

Haitian migration to Brazil: when the racial landscape changes and “i” and the “other” confront each other in the media and in digital social networks

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Brazilian migration: selective and restrictive

This study is part of a doctoral thesis in Education [still in progress] developed in the Program of Postgraduate Studies in Education, of the Federal University of Mato Grosso, in the research group *Laboratório de Estudos sobre Tecnologia da Informação e Comunicação na Educação – Lêtece – UFMT* [Laboratory of Studies on Information and Communication Technology in Education – Lêtece – Federal University of Mato Grosso], connected to the project *Aprender e ensinar com as TDIC: sobre tendências, dilemas e perspectivas* [Learning and teaching with information and communications technology: on trends, dilemmas and perspectives]. It aims at analyzing the manifestations of Brazilians, in some digital media and social networks, related to the presence of Haitian migrants in the country, focusing on the history of the Brazilian social thought. The choice of *who I want in the country where I live* will help us reflect on the expressions found in these discourses, how they are and why they are motivated.

The understanding of the Brazilian social thought and of its connections with the process of racialization that has been present in Brazil since the 19th century, when European migrations to the country were encouraged, allows the com-

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prehension that a selective and restrictive behavior has been developed, which has been guiding the migration policies in the country, whose reflexes are still prevalent in the 21st century. This behavior demands discriminatory attitudes against the black population who come to Brazil, whether they are Caribbean or African.

The migration process is co-responsible for the formation of the ideology of Brazil as a nation: what kind of nation was then desired? Therefore, migration configured itself as an important aspect of the Brazilian civilizing process and it was a condition for the country to become a nation. It was initiated still at the beginning of the colonization, with the arrival of the Dutch and of the Portuguese, having the latter a more prevalent presence, followed by a “forced transmigration”, according to the expression used by Azevedo (1975, p. 12), of Africans in an enslaved situation and continued with the encouraging of the arrival of European immigrants in the end of the 19th century. The will for a selection of which individuals were desired to build the “Brazilian type” was present even at that century and it is maintained up to this date.

A look at the Brazilian migration process reveals that there were restrictions imposed by the Brazilian laws at different moments. Looking at the history of the Brazilian social thought, we find that “the racial issues pervaded the immigration projects since 1818, even before the word ‘race’ became part of the Brazilian scientific vocabulary and of the concerns with the national formation” (SEYFERTH, 2002, p. 118).

This research retraces the historical background of national and international Brazilian migration from the 19th century, through the 20th and into the 21st: 1. from 1870, marked by the peak of the migrant entry encouraged by the Brazilian government, to 1930; 2. from 1930 to 1980, marked by the internal movements, with a greater mobility between 1930 and 1950, and by a decline in the number of foreigners³ in the country, as a result of the militaries’ and Vargas’ dictatorship, as well as of the hindrance of the entry of the “undesirable”; 3. from 1980 to 2010, marked by the emigration of Brazilians to other countries, a consequence of the economic crises experienced locally, whose peak occurred in the 1980s, and of its return, from 2008 onwards, with the economic crisis in North America and in Europe; and, finally, 4. from 2010 onwards, when there is a new migratory panorama in Brazil.

This new reading is relevant because the Brazilian laws that currently regulate the migratory movements are not recent ones – some of them were promul-

3 We use the term “foreigner” in accordance with Law Number 6,815/1980, which is in full force and effect and which regulates the entrance and the permanence of *foreigners* in Brazil, based on security and on national interest. In its text, the law, when dealing with migrants as *foreigners*, acts in a discriminatory manner.

gated in the 20th century. It is therefore not possible to talk about contemporary Brazilian migration without understanding its historical processes, considering that the process is still submitted to the dated rules from the last century, such as the Law Number 6,815/1980, in full force and effect, which legislates *on the entry and permanence of foreigners* in Brazil, based on security and on national interest.

Historically, Brazil presents selective traits in its migratory policy, adopting such position for the reception of the immigrants. This process is rather a social one, before being political, once it emerges from a position that conforms itself to the desire to have, in the country, a racial landscape built in the European manner, especially when we consider how the migration was set up in the 19th and in the early 20th century.

From 1870 to 1930, the arrival in Brazil of about 40 million people began. They were attracted by job offers in the rural properties and in the industries of the southeast of the country and came mostly from Western Europe, supported by public policies.

The idea was that America “was formed by a melting pot and by white people” (SEYFERTH, 2015, p. 24). According to this author, this notion, idealized in the 19th century, adopted principles from the Enlightenment period and defended the notion that “America could be a country that would concentrate different European nationalities *in harmony* and they could interact with each other in both directions, i.e. cultural and physical” (SEYFERTH, 2015, p. 24, emphasis added). Therefore, the term becomes appropriate in Brazil to “justify and consolidate the ideal of miscegenation” (SEYFERTH, 2015, p. 24), also justifying the need to encourage the migratory policy of European people.

In this way, the recently established migratory policy was conducted: in order to reflect on a socio-racial construction for the Brazilian people – from a nation that was the last one to abolish slavery to a nation that imported European work force for the formation of a civilized society in the European way. Thus, “the promotion of the European immigration would have the double advantage of providing free labor and a ‘purifying’ influx, brought by the white race” (GORENDER, 1990, p. 163). As a result, immigration is seen as “civilizing factor” (SEYFERTH, 2015, p. 48). Only through this process a nation could be created and a middle class could be formed, in a liberal project.

From 1881 to 1902, migration to the São Paulo coffee plantations were subsidized by the government, with the arrival of the Italian, Portuguese and Spanish. After that, many people went to São Paulo because of the industrialization. From 1908 onwards, the government also subsidized the arrival of the Japanese to the same region for the same purpose, and many of them also made their journey to the urban area. In 1901, foreigners constituted 92% of the workers in the São Paulo industries.

The difference between the two migrations, the one subsidized by the state and the one that was forced over the centuries, contributed to the formation of the Brazilian social thought. The first was considered as the one that overcame barriers and ascended socially; the second is perceived as the one that did not achieve social mobility. These are the molds that built the racist imagery of the Brazilians towards black people, not taking into account the historical context of the late 19th century and of the entire 20th century.

During the 1930s, Brazil promulgated restrictive measures for the entry of international immigrants in the country (PATARRA, 2012; PATARRA; FER-NANDES, 2011). The restrictions were then extended and the constitutions of 1934 and 1937 established quotas on the foreigners' entries to prevent the arrival of the "undesirable", according to nationalism and to the new conceptions of what society should be, proposed by the Estado Novo and included in the constitutions of the Vargas Era, when measures for the entry of foreigners are established and new laws are promulgated (Constitutions of 1934 and 1937). These measures regulated the nationality, citizenship and individual rights of foreigners. From that moment onwards, the landscape of migration in Brazil is changed.

The period from 1930 to 1980, can be considered in a hybrid one in the migratory context: it is a period when internal movements in the country are constant, mainly from the northeast to the south; the arrival of foreigners is reduced and many Brazilians start to leave the country to international destinations. Therefore, the migratory process from the 20th century onwards has a small number of arrivals and a large number of departures, which was supported by the restrictive migratory policies established in the Decree-Law Number 406, of May 4, 1938. The decree, in addition to prohibiting the entry of "those with physical disabilities, maimed, disabled, blind, deaf-mutes, paupers, vagrants and similar people", explicitly gave full power to the federal government to, according to its article 2, "limit or suspend, for economic or social reasons, the entry of individuals of *certain races or origins*, after being heard the *Conselho de Imigração e Colonização* [Board of Immigration and Colonization]" (emphasis added).

Póvoa Neto (2012), comparing today with yesterday, states that:

For a hundred years, until the middle of the 20th century, the country attracted immigrants, mainly European, but also Japanese and Arabs. Because of the Second World War, this process was interrupted and when the war ended, migration was resumed. Until the middle of the 1960s, Brazil was still receiving immigrants. In the 1980s and 1990s, the country began to receive a very different immigration as compared to the one that arrived before the Second World War, because it was not European, but South American, especially from Bolivia, Argentina, Paraguay, Peru,

and later the Asian, and no more from Japan, but from China and South Korea. In a smaller quantity, also from Africa. This profile is maintained up to this date. Immigration today is much smaller in quantitative terms. (NETO, interview to the Institute Humanitas Unisinos, 16 May, 2012).

It can be observed that the migratory phenomenon, in Brazil, is quite complex, since there is no seasonality on it and the current quantitative aspect is no longer equal to the transition period between the 19th and the 20th centuries. However, the arrival of Haitian migrants in Brazil seemed to cause discomfort in a certain portion of the population, which was largely driven by the media and by the social networks. The analysis of this phenomenon requires an attentive consideration.

It appears to be consensus, in the media, the fact that Brazil has, in the 21st century, assumed the position of a country of return that is also a receiver, as shown in a news report from the newspaper *O Estadão*, published in 2012.

Global revolution. The rise of emerging countries is revolutionizing the global immigration. [...]. Brazil is in the midst of this demographic swirl. Two decades ago, Brazilians were escaping from their country, just as Haitians. Now, they return. Stable, democratic, with a booming economy [...]. Reissuing the history of the 19th and 20th century, the country has widely opened its doors to European immigrants, but also for Latin Americans (O ESTADÃO, International section, 8 January 2012, emphasis added)⁴.

On a daily basis, data on the arrival of new migrants are published and the digital media and the social networks have become spaces for the dissemination of such data, besides promoting debates on the subject. One aspect that has drawn the attention of several scholars (PÓVOA NETO, 2014; COGO; BADET, 2013, among others) are the terms used in numerous news reports that stimulate xenophobia, as highlighted in the expression *widely opened*.

Addressing the phenomenon as a “global revolution” and comparing Brazilians to Haitians for having experienced “escapes” imparts to the reader the impression that Haitians are fugitives, as were the Brazilians in the 1980s and 1990s, that is, the expression disregards the specific contexts of both peoples. The expression “widely opened” also imparts the idea that there is an absence of restrictive migratory policies. This becomes even more evident with the use of the expression “but also”, making it seem as if this is the problem that needs to be solved. The

4 Available at: <http://internacional.estadao.com.br/noticias/geral,brasil-novo-polo-de-imigracao-imp-819891>. Accessed 3 April 2014.

expression “widely opened” still denotes that Brazil is open to receive any foreigners, like the Latin Americans, without imposing limits on them.

It is possible that the country is indeed reviving the immigration boom of the late 19th century. However, the present situation still could not be considered a record and is not meant to be a revival of that century. The numbers point out that, worldwide, there are about 250 million immigrants and less than 1 million is living in Brazil (data from the Brazilian Federal Police Department, 2012). The website “OEstrangeiro.Org” published, on 22 May 2013, an article with updated statistics of the number of immigrants in the country, covering all categories. The article pointed out that less than 0.4% of the migrant population of the world is living in Brazil, and, regarding the refugees, visa grants did not reach 3,000/year (data from “OEstrangeiro”, 2013)⁵. Regarding the Haitian migration, in 2015, the government granted permanent residence to 43,800 Haitians (BRAZIL, 2015). The inheritance from the mentioned centuries is a group of restrictive and selective laws and not a “global revolution”. Digital media, when exacerbating about this new migration flow, collaborates to the existence of discriminatory manifestations against the Haitian immigrants.

The *Centro de Estudos das Relações de Trabalho e Desigualdades* – CEERT⁶ [Studies Center for Labour Relations and Inequalities] presents, in its website, 12 news reports related to Haitians that suffered discrimination in various parts of the country: “Some Brazilians treat Haitians as slaves,” says the organization (11 February 2016); “At least 500 Haitians have suffered violence due to racism in MT [Mato Grosso]” (12 December 2015.); “Public hearing in the Chamber of Deputies [from São Paulo] debates the recent xenophobic attacks in Brazil” (23 September 2014); “Haitian immigrants suffer racism and xenophobia in Brazil” (15 May 2014). What is true, therefore, is that, from 2010 onwards, with the new migratory panorama in Brazil, the country witnesses the arrival of “undesirable” people, “whose visibility and interest need to be constantly negotiated because they represent exactly the *historically unwanted ethnic groups* to populate the country” (COGO; BADET, 2013, p. 23, emphasis added).

5 OESTRANGEIRO.ORG. Exclusive: the exact and updated numbers of foreigners in Brazil. 22 May 2013. Available at: <https://oestrangeiro.org/2013/05/22/exclusivo-os-numeros-exatos-e-atualizados-de-estrangeiros-no-brasil-2> Accessed 6 April 2014. In a page endnote, the journalist says: “The data presented in this piece were obtained through requests made by the e-Sic (system of information to the citizen). The 2012 numbers were requested to the Itamaraty, Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the total numbers were required to the Federal Police.

6 CEERT. Search: #haitianos. Available at <http://www.ceert.org.br/noticias/tag/haitianos>. Accessed on 30 March 2014 and updated on 12 April 2016.

Countries, including Brazil, “always tried to select the type of immigrants they wanted” and the media fulfills its role in strengthening this ideal (PÓVOA NETO, 2012). Analyzing the past/present context, there seems to be still a “desirable” profile and another “undesirable”, explicit in the policies that regulate migration and also in the official (or not official) discourses.

The difference is that both categories are currently living in the country (Patarra and Fernandes, 2011) and one of them, the Haitians, has been subject to hate speech, including official ones: “Brazil has managed to attract a lot of immigrants, Haitians and Africans, but also skilled workers” (President of the CNIg [National Council of Immigration] in an interview to *El País*, Brazil, 8 June 2015). Again, the use of the terms “but also” established two poles: the “qualified” migrant group and the other, “disqualified”, taking the origins of one and of the other as a criterion for the adjectival phrase.

This way of thought seems to be the result of a past whose history was racially built, when the Brazilian social thought was instituted, aiming at the formation of a civilized nation (MOORE, 2007; IANNI, 2004; DA MATA, 2010), and this is perpetuated and strengthened in discriminatory behaviors that echo through the news broadcast in the media, both in the comments that the news generate, whose contents are felt and experienced by the migrant who claims: “THE COLOR OF MY SKIN DOES NOT DEFINE MY FUTURE”, a cry of a young Haitian in his Facebook account (2015)⁷.

1 “The color of my skin does not define my future”

A young girl from Santa Catarina posts on her Facebook (November 2014) a question about the reason why there were so many Haitians “per square meter” in Florianópolis, a situation which has left her horrified. The post received more than 130 responses and many of them talked about political issues and conspiracy. One person mentioned it was a measure to weaken the national identity.

Another young girl writes on her Twitter account:

Gosh, are you going to Haiti? That’s nice! I wouldn’t have the courage to go to a place with so many niggers (October 2011).

Another person comments in a journalistic piece published in G1:

these people come here only to bring AIDS and steal, here in SC [Santa Catarina] there are many of them around, it’s an infestation on the streets,

⁷ Post by a Haitian young boy on 26 September 2015, motivated by the assassinations against Haitians in Brazil. The capital letters were maintained as in the original post.

dirty things, and so on, so they arrive and are quickly entitled to vote here, and on whom will they vote? (January 2016).

These manifestations, among thousands of others, are daily exposed in the media and in the social networks and present themselves to our eyes. Would our sovereignty be indeed threatened by the presence of the black migrant? The aggressor of a Haitian argued, defending himself when he was called a racist at a gas station in the city of Canoas, Rio Grande do Sul, that his gesture “was not racist or xenophobic – it was an act for the sake of the national sovereignty” (May 2015). One of the videos on Facebook that showed the event received over 9,000 shares and several comments in favor of the attitude of the Brazilian. Why is there this fear of the black migrant (AZEVEDO, 1987) and not of the white migrants from North America and Western Europe?

It is understood that a secularly elaborated crossbreeding project, that resulted in the hybrid color category, the pardo Brazilians (OSORIO, 2003), seems to be threatened by the arrival of black migrants, coming from a poor country. The national identity, so severely persecuted and strengthened by the myth of the racial democracy, would also be threatened, (Ianni, 2004; Nogueira, 1985, among others). This myth faked the idea of a white/mestizo and *civilized* population. The arrival of black migrants changes the urban racial landscape and is considered uncomfortable, horrifying. This fear and horror, imposed to Haitians in the Western world (SCARAMAL, 2006; SEITENFUS, 2014), has been substantial to these behaviors and it scares the migrant, propelling him to a distressed cry, connecting the color of one’s skin to the definition of his future. This relationship to that Haitian young man is unintelligible.

In this context, there are binary categories, the “I”, Brazilian, who is already established and *who has a voice that says*; and the “other”, migrant, Haitian, out of his place, contextualized subject to these comments. What does the “I” say about the “other”, the one who comes and carries in his body the mark of being a migrant, from a poor country and black, that is, one that carries a triple mark: migrant, black, poor? To analyze these sayings, we turned to the cyberspace (LEVY, 2000), as the selected field for data collection. The methodology was the netnography mode.

The social researcher revisited the history of the Brazilian migration, perceived it as a social process motivated by the Brazilian social thought of a racist nature (SEYFERTH, 2000, 2015, and others) and was urged to reflect on the discursive events posted in cyberspace, which were seen as concrete social facts, once they were generated and consolidated historically.

The meanings of these sayings about the migratory context are relevant because they seem to bring back a forgotten memory – the racial whitening in Brazil. A possible blackening seems to have intensified the fear and the hatred

(FANON, 1968; MOORE, 2007) against the black population, now conjugated with xenophobia. Therefore, the Brazilian racism (cloaked in secrecy) is tested and the racist voices become audible and visualized also in xenophobic tones. It is not just hatred of foreigners, but of a certain foreigner.

My grandpa about the tragedies in Haiti: When a niger normally doesn't take a shit at the beginning, he does it at the end. Whereas the Haitian do it on both times. (Twitter, 17 February 2015).

haiti isn't in africa but it is all nigers all peas in the same pod (Twitter, 15 October 2014)

Another #cyclist assaulted in Ribeirão Preto. He went cycling and lost his bike. Till when? Before it was Brazilian California, today Haiti!!! (Twitter, 14 July 2014).

Haitian contemporary migration in Brazil, in this context, is a phenomenon that needs to be understood, as well as the reactions it triggered. This study, which involved the relationships among different individuals, demanded a questioning of its ethical aspect. We reflected, therefore, that the researcher's commitment was related to the perceived subject, the Haitian migrants, and the silencing of the xenophobic discourse, of racism and of discrimination would place the researcher in a complicity state with the speakers, authors of such sayings, that carry with them *habitus*.

Bourdieu's notion understands *habitus* as “*dispositions* acquired by experience, therefore, variable according to the place and the moment”, that are “socially constituted” (BOURDIEU, 2004, p. 25). Thus, the Brazilian views about the black and poor migrants make up the historical provisions and are apprehended as social structures. So, we talk from the place we occupy, which is historically constructed, and the words are placed according to our *dispositions*. Any word spoken conforms with the social place occupied by who says it, that is, each person sees the space where they live according to its position in that space (BOURDIEU, 2004).

For that reason, they are *habitus*, historical and social apprehended, that allow *some* to select *others*, that is, to determine *who I want in my country*. Each comment expresses the social place that the author occupies and this is determined by one's way of seeing the world.

To bring these events to light is to understand the perception that “social science is a power system which helps to normalize the social order” (CHRISTIANS, 2006, p. 150). Even if it has been so, it can be different, and that is a challenge for the quest of a humanization of the migratory issues, once a neutral observer would possibly ignore the “relationships of power that are associated with the gender, [...], the ethnicity, the race and the nationality” (CHRISTIANS, 2006, p. 150), which are expressed in daily behavior.

The following are words from a Haitian man about the Brazilians:

'I had a vacant seat on my side (on the bus). Some people came in, but no one sat next to me. On that day, I was very sad, upset. From that day on, I have been feeling the pain, I have been embarrassed,' blurted the Haitian immigrant Joaquim Ansiote to the Caminhos da Reportagem. Want to know how it is to be an African and Haitian immigrant in Brazil? Watch the complete video: <http://bit.ly/1OosQT7>.

These are words from a Brazilian about Haitians in a news report on 23 February 2014. The piece, entitled "Haitian man is beaten and fainted in RS [Rio Grande do Sul]", was published in several national media:

Is he going back home after that? Or will he expect something worse to happen? I am against violence and I also don't have anything against immigrants. The problems are those who have nothing to add to our country, such as Haitians and the "cucarachos" Bolivians. If I could say this to him and he could understand me, I would say it...

The following is a comment made by a retired man who lives in Brasília, state of Acre, about the crime of the vilification of a corpse, occurred in the city on 16 April 2013:

It had to be a Haitian.

About the same issue, another resident also accuses the Haitians:

No one knows the origins of these people. We know that their country has epidemics of cholera, hepatitis, AIDS. They have no control about things, they don't have protected sex.

All of these attitudes carry with them the history of the social Brazilian thought, whose memory is still alive in the 21st century.

2 Considerations on the confront between the "i" and the "other": "each one, a brave one"!

To immigrate is to establish a certain relationship in a context of power, already experienced by an "I", who is already established. The "I", who talks about

the “other”, talks according to the place he or she occupies. This process needs to be humanized and the attitude of the government agencies has proven to be counter-productive⁸, considering that the legislation still in full force regarding the reception of migrants is from the 1980s, when the country was under a military dictatorship.

It can be noted that the arrival of Haitian migrants endangers a project of a white nation, blue-eyed and considered civilized – this has been seen as “national threat”. The racial landscape changes, becomes black, mainly in the south and southeast of the country, and the discourses point out this new color as a problem to be solved.

It is necessary, therefore, to write a new page in the history of the Brazilian migration, in which the “other”, “undesirable”, becomes visible. It is in such context that the social researchers must act. To analyze the Brazilian reality and suggest new practices and behaviors to the Brazilian nation is one of the current challenges. Understanding the interaction processes between Brazilians and Haitians, so that this migrant is seen as a potential for social transformation, as it has been throughout the Haitian history: individuals capable of doing the only black revolution in the world (JAMES, 2010), and that study even without resources, as explains a young Haitian boy, Alix Georges, who lives in Brazil since 2006, in Porto Alegre – Rio Grande do Sul: “Our people is very fond of studying. Haitians study even hungry and with very few resources”⁹.

Finally, migration is a human right and “we must see in each of them [the immigrants] a brave person. Someone who overthrew the prevailing rule of the world. And the best we can do is to put ourselves in that person’s shoes, holding his hand so that he becomes a victorious individual” (VENTURA, 2016).

Progressively, the racial pyramid has been inverted. There are more black men and women that are actors of a processes of change, which means that the socio-racial landscape has become more black, pointing to a new Brazilian racial identity: the black, coming from a new geographic area: the Caribbean. With this new identity, it is possible to revisit the official historiography from the Haitian point of view and of its influence in the history of Brazil, establishing a dialogue

8 This does not necessarily represent the entire sphere of the Brazilian government. We refer to the granting of permanence, in 2015, given to about 43,000 Haitians, but much remains to be done to give them dignity. We refer also several actions by the municipalities, such as Contagem, in the state of Minas Gerais, which carries out projects for the inclusion of Haitian children in municipal schools.

9 Available at TERRA, EDUCAÇÃO. “Our people study even hungry, says Haitian man who is taking a Master’s Degree course in Rio Grande do Sul”. Published on 26 April 2013. Available at: <http://noticias.terra.com.br/educacao/nosso-povo-estuda-mesmo-com-fome-diz-haitiano-que-faz-mestrado-no-rs,09c43e6dae24e310VgnVCM5000009cceb0aRCRD.html>. Several accesses.

with the social research today. It is urgent to find creative solutions and take sovereign and human action when it comes to solving the migratory processes.

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