

# The role of violence in the classics of Brazilian Social Thought

## O papel da violência nos clássicos do Pensamento Social Brasileiro

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### Abstract

*This essay had the objective of problematizing the role of violence in Brazilian social life and of discussing the relevance it poses in three classics of Brazilian Social Thought. By analyzing how the issue was treated in Casa-Grande & Senzala, Raízes do Brasil, and Formação do Brasil Contemporâneo, we aimed at defending the argument that, although the emergence of violence appears to be, to certain common sense, a new phenomenon, its widespread employment has been an integrative element of social interactions in Brazil, but is mainly used against more vulnerable segments of society. Furthermore, by taking advantage of each author's conceptual apparatuses, we introduced a discussion not only about the role of violence in the Brazilian colonial era, but also about its continuity over time and the social-historical manifestations it has in contemporaneity. We concluded that these seminal books give support to our argument insofar as violence appears in all of them as an element that grants cohesion to society as it ensures the submission of the dominated to the dominant.*

**Keywords:** violence, Brazil, Brazilian Social Thought.

### Resumo

*Este ensaio teve o objetivo de problematizar acerca do papel da violência na vida social no Brasil e discutir sua relevância em três clássicos do Pensamento Social Brasileiro. Por meio da análise sobre como o assunto aparece em Casa-Grande & Senzala, Raízes do Brasil e Formação do Brasil Contemporâneo, procuramos defender o seguinte argumento: embora o surgimento da violência aparente ser, para um certo senso comum, um fenômeno novo, seu uso amplo tem sido um elemento integrador para as relações sociais no Brasil, porém, utilizada principalmente contra os contingentes mais vulneráveis da sociedade. Além disso, aproveitamo-nos dos aparatos conceituais dos autores para introduzir uma discussão não apenas sobre o papel da violência no Brasil colonial, mas também sobre a continuidade desta e de suas manifestações sociais e históricas na contemporaneidade. Concluímos que tais obras seminais dão suporte ao nosso argumento, pois a violência aparece em todas elas como um elemento que garante a coesão da sociedade, a medida que assegura a submissão dos dominados aos dominantes.*

**Palavras-chave:** violência, Brasil, Pensamento Social Brasileiro.

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## Introduction

Our objective in this essay is to highlight the protagonist role of violence as a form of action in the public and private realms of social life in Brazil. For such, we base ourselves on how violence was portrayed in the three most seminal classics of the Brazilian Social Thought. Our central argument is the following: in spite of the fact that the aggravation of violent upheavals appear to be a contemporary phenomenon, the resort to violence as form of social control and intervention has been taking place systematically throughout Brazilian History. In this sense, in historical terms, such subterfuge was directed specifically to the dominated contingents of society like women, children and, specially, the slaves. In its many variants, the use of violence has been a constituent element of social cohesion in Brazil.

Our point of departure was the willingness to question what we judge to be a false perception, coming from a certain common sense, in which Brazilian society used to be more pacific until the middle of 1970s. We align with the analysis of Almendra and Bode de Moraes (2012), who foregrounded how this perception is diffused in the media as well as in different social networks. These authors stated that employing the 1970s as a time marker normally means that violence, as a generalized phenomenon, would have come about as a direct and indirect consequence of the struggles for control of drug markets. These struggles, engendered by criminal organizations, would have started at poorer regions of central urban areas, but as these organizations and their feuds evolved, the blowback of their actions began to affect the rest of society (Almendra and Bode De Moraes, 2012; Chies, 2013).

Nevertheless, this impression masks the fact that over Brazilian History violent forms of repression have been utilized systematically against those belonging to the lower classes and/or to socially inferiorized groups. For example, Auras (1984), Ramos (1998, 2005) and Martins (2007) denounced the extensive employment of violence to suppress insurgents in the end of 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries in the South and Northeast of Brazil. In this regard, social movements such as *Canudos* (which happened in the state of Bahia), *Contestado* (which occurred in the South) and *Caldeirão* (which took place in the state of Ceará) were targets of intense violent outbursts brought about by State officials aiming to ensure the termination of these movements.

In order to problematize our argument, we intend to show how this topic is presented in three seminal works. We justify this choice not only on their influence in Social Sciences, but also on a reasonable consensus about their weight for different areas of intellectual production in Brazil (Ianni, 2000; Brandão, 2005).

Furthermore, in a second moment of our argument, we move the debate to the present, insofar as we wish to emphasize the framing role of violence in the most diverse spheres of social relations in Brazil. Our objective is to show not only the

pertinent analytical potency of these authors' conceptual apparatuses, but also to posit how the alluded emergence or even the resort to violence have not been deviant conducts. In truth, violent interactions are constituents of the social cement that bonds society altogether.

Therefore, to reach our objective, we have organized this essay in the following way. After this introduction, we discuss the importance of the contemporary debate about violence, focusing on the implications it has with Brazilian historical social inequalities and exclusion. Afterwards, we move on to present how violence is depicted in Gilberto Freyre's *Casa Grande & Senzala*. In his book, violence emerges as a fundamental element for the construction of "contradictory relations of harmony" established within patriarchal families.

After that, we introduce violence as an instance of cordiality as it is shown in Sérgio Buarque de Holanda's *Raízes do Brasil*, highlighting its role as a powerful tool to those situated in a higher hierarchical position to demonstrate their rule. Such violent dynamics have turned out being a preponderant historical component to the establishment of social order. Subsequently, underpinned on *Formação do Brasil Contemporâneo* by Caio Prado Junior, we pose that the resort to violence was not only restricted to the private realm, in the sense of the relationship set between proprietors and those submitted directly to their authority, but it was also employed broadly against all those belonging to any lower class. At last, in the final remarks, we offer our conclusions considering the arguments proposed here.

## Violence in contemporary Brazil

Adorno *et al.* (2016) asserted that the growth of urban violence has been faced as one of society's biggest concerns in Brazil in the last four decades. These authors emphasized a multiple morphology of how violence emerges in Brazilian social life, going from common felonies as well as crimes perpetrated by drug-related organizations to human rights violations and cases of domestic violence. Moreover, feelings of fear and unsafety towards these forms of crime have intensified, something exemplified in public opinion surveys and through the persistent focus this issue has received whether in print or electronic media. Ultimately, when violence surfaces as an aggression against individuals or the collectivity, it annihilates their sense of politics and, to an extent, disables a shared common world.

Nonetheless, it is imperative to bring forward that Brazilian patterns of wealth concentration and social inequality have diminished very little over the past forty years. Despite some advancements in certain areas, the inequality of access to basic rights and to justice, for instance, has increased as society has developed in terms of density and complexity, which has also led to an intensification of social conflicts. In this scenario, violence rates related to different sorts of crime have actually risen. In other words, common crimes, fatal violence connected with criminal organizations, grave violations to humans rights and

conflicts in personal relations have increased over time (Almendra and Bode De Moraes, 2012; Adorno *et al.*, 2016).

Furthermore, it is necessary to foreground the development of drug trafficking in the construction of collective sentiments. In our contemporaneity, drug trafficking has evolved as a disorganizing agent to traditional forms of sociability, particularly, within urban popular classes. It has prolonged to the high and middle ones as it stimulates fear and unveils the incapacity of public authorities to enforce law and order (Adorno, 2002b).

Regarding the stimulation of fear and its relationship with the media, we agree with the idea that the manipulation of determined forms of fear can be an important element for social control. The media has a central role for such as it enables not only the reproduction of specific dismays, but also reflects a certain diluted social perception. In their daily lives, people are confronted with violent situations whether as witnesses or protagonists as well as they receive common sense conceptions acquired in the mediated public sphere. These conceptions are recursively fed by processes of socialization and again by the media, which, in its turn, reinforces the collective construction about the perceived width of violence (Almendra and Bode De Moraes, 2012).

Moreover, after the period of military dictatorship (1964-1985), Brazilian society began to experience four main tendencies regarding the upsurge of violence. First, the growth of urban delinquency, for instance, crimes against patrimony and manslaughter. Second, the rise of the so-called organized crime connected with international drug trafficking, which has been causing deep changes in conventional models and profiles of urban delinquency, imposing new problems for penal law and for the standard functions of criminal justice. Third, human rights violations that jeopardize democratic political order. Fourth, the emergence of conflicts within intersubjective relations, as animosities between neighbors converge to deadly endings. Adorno (2002a, 2002b) suggested this typology of tendencies, but he also stressed that despite of their diverse roots, they must be thought in relational terms in order to make sense.

Moreover, in an attempt to elaborate a taxonomy about the explanatory efforts on contemporary violence, Adorno (2002a) groups such efforts in three directions. First, in explanations focusing on changes in society as well as in conventional patterns of delinquency and violence. Then, a second group underscores the crises in the criminal justice system. Finally, a third set of explanations that grants more importance to social segregation and inequality.

In order to align with our objective and argument, we prioritize the historical relevance implicit in explanations related to social segregation and inequalities. It is imperious to accentuate that such dense social and historical element has already appeared through different theoretical lenses in Brazilian Social Thought. Thus, we drew on the three most mentioned classical thinkers of Brazilian History, who provided pioneering interpretations about the role of violence in the constitution of sociability in Brazil. Whether as an integrating or disaggregating

character, violence has a patent social function for these three interpreters, to be focused over the next sections.

## **Casa Grande & Senzala: Violence as a social integrator**

In his *Casa Grande Et Senzala* of 1933, Gilberto Freyre took a rather different direction considering the intellectual trend of his time. Instead of perceiving miscegenation as a harmful phenomenon, a position defended by the advocates of scientific racism, Freyre (2003) affirmed that miscegenation enabled the formation of a hybrid society in Brazil with a strong ethnic identity (Lima, 2014). In his thought, the typical colonial landowning system, based on large rural properties oriented to the monoculture of sugarcane for exportation was a success, supported by slavery as the mode of production and commanded by an elite of landowners aligned with the economic interest of the Portuguese. Concomitantly, violence was converted into an intrinsic aspect of society, as it has been present in our authoritarian logic of command and in cultural imperatives since the colonial era.

Brazilian society was constituted as "agrarian in its structure, slave-based in its technique of economic exploration. A hybrid between the native – and later the negro – in the composition of the workforce" (Freyre, 2003, p. 65). In this sense, the Portuguese presented a singular predisposition to this hybrid and slave-based colonization of the tropic, being able to perform the "astonishing" transportation of almost entire nations of negroes from Africa to Brazil, most destined to the agrarian work (Freyre, 2003).

Institutionalizing slavery implied in both physical and symbolic forms of domination whose targets were primarily these slaves coming from Africa. For such, the negro submission was fundamental mostly because of the sociability enacted within the *casas grandes*, a feature that turned out being irradiated to other branches of social life (Velho, 2000). It is important to state that geological, botanical and physical-geographical aspects also conditioned the social space occupied by the patriarchal system in the sugarcane plantation. Nevertheless, the patriarchy was superior to any physical elements in its stable format and ongoing processes as well as in its actions and dynamics (Freyre, 2003).

Violence intertwined most relations established between white conquerors and native women, but later became extensive to the interactions established between landowners, their offspring as well as wives and their male and female slaves. It is possible to understand the description of brutal events being alleviated in a condescending manner through Freyre's words (2003, p. 113), as in the passage "a kind of white sadism and native or black masochism was predominant in sexual and social relations between the European and the women from races subjected to their rule". These relations were passed from aristocrat father to son, for instance, when the infant expressed his sadism by ordering a slave to be beaten, to have his or her

pulled out or by ordering slaves to fight one another. Moreover, the aristocrat's wife demonstrated the same sadism when she ordered female slaves to be punished for no explicit reason besides some possible jealousy or envy.

The sugar cane region in the Northeast of Brazil was the place where the patriarchal system reached its apex, represented by the binomial *casa grande* and *senzala*. Freyre (2003) argued that this construction provided the conditions for an entire economic, social and political system. A system built essentially on the violent subjection of the black slave to the white lord. The *casa grande's* characteristics, i.e., the slave-based monoculture placed on a large rural property, were not restricted to sugar cane plantation or to the northeastern patriarchy. This binomial model became the translation of a Brazilian social character (Calazans, 2007).

If the patriarchal society is a "luxury" of balanced antagonisms, this balance was only viable through the resort to violence. Freyre emphasized the "patriarchal civilization" as being capable of holding together the very oppositions generated in its own basis (Goldstein, 2010).

Therefore, the Brazilian social formation, laid upon the colonial family, constituted itself as a legacy of the agrarian wealth associated with the use of slave-based workforce, which, by their turn, also engendered a whole variety of social and economic functions. A deep process of balanced antagonisms spawned this formation, being the most fundamental one the antagonism established between lords and slaves (Freire, 2003).

Moreover, one can dialectically add to this authoritarian rationale its own contemporary reflexes through, e.g., the violence suffered by women. For instance, the rate of homicides against women was of 1,353 victims in 1980 and went up to 4,762 in 2013, an increase in the rate per one hundred thousand inhabitants of 2.3% in 1980 to 4.8% in 2013 (Waiselfisz, 2015). In this regard, "from the 4,762 homicides against women recorded in 2013, 2,394, i.e., 50.3% of the total were committed by a victim's family member. This figure represents that seven femicides happened every day and all their perpetrators were family members" (Waiselfisz, 2015, p. 70).

In the daily life, a parent, a stepparent, a spouse, an ex-spouse, a brother or a child of the victim is the most usual vector of domestic violence, which can be either physical, psychological or both (Waiselfisz, 2015). Violence against women strengthens an authoritarian logic and utterly objectifies women's submission to men in domestic as well as in political interactions.

This subjection also emphasizes a racial aspect inasmuch as if women are more exposed to violence and its physical, psychological and economic consequences, black women are even more vulnerable to it. For example, there were 1,747 white victims of homicide in 2003, a rate that decreased to 1,576 in 2013, foregrounding an actual decline of 9.8% in this period. Nonetheless, homicides involving black female victims raised 54.2%, going from 1,864 in 2003 to 2,875 in 2013. Thus, although such vulnerability manifests itself in different ways over History, it keeps pending asymmetrically against African-descendent populations.

Therefore, it can be understood that the rates of homicide involving black women brings forward the form that the relations of subjection are conditioned in Brazil, demonstrating the power racial violence has in the very constitution of Brazilian social life. The sort of relations perpetrated in and from the *casa-grande* to the *senzala* have been updated through domestic and racial violence, integrative elements of our society.

## The violent cordiality in *Raízes do Brasil*

Sergio Buarque de Holanda's contribution in *Raízes do Brasil* to understand the role of violence lies in its central concept: the cordial man. Holanda was concerned with interpreting the transition to modernity, thus, he investigated the Portuguese heritage for the roots to understand the configuration on which Brazilian society was based, taking into account the way it was entering modern times. Such society was product of a strong Portuguese influence, but it was also the result of interactions with African slaves and native peoples.

The looseness of its social structure, the lack of organized hierarchy and the traditional personalism have been formational features to Brazil (Holanda, 1995). In Buarque's vision, there was a complete, or almost complete, absence of any racial pride in the Lusitanian colony, something that might be explained by the fact that the Portuguese were also a mixed-race people. Accordingly, "Brazil was not the arena of anything new. The mixture of colored people had started in the metropolis itself" (Holanda, 1995, p. 53).

In this sense, Damazio (2010) indicates that Holanda's attempt to comprehend Brazil was intertwined by the idea that our formation was in deficit because of the combination of European cultures and ethnic mismatches. This material and symbolic disagreement is seminal to understand Brazilian reality. This matrix was the major innovation that made Buarque's vision different of the predominant rhetoric of his time.

About the "cordial man", it is necessary to highlight that it does not refer only to a sort of docility, connected to an alleged submission to command. The concept is, as well as the book itself, loaded with typical antinomic kantian characters, which inspired, in their turn, the weberian epistemology (Cohn, 2002). In fact, cordiality is linked to the most diverse forms of socialization.

The cordial man refers to the difficulty this Brazilian ideal type would have to deal with social and/or political issues in a strict rational manner. In effect, the cordial man treats the public sphere in an impersonal way, as if it was the arena of individual interests instead of collective ones. Cordiality would be a founding trait of the Brazilian individual, abiding him or her to foster its worldview on passion rather than rationality. Thus, his or her subjectivity is heavily selfish and egocentric. "Cordial" has its etymological roots in the word "heart"; hence, the Brazilian cordiality would be underpinned much more by irrational and violent passions than by docility (Damazio, 2010).

To Holanda, the large rural property became the main unit of production because of the abundance of underexplored fertile lands. In a strict rational way, the introduction of African slaves turned out to be the easiest solution to solve the workforce problem. The negro, as a slave, would not represent serious obstacles to landowners for they displayed "a coy and sugary smoothness that pervaded, even in early stages, all spheres of colonial life" (Holanda, 1995, p. 61).

The prevalent feeling among the dominators towards the working mass was of detachment. Mainly colored men formed such mass: "the slave from plantations and gold mines was not only a source of energy, a kind of human coal waiting for the industrialist to replace him by other fuel" (Holanda, 1995, p. 55). These large crops were only feasible due to slavery and the amount of land available. To protect slavery, the Portuguese government even created a type of institutional racist exclusivism which prohibited black men and their descendants to exert better-ranked jobs (Holanda, 1995).

Although it is not a direct focus of the book, violence has an important role to understand how social cohesion is constructed in social spaces in Brazil. Cordiality brings, in its anti-nomic bulge, both docility and the normalization of violence as a solution to conflicts. The socialization processes that emerge in Brazilian society have been historically permeated by ambiguous engenderments between kindness (expressed through hospitality, for example) and violent outbursts in public as well as private spaces.

Therefore, violence appears in *Raízes do Brasil* as an inherent resource for the cordial man's typical sentimentality. This resource interweaves the most diverse forms of socialization and grants cohesion to established societal forms, not only in their immediate individual shapes, but also to the relations people settle with institutions. In this perspective, the little resistance to the use of violence, its trivialization and normality in Brazilian society can be comprehended through this cordial matrix, an indispensable characterizing element to "being" Brazilian.

To understand the role of violence in contemporaneity, taking Holanda's work as a base, we began from the comprehension that cordiality is in the very constitution of the Brazilian individual. In this sense, the understanding about the cordial man does not only encompass its docility, but its little resistance to the use, normalization and trivialization of violence. A phenomenon that can be expressed through the official statistics about the topic. For example, the number of fatal victims of firearms in Brazil went from 8,710 in 1980 to 44,861 in 2014, an increase in the rate of homicides per one hundred thousand inhabitants from 5.1% to 21.2% (Waiselfisz, 2016). In addition, from 1980 to 2014 967,851 people died victims of gun violence, 830,420 of those deaths, i.e., 85.8% of the total were homicides (Waiselfisz, 2016). Such figure highlights the difficulty the cordial man faces to act in a pure rational fashion insofar as it is easily taken by violent outbursts.

Regarding homicides, the most prominent form of death by firearms in Brazil, it becomes important to analyze it in a

racial perspective again insofar as it is observable that Brazilian cordiality irradiated from Portuguese colonizers to other populations. On the one hand, 13,224 homicides by firearms were committed in the white population in 2003 and this figure decreased to 9,766 in 2014, a decline of 26.1%. On the other hand, the quantity of black victims raised from 20,291 in 2003 to 29,813 in 2014, an escalation of 46.9% (Waiselfisz, 2016). In other words, due to social and economic causes that have deep historical basis, the direct objectifications of violence continue to victimize black populations much more, inasmuch as they are effectively situated in an inferior position in the hierarchical organization of society.

In truth, the number of homicides with black victims enable us to state two affirmations: inequality in Brazil holds deep historical roots and it has strong racial connotations. These figures also allow us to theorize that the construction of spaces of cordiality in Brazil have been interweaved by backgrounds of violent prejudices.

## Violence between classes in *Formação do Brasil Contemporâneo*

In his book, Caio Prado Júnior states that violence would not be just a form of action of a race against another (like an "integrating element" as it appears in *Casa Grande Et Senzala*) neither against a social stand emerging from an ideal-typical matrix (in the way it develops in *Raízes do Brasil*). In *Formação do Brasil Contemporâneo*, violence settles as a seminal tool for the rule of dominant classes over the dominated. It serves, in its many social-historical modes, as an instrument for maintaining a hegemonic order. In other words, violence enables subjection.

Prado Jr.'s interpretation drew on the analysis of the colony's hierarchies and social structures, constructed by a small group of landowners and a crowd of slaves and individuals belonging to lower classes. The first arose as rulers of the colonizing process in its many segments, while the second and the third constituted the huge working mass (Prado Júnior, 1963). These relations between lords and slaves were inscribed as insurmountable barriers to an approximation amid individuals or classes. In this regard, such relations "label the individual, contribute to strengthen and reinforce the barriers that separate classes. The approximation and fusion become more difficult, as the rule of one class over the other becomes pronounced" (Prado Júnior, 1963, p. 274).

Focusing on geographical characters to outline the colonial enterprise, dividing it in large extensions of land, Prado Jr. observes that the colonial enterprise was only possible because of violent processes established from the metropolis to the colony. This observation on its own would not be the author's idiosyncrasy, but it is imperative to stress his focus on how the subterfuge to violence objectifies in the strategies set by the ruling government to repel popular upsurges, as well as the importance Prado Jr. gave to those popular movements *per se* (Baptista Jr., 2010).

Prado Jr. argues that to understand the meaning of colonization, the colony must be seen as an organism insofar as it is part of an organic totality which is, in its turn, submitted to the production oriented to European consuming markets. This direction was feasible due to an institutional order meshed in violence, aspect that framed all colonial society, with elements of continuity objectified even in Brazilian contemporary social organization (Baptista Jr., 2010). It is possible to affirm, roughly, that violence from macrosocial relations was irradiated to the most diverse microsociological realms.

In this sense, the slave workforce was introduced as a type domination impetrated through violence considering two factors: labor and sex. Regarding the labor factor, it is "the constraint physical effort demanded; it did not educate the individual; it did not add any moral element; and, conversely, it degraded him" (Prado Júnior, 1963, p. 342). The slave was seen as an irrational living instrument of work, being reduced to its brutal and material force, which could be conducted through the overseer's violent whip (Prado Júnior, 1963). Considering the sexual factor, the female slave was recognized as instrument of sexual necessities for dominators. As a byproduct of slavery, it was expected that she provided easy caresses to satisfy the colonizer's sexual needs given that he was deprived of women of his own race and category (Prado Júnior, 1963).

In *Formação do Brasil Contemporâneo*, these processes were legitimized via external and legal relations as well as through religious practices and norms present in moral and sacred codes, regulated by religion. The use of these rules were softer to whiter slaves than to blacker ones and the religious rules defended the natives whereas accepted and promoted African slavery. Thus, "the negro did not have any protection in Brazil" (Prado Júnior, 1963, p. 276). Black slaves had their moral and intellectual formation treated with contempt, creating an enslaved low-level mass, as it is seen in the passage "the slave is a 'thing' for his lord, disposable as he best wishes. The restrictions to this rule, which would bring the slave some protection, were not numerous" (Prado Júnior, 1963, p. 277).

In a historical perspective, violence (as well as colonization itself) cannot be discussed only as an opposition between external and internal agents. In truth, the colonization process required incorporating ways of thinking and acting from external agents by internal ones, that is, the internalization of praxiological categories from the dominators by the dominated. In effect, this movement was practicable in Brazil mainly through violent engenderments from one class over another.

To consolidate its condition, the position of colony involves the complete subjection of dominated so the exploitation of all resources the colony might offer be successful. The very idea of "conquest" brings in its core this notion as it makes clear the inherent violence to the entire colonial process.

Furthermore, violence updates itself as an instrument of domination in the most idiosyncratic ways. For instance, through the attempt of stripping down workers from their rights with the current Labor Reform in Brazil. This reform presents "a

strategy to eliminate the structures of social life and to promote conditions that favor only one actor in society: the employers" (Galvão *et al.*, 2017, p. 7). The proposal inhibits perspectives of a better future to the working classes, because it submits them to insecurities of the so-called market and to labor precarization.

In this regard, two studies from the International Labor Organization (ILO) – the first took place in 63 countries from 1993 to 2003 and the second in 111 countries from 2008 to 2014 – about the impact of norms related to labor protection and level of employment reached the following conclusions. There is no statistical significance between more flexible labor laws and levels of employment. Conversely, countries where regulation decreased actually faced higher levels of unemployment whereas in the ones where regulation grew unemployment rates declined (Galvão *et al.*, 2017).

The kind of predominant interests in Brazilian Labor Reform also display the maintenance of a very determined hegemonic order between classes, given that employers preserve their historical privileges. If in the past the colonizing enterprise was possible only because of the use of metropolitan force against the colony, in the present, we observe the engagement of ideological and repressive State apparatuses against the working class through the Labor Reform.

Furthermore, there are two central purposes in this strategy of disassembling social policies and withdrawing labor rights: to reduce State's protagonism in formulating and implementing policies as well as to allow privatizing public organizations (Galvão *et al.*, 2017). These maneuvers aim to create strict benefits to very specific sectors, preserving asymmetrical power relations of negotiation between employers and employees, empowering only the former. "The intention is to deconstruct the social protection network built in a very unequal Brazil and, as a consequence, to empty out Labor Justice whose ultimate function is to make Labor Law concrete [to society]" (Galvão *et al.*, 2017, p. 16).

Therefore, this issue is actually part of a broader scenario of neoliberal reforms and represents an effort to dismantle the State and its public policies. "It is History being perpetuated and reinvented in the present juncture, putting at stake democracy and the struggle of workers for their rights" (Galvão *et al.*, 2017, p. 8).

## Final remarks

This essay aimed to discuss the role of violence as a form of political action in Brazilian social life. Based on three classical authors Brazilian Social Thought, namely, Gilberto Freyre, Sergio Buarque de Holanda and Caio Prado Júnior. Our argument was that, although the intensification of violent experiences seem to be a recent phenomenon, violence as a form of social control and intervention has existed (and persisted) at least since the colonial period.

Through the theoretical lenses of these interpreters, it was possible to see that violence has a founding importance

to social cohesion in Brazil. In the work of Gilberto Freyre, *Casa Grande & Senzala*, violence is shown as an essential aspect for social integration in the formation process of Brazilian society. It was key during the period of slavery as a mode of physical and symbolic domination that was objectified in its main *locus*, the *casa-grande*, complemented by the *senzala*. Roughly, this system consisted in the violent submission of the negro slave by its white owner mainly through the systematic employment of physical (and sexual) violence.

Next, in *Raízes do Brasil* by Sérgio Buarque de Holanda, the comprehension of how violence has been engendered within society relates directly to the ideal-typical cordiality of the Brazilian individual. Violence in public and private spaces emerges as the stratagem of a specific kind of impersonal (and emotional) individual to deal with social and political issues.

Afterwards, in *Formação do Brasil Contemporâneo*, Caio Prado Júnior portrays violence as a vital instrument of domination for the ruling classes. In this sense, violence has the duty to maintain the hegemonic order. The different patterns of violent processes impetrated by the metropolis against the colony were irradiated to ensure the rule of the dominant over the dominated.

In another moment of our discussion, using the authors' analytical categories, but employing contemporary data, we suggested the actualization of their debate. We aimed to underline the structuring importance of violence in Brazilian societal life. Moreover, the focus was to argue about the pertinence of their conceptual apparatuses, underscoring that the alleged "recent emergence of violence" is in fact false. The subterfuge to it in and by society is not an anomalous phenomenon. In effect, the systematic use or outbursts of violence are integrating parts of society's organization in Brazil.

Therefore, it is possible to conclude that violence is a constituting element of our social cohesion. Although we have not ignored the contribution of contemporary factors such as drug trafficking and the media, it is perceivable that violence has been present at least since the arrival of the Portuguese invaders. In the most diverse ways and shapes, violence appears to be fundamental for the production and reproduction of associative societal life in Brazil. Unfortunately, it has served continuously as our "social cement".

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