SOCIO-RACIAL INEQUALITY AND BRAZIL'S NATIONAL IDENTITY PROJECT

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to discuss racial inequality and the national identity project of Contemporary Brazil, and how this issue was addressed in the electoral campaign for the presidency of the Republic in 2022. The research consists of an analysis of the historicity of the black population in the country through the theoretical contributions of Joaquim Nabuco who analyzes the issue of abolitionism in Brazil, Oliveira Viana who, among many themes, reflects the issue of the whitening of the Brazilian population and the thoughts of Gilberto Freyre who marks a period in which there was a social change related to the conception of blackness and impact, to the present day, in actions aimed at reducing the consequences caused by slavery. Over the years, different public policies have been implemented in Brazil in order to enable the rise of the black population, including the affirmative action policy that contributes significantly to the socioeconomic development of the country, in addition to promoting equity for this social group.

Keywords: Socio-racial inequality. National Identity. Brazil. Abolitionism. Elections.

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INTRODUCTION

To understand the current scenario of racial inequality and reflect on the current actions to combat racism, it is necessary to analyze the trajectory of the black person inserted in the nation's project. Considering the construction of Brazilian social thought on issues related to blackness, it is possible to identify that the current political, social and economic scenario is a reflection of several events that have occurred throughout history, in addition to slavery. The colonization process and the way it occurred in the country are directly responsible for the characteristics that symbolize the Brazilian national identity. According to Debrum (1990, p.46):

> "The Brazilian national identity is not just one. Its political and cultural dimensions, in particular, have not gone hand in hand. Nor do they refer to the same spirit, unlike what Gilberto Freyre believed, for whom the mutual tolerance that reigns in the socio-cultural area of human relations should be translated, naturally, into equal tolerance in the political area: our liberalism should not and could not be based, like Anglo-Saxon liberalism, on competition where the best or the most astute wins, but in the harmonious reconciliation of differences. This is not quite the case: there is in fact, in Brazil, a political form of conciliation, but this, far from being defined by mutual tolerance, rests on the more or less forced co-optation of the less strong by the stronger."

Inequality began in the institution of Brazil as a nation through slave labor. The colonizing elite, from the beginning, implanted social roots rigidly marked by differences of race and, consequently, of class. This was the beginning of the project to which the entire national construction was articulated. For Gatto (2020):

> One of the most curious elements of the conjuncture that separates the signing of the Golden Law, on May 13, 1888, and the proclamation of the republic, on November 15 of the following year, is the mobilization of social classifications in the space of politics. The organized political reaction against slavery rallied around the banner of reparations to the master and the slaves, which used resentful and overtly racist language to convince freedmen about the growth of the cause.

Joaquim Nabuco (1883), one of the main leaders of the abolitionist movement, analyzing the impacts of slavery, denounces that it was a great stain on the history of the motherland and served only to introduce Africans in a criminal way into the country with the intention of enriching the settlers. The entire social structure was conniving with the slave inhumanities, including the church, which had slaves for all the clergy and did not take a position in relation to the conditions of captivity and mistreatment. Despite the extreme influence of the church in the formation of the country, it did not join the abolitionist movement with the intention of emancipating the black population.

For Nabuco (1883), abolitionism was not only about promoting the rescue of slaves, but also about a process of raising awareness in society "[...] As long as the nation is not aware that it is indispensable to adapt to freedom each of the apparatuses of its organism that slavery has appropriated, the work of slavery will go on, even when there are no more slaves." (NABUCO, 1883, p. 3). Freeing the slaves was also a matter of justice and political positioning. Still for the author, abolitionism was a process developed gradually. Because, in the period before Independence, there was a restlessness related to slavery in the working generation, for having followed the liberal ideals of the early nineteenth century, in which the conception of national emancipation did not match the slavery scenario.

Initially, the opposition was only to the slave trade, as it was understood that by eliminating the import and export of slave ships, slavery would slowly be reduced by deaths, despite births, therefore, in 1850 there was the criminalization of the slave trade. And then, on September 28, 1871, the Law of Free Womb was enacted, which considered the children of slave women free. The children were in the care of the masters until they turned 21 years old and later had their rights of freedom guaranteed. It is from this point on that the national conjuncture goes through another guise: it is necessary to abolish slavery beyond the political and moral necessity, it is necessary to recognize the economic impact generated now with the new configuration of government installed:

> Relations between parliamentary figures, the press, and the streets were not new in imperial history, but by 1880 they had acquired new qualities. If in the past parliamentary movements had used popular mobilization to put pressure on cabinets, the cities now, especially Rio de Janeiro, had a distinct potential. As early as 1860, the successes of the liberals in urban areas evidenced the relative independence of a growing urban middle class. (Needell, 2013, p.292).

Abolitionism, a book by Joaquim Nabuco (1883), was published five years before the total liberation of slaves, but in 1885 Law No. 3,270 was enacted, also known as the Sexagenarian Law or the Saraiva-Cotejipe Law, which benefited blacks over 65 years of age and from this age were no longer considered slaves and only on May 13, 1888, through the enactment of the Golden Law signed by Princess Isabel, slavery ended in Brazil.

The main effect of slavery on the Brazilian population, according to Nabuco (1883), was to Africanize it, because only by surviving and propagating during the period of slavery did blacks become a considerable element of society. There was also the mixture of races between whites, blacks and Indians that is a consequence of this period.

> Of the three main currents of blood that have been mixed up in our veins – the Portuguese, the African and the indigenous – slavery vitiated the first two above all. Here we have a first effect on the population: the crossing of the characteristics of the black race with those of the white race, as they are presented in slavery; the mixture of the servile degradation of one with the brutal imperiousness of the other. (NABUCO, 1883, p. 98).

After abolition, the aspect of miscegenation is the central theme of thinkers in Brazil and in the world. Slavery did not match the idea of progress and blacks and Indians were not considered intelligent to contribute to the development of the country, so the solution was to enlighten the nation, because the closer the black was to the white man, the greater the chances of ascension in society.

Oliveira Viana (1922), thinking about the development of the country and addressing the importance of the rural aristocracy in the political characteristics of Brazil, is also one of the authors who discuss Brazilian miscegenation.

For the author, the formation of nationality was based on the rural domain, so understanding the dynamics of the ruralists is extremely important.

The seigniorial family composed exclusively of whites is the leading force of the latifundia. From the manor house come all the actions and plots that colonial history was made. According to Viana (1922), the mestizos are a historical product of these latifundia, since in order to maintain the rural domain, it was necessary to have an integrating center between the three distinct races, the white, the black and the Indian.

The mestizo freed from rural work had a false social ascension, because he was always repelled by the white, he never leveled out. In the composition of society in the first centuries, aristocratic prerogatives and ethnic purity were dominant, therefore, the mestizos were always reduced to a condition of inferiority, condemned to a humiliating subordination. The demonstration of nobility, social and moral superiority was to have white skin, European blood and not to have a mixture with the races of the inferior type, especially the black. Even among poor citizens, being white was synonymous with being noble.

Within this context, even in the legislation of the time, the mestizo was treated as a separate class, with battalions and justice exclusively for browns. The mestizos were excluded from the process of sesmarias, as they did not fit the criteria for granting land, since the petitioners had to have a family, many possessions, be men of quality and provide services at their expense for Her Majesty.

In accordance with the prevailing thinking of the nineteenth century, according to which blacks, Indians and mestizos were inferior, Viana (1922) points out that there are two types of mulattoes, the result of the crossing between white and black: those of the inferior type who have more black characteristics and therefore cannot ascend socially and the

superior mulattoes who have whiter characteristics and are Aryan in character and intelligence. capable of collaborating with the whites in the organization and civilization of the country.

The Mameluke, crossed between white and Indian, according to the author, are superior to mulattoes, because the red race is less distant from the European one, so it has a better balance of appearance than the mestizos of whites and blacks.

For Viana (1922), the Aryan character of the upper class, preserved for the first three centuries, saved the country from a regrettable regression. According to the author, the Indian, the black and their mestizos could not exercise a superior function and contribute to the development of Brazil:

> In colonial society, the desire to enrich oneself, to rise, to improve, to enjoy the fine pleasures of civilization can really exist only in the white man. The Negro, the Indian, the mestizos of one and the other, these, in general, only exceptionally feel, in their highest exemplars, the will to reach these social situations, whose enjoyment and importance only the man of the Aryan race, with his sensibility refined by the work of a slow evolution, knows how to appreciate properly. (VIANA, 120, p. 176).

Viana (1922) also points out that the mestizos, the mulattoes and the superior mamluks who won in the social context of the time, only succeeded when they transformed themselves and lost their own characteristics, when they ceased to be psychologically mestizos to become Aryans.

Contrary to the perspectives of racial superiority that was part of Brazilian social thought, in 1933, Gilberto Freyre published Casa-Grande & Senzala. Influenced by the study of anthropology through Franz Boas, the author began to analyze the Portuguese, indigenous and African contributions in the process of formation of the Brazilian people and to value the three races in the same proportion.

The term big house complemented by the slave quarters is a metaphor related to the patriarchal system of Portuguese colonization in Brazil and represents an entire system of production structured through the economic activity of the landowning sugar monoculture and also represents the family ways of life that resulted in a hybrid society.

Freyre (1933) points out that the Portuguese families that settled in the country created a solid network with the sole purpose of getting rich quickly and their relationships were built to ensure the acquisition of these gains, in this way, an aristocratic, agrarian and slave-owning elite was constituted that openly sought to remain in the highest degree of nobility with the emphasis on the plantation owner.

Colonization contributed to miscegenation and the fusion of different cultures resulting from the relations between white, black and Indian. Through the Jesuit missions,

the European colonizer interfered and influenced, from the first contact, the way of life of the native savage, the relationship they had with nature and religion.

In order to adapt, the Portuguese settler became more tolerant and, unlike the Spanish colonization that developed based only on violent acts, he began to relate, at first only with the indigenous women with the encouragement of the church due to the lack of white women, but later he also related to black women who were transported from Africa. This characteristic of mixing with other races was greater in the Portuguese than in any other European colonizer.

The colonization of the Portuguese family is marked by the supreme domination of the rural family and native women were not only used for the exploitation of labor, but also as an element in the formation of the family. According to the author, Brazilian society was, throughout the Americas, the one that best maintained racial relations in harmony and facilitated the miscegenation of races, because the Indian woman dreamed of having children with the race she considered superior.

> The environment that began Brazilian life was one of almost sexual intoxication. The European jumped ashore slipping on a naked Indian; the priests of the Society themselves had to descend carefully, otherwise they would get their feet bogged down in flesh. Many clergymen of the others allowed themselves to be contaminated by debauchery. Women were the first to surrender to the whites, the most ardent going to rub themselves on the legs of those who supposed to be gods. They gave themselves to the European for a comb or a shard of mirror. (FREYRE, 1933, p. 161).

After the first relations with the native Indians, which at first was based on the exchange of gifts, curiosity and knowledge on both sides, the violent process to capture slave labor began, therefore, some Indians worked in fields, others fled and hid in the forests to survive and thousands more died contaminated by diseases brought by the Europeans.

To replace slave labor, the colonizer, therefore, transports blacks from Africa to continue the process of accumulating wealth, as blacks were more resistant to the tropics and also stronger. Freyre (1933) portrays blacks in a higher cultural stage related to the indigenous. Blacks were exploited in the sugar cane plantations and subjected to various atrocities, but there was a differentiating factor between the slavery of blacks and that of indigenous people, as some blacks went to live in the big house and, after Christian baptism, worked in the kitchen and later black women were assigned the task of taking care of the masters' children.

For Freyre (1933), miscegenation corrected the social distance between the big house and the slave quarters. Black women, Indians, mulattos, concubines and even the

legitimate wives of white masters contributed to social democratization in Brazil, because among the mestizo children, legitimate and illegitimate, a considerable part of the large properties was subdivided, which broke the strength of the feudal sesmarias and the large estates.

The author portrays the cultural elements that each race made available for the formation of the Brazilian people. From the Indians was inherited vanity, cleanliness, the various ways of using the net, the preparation of cassava and its derivatives, the production of ceramics, canoes or igaras, wooden pestles, foods that are used as medicinal herbs, fishing techniques and hunting traps, toys, children's games and various popular legends and superstitions, among other infinities of elements that are still characteristic of the Brazilian population today.

From the Portuguese was inherited the taste for running water, spouts, fountains and fountains in the gardens of the houses, Turkish carpets, western cushions, the use of tiles in homes and even in churches, the Moorish tile, the hinged or checkered windows, the taste for oily, fatty and sugary foods, among other customs.

And, finally, one of the cultural legacies left by the black people, among several contributions, was Brazilian cuisine, the taste for farofa, quibebe, vatapá, feijoada, palm oil and various types of sweets. In the language, several dialects were incorporated and in the Catholic religion there was the incorporation of some rites and what we now call religious syncretism.

It was the black man who gave joy to the domestic life of the Brazilian, marked by the melancholy of the Portuguese and the Indian. The African gave liveliness to the mill festivals, animated the bumba-meu-boi and the festivals of kings. Blacks worked singing, even in extremely precarious situations, in the coffee plantations or in the kitchens.

Freyre (1933) does not deny that violence occurred in the process of miscegenation, but it is possible to identify a romanticized aspect in his work to the point of describing the submission of slaves only as a form of survival and the attitudes of patriarchal and slave-owning society as well accepted by subordinates, as in the case of indigenous women, for example, who supposedly wished to marry white men.

It is in this relationship of power and survival that the fusion between whites, blacks and Indians is born, which resulted in the miscegenation of Brazilian society. In the mixture of vocabularies, cultures, daily practices and beliefs that a new articulation of nationality emerges.

Some critics, such as Sérgio Buarque de Holanda in Raízes do Brasil (1936), do not have the same reading as the author about this period of colonization and its results. Other

reports portray this process, reinforcing the violence suffered by blacks and Indians and the predatory aspects that culminated in the extermination of millions of people, including indigenous people and slaves.

However, the work of Gilberto Freyre (1933) is extremely important, because from it the conception is created that there is no difference between races, only between cultures, and all of them contributed to the constitution of Brazilian society. By pointing out the benefits related to miscegenation, Freyre (1933) demystifies previous studies that there is a superiority of whites in relation to blacks and Indians.

Even after Freyre's development on the equality of races, from the analysis of the historicity of the black population it is possible to identify that Afro-descendants were not treated equally.

African peoples were uprooted from their origins, had their lives and cultures usurped because of the ambition of Europeans to maintain their power and wealth. In Brazil they were exploited and tortured as slaves, forbidden to follow their religion, their customs and forced to acquire other beliefs, profess another faith and follow Catholicism.

Throughout history, blacks rebelled against such atrocities they suffered and many were successful in escaping and forming quilombos, communities that were very reminiscent of those experienced in Africa.

Although abolition brought legal freedom, it failed to guarantee decent living conditions for freed slaves, the reality was one of enormous degradation, without decent housing, employment or financial conditions to sustain themselves and much less assistance from the state. The population lived in misery accompanied by numerous difficulties. Among them, the prejudice and discrimination that kept them away from the work of the city, no longer fit in the activities of the countryside, because in the fields the European immigrants replaced them.

On the issue of political voting, for example, since 1888 Brazilian law has not made a distinction between whites and blacks, so after the abolition of slavery, in theory, the black population could already participate in political life, but in practice this did not happen because of the Saraiva Law, created in 1881, which prohibited the vote of the illiterate (most of the black population was illiterate for the years in captivity).

Slavery left deep marks that have consequences to this day. Blacks live in inferior conditions to whites, due to the great process of social exclusion, with lower education, qualification, salaries, leadership and leadership positions, representation in the mainstream media and in government entities.

"WE ARE ALL EQUAL" AND THE MYTH OF RACIAL DEMOCRACY: AN ANALYSIS OF THE IMPACTS OF THIS DISCOURSE ON THE SOCIAL POLICIES OF BRAZILIAN IDENTITY

The principle of equality provided for in the Federal Constitution of 1988 deals with the logic that all citizens freely enjoy equal possibilities of civil rights. In Article 5 of the Constitution, discrimination of any nature is expressly prohibited.

According to the 1988 Federal Constitution, since everyone is equal without distinction, they should therefore enjoy conditions for the exercise of such equality. This right, provided for by law, legitimizes meritocracy, which comprises the hierarchy of accesses based on individual merits. However, in contemporary Brazilian society, this hierarchical system does not correspond to the reality of citizens.

Historically, the concept of meritocracy carries several meanings. Of aristocratic origin, he understood intellectual superiority. This term was transported to democratic societies, establishing itself as one of its pillars. Since in order to create an access system in which everyone can equally participate, it is necessary to choose principles and criteria that ensure these accesses, so as not to corrupt the ideals of democracy.

Article 5 of our constitution expresses some of the conceptions present in American democracy. Equality in this case does not necessarily mean that everyone is equal by nature, but that all citizens are on an equal footing of opportunities. It is through this bias that we can think of a fair meritocracy. Based on this assumption, it is feasible to think of a meritocracy that strains privileges, and guarantees evaluation conditions consistent with the reality of the groups as a whole.

 In terms of Brazil, there is a caveat: how to treat people equally before the law, and unequal in opportunities? How to ensure this equality, since the Brazilian nation was constituted by more than three hundred years of slavery? A possible answer to this problem would be the creation of equitable policies and/or affirmative actions, which aim to repair historical inequalities and establish a balance, so that citizens can seek individual recognition, without such alarming social and/or racial disparities.

For Barbosa (1999, p.11), the granting of advantages and privileges as a way of recognizing exceptional performance is quite conflicting in Brazilian society. Only in some domains does it manage to materialize and even so it is controversial. This happens because the roots of slavery are imbricated in the social relations of our nation. As previously exposed in this article, the black population has always been underrepresented in the areas of politics, the labor market, and high-ranking positions. In this way, the meritocratic discourse is not able to erase a harsh reality: only recently have social and

racial equality policies been thought of for this population contingent, which currently comprises about 51% (fifty-one percent).

Affirmative action policies are temporary measures that aim to correct socially structured inequalities. Racial equity is a subject that has been widely debated in recent decades, and these discussions have generated, in addition to findings, policies and bills that are based precisely on the guarantee of article 5 of the 1988 Federal Constitution.

But caution is needed when addressing racial equality/equity from an institutional point of view. Although we know the importance of regulating measures that ensure universal rights and opportunities, it is necessary that we do not forget that the myth of racial democracy haunts the imagination of Brazilians. There is a risk that we will create reformist measures, which do not solve the problems in their genesis, but rather which, in the long run, conceive a new myth in our society. To better demonstrate this argument, I will use quota policies as an example. When proposed, it was believed that black men and women would achieve racial equity not only in the academic spheres, but also in their insertion in the labor market. However, after almost twenty years, what is observed is a negligible representation of this group in high-ranking positions. Wage inequalities persist, and it was necessary to think of specific measures for this social sector. However, we come up against frauds and identity limits (in a country purposely miscegenated by the process of whitening in the period of nation-state construction, it is difficult to accurately define the blackness of citizens). This fact opens even more margins for fraud, in addition to generating a series of controversies that come against the strengthening of the policy. An example of some factors that directly imply the effective applicability of the Quota Law are the representations of blacks.

Affirmative action policies influenced by the American model did not take into account the specificities of the construction of the term "race". Debret's paintings (1834) illustrate black people in social relations close to the master, even if their place was still one of servitude. This image of "all together and mixed" evokes what we call "Brazil, land of all colors and flavors". It is also in this context that the black population fought for racial equality rights in the nineties, when the Black Movement chose to run for the federal government.

The redemocratization of Brazilian society inaugurated in the late 1970s coincides, at the level of the social sciences, with the dissemination of new interpretations of racial relations in Brazil. Until then, the studies sponsored by UNESCO in the early 1950s and their developments in the 1960s had revealed the tensions between the myth of racial democracy and "Brazilian-style racism" (MAIO, 2005, p.3).

The panorama of race relations in Brazil proves the institutional limits of policies that repair inequalities. Once the State has calculated whitening, quota policies become insufficient to actually equalize the existing discrepancies in access to education and/or the labor market. Only with more rigid mechanisms of control and inspection of the system, we will be able to move towards a true democratization of education.

As I mentioned above, the production of theories of egalitarian representation of society brings as a background another dilemma: the effectiveness of this representation. According to Rosane Borges (2021, p.191), historical markers indicate part of the trajectory taken by the theme. The discourse of recognition is the work of the modern adventure, and the claim of new/other regimes of representation/visibility aimed at historically discriminated groups is a phenomenon whose physiognomy has taken root since the beginning of the twentieth century.

Recently, we witnessed the scenario of the 2022 elections, as the stage for speeches that confirmed the thesis that representativeness not aligned with conscience does not reach its effectiveness. In the second round of elections, we had Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and Jair Bolsonaro as presidential candidates, vying for different audiences. Bolsonaro's speech: "*here in Brazil there is no such thing as racism*", resumes a paradigm that has not yet been overcome. It paradoxically brings to light what has not been said. When he refers to racism as something no longer present in human relations, he is in some way highlighting this social problem; a negative highlight, but still something unsaid that can be explored. The myth of racial democracy continues to reign in the construction of our country. The acclaimed miscegenation behind his discourse plays the game of hierarchical separation, and not of inclusion as we usually think. Since Brazil was not constituted from miscegenation in a natural way, there was not only violence against the bodies of enslaved black women, but also a project that considered the possibility of a kind of "racial purity". If we look closely at the period in which the integralist movement spread, we will realize that strategically blacks have always been in subordinate positions. And what does this have to do with representation?

Representativeness is one of the current flags of various segments of the Brazilian black movement. Initially, it was intended to gain visibility through broad representation in spaces of power. However, what happened was a mere representation of these bodies in these sectors, on a large scale. The lack of strategies to face institutional limits has meant that important activists for inclusive causes are out of place and without much power of agency. It is not enough just to be, it is necessary to act. And in order to act, it is necessary to change some already preconceived constructions of mobilization and the State. How will

we make our voices echo in places designed so that they can be concealed? This is only possible when those at the top dialogue with those at the bottom.

In the elections, we could see that Jair Bolsonaro represented the expression of the voices of many of his voters, who propagate not only the non-existence of racism, but also a series of oppressions that victimize people every day. According to IPEA (2017), every twelve minutes, a young black man dies in Brazil. To ignore the genocide of the black population is to close one's eyes to a harsh and cruel reality. We also saw an intriguing fact in the electoral scenario: a black man, a supporter of Bolsonaro's speeches, supporting racist speeches by his candidate and being cited as a way to legitimize such speeches. We have here a typical racial representation, but not representation. Since the latter does not speak on behalf of his peers who throughout the campaign denounced such a government proposal as sectarian and racist. The dilution of identity at this moment occurs from the figure of identification with the "oppressor". Frantz Fanon says that it is about wearing "black skins, white masks" as an attempt to defuse the impacts of racial violence. Despite being an unconscious movement, the individual reaffirms himself based on the image of the colonizer and/or the one who represents him, either through discourse or through racist and tutoring practices. Still for Fanon:

> This denial of self places the colonized in a neurotic position, in a psychic confrontation against himself, and as a consequence an "inferiority complex" is born in him. It is precisely this complex that European colonialism appropriates and feeds on. (FANON, 2008).

In this sense, both Freyre and Vianna and Gatto agree with the hypothesis that the Brazilian national identity still presents racialized marks of the process of miscegenation, originated from the consequences of the slavery period. Freyre, despite resorting to the discourse of racial neutrality, discusses in his main work characterizations of this racialization, contradicting himself and improving a narrative that at the time was unusual: the recognition of blacks in the construction of the country, even if in a subordinate way, was something invisible.

The understanding of the unsaid from historical events is problematized by Matheus Gatto (2020) and the place of violence contextualized. After all, why does the black population historically appear in statistics related to violence, depreciation, worse positions, underemployment? Since the Monarchy, the country has witnessed a markedly fierce nation-building between black and white flags. And these flags were raised according to the realities that each social group experienced. Three centuries later, the narratives of

nationality express the character of class and race. The 2018 and 2022 elections attenuated words and buzzwords that speak directly to these social strata.

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