


FROM THE TUMBEIROS TO THE PERIPHERIES: DOMINATION, RESISTANCE AND STRUGGLE

 <https://doi.org/10.56238/arev6n3-022>

Submitted on: 05/10/2024

Publication date: 05/11/2024

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ABSTRACT

The article examines the subordination of the black population in Brazil from the colonial period to the present day, highlighting the permanence of racist legislation in the Brazilian legal system and the marginalization of Afro-Brazilian voices in literary historiography. Using the interdisciplinary approach of Law and Literature, the research analyzes divergences and convergences in the treatment of Afro-descendants throughout Brazilian history, focusing on the short story *A escrava*, by Maria Firmina dos Reis. It is argued that the exclusion of Firmina from canonical historiographies is a reflection of a political-ideological project rooted in Brazilian Romanticism, whose purpose was to sustain an elitist and Eurocentric national identity. The study concludes with the defense of the implementation of an anti-racist education, based on Law 10.639/2003, as a way to decolonize knowledge, promoting representativeness and recognition of the Afro-Brazilian contribution in the literary, historical and cultural spheres.

Keywords: Subalternization. Law and Literature. Maria Firmina dos Reis. Structural Racism. Anti-racist education. Afro-Brazilian Historiography.

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INTRODUCTION

The subordination of blacks in the social order has been part of the Brazilian political project since the beginning of colonization and, until contemporaneity, we have experienced the effects of racist legislation. From the line of research Law and Literature, we intend to reflect on the divergences and convergences in the treatment of the Afro-descendant from the *tumbeiros* to the present day. Under the aegis of Law, we will start from a historical overview of Brazilian legislation regarding the rights and duties of blacks in order to understand the effects of the European invasion on the lives of Afro-Brazilians. In the light of Literature, specifically, the short story "The Slave", by Maria Firmina dos Reis, we will investigate the ideologies and worldviews of a country that was experiencing the end of the slave regime. Both Firmina's work and life are examples of the black woman's search for the freedom to exist as a political being, contrary to the hegemonic discourse.

We know, as Professor Antônio Cândido (USP) has already pointed out in his famous study "Right to Literature", that literature is a human right and, according to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), knowledge of the history of African and indigenous peoples is also a basic right. Therefore, we understand that the absence of the name of Maria Firmina dos Reis in canonical historiographies points to a political project of a socio-ideological and historical nature: the attempt to keep unchanged the privileges of an elite that sought a national identity – a political-ideological project of the first phase of Brazilian Romanticism – for the newly independent Brazil, based on Eurocentric standards and ideals and without altering the current social stratification. We ask ourselves: how much of this slave-owning Brazil remains in the twenty-first century?

MARIA FIRMINA DOS REIS, A PRECURSOR

The romantic writer Maria Firmina dos Reis (1825-1917) is the author of the first Brazilian novel by a woman – *Úrsula* –, however her name was ostracized until 1975 (and is still unknown to most Brazilian students today), when the historian from Paraíba Horácio de Almeida (1896-1983) acquired what he understood to be the only copy of *Úrsula* and, at the request of the governor of Maranhão, he prepared a facsimile printing of the novel.

The writer was born in São Luís, Maranhão, on October 11, 1825. Daughter of João Pedro Esteves and Leonor Felipe dos Reis, she did not carry her father's surname because she was not recognized by him; She grew up, therefore, under the stigma of a bastard daughter. In Firmina's skin, poverty, blackness, northeastern origin, gender oppression, the

fact that she is a bastard daughter, intersect. From his life, we can understand the concept of intersectionality (systematized by the American theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw):

[...] a conceptualization of the problem that seeks to capture the structural and dynamic consequences of the interaction between two or more axes of subordination. It specifically addresses the way in which racism, patriarchy, class oppression, and other discriminatory systems create basic inequalities that structure the relative positions of women, races, ethnicities, classes, and others. In addition, Intersectionality deals with the way in which specific actions and policies generate oppressions that flow along such axes, constituting dynamic or active aspects of disempowerment. (CRENSHAW, 2002)

A breaker of social shackles, she was courageously a precursor: she composed classical and popular songs; contributed to local newspapers, publishing poetry, chronicles, fictions; she was the first effective teacher to join the teaching staff of Maranhão; he founded the first free mixed school in Maranhão (which scandalized the village of Maçaricó and, therefore, after operating for three years, it was closed).

Every morning, [Maria Firmina dos Reis] climbed into an oxcart to go to a shed owned by a plantation owner, where she taught the owner's daughters. He took some students with him, others joined. [...] The master was energetic, spoke softly, did not apply corporal punishment or scold, she advised. She was esteemed by the students and the population of the village. Reserved, but accessible, every march of the residents of Guimarães stopped at her door. They cheered, and she thanked them with an impromptu speech. (TELLES, 1997, pp. 411-2)

From this report, we realize that, when working for the formal education of women, the writer assumed an emancipatory position. She even lived on her own salary, since she did not marry and was financially independent, at a historical moment when women being single and working was a behavior that was frowned upon socially.

Above all, Firmina was an abolitionist *avant la lettre*: she published her anti-slavery novel *Úrsula* (1859) even before the Brazilian abolitionist movement, which began in 1868. The short story "A escrava" (1887) was published in *Revista Maranhense*, a year before the enactment of the Golden Law and, unlike her contemporaries, such as José de Alencar, who excluded blacks from the Brazilian national project, Firmina was "the mother of slaves"³ and dreamed of a Brazil that would treat blacks with dignity, including them in the citizen order.

³ Let us remember that "the father of slaves", Castro Alves, would only launch his *Navio Negreiro* in 1869, a decade after *Úrsula*, which reinforces Firmina's pioneering spirit in abolitionist engagement.

To understand the literary miracle that Firmina's work represents, let us remember that Indianist Romanticism created a myth of origin, aiming to build a Brazilian identity for the newly independent nation. The indigenous man played the role of national hero, as he was the only native Brazilian, in addition to representing no threat to order, since, since the European invasion, he had already been exiled in his own country. The black man was present in the social environment, was the enslaved element and represented a real danger to the maintenance of privileges. Thus, admitting indigenous ancestry was the way to hide our African origin. Therefore, by bringing blacks to the core of literature, giving voice to their struggles, denouncing the atrocities committed against them and, above all, humanizing them, Firmina was a transgressor, a breaker of shackles.

THE FEMALE AND EMANCIPATORY VOICE IN "THE SLAVE"

The short story "The Slave" begins in a hall where "many distinguished people, and well placed in society" (REIS, 2018) were gathered and, at a certain point, they began to talk about slavery. Then a "lady, with sincerely abolitionist feelings" (REIS, 2018) took the lead in the discussion and in the story itself, and was completely "astonished" by the fact that slavery still persisted in the nineteenth century. (REIS, 2018). Then, he made a scathing criticism of the slave system, which hindered the socioeconomic development of the country:

Whichever way we look upon slavery, it is, and always will be, a great evil. Hence the decadence of commerce; for trade and farming go hand in hand, and the slave cannot make the crop flourish; because their work is forced. He has no future; your work is not compensated; From it comes reproach, shame; because with a haughty and fearless front we cannot face free nations; That is why the stigma of slavery, due to the crossing of races, is stamped on the foreheads of all of us. Embalde will seek one within us to convince the stranger that in his veins there does not spin a single drop of slave blood... And then, the character that impresses us, and shames us! (REIS, 2018).

In this way, we witness the female character as a political being, contrary to the hegemonic discourse. She took the floor and, publicly, demonstrated a clear awareness that the remedy for the evil of slavery was the liberation of blacks and the consequent economic restructuring, which should lead, for example, to the redistribution of income, the reorganization of the division of labor, respect for cultural diversity, the appreciation of non-hegemonic voices. Only then would it really be possible to have a Brazilian nation. The

character demonstrates the awareness that miscegenation is stamped on the forehead of all Brazilians, which affronts racist logic.

"You are the executioner", the lady noted (REIS, 2018). According to the *Oxford Languages dictionary*, *verdugo* is the "1. an individual responsible for carrying out the death penalty or other corporal punishment; executioner, executioner. 2. a cruel individual, who inflicts mistreatment on someone". *Lord* is, therefore, synonymous with torture, cruelty, backwardness, infamy; "*Sinhô*" is horror, dehumanization. Throughout the story, several qualifications are used for the oppressor subject, they are: executioner, overseer, tiger, beast, slaver, trafficker of human flesh, executioner, man of the *azorrague*.

To prove that her libertarian ideas are pertinent, the abolitionist tells a story about "the executioner and the victim" (REIS, 2018). The story begins in the best romantic style, full of metaphors, images of nature, adjectives, lyricism, subjectivism: "It was an August afternoon, beautiful with a woman's ideal, poetic as a virgin's sigh, melancholic, and soft as the distant sounds of a mysterious lute" (REIS, 2018). And, of course, there could not be a lack of emotion on the surface: "I don't know what unknown sensations agitated me, I don't know... but I felt in a mood to cry" (REIS, 2018). It is as if the lady sensed what was to come: "some pitiful screams, some anguished sobs", were the desperate laments of the slave Joana.

Before the master could even help the enslaved woman, a man with a ferocious appearance, the overseer, appeared, shouting: "Hell! Damn!" (REIS, 2018). It is important to underline his physical characteristics: brown, black and ringed hair, which denounced his black ancestry. However, he did not show any sense of ancestry. Upon understanding the situation, the lady used the word *horror* to mark the brutality of the situation. This word will appear two more times in the story, emphasizing the abject feeling that slavery aroused in her.

Then the despicable overseer cursed, cursing the numerous escape attempts of the enslaved Joana, revealing that the poor woman was often punished in the trunk, an instrument of humiliation and torture used in the slave regime. It should be noted that, throughout the story, Firmina emphasizes the inhumane conditions to which the enslaved were subjected, with a view to moving the reader and engaging him in the abolitionist struggle. The writer's word is a revolutionary weapon. Her writing reveals courage and dignity in a nineteenth-century Brazil, a very unusual and inhospitable scenario for a black woman to launch herself into letters.

The overseer who hunted poor Joan described her as "douda", falling into the commonplace reserved for women. The French philosopher Michel Foucault, in *História da Loucura*, highlighted that the concept of normality has been an instrument of social control throughout history. In this way, the person labeled as crazy became the target of manipulation and control by society. Historiography does not let us forget that, for centuries, countless women were admitted to asylums as insane for very questionable reasons, such as rejecting imposed destinies, subordinate positions, arranged marriages, unjust rules, or even for fighting against social injustices. The label "crazy" worked as a mechanism for delegitimizing and disqualifying women's actions.

This is how the dialogue between the lady and the overseer takes place: "- Do you always run away?", "- Always, my lady. At the slightest carelessness he runs away. He wants to make believe that he is douda.", "- Douda! I exclaimed involuntarily, and with an accent *that betrayed my feelings*" (REIS, 2018, emphasis added). Two considerations stand out: 1. the awareness of the subordination reserved for women and, in the case of black women, the intersectionality that crossed their bodies: gender, race, and class discrimination; 2. Joana "always runs away", deconstructing the myth of African passivity. The lady, in order to cover up Joana, indicated the incorrect escape route to the overseer.

When she got rid of the detestable executioner, the lady came across a young black man, who would turn out to be one of Joana's sons, Gabriel. In search of his mother, "the miserable slave" (REIS, 2018) abandoned his job, thus becoming another escaped slave, which could cost him three hundred lashes or, in other words, his death, his murder. Conscious, the son then chose to risk his life in order to help his mother: "Let me go back to the farm, be punished severely; But I don't want to, I can't see my mother die here, without any help." (REIS, 2018). He also said that, if necessary, he would take his mother alone in his arms to the end of the world. Filial love humanizes and ennobles the young victim of slavery. The young man then revealed that his mother, while working, fell faint, to which the overseer reacted with whippings, so she started to run.

By giving voice to blacks through sensitive and conscious characters, Firmina did something until then unthinkable for the time: her literature is an instrument of criticism of slavery through the humanization of enslaved voices. While racism intends to castrate the humanity of blacks, his literature aims to return a dignified life to Afro-Brazilians.

The mistress, moved by the dramatic situation, was willing to help the two runaway slaves. "Yes, the revenge of the law; a law that unfortunately still endures, a law that

guarantees the strong the abusive and execrable right to oppress the weak. [...] I courageously took responsibility for my act: humanity imposed this holy duty on me." (REIS, 2018) In this excerpt, we have the recognition of legislation as an instrument of oppression and racism. You were left with the duty to act humanely.

When she came to her senses, poor Joana's first words were: "It's night. I die... And the service? And the overseer?", revealing the panic for his condition, not having peace even on his deathbed. Then, the woman made a point of using her last strength to give her testimony of life: her twin sons, Carlos and Urbano, still small, were torn from her arms and sold as slaves. Then, she cursed the slaveholder and revealed her surprise that the lady cared about her case: "I have never met a white man in my life who took pity on me" (REIS, 2018). He also said that his parents were deceived by the slave owner, who took advantage of their illiteracy and sold a false letter of manumission. When Joana's mother discovered that her daughter's emancipation document was worthless, she fell dead on the floor. As soon as she finished her testimony, Joana died.

Shortly after, the overseer knocked on the door and, in conversation with the lady, tried to recover the young slave without success. Then, the slave master went to the house of the benefactor lady and, "without conscience, without horror" (REIS, 2018), witnessed the scene: the mother dead and the son bereaved. About what happened, he said: "He died, I do not regret this loss; it was no longer good for anything" (REIS, 2018) and then demanded that the lady return Gabriel to him. Handing him sealed documents, she replied: "In exchange for this amount I demand the freedom of the slave so-and-so – whether or not his master approves it" (REIS, 2018). Gabriel became free.

The lady was referring to the "Free Womb" law (in 2040), of September 28, 1871, which, in addition to making free all those who were born of a slave womb after its promulgation, also allowed the enslaved to buy their manumission through compensation to their masters, regardless of their agreement.

RACIST LEGISLATION

The universalizing character of the capitalist system impelled Europeans, in the fifteenth century, to overcome geographical barriers in order to create objective conditions to expand mercantilist relations. However, such relations were not established peacefully, but subjugated the other continents, imposing a relationship of subordination and dependence, both economically and culturally.

Moved by the precepts of mercantilist imperialism, the Europeans inaugurated a new geopolitical era. In America, they established the mercantilist standard colonies. In Asia, they established a very lucrative spice trade. In Africa, they trafficked slave labor. Undoubtedly, it was the Africans who paid the highest price for the expansionist ambitions of others.

Historian Mario Maestri (apud LIMA, 2020, p. 29) reports that ships were built with three layers in order to prevent rebellions. Thus, men traveled in the lower hold; women, in the intermediate; and children and pregnant women, at the top.

These ships carried 300 to 3,000 cubic meters of payload, or from one hundred to four hundred captives [...]. Until the beginning of the eighteenth century, the average mortality of captives in the *tumbeiros* was around 20%. [...]. It is estimated that, in the nineteenth century, around 10% of captives died during the crossing. It is estimated that more than 1.5 million Africans died during the crossing. This data does not include total losses due to shipwrecks, which are much more common than one might think. In the mid-eighteenth century, a Luso-Brazilian monopoly company would have lost in shipwrecks no less than 14 of its 43 *tumbeiro* ships. (MAESTRI apud LIMA, 2020, p. 30)

They trafficked Africans in the worst conditions imaginable. The ships sailed crammed with men, women and children who traveled towards death, whether literal or symbolic. Before embarking, they were branded with a red-hot iron, then chained and stacked, given almost no food, and the water they drank was brackish. The trips could last up to four months. It was common for only half of the enslaved to arrive alive at their destination. Official landings in Brazilian lands began in the 1530s.

In 1583, in Brazil, there were about 14,000 slaves, a figure that would rise steadily until the peak of the slave trade, between 1800 and 1850, a period in which 2.3 million blacks landed in Brazilian lands.

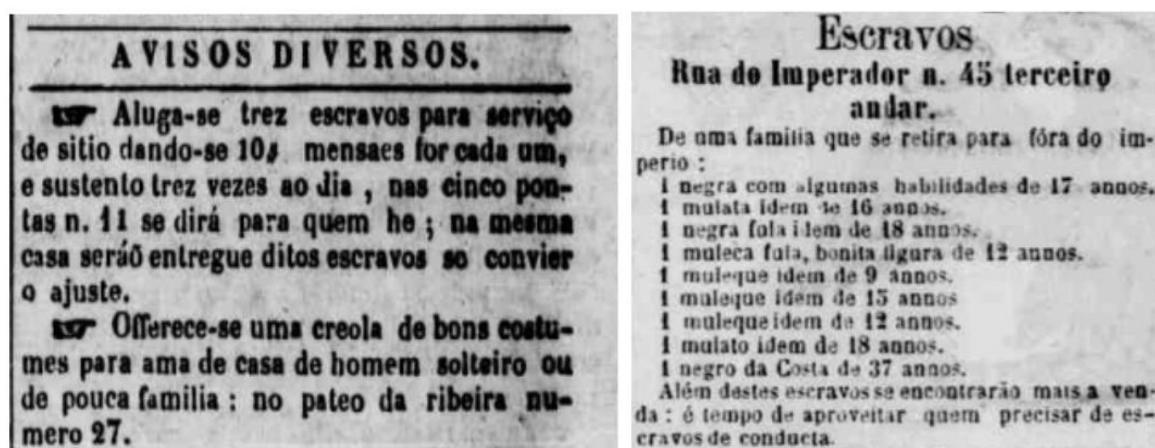
In 1831, the Feijó Law came into force, which "Declares free all slaves coming from outside the Empire, and imposes penalties on importers of the same slaves." (BRAZIL, 1831). The law "for the English to see", a nickname that became popular, had no effect off the paper and Brazil failed to comply with the agreement made with England in 1826, which provided for the end of the Atlantic trade in three years.

In 1837, access to formal education was forbidden to Africans, even freedmen. Law No. 1, of January 14, 1837: "The following are forbidden to attend public schools: First: people who suffer from contagious diseases. Second: slaves and black Africans, even if they are free or freed." This law remained in force until 1934.

In 1850, Law No. 601 prohibited black people from owning land or any access to housing. "Article 1 – The acquisition of vacant lands (State lands) by any title other than that of purchase is prohibited. Except for lands located within the limits of the Empire with foreign countries in a zone of 10 leagues, which may be granted free of charge." (BRAZIL, 1850). By determining that land could only be acquired through purchase, it prevented the poor, quilombolas, and blacks from having access to it.

The slave trade will only be prohibited, in fact, in 1850, with the Eusébio de Queirós Law, however, this milestone happens only in the letter of the law, as it was common practice to smuggle Africans, breaking the law and the agreement with England.

The slave market was a symbol of this trade in souls: there men and women were bought, sold, rented, pawned, traded. Customers could analyze teeth, skin, appearance without parsimony. It was a true horror show. In the newspapers, the reality was no different.



Available at https://www.vice.com/pt_br/article/8x53y3/revisitando-anuncios-de-escravos-do-seculo-19. Accessed on June 27, 2021.

On September 28, 1885, Law No. 3,270, known as the Sexagenarian Law, was enacted, which granted freedom to slaves over 60 years of age. But who survived to 60 years old? Living conditions were precarious, so the life expectancy of male slaves was 25 years: "The lack of food, clothing and appropriate housing, in combination with punishments, weakened them and prepared them to be liquidated by viruses, bacilli, bacteria and parasites that flourished in the dense population of the urban river." (NOGUEIRA, 2011) Men, women and children worked, until exhaustion, in the fields, in the big house, as cooks, cleaners, wet nurses and could also be targets of sexual violence.

It was only in May 1888 that slavery was abolished in Brazil, making it the last country in the West to free its black people. After the abolition of slavery, there were no government measures to include the Afro-Brazilian community in society. On the contrary, blacks were left on the sidelines. There was even an incentive for migration policies, in order to attract Europeans to Brazilian territory and, with this, "whiten" the local population. Part of the white population still refused to pay blacks for services that they obtained "for free", enslaving. The controversy, at the time, was due to the fact that the State had not compensated the whites who lost their "goods", their slaves. Once again, blacks were marginalized.

The capitalist system is based on the unequal distribution of the opportunity to live and to die. This logic of sacrifice has always been at the heart of neoliberalism, which we should call necroliberalism. This system has always operated with the idea that someone is worth more than others. Those who have no value can be discarded. The question is what to do with those we decide are worthless. This question, of course, always affects the same races, the same social classes, the same genders. (MBEMBE, 2020)

In 1890, two years after the abolition of slavery, the Law of Vagrants and Capoeiras (Penal Code – Decree No. 847, of October 11, 1890) was published, which provided that any black person walking through the streets of cities without a certain destination would be arrested.

Article 399. To cease to exercise a profession, trade, or any other trade in which to earn a living, not having means of subsistence and a certain domicile in which to live; provide for subsistence by means of occupation prohibited by law, or manifestly offensive to morals and good customs [...]

Article 402. Doing exercises of agility and body dexterity known by the name capoeiragem in the streets and public squares [...]

Sole paragraph. It is considered an aggravating circumstance that capoeira belongs to some band or gang. (BRAZIL, 1890)

With this brief history, we realize that racism is in the structure of the Brazilian State, it is the solid basis of national construction. Racism is present in the structure, in the social and political foundation of the country. According to Silvio Almeida, in *Structural Racism*:

In short, racism is a result of the social structure itself, that is, of the "normal" way in which political, economic, legal and even family relations are constituted, and is not a social pathology or an institutional derangement. Racism is structural. (ALMEIDA, 2018, p. 38-9)

Slavery is an open wound and infected in Brazil to this day. It is marked in the most unsuspected places, according to Schwarcz, in the language itself, when expressions such

as "good hair" (synonymous with straight hair), "marry well" (means to marry someone white), "nightstand" (as opposed to the talking servants who stayed by the bedside in order to serve the lord) etc.

THE MYTH OF BLACK PASSIVITY

In "Slaves and their rights", Silvia Hunold Lara brings to light the matrix theory of the objectification of the slave, present in the book *Capitalism and slavery in southern Brazil*, by Fernando Henrique Cardoso. In the work, Cardoso investigates the theories of Perdigão Malheiro, who lives the dilemma of whether or not to consider the slave a thing or a person. Such a dichotomy reveals an essential fact of the essence of slavery: men and women were sold as commodities, then seen as "things" by fiction of the law. However, saying that slaves had no rights would also be "fiction," according to Lara.

Perdigão, in an abolitionist zeal, stated that all rights were denied to the enslaved. Such a statement deprived blacks of the condition of agent and political subject. This view of the slave as a totally docile and submissive body, objectified, is questioned by Lara, since he resisted, rebelled, conquered rights in negotiations with his master. The conservative abolitionist vision posed an equation that was impossible to solve: the barbarism of slavery *Versus* the civilized world. This opposition served as a justification for the non-integration of blacks into modern society. So, when freed, they were not admitted as free workers, as they were seen as undisciplined. Thus, Lara raises two initial reasons to overturn the thesis that slaves had no rights: a) it would be possible to speak of slave legislation; b) struggles of the enslaved were transformed into rights (although the vast majority were not written, but oral agreements).

The master's domain belonged to the domestic order, so the law did not reach him. Even so, the masterly recognition of the humanity of the enslaved was presupposed, so it was assumed, albeit tacitly, that blacks had needs and desires, which should be observed – at least in part. Thus, historiography has long viewed the relationship between slave and master in a more complex way. It is understood that the physical punishment intended for slaves was dosed with other mechanisms of coercion. Through attitudes of resistance, slaves imposed limits on the orders and wills of the masters, conquering "concessions" that should be maintained as "rights".

Subsequently, actions for the freedoms of enslaved women and men pressured the judiciary to make gradually more politicized decisions on the issue of savings and the

purchase of manumissions. The abolitionist Luiz Gama, between the 1860s and 1870s, militated in the courts and won the freedom of countless slaves by contesting the legality of their conditions, invoking the law of 1831, which abolished the slave trade. It is also possible to seek other aspects of the *modus operandi* of the relations between masters and slaves. As an example, Lara cites the black brotherhoods, which built important communication channels and demands during slavery. It is intended, above all, to highlight the fact that the voices of the enslaved have made themselves heard and conquered spaces, claimed rights, even in situations of subjugation.

Despite the constitutional guarantees provided for in the 1988 Magna Carta and its clearly expressed objectives – "to build a free, fair and solidary society", "to eradicate poverty and marginalization and to reduce social and regional inequalities" (art. 3, I and III) – Brazil continues to execute its Afro-descendant citizens. In a report produced by the Network of Security Observatories, it was found that the black population is the main target of violence: 75% of those killed by the police are black. Among the victims of femicide, 61% are black women. In relation to the general homicide rate in Brazil, we have the following data: 28 people per 100 thousand inhabitants; however, among black men aged 19 to 24, the number rises to more than 200 per 100 thousand inhabitants (ESTADÃO, 2020). According to the Report,

Black boys from the peripheries learn to be afraid of the police from a young age. They know that they can be targets of unjustified approaches, humiliating searches, illegal arrests, verbal aggression, false flagrante delicto and sometimes beatings and death. (ESTADÃO, 2020)

Also according to the Report, there is a racist historical construction of the standard criminal that is directly linked to the "eugenic civilizing project of whitening the country and physical elimination of the other" (ESTADÃO, 2020). The legacy of slavery still weighs mortally on the shoulders of the Afro-descendant population.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The characteristics that will exclude and legitimize always occur in the field of politics, which represents power. The inclusion of minorities has to come from government initiatives and programs. It is necessary to implement public policies that protect these groups and aim at their inclusion and greater participation in society. Although the Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education (LDB) already declares mandatory "the

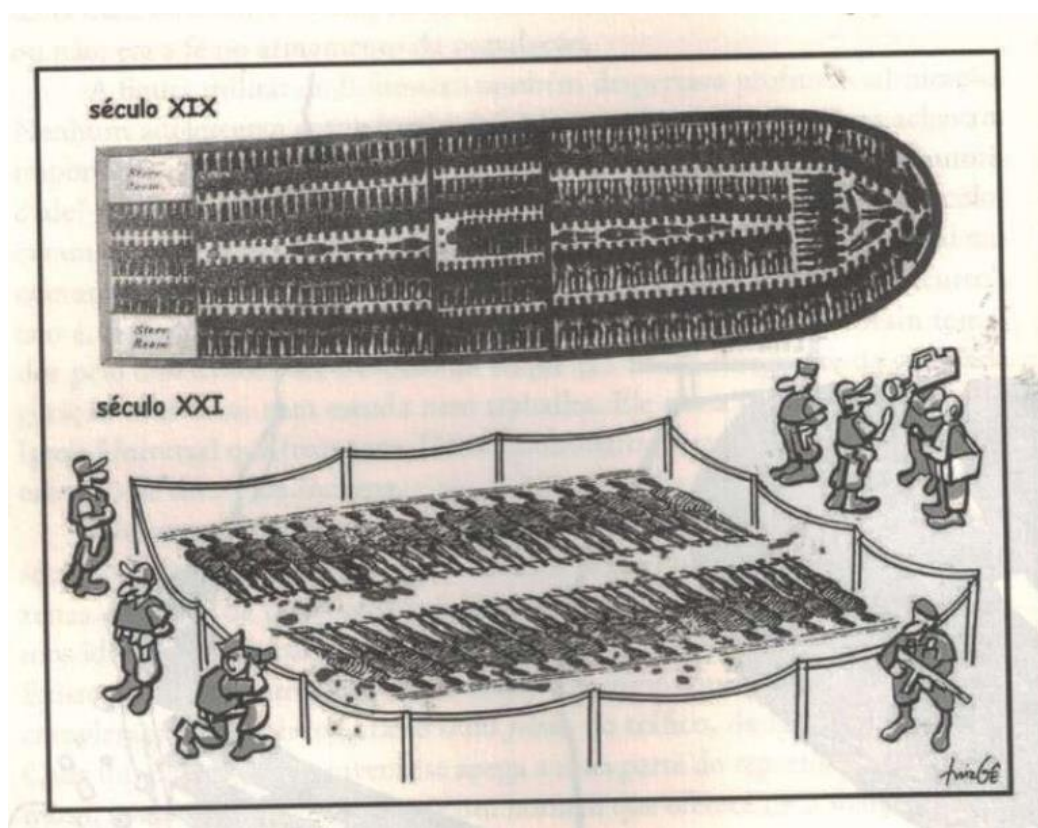
teaching of Afro-Brazilian and African history and culture in all systems and modalities of education" (LIMA, 2020, p. 50), such application of the law is still far from being a reality experienced in Brazilian schools.

There is no more fertile ground than the school to sow an education for diversity. It is essential that the school takes an anti-racist stance and ensures compliance with the law, teaching Afro-Brazilian culture and history (Law 10.639/2003). Special attention should be paid to the selection of the bibliography of these classes, in order to ensure that the history of the black population is told through the eyes of blacks, since the same fact has several perspectives and, to date, the versions of the history of African peoples that circulate in school curricula have been written by whites. If we continue to perpetuate white voices by telling a single version of the history of African peoples, we will steal people's dignity, as the Nigerian writer Chimamanda Adichie says in her famous lecture "The Danger of the One Story" (ADICHIE, 2009): "show a people as one thing, as only one thing, over and over again, and it will be what they will become." For her, "power is the ability to not only tell another person's story, but to make it the definitive story of that person," creating and reinforcing stereotypes.

We live in a "time of party, time of broken men. [...] Laws are not enough. Lilies are not born of the law" (ANDRADE, 2012). Although this poem by Carlos Drummond de Andrade has the Second World War as its context of publication, airs of that time still persist, because even today "Men ask for meat. Fires. Shoes." (ANDRADE, 2012). Racism perpetuates socioeconomic inequality. But the lilies, these will be born at school. It is in it that we teach that African civilizations have a vast culture and a grandiose history of glories, struggles and victories, whose first chapter dates back to the emergence of humanity, since the first human groups emerged on the African continent (ZORZETTO, 2007). It is necessary to offer children and adolescents references of black people in the most varied areas of knowledge, not only in sports, but mainly to break stereotypes built by the Eurocentric gaze, to credit due merit to the most diverse scientific, artistic, literary contributions, etc., made by black professionals. Students need references, it is urgent that they feel represented.

Stories have been used to expropriate and make evil. But stories can also be used to empower and humanize. Stories can destroy the dignity of a people, but stories can also repair that lost dignity. (ADICHIE, 2009)

In this way, studying the writers who built our literature is directly related to the need to recognize our history, our origin, preserve our memory. The relocation of Firmina's voice in history must necessarily go through basic education – it is not enough just to stay in the restricted and rare academic circles – it must reach the thousands of boys and girls who do not feel represented by the literature taught in schools. These children are deprived of their history, of their ancestry, which is also the history of Brazil. To critically review literature is, in this sense, to know one's own historical past and to make a dignified future possible.



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