not need further incentive to compete, whereas the culture of competition is necessary for big firms, “such as Car Wash’s [a Brazilian corruption investigation] constructors”. The food retail entrepreneur also stated that “sectors involving smaller enterprises are mostly characterized by extreme competition, while sectors with large firms are characterized mostly by duopolies”, but he added that competition has no need “to become cultural in society”, since it is a “concept of the business world” whose distance to “disunity” is “very small”. The investment partner declared that there is “monopoly of some sectors” which prevents “development” of the nation, because of “protectionism and accommodation”. As to the “culture of competition”, he complemented, “we need to learn a lot from the big ones in each sector”.

In our small sample, there seems to be no consensus around what competition actually means and on who benefits from it. There is also doubt about which parties would need a greater culture of competition in Brazil: whether only large firms, the entire economic sector, or even other spheres of society beyond the business world. Finally, the impact of the notions of competition as constructed by Brazilian antitrust agency (the CADE) seems to remain limited, although it apparently varies by company size. Even if they are intended to make no empirical proof, such results are a fine illustration of the problems and the hypothesis addressed by the present work.

The main problem from which our research stems is that competition has not been semantically consolidated as a goal of antitrust. People usually know antitrust as a “competition policy”, antitrust agencies claim to foster a “competitive process”, antitrust

attorneys call themselves “competition lawyers” – but only a few scholars have dedicated their works to decrypt what competition could possibly mean as an autonomous drive for antitrust. As far as one can see through the tropical mirror, this is an international issue. “Both judicial and non-judicial writing manipulates the terminology and concepts”, argue the authors of an eminent treatise, “often without penetrating the underlying substance”. As to competition, the same treatise observes:

“In passing the antitrust laws, ‘Congress was dealing with competition, which is sought to protect, and monopoly, which it sought to prevent’. While rhetorically reassuring, this simple formulation is hardly self-defining, and it conceals a diversity of possible objectives”³.

Indeed, such “rhetorically reassuring” formulation has not prevented the concern with competition in antitrust from overflowing to the broader public discourse in the last few years. The media⁴, the political system⁵ and non-specialized publications⁶ have been reflecting the call for “more competition”. Antitrust scholars started to take the problem seriously and different nuances of the debate are showing up⁷. In Brazil, two of the most important antitrust scholars have recognized a “disappointment” or even a “paralysis” in the realm of antitrust⁸.

³ Phillip E. Areeda, Herbert Hovenkamp, *Antitrust Law: An Analysis of Antitrust Principles and Their Application* (2013), New York, Wolters Kluwer, xix and 3. Referring to the disagreement among antitrust practitioners and theorists on the meaning of competition as a “scandal”, Oliver Black, *Conceptual foundations of antitrust* (2005), Cambridge, University Press, 6.

⁴ See “The Economist”, *The University of Chicago worries about a lack of competition* (Apr 12, 2017). Before, “The Economist”, *Too much of a good thing* (Mar 26, 2016).

⁵ See Democrats, *A Better Deal: Cracking Down on Corporate Monopolies and the Abuse of Economic and Political Power* (2017), available at <https://www.democrats.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/2017/07/A-Better-Deal-on-Competition-and-Costs-1.pdf>

⁶ For instance, Jonathan Tepper, Denise Hearn, *The myth of capitalism: monopolies and the death of competition* (2019), New Jersey, Hoboken.

⁷ See, among many, Carl Shapiro, *Antitrust in a Time of Populism* (2018), International Journal of Industrial Organization, available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3058345>; Lina Khan, *Amazon’s Antitrust Paradox* (2017), 126 Yale Law Journal 710; and generally the debate on the “New Brandeis School”. In the European context, see Oles Andriychuk, *The Normative Foundations of European Competition Law* (2017), Cheltenham, Edward Elgar (arguing that the main constitutional importance of competition lies in the ethical value it represents for society).

⁸ See Calixto Salomão Filho, *A paralisia do Antitruste*, in *Revista do IBRAC – Direito da Concorrência, Consumo e Comércio Internacional* (2009), vol. 16, 305-323 (referring to a loss of “theoretical density” in antitrust) and Paula Forgioni, *Os Fundamentos do Antitruste* (1998; 9th ed. 2017), São Paulo, Revista dos Tribunais, 128 (identifying, despite the advances, that Brazilian antitrust agency has focused almost exclusively on mergers, which rarely present relevant competition problems).

This thesis is not directly concerned with the current competitive structure of Brazilian markets, nor does it deliver a critique of a comprehensive set of CADE's decisions. We are interested in such topics as long as they help us better assessing our main research object: antitrust doctrine. Antitrust doctrine is a privileged arena for observing the discussion on antitrust goals, including competition, and the concepts thereby associated. Scholars have been discussing the goals of antitrust without the need to defend a specific party nor the pressure to decide a singular case. Although our primary focus is Brazilian antitrust, we accept it as being deeply tangled with the international debate. As will be made clear throughout this work, the "tropical mirror" reflects both the viewer and its context.

Our fundamental hypothesis is that antitrust doctrine has not consolidated a concept of competition that is both (i) legally coherent (with antitrust statutes and decisional criteria) and (ii) socially adequate (to competition empirical manifestation and its modern imaginary). Despite the efforts and advances, they have not resulted in a concept of competition that is consistently applied by agencies and perceived by the public as a specific antitrust goal. We also suppose that the supremacy of economic theory as a source of antitrust doctrine has contributed to such failure. If we are right in such outlooks, the supporters of competition as an antitrust goal could benefit from a socio-legal approach which incorporates other sources, such as the sociology of competition. As much as presumptions and definitions are made explicit, critics will also gain from enhanced transparency in the debate.

The strategy chosen to address such issues is essentially three-phased, each phase corresponding to one chapter of this thesis. The first step asks: "*What has been tried?*". It retrieves important moments of the debate on antitrust goals to understand how competition has been differentiated from other goals. The same concern illuminates our assessment of Brazilian antitrust doctrine and its eventual impacts in CADE's practice. Closing the first chapter, we explore non-dogmatic sources of antitrust, such as political philosophy, economic analysis, law and economics and a promising law and society approach.

The second step asks: "*What has been missing?*". It tells an alternative story about competition that is centered on sociological works. Essentially, we look at social forms and potentially addressed social problems. The Brazilian nuances of such story are also outlined, as well as imbrications with the country's economic structure. The purpose of this chapter is to build a concept of competition that corresponds to its modern imaginary and emergence

in tropical contexts. Such task is ultimately endeavored based on the works of Niklas Luhmann, Tobias Werron, Harrison White and classics of Brazilian social thought.

Finally, the last step inquires: “*What could be tried?*”. It thoroughly analyses three antitrust cases in Brazil so as to identify the criteria used by the antitrust agency. We test whether the concept built in the precedent chapter could be compatible with antitrust reasoning in each of its main branches: cartels, mergers and exclusionary conducts. Such exercise is made with a view of current tendencies of antitrust analysis, so as to cope with its evolution. The chapter ends with theoretical considerations on the possible impacts of such an approach for antitrust, for legal doctrine and for legal sociology.

The method underlying our strategy is unavoidably multiple and cannot be coupled with a single theory. It is only so because of the complexity of our research object and due to the paths implied in the problems here addressed. As it happened to come out of the responses to NECSO’s questionnaires, competition can be seen as a mere rivalry between bakeries, as investing to “win the market” or as a structure that includes buyers, suppliers, potential entrants and substitute products. Competition’s effects are often ambiguously evaluated, and though there seems to be a tendency of its dissemination, one can still cast doubts at its real extension in the economy and at its need “to become cultural in society”. Agencies maintain the job of spreading the competitive word, but placards supporting competition do not necessarily lead to compliance with antitrust-specific views, and even those who follow the policies of “good practice” are eager to learn with the “big ones”.

All things considered, this thesis is partially a history of ideas’ enterprise, as we are concerned with the historical construction of competition both in antitrust and in sociology. Partly, it is also sociological work, since we develop a second-order observation of the legal system and outline a social form of competition in the Brazilian context. Finally, and mostly in the last chapter, we will take a step that is usually done by legal doctrine: working on a concept based on distinctions adopted in antitrust decisions. The work that derives from the above-mentioned problems, hypothesis, strategies and methods is nothing but *another* story about antitrust. It can nevertheless interest someone who is not only longing to see oneself in the other, but prone to find “*the other in oneself*”⁹.

⁹ Viveiros de Castro, *Prefácio* in Beatriz Azevedo, *Antropofagia: Palimpsesto selvagem* (2016), São Paulo, Sesi SP, 16.

FINAL REMARKS

*“It is not far-fetched to view antitrust as a microcosm in which larger movements of our society are reflected and perhaps, in some small but significant way, reinforced or generated”.*⁷⁶⁶ The phrase from Bork’s classic book could have worked well as an introduction to a research agenda, but it seems to have remained an insight that has not been fully developed. Neither Bork himself nor many antitrust authors were curious enough to approach competition as a social phenomenon, besides describing it as an economically inspired legal construct. Facing antitrust from a legal-sociological perspective, this thesis is among the outsiders in such landscape.

It began by observing that the Sherman Act (1890) in the United States brought innovations that went beyond the common law. Such freshness gave its framers an occasion to formulate the goals of antitrust policy, but the formulators seem to have believed the goals of opportunity, efficiency, competition, fair distribution and political freedom were consistent. The existing notion of competition implicitly reflected an emergent neoclassicism: voluntary price-fixing agreement was anti-competitive not because anyone’s freedom to act was restrained, but because market opportunities were lost. Taft’s *Addyston Pipe* opinion fused the neoclassical economics with the classical doctrine, creating the illusion common law had always been concerned with competition neoclassically defined.

In 1978, Bork’s Antitrust Paradox stated that the goal of antitrust was to improve allocative efficiency without impairing productive efficiency in such a way that no gain or a net loss was produced in consumer welfare. Correspondingly, competition was understood as a term of art designating any state of affairs in which consumer welfare cannot be increased by judicial decree. Maximization of consumer welfare, in this reasoning, was conceived as the best practicable approximation to a constantly moving economic “equilibrium point”. Such statements make clear, as Posner puts it, that the effort of Chicago School was to replace forays into sociology and psychology by the “rational” definitions and “logical” structure of economic theory.

The current international debate on antitrust goals includes dispute on the concept of consumer welfare, attempts to develop the goal of consumer welfare at its margins and suggestions of alternative goals. At the end of the day, the debate consolidates no

⁷⁶⁶ Robert H. Bork, *The Antitrust Paradox: A Policy at War with Itself* (1978; 1993), New York, The Free Press, 10.

comprehensive meaning of competition. In the earlier years of antitrust, competition had been negatively defined as an *absence* (the neoclassical absence of market coercion). Chicago School made it a *derivation* of another goal (a shorthand phrase for consumer welfare maximization). In its turn, the recent debate carries a high degree of *indetermination*: competition appears as a “lost goal”, a “complex system” or the “contrary of monopoly”.

In Brazil, the scholars who addressed the issue of antitrust goals had to face three challenges posed by antitrust. First, the antitrust legal duty to observe potential effects seems to require some intimacy with a (conceptually uncertain) future – whereas legal dogmatics usually deals only with conditional programs. Second, the dialogue with economics brings models that were not produced by a legally controlled decision and were meant to present only probably correct answers for most of the cases – while legal dogmatics traditionally works between positive law and the prohibition of denial of justice. Finally, many of antitrust criteria were created by judges in a Common Law environment inspired by a “rule of reason” – whereas legal dogmatics is expected to consolidate concepts applied across decisions. Brazilian scholars are aware of the challenges. In view of both its potentialities and difficulties, this thesis referred to Brazilian antitrust “dogmatics” as a legal *doctrine*.

Since the early years of such doctrine – aided by a statute that, differently from the original Sherman Act, expressly mentioned the word – there were attempts to define competition as a goal. In the origins of antitrust in Brazil, competition was conceptualized as “limited” competition, as an “absence” (of monopolies harmful to popular economy) or as “free” competition (necessary to industrial development). During the so-called conversion of Brazilian antitrust in “modern antitrust”, at least one author tried to overcome the pathological angle, which faces competition only as an economic illicit. Finally, the current debate depicts competition as an “instrument”, a “protection” of the market dispute or as effective “possibility of choice”. All things considered, there is a Brazilian lineage explicitly approaching competition as a nuanced concept, which in different contexts included authors such as Ferreira de Souza, Isabel Vaz and Salomão Filho.

Brazilian antitrust doctrine is only moderately reflected at CADE’s practice. In our empirical assessment of the materials produced by the antitrust agency, competition appears as the most frequently pursued goal. Yet, the lack of support on a semantically consolidated concept results in a case law that is plentiful on references to “competition”, and at the same time silent or obscure as to its conceptual delineation. In at least one case, an economic

approach rivaled with a legal-dogmatic view, while a sociological input was briefly suggested. The door was open to a multiplicity of sources, but the passage between the (legal) “interior” and the (economic, sociological, etc.) “exterior” was only timidly traversed.

Exploring the “external” sources of antitrust was the next step of our work. We initially observed a debate on Chicago School’s claim that *wealth maximization* provides a basis for a normative theory of law in general. The proposal of reducing political philosophy to economics had to present itself in philosophical terms, and the School’s expansion to new legal fields raised complexities that remained latent in the taken-for-granted world of antitrust. The boundaries of the wealth maximization morality, for example, became explicit, as well as its incapacity in playing a “foundational” role. Once justifications based on efficiency lose attractiveness in public discourse, one must contemplate other reasons for the persistence of economically inspired legal approaches.

We found such reason in the idea of *scarcity*. Basic microeconomics holds that under conditions of scarcity one should perform an action if and only if its benefits exceed its costs. On the one hand, neoclassical economics derives its views on competitive and monopolized markets from such assumption of rationality. On the other hand, legal procedures distribute scarcity by deciding who is entitled to disputed resources. In an “Economic Analysis of Law” approach, one could use economic models to criticize contemporary decisions as “irrational”. But one can also observe that access – the other side of scarcity – is influenced by concrete relations that can be *regulated* (besides modelled with game theory). The bilateral interchange between law *and* economics in the treatment of scarcity makes Calabresi suggest an approach which can result in changes in economic theory rather than in the way legal reality is described.

An example of a relation that influences access is precisely *competition*, which both produces and results from scarcity. But in addition to being legally regulated and economically modelled, competition emerges as a social phenomenon. Such feature recommends a combination of various disciplines, including economics, to grasp the emerging phenomenon: a “Law and Society” approach. In the history of antitrust, such comprehensive insights were attempted by authors like Louis Brandeis and Thurman Arnold. The former’s “passion for facts” isolated market coercion from effect upon prices. The latter’s realist background favored to treat, in antitrust policies, organizations as individuals (the “folklore”). Nonetheless, a specific sociological approach on competition would only

be tried by Stern's forgotten article in 1971. In Brazil, the frequency of legal sociologists working with antitrust suggests a more welcoming environment for alternative views.

We started to build our alternative view based on the pioneers of sociology of competition. After the second half of the 19th century, a concurrent discourse on competition was favored by the recognition of competition's ambivalent effects and of its emergence in areas that are not strictly economic. Authors like Cooley and Simmel published works that were not primarily dedicated to draw links between competition and economic effects. Cooley viewed competition as a selective process capable of defining the position of an individual in society – a process that allows one to see in the opponent “a man like himself” and his own life “from a new point of view”. Simmel characterized “pure competition” as an indirect contest in which participants seek favors, attention or material sources from a third party. In such contest, competitors produce objective values and are inspired to discover the deepest desires of the third “even before he becomes aware of them”.

In the 1940s, sociology of competition met two influential authors and a missing link. Polanyi avoided the strict separation between themes of economic and of sociological research. In his description of the “great transformation” after which social relations would end up embedded in the economic system, antitrust legislation opposed the needs of a self-regulating market to the demands of laissez-faire. Hayek's criticism of the theory of perfect competition comprised the remark that the theory had excluded “all personal relationships existing between the parties”. In its place, the author suggests a competitive *process* whose achievements should be judged in comparison to the situation as it would exist if competition were prevented from operating. Finally, the overlooked work from Geiger is dedicated to the nuances of competition as a social relation instead of normatively supporting it as a principle.

The sociological approaches produced after the 1970s connected to the 1940s as conceptual developments of Polanyi's insights, as latent links to Geiger's nuanced view or as reactions to the policies alleged inspired by the practical utility of Hayek's ideas. Among the “founding fathers” of the New Economic Sociology, White perceives the role of competition in the reproducibility of markets. Producers observe each other, not consumers, in the mirror. Thus, they are able to reproduce existing structures without the information required for maximizing of efficient behavior. An attempt to provide a more general approach – one that combines the sociology of competition with a theory of modern society – is offered by Bourdieu. Present in different fields, in economy competition involves

conducts that can present themselves *publicly* as having the aim of maximizing individual profit. Such pervasive feature of competition in modern society led authors to refine the diagnostic of an “economization” of society through the use of sociology of competition.

But how far would competition have spread in the economic context itself? And what would be the lessons to be learned therefrom? An influential interpretation of Brazilian economic history holds that the country’s economy and society were organized with an external objective: the interests of European commerce. A development of such view observes that, beyond external dependence, the status of colony created internal power structures: monopolies with “triple draining” effects. Reading such diagnosis through the lens of methodological caveats from economic historiography, we suggested to look at the “other side” of monopolies. Competition in Brazil could have evolved within a social project of archaism, one that aimed at reproducing a highly differentiated hierarchy through relations of power based on slavery.

Although free competition, among other principles of liberalism, reverberated into Brazilian political commitments since the 1830s, it was only partially reflected in social relations. The defense of “free-exchange” came along usurpation of public lands by well-connected individuals; “individualism” was defended by farmers who organized measures to avoid competition in the railway sector; “liberalism” was advocated while a few banks dominated a financial sector with formal and informal links to the government. At a time when liberal ideas were being challenged in many ways, Ferreira de Souza published a book in 1939 sustaining that free competition is only one of competition’s modalities or historical forms. Whereas free competition is regarded as a “myth” in the tropics, “limited” competition can be controlled by law for the sake of public interest.

Moving away from a normative support of competition as a principle, Brazilian social thought captured interesting traits of the competitive social phenomenon in the country. With Freyre, we noticed that competition in Brazil emerged as a low-energized struggle within boundaries that excluded the former inhabitants of *senzalas*. With Buarque de Holanda, we observed that competitive indirect dispute was tensioned in the country by person-to-person relations and by an emotive background. Faoro enabled us to see Brazilian competition as an aristocratic and state-determined social phenomenon. Lazzarini provides a contemporary diagnosis based on empirical data where competition appears constrained by relationship networks (“ties”) and by strategies on political contacts.

Both the recapitulation of sociology of competition and the observation of its Brazilian delineation brought sufficient material to work on a concept of competition. But we still needed to specify the perspective through which we would do so. Despite its controversial character in the realm of both natural and social sciences, we decided to rely on a functional approach that has solid backgrounds and optimistic contemporary endeavors in legal functionalism. Embedded in such functionalist tradition, our approach could not be subsumed to any of its manifestations: away from causality, from indistinct teleology and from theoretical monolithism, we accepted Luhmann's early critiques of previous sociological methods and did not fully adhere to his preferred attitude.

In Luhmann's systemic construction, the phenomenon of competition was observed mainly with reference to the economic system. Competition was presented as a structure of economic environment which structures risk by enabling competitors to observe each other's strategies through a doubly contingent relation. The embraced method referred to a specific problem (uncertainty in market orientation) and compared different performances (competition, interactional conflicts, cooperation/exchange). We found that the particularities of competitive phenomenon – its social pervasiveness and its inability to form systems – justified a reversal: instead of analyzing *equivalent performances* based on a referential problem, one could heuristically compare *the multiple problems* addressed by competition. Not only does such multivalued function (and dysfunctions) help to explain the pervasive emergence of competition in modern society, but it also helps to justify the protection of competition as an autonomous goal of antitrust.

Indeed, competition has such a strong presence in education, sports or science not only because of its alleged economic effects, but due to the social problems it addresses. Competition enables sociability in scarcity; complexity, moralization and avoidance of conflicts; reproducibility and objective values within uncertainty, etc. While doing so, it also creates problems: it disrupts cooperation; produces isomorphism and heteronomy; naturalizes exclusion, etc. Such multivalued competition is not an idealized principle, nor a "but-for" (negative) concept: it is a specific and historically-situated social form. Based on Werron's insights and on Brazilian social thought, we described it as a doubly indirect triadic dispute for the favors of consumers – a form that can be stressed by personal relations, by the incentives of a State-third and by social barriers that reproduce hierarchies.

In the last chapter, the thesis inquired about the convergences and divergences of such form with the distinctions produced in Brazilian antitrust cases. While the second-order observations made in the preceding chapters stand on their own, the third chapter expands their scope and asks whether they could impact an exercise traditionally done by legal doctrine. We noticed that an agreement on prices among competing bakeries risks to transform the most basic feature of competition's social form – its triadic structure – into a dyadic one, even if its economic effects are most likely neutral. Other antitrust distinctions are also inspired by the protection of the indirect triadic form: hardcore cartel/diffuse cartel, exchange of sensitive information/agreement on competitive issues, parallel behavior/collusive behavior. Although the complexity of the analysis tends to raise with technology (e.g. with the use of softwares and algorithms to collude), the preservation of triadic social forms remains a compelling explanation for several criteria in cartel cases.

Something similar could be said about merger control. Using the doubly indirect social form of contemporary competition, we noticed that the discovery of an intermediated relation between patients, oncology hospital/clinics and non-oncologist doctors changed the result of a merger analysis. As non-oncologist doctors observe, compare and evaluate the offerings of oncology services and articulate expectations of patients, CADE decided for remedies that potentially restored the objectivity of doctors' intermediate role, even though market shares indicated no antitrust concern. With advancements in technology and interconnectivity, the kind of intermediate that has been receiving growing attention by competition researchers and antitrust community are the public communication processes that allow observation accessible to both competitors and their audience. We briefly explored the impacts to antitrust analysis stemming from the acknowledgment of such intermediated social forms in cases involving rankings, platforms, market analysts and big data.

Antitrust analysis of exclusionary conduct also reflect concern with the social form of competition, specially bearing in mind the stressing factors that often accompany such form. In a Query made to CADE about the so-called “tax war” between Brazilian states, the agency observed competitive dynamics moved from a dispute for the resources of a consumer-third to a struggle for the favors of a state-third. Since antitrust is a strong component of the public discourse on competition in modern society, it could adopt measures to protect the social form of competition even if there is technically no exclusionary conduct. If an antitrust decision-maker does so, the weakening of social forms of competition might be sufficient to recommend an affirmative covenant as a case solution.

Protection of competition, thus, can be an autonomous goal of antitrust, which fits to the idea that multivalued competition addresses social problems regardless of economic effects. The theoretical implication for antitrust deriving from such attitude is twofold: (i) first, one needs a definition for competition, (ii) second, one needs to lose the fear of paradoxes, since competition will eventually clash with other antitrust goals. As to the former, we detected how the recent rise of an explicit defense of competition goal still struggles to overcome antitrust traditional notions of competition. The empirical approach of behavioral antitrust, in its turn, is theoretically deficient in its consideration of competition as a matter of independent cognitions. With regards to the emergence of paradoxes, distinctions need to be consolidated in order to enable and control decision-making.

And this is classically a task for legal doctrine, the second impacted area according to the last sections of this thesis. In order to accomplish its duty of deciding mergers and conducts, antitrust does not require one to rationalize decisions basing them on an indistinguishable process, to justify goals, or to establish the supremacy of only one goal. It needs only to find distinctions that exclude, discriminate and thus allow decision-making even though the rule of reason is not good at balancing. Based on the legacy of Orlando Gomes, we suggested that antitrust could benefit from a legal doctrine that is both careful with legal distinctions and attentive to the need of social adequacy. Such doctrine would identify the differences that make a difference in a case, develop concepts based on the recurrence of such differences across several cases and accommodate tensions between economic goals and competitive relations in view of multivalued triadic forms.

Finally, the approach developed in this thesis presented a potential impact for legal sociology. The legal sociologist could become a *tertius gaudens* that benefits from the dispute between law and sociology (a dispute particularly noticeable in Brazilian historical context) without necessarily provoking a conflict. It suffices to discern the qualitative dualism between legal dogmatics and sociological knowledge in order to deal with different systemic rationalities and harmonize high social complexity with the need for legal consistency. To some extent, such legal sociology (also a kind of peripheral doctrine) is *both* law and sociology, since it requires serious immersion in each of the fields before offering its third-like perspective. But it is also *none* of them, as it never loses the double-colored hat with which it walks along the border between the fields.

In a nutshell, the descriptive part of this thesis found that negative notions (absence of market coercion, but-for world), ideal principles (free competition, equilibrium point) and indeterminate processes – all strategies attempted by antitrust doctrine to grasp competition – did not produce a recursive use of such concept in antitrust practice. We confirmed and specified the hypothesis that antitrust doctrine has not consolidated a concept of competition that is both legally coherent and socially adequate. Instead, based on sociological works, competition could alternatively be viewed as a multivalued doubly indirect social form that emerges and pervades modern society.

If antitrust agencies and statutes are certain that protecting competition is a goal of competition policy, the doctrinal part of our work offers a possible route. It suggests that a socially adequate concept of competition could help identifying the protected competitive phenomenon and avoiding social problems resulting from its unthought-of promotion. Notwithstanding convergences and divergences, part of Brazilian antitrust doctrine and cases are headed in such direction: competition policies can be designed to help protecting competition. Such conclusion might sound too simple or too obvious, but this is not necessarily a bad thing according to John McNaughton⁷⁶⁷: “*An outside idea has a chance to influence government policy only if it has two characteristics. First, it can be stated in a simple declarative sentence. Second, once stated it is obviously true*”.

⁷⁶⁷ A former assistant secretary of defense of the United States, quoted by Emily Parker, *To Be Read by All Parties* (2012) The New York Times Book Review, 27 [February 19], available at https://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/19/books/review/the-impact-of-books-on-washington-policy.html?pagewanted=1&_r=1. Also quoted by Robert Lande, *A Traditional and Textualist Analysis of the Goals of Antitrust: Efficiency, Preventing Theft from Consumers, and Consumer Choice* in *The Goals of Antitrust* (2013) 81 Fordham Law Review, 2403.

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⁷⁶⁸ The law firm where I worked during part of the PhD (AJDC) represented clients in some of the following cases. Opinions and views expressed in this thesis are the author's own and do not represent any client's position.

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