

Popular insurrections, conflicts and compromises between free and freed men in Portuguese America and Rio de la Plata. Commentary of texts by Gustavo Paz and Luiz Geraldo Silva

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Abstract

This article presents some comments to the texts "*La guerra plebeya: movilización popular en el interior del Río de la Plata durante la independencia*" from Gustavo Paz and "*Afrodescendentes livres e libertos e igualdade política na América portuguesa. Mudança de status, escravidão e perspectiva atlântica (1750-1840)*" from Luiz Geraldo Silva. I emphasize the text's main arguments and focus my comments on the historiographical and conceptual discussions presented.

Resumo

Este artigo apresenta comentários aos textos "*La guerra plebeya: movilización popular en el interior del Río de la Plata durante la independencia*" de Gustavo Paz e "*Afrodescendentes livres e libertos e igualdade política na América portuguesa. Mudança de status, escravidão e perspectiva atlântica (1750-1840)*" de Luiz Geraldo Silva. Destaco inicialmente os principais argumentos de cada texto e concentro meus comentários nas discussões historiográficas e conceituais apresentadas.

Keywords

Historiography – popular mobilization – independences wars – Free and Freedmen African Descent – Portuguese Empire

Palavras-chave

historiografia – mobilização popular – guerra de independências – Rio da Prata – Afrodescendentes livres e libertos – Império português

The forum *Insurreições populares, conflitos e acomodações entre livres e libertos na América portuguesa e no Rio da Prata (1750-1840)*—Popular insurrections, conflicts and compromises between free and freed men in Portuguese America and Rio de la Plata—discussed “Popular war: Gauchos and the challenge to Elite power in Northern Rio de la Plata in the Revolutionary Period” —by Gustavo Paz (Universidad Nacional de Tres de Febrero y Conicet, Instituto Ravignani/UBA) and “Free and freed Afro-Descendants and political equality in Portuguese America: Change of status, slavery, Atlantic perspective”, by Luiz Geraldo Silva (UFPR). These two thought-provoking texts are the result of research developed for the project, “Política e sociedade nas Américas ibéricas: independência, formação do estado e da nação: Brasil e Rio da Prata, 1750-1850”—Politics and Society in Iberian-America: Independence, State Building in Brazil and Rio de La Plata—presented to CAPES’ International Cooperation Program and Argentina’s Ministry of Science, Technology and Productive Innovation, under the Joint Research Groups modality, since July 2012. This is a project that among its multiple merits has the objective of bringing together the experiences of the Iberian colonial empires (Spain and Portugal) and of their territories in America which undoubtedly display converging and articulated historical trajectories. It proceeds to accomplishing this task by focusing on the period of crises of the *Ancien Régimes* of the Iberian world and on the waning of their colonial empires in America, a period which traditional analyses tend to delimit by underscoring differences and distances rather than approaches. To this end, it seeks to take their dynamic relationships, reciprocal interdependencies and global relations into account, not just in Europe but also in Africa and Asia, all from an Atlantic perspective.¹

It should be noted that this research approaches themes, problems and the treatment of different sources relative not just to the elites, but also, and above all, to the popular strata. It delves not so much into the political projects of the winners, but mainly into the threads of defeated political projects, not for that of any lesser importance. It connects these processes to other more widespread ones concerning the forms of government (monarchies, republics, federations) and their institutions (such as State building in confrontation with religious authorities). Finally, this project also involves the study of the fields connected to large-scale commerce and its political and Atlantic sociabilities.²

As such, the project brings together three basic threads of collective research: *a)* Political projects and independence in Rio de la Plata and Brazil (1750-1850);³ *b)* Political networks and Commercial networks: Rio de Janeiro and Rio de la Plata (1750-1830);⁴ and *c)* War, citizenship and ethnical-racial questions (1750-1830), with the authors of the texts presented in this forum, Luiz Geraldo Silva and Gustavo Paz, as directing researchers and advisers.

The fact that these works are inserted in this line of research heralds the advances of the latest historiography over the agency of the popular bases in the pro-independence political processes and the formation of the Iberian-American states and nations. In this vein, these works perform a comparative study of the social patterns of recruitment, the call to arms and the possibility of access to citizenship, taking into account the men of color in the context of the French Caribbean, Spanish-America, and Portuguese America, and the social group of farm laborers of the Rio de la Plata hinterland known as *gauchos*.

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Project for Technical, Scientific Research & Cooperation and Human Resources Building, *Politics and society in the Iberian Americas: Independence, state and nation building—Brazil and Rio de la Plata, 1750-1850*, presented to the CAPES and Ministry of Science, Technology and Productive Innovation of the Republic of Argentina’s Program for International Cooperation, under the Joint Research Groups modality, Brasilia, July 2012, p.4

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Ibid p. 6.

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Researchers and advisers in charge: João Paulo G. Pimenta (USP), Wilma Peres Costa (UNIFESP), Marcela Ternavasio (UNR) and Ignacio Martínez (UNR).

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Researchers and advisers in charge: Andréa Slemian (UNIFESP) and Elsa Caula (UNR).

The two articles involve very consistent, up-to-date and innovative historiographic reflections and debates including a strong conceptual discussion, the fruit of their authors' mature and consolidated work on the presented topics. And that is why, despite having felt prompted by countless interesting questions developed in the two texts, I have chosen to comment on the historiographic and conceptual discussions they bring up.

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DONGHI, Tulio Halperin. *Revolución y guerra. Formación de una élite dirigente en la Argentina criolla*. Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI, 1972; DONGHI, Tulio Halperin. Estudio preliminar. In: LAFFORGUE, Jorge. *Historias de caudillos argentinos*. Buenos Aires: Alfaguara, 2000, p. 19-48; DONGHI, Tulio Halperin. Militarización revolucionaria en Buenos Aires, 1806-1815. In: _____ (Dir.). *El ocaso del orden colonial en Hispanoamérica*. Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 1978, 121-158.

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See DI MEGLIO, Gabriel. La participación popular en la revolución de independencia en el actual territorio argentino, 1820-1821. *Anuario de Estudios Americanos* 68 (2), July-December 2011, 429-454; DI MEGLIO, Gabriel. Un nuevo actor para un nuevo escenario. La participación política de la plebe urbana de Buenos Aires en la década de la Revolución (1810-1820). *Boletín del Instituto de Historia Argentina y Americana "Dr. Emilio Ravignani"* 24, 2001, 7-43; DI MEGLIO, Gabriel. ¡Viva el bajo pueblo! *La plebe urbana de Buenos Aires y la política entre la Revolución de Mayo y el Rosismo*. Buenos Aires: Prometeo, 2006; FRADKIN, R. (Dir.). *¿Y el pueblo dónde está? Contribuciones para una historia popular de la revolución de independencia en el Río de la Plata*. Buenos Aires: Prometeo, 2008; FRADKIN, R. Los actores de la revolución y el orden social. *Boletín del Instituto de Historia Argentina y Americana "Dr. Emilio Ravignani"*, n. 33, 2010, pp. 79-90; BRAGONI, Beatriz, LÓPEZ, Sara Mata de. Militarización e identidades políticas en la revolución rioplatense. *Anuario de Estudios Americanos* 64 (1), January-June 2007.

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FRADKIN, R. (Dir.). *¿Y el pueblo dónde está? Contribuciones para una historia popular de la revolución de independencia en el Río de la Plata*. Buenos Aires: Prometeo, 2008; FRADKIN, R. "Los actores de la revolución y el orden social." *Boletín del Instituto de Historia Argentina y Americana Dr Emilio Ravignani* n.33, 2010, p. 79-90; FRADKIN, R. and GELMAN, Jorge (Dir.). *Desafíos al orden. Política y sociedad rurales durante la Revolución de Independencia*. Rosario: Prohistoria, 2008.

Commentary of "Popular war: Gauchos and the challenge to Elite power in Northern Rio de la Plata in the Revolutionary Period", by Gustavo Paz⁵
Based on the narratives of the urban elites of the interior of Rio de la Plata in the first half of the nineteenth century who were involved in building a new centralist republican order for the preservation of their ascendancy in the new political system, Gustavo Paz starts his article with a diagnosis: At that point in time those urban elites felt they had completely failed. Away from power and exiled from the fatherland, they placed the blame for their situation both on the popular mobilization of a rural militia triggered by a never-ending war for independence under the command of *caudillos*, local military leaders whom the urban elites identified as all-powerful, new political players, and on the democratic and egalitarian tendencies that came along with that war.

Although the Argentinean historiography of the 1970s rescued and developed this diagnosis—specially in Tulio Halperin Donghi's groundbreaking and classic work *Revolución y Guerra*, as well as in other of his books and articles⁶—and despite the interest in popular political agency boasting a long life in the historiographic studies in this country, from Bartolomeo Mitre's founding texts in the nineteenth century up to the Marxist interpretations dedicated to the analysis of the proletarian classes one hundred years later—historical studies about popular agency only started to gain relevance in Argentina very recently,⁷ a development that has brought it closer to other historiographies, including Mexico's, which has been working on these themes for a long time now.

Paz rescues the works by Raúl Fradkin,⁸ who stakes out two very different fields of analysis in the historiography of nineteenth century Rio de la Plata. One he names "political history," which focuses on a history from the top hinging on the analysis of institutions, discourses, ideas and representations. It is a history which looks at the margins from the center, foregrounding the cities, the urban elites and the state. This "new political history" made a significant impact on Argentinean historiography about the nineteenth century, but according to Paz made little room for the study of the popular stratum, as it encouraged dissociating political analysis from its social component, leading the study of the political arena to ignore the social conflicts which would make the behavior of those players intelligible. The other field, which he names "popular history," and which focuses on the study of the forms of collective action, popular cultures, and the struggles led by the popular strata, specially the farm hands and the indigenous people. Its perspective departs from the "bottom," favoring the margins over the center, and the popular sectors over the elites.

From the analysis of these different historiographic perspectives, Paz highlights two important questions, which he develops in his article: For one, he underscores the existing link between the pre-revolutionary historical experience of these popular sectors and the accomplishments of the revolution, in this way refuting the analyses marking 1808 as the definitive

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GUERRA, François-Xavier. *Modernidad y Independencias: ensayos sobre las revoluciones hispánicas*. México: Editorial Mapfre; Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1992.

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PAZ, Gustavo L. *Province and Nation in Northern Argentina. Peasants, Elite, and the State, 1780-1880*. Ph.D. Dissertation: Emory University, 1999; PAZ, Gustavo L. *Las Guerras Civiles (1820-1870)*. Buenos Aires: Eudeba, 2007.

date for the beginning of the revolutionary period, and shedding light on preexisting social and ethnic conflicts; secondly, he notes that the innovations stemming from revolutionary politics provided popular sectors with a certain autonomy, a choice of opportunities and a repertoire of political actions ranging beyond the boundaries of colonial traditions. I should note that, for me, Paz's rescue of the historical prerevolutionary experiences of the popular sectors and their fundamental links with the successes of the independence revolution in the Rio de la Plata region comes through as a key contribution of his article insofar as in it he questions a strong trend in Argentinean historiography mainly represented by the work of François Xavier Guerra⁹ establishing 1808 as the year when the revolution started.

Gustavo Paz situates his historiographic work in the tradition of the popular history—which has flourished in Argentina over the last decade in the wake of a renovation of the field of political history and the celebrations around Spanish–America's independence bicentennials. In this field, specifically, the author has long been studying the participation of the *gauchos* from Rio de la Plata's northern region in the revolutionary war. He notes that the *gauchos* took part in the war from its very beginning, in 1812, taking a more widespread role as of 1815, when the war became endemic; and that between 1815 and 1821, the mobilization of the peasants into militias in the Salta and Jujuy jurisdictions became an open challenge to the "decent people" of those towns, leading to the destruction of the foundations of colonial order. He hypothesizes that for the towns of the interior of Rio de la Plata the war for independence meant the release of existing social and ethnic tensions under containment since colonial times. The mobilization of large popular segments during the revolutionary times led to a rupture of the social ties between the elite and the rural population, rooted on sharecropping, farm labor, the provision of credit and the administration of justice by the town council, or *cabildo*.

Ever since his doctoral thesis the author has been studying the popular characteristics of this mobilization,¹⁰ which was under the leadership of Martín Güemes, the overall militia commander as of 1814, and governor as of 1815. Güemes consolidated his power by extending protection and material compensation to the rural population who had taken up arms, the *gauchos*, who mobilized to such a degree as to strongly affect ancient social ties. The principal argument relative to the study of these groups refers to the thesis that the independence war in the interior of Rio de la Plata was above all a social and ethnic war involving conflicts between the elites and the mobilized peasantry. The profound mobilization of the *gaucho* peasantry allowed them 1) access to *fuero militar* – military jurisdiction, and 2) access to benefits from the waiver of sharecropping agreement payments—facts which, as a whole, eroded the colonial hierarchical ties, almost leading to their disappearance.

Sharecroppers and farm hands who occupied the *fincas* of rural proprietors, and had a share of their landlords' cattle began to answer them as equals and to denounce them to the authorities, leading in this way to actions which were unthinkable before the independence revolution. These actions seem to provide a framework to the new social ties, which among its basic components included a notion of equality underpinned by the *gauchos'* collaboration to the war effort. Vaguely defined, however, this equality was based on the repudiation both of the bonds of colonial deference and control, as much in their social as in their juridical aspects, and

of references to ethnic markers. It was only in the 1820s that the ebbing of the war and the relative political and institutional balance attained by the provincial elites allowed the latter to crown their longstanding efforts to impose discipline on the *gauchos* by enacting an orderly process of militia recruitment, revoking their right to military justice granted ten years earlier and increasing the coercive means of rural employment.

Paz performs an interesting analysis of the origin of the concept of *gaucho*—peasants who became militia soldiers to defend the land against the frequent Spanish invasions—a name first used in documents as of 1814. Socially, they were profiled as landless peasants—most of them adults between 20 and 35 years of age, married with families—who worked as farm hands or earned their livelihood as sharecroppers in the *haciendas* of the elites, to whom they paid rent in the form of barter, cash and work. Their reputation as valiant and ferocious soldiers, skilled at managing cattle and in the use of the knife—as rather undisciplined characters with deep knowledge of the land—starts to be built at this time.

I will concentrate my comments on the author's understanding of what is known as *new political history*. I believe that the recovery of the political history marking the most recent Latin-American historiography raises questions that overshadow the vision of a history divided between a history of the elites and another of the popular strata. Unquestioningly, the historiographic renewal effort linked to what is conventionally called *new political history* involves the rehabilitation of an intellectual and juridical-institutional history often identified with the history of political language or with the conceptual history of politics: an intellectual history with a field of studies encompassing forms of thought as wholes, instead of the traditional history of ideas. Currently, there is a significant consensus among historians when it comes to determining the connections between intellectual history and social history, as well as with anthropology, political sciences and sociology. In this way, intellectual history is supposed to become concerned with how ideas articulate with their external conditions. This is not a history of ideas in the abstract, that display a life of their own, but rather of ideas related to a given context. An important consequence of this approach may be found in the tendency intellectual history has of breaking established disciplinary boundaries as it studies ideas and actions in the context of social practices. This renewal begins in the 1990s and, in Latin America, coincides with the transitions to democracy, which brought with them a renewed interest in the political and institutional history of these countries.

The history of political language or the history of concepts, for example, show how this community shared a common political vocabulary. In the context of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century transformations of the Atlantic Basin, this vocabulary produced, in the Americas, intense political experimentation and an accompanying resignifying of key concepts. Its "basic methodological claim can be summarized in the following terms: The political and social conflicts of the past should be discovered and interpreted through the conceptual horizon of their times and in accordance to the mutually shared linguistic usage of the agents in these conflicts."¹¹ Thus the history of concepts stakes the claim over the need to determine the concepts constituting the specific vocabulary of political and social language, and ties the concepts employed in political, social and economic discussions to the groups who either support or

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JASMIN, Marcelo and FERES JR., João. (org.). *História dos conceitos: debates e perspectivas*. Rio de Janeiro: Editora PUC-Rio; Edições Loyola: IUPERJ, 2006, p. 12. (Tradução feita por mim)

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RICHTER, Melvin. *Begriffsgeschichte in theory and practice: reconstructing the history of political concepts and languages*. In: MELCHING, W. & VILEMA, W. (org.) *Main currents in cultural history: ten essays*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1994, p.124., *apud*: JASMIN, Marcelo and FERES JR., João (orgs.). *História dos conceitos: debates e perspectivas*. Op. Cit., p. 23. (Tradução feita por mim)

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TERNAVASIO, Marcela. "Política y cultura política ante la crisis del orden colonial." *Boletín del Instituto de Historia Argentina y Americana Dr. Emilio Ravignani*, Buenos Aires, n. 33, dez. 2011, pp. 39-53. Available at <http://www.scielo.org.ar/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0524-97672011000100007&lng=es&trm=iso>

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Ibid, p. 39. (Tradução feita por mim)

reject the conflict. It is about rethinking, "on the one hand the reciprocal ties between continuities, changes and innovations in the meanings and usages of political and social concepts, and, on the other hand, the large scale structural changes in the government, society and economy."¹² In this sense, emphasis should be placed on the works by Noemí Goldman, Fabio Wasserman, Elias Palti or Hilda Sabato, Marcela Ternavasio, Jorge Myers, and many other Argentinean historians who, despite not identified with these labels, recently have been working on Argentina's nineteenth century political history.

Here I must point out that this discussion about the different understandings of what is held to be the new political history has been the object of riveting discussions among Argentinean historians immersed in the political history of the revolutionary period. Marcela Ternavasio, for example, in her article, "Política y cultura política ante la crisis del orden colonial," published in the already cited special Instituto Ravignani number dedicated to the May 1810 Revolution Bicentennial,¹³ stresses the need to move beyond a combative history opposing what is known as traditional history, to a reflection on the existing conflicts inside a certain historiographic consensus about this new political history which at its core brings up different perspectives, shades of interpretation and significant points of divergence.

According to her, many of the critics of the "new political history" label appended to this task of renewal, prefer to speak of "new perspectives," accepting that these perspectives formulated new questions that shed light on unknown or little known facets of the historical process; there are also those who ask themselves whether the new perspectives of the "new political history" are really different, or whether it is only a matter of points of view within an already configured field of unquestionable problems. Relative to this, Ternavasio shows that a certain consensus already exists both over the autonomy of the political history field and the supposition that many of its problems and questions do not stem from other fields, but are decoded within its own domain. In this way, this discussion tends to rescue the always difficult dialogue between political history and social and economic history. For her, "The exchanges between political history and social and economic history—even as they surpass the old perspectives in which politics is a variable that depends on the social and the economic factors—are not free from tensions, the expression of serious misgivings about accepting the premiss of an autonomous politics and, particularly, the hypothesis that the independence revolutions were basically political phenomena."¹⁴ Such tensions become stronger in the debate with social history which, despite having expanded its thematic field and methodological perspectives, insists on adopting a history format which presupposes a certain gap between those who work on a renewed political history focusing on the role of the elites—a top to bottom sort of history—and another history made from the bottom upwards, that is more involved with social factors, paying more attention to subaltern groups.

The critique of those who take the latter perspective make of their colleagues who work on a history centered on the political dynamics of the elites is that they suffer from a kind of social deficit. By the same token, and in the reverse sense, the latter could question the political deficit of some interpretations. For Ternavasio, in some cases such critiques seem to exhibit "traces of the old structure of socio-economic determinism," insofar as they cannot conceal their difficulty in accepting the legitimacy of

the multiple facets the object offers. "If the renewal of political history is marked by a multiplicity of perspectives (the convergence and intersection of which no longer stem from a single source of theoretical inspiration) and by an expansion of its field of studies (underpinned by the certainty that *power* expresses itself in many different ways deserving analysis), then I have to ask myself whether a return to the search for some kind of synthesis or convergence of the two different levels of analysis conceals a reality in which it is assumed that the new perspectives do not require—as they did previously—to be converted into hegemonic paradigms or models, but rather into one more point of view among others."¹⁵ Her conclusion is that the increase in the number of political perspectives brought about by the *new political history* broadened her field of studies and created a displacement in which politics and political culture merged into a single thread.

I should say that I do not think Gustavo Paz's work ought to be slotted into any type of orthodox theory or methodological formula. On the contrary, his interest in the popular participation in the political life establishes an essential object, and his research contributes to the building of a specific field of studies—the political history of the popular strata—as well as adds to the reconstruction of the ways the rural population took part in politics throughout the nineteenth century. He has for point of departure a socially defined sector whose agency in the political scenario he seeks to explore. Shunning deterministic formulas and avoiding obvious conclusions, Paz focuses on the relationship between the social locus of the subjects and their political actions—be they individual or collective.

Paz's excellent work contributes qualitatively and substantially towards balancing the very uneven advances of a historiography that always focused very intensely on Buenos Aires and the coastal areas, with the other regions of Argentina, such as Salta and Jujuy, receiving much less attention. In this sense, his research may be viewed in the context of the growth of provincial historiographies over the last thirty years. This increase is mainly due to the democratic stability of this period and to the successful creation of research groups in the national public universities located in the provinces.

Luiz Geraldo Silva's text: "Free and freed Afro-Descendents and political equality in Portuguese America: Change of status, slavery and Atlantic perspective (1750–1840)"

Luiz Geraldo starts off by stressing the need for developing approaches that incorporate concepts and notions drawn from sociological and anthropological theories and from the long-term and Atlantic perspectives in the study of the actions and mental representations of individuals and social groups from the lower strata throughout what he calls the transition process of the old or oligarchic type of society towards its democratic and representative form. Thus in the present and in other more recent works, he employs concepts such as *social figuration* and *freedom-slavery continuum*, underscoring as well the importance of focusing on connection network planes, structural regularities and recurrences for approaching the experiences, actions and mental representations of *free and freed Afro-Descendents* from all of the modern age colonial empires marked by slavery. He notes that despite their obvious differences, "the specific social representations that exist within the comprehensive social figurations of the Spanish, Portuguese and French Empires produced social positions and

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SILVA, Luiz Geraldo. Afrodescendentes livres e libertos e igualdade política na América portuguesa. Mudança de status, escravidão e perspectiva atlântica (1750-1840), Text present at the Forum, p. 1.

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ELIAS, Norbert and SCOTSON, John L. *Os estabelecidos e os outsiders. Sociologia das relações de poder a partir de uma pequena comunidade*. Rio de Janeiro: Jorge Zahar Editor, 2000.

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SILVA, Luiz Geraldo Silva. Forum text, p. 4.

status change processes related to that social group that, in the "era of revolutions", allowed to claim simultaneously *political equality* in relation to other individuals and social groups in their respective societies."¹⁶

In his article, Silva indicates two central aspects interconnecting the experiences of free and freed Afro-Descendents in the French, Spanish and Portuguese colonial empires, and shedding light on the nature of their actions and representations throughout the transition of the old or oligarchic type of society to the democratic and representative type: For one, the demands of free and freed Afro-Descendents in the democratic and representative societies diverged radically from those in the old or oligarchic type. According to Silva, those in the latter type struggled for privileges, forums, franchises, and exemptions, whereas the former mainly demanded *political equality*, i.e., citizenship underpinned by the civil and political rights common to all other individuals enjoying the political and legal status of "free man." Considering that this is a transitional phase, by using the *freedom and slavery continuum* concept, and by problematizing the specific social position of free and freed Afro-Descendents in the social figurations of which they were part, Silva is able to question the idea of this group's ambiguous or erratic behavior that historiography in general often puts forth.

Silva postulates that free and freed Afro-Descendents constituted a social group marked by *strong social cohesion*, a notion formulated by Norbert Elias¹⁷ that is strongly present in the abundance of empirical materials this group produced in the course of the 18th and 19th centuries. In these documents, they not only expressed their demands in conformity with the social figurations to which they belonged and with the types of societies in which they lived, but also and principally they staked out their differences in relation to individuals and social groups of the higher strata and to slaves.

Secondly, Silva proposes that in the context of their respective social figurations the individuals and social group under analysis located themselves in a specific social position of a certain status which ultimately had its origins in the very nature of slavery, a position which differently from what recent historiography has insistently asserted; was sociologically rather than racially determined. He says that in all slave-holding societies, regardless of their being Asian, Western, African, modern or ancient, the stigma of previous submission to slavery constitutes one of the central aspects for determining the social position of the freed man. That is where the fact that they are rarely "perceived as equals" stems from in the context of a slave-holding society, even after having obtained the political and legal status of free man.

For Luiz Geraldo Silva, the emphasis on explanations of the racial type stems from historians neither working with the concepts and notions of the general theory of slavery nor with the concepts generated by sociological theory, which in his opinion are essential for postulating this analytical problem. Furthermore, according to him these aspects can only be adequately understood if they're treated from a *figurational* perspective, a perspective "that contemplates the relations of interdependence and social positions of all individuals and groups who conformed the old or oligarchic type societies and the democratic and representative types".¹⁸

His central hypothesis is that in all relations between established social groups and *outsiders*, marked as they are by an enormous power

retention differential, the aversion, contempt and hate some established groups hold for *outsiders* are generally aimed at some marginal aspect of those relations so as to turn the attention of the beholder away from what is central, namely, "the power differentials and the exclusion of the less powerful group of positions with greater potential to influence."¹⁹

Hence Silva's critique of historians who explain in strictly racial terms the formal or informal obstacles imposed on free and freed Afro-Descendants of the French Caribbean, Spanish America and Portuguese America, and thus end up underscoring secondary aspects and neglecting what is at the core of their power relations. Hence the uptake wherein the further Afro-Descendent individuals and social groups moved away from slavery through the change of status process leading to the free man status, the closer they were to facing the obstacles discussed above.

From this perspective the crux of the matter, for Silva, lies not in the "racial relations" or in the "class relations," but rather on the more general plane of an established-*outsiders* relationship marked by a very significant power retention differential. Additionally, these interdictions in the context of the slave societies of the French Caribbean, Spanish America and Portuguese America point to the fact that as the freed men and their descendants progressed along the change of status process, they increasingly had to overcome obstacles in the form of allegations of incapacity stemming from several generations back—obstacles which were brought into play even in the context of societies of the democratic and representative type.

Silva's main concern lies in underscoring that in all slave-holding societies—be they ancient or modern—the political and legal status of free man did not represent the end of the process of marginalization, but rather the end of a previous phase, namely, that of slavery, which in turn was marked by different stages of its own. Thus, the nature of the *sociological* stigma attributed to the freed man in the slave-holding societies of the New World was not a result of "racial or proto-racial" ideology, but rather stems from the stigma's ancestral and processual tie with the status of "slave." Analytically speaking, for Silva the sociological underpinnings of those obstacles ultimately rested on the structures of power relations between the established and the *outsiders*, that is, on the social tensions marked by the monopoly individuals from the higher strata hold over prestigious social functions.

Silva repeatedly points in his text to the fact that, the field of social tensions in the democratic and representative type of society features a more open and horizontal nature, and that power relations and disputes for socially influential positions, which on appearance were to be carried out on an impersonal and arms-length basis in conformity with the legislation in force, tend to be punctuated by occasional references to certain reinforcement signals, such as skin color or ways of speaking and behaving in public, which in turn referred to the emotional aspects of the social tensions.²⁰ With basis on an impressive amount of empirical research, Silva analyzes countless instances of the use of "reinforcement signals" such as skin color in the Portuguese, French (Saint Domingue) and Spanish empires (Vice-Royalty of Nueva Granada), employed to disqualify candidates for socially influential positions who were inter- or intragenerationally connected to slavery.

Among Silva's most important conclusions is that, in *social figurations* made up mostly of free Afro-Descendants, including the successful

individuals, the attribution of a stigma and the creation of barriers against their access to prestigious social functions appears to have been a fundamental requirement for the higher strata social groups to maintain their own cohesion. It is in this sense that the enormous potential for power retention on the part of the higher strata groups and individuals was turned into a sign of higher human worth, with the entailing dissemination among the *outsiders* of the notion that their *powerlessness* was emblematic of *human* inferiority.

My comments will focus on the wide use of certain categories borrowed from sociology, as well as on some premisses mentioned here and already developed in other texts of his.

I recognize how historical sociology can impart merit by providing, among others, the means for building thought-provoking theoretical frameworks for the comparative analyses of different processes of social organization, as in the case of this research. Yet in particular I think that, at the core of his work, the concepts of *societies of the old or oligarchic type/society of the modern and representative type*, and their relevance to the analysis of the societies under scrutiny here, deserve to be further developed, specially with respect to their definition and the way they are appropriated. Clearly, Silva found inspiration in Norbert Elias, who employs the competition games metaphor (between two individuals; among several people at the same level; multipersonal games; two-level game models of the oligarchic and of the democratic type) he developed in his *Introduction to Sociology* to discuss sociology's task. Elias himself says that these are not theoretical, but rather didactic models for facilitating the redirecting of our powers of imagination and conceptualization as we seek to better understand the nature of the tasks sociology faces. Additionally, the use of these categories sometimes appears to rigidify values and meanings belonging to either type of society, making it necessary for the idea of transition to become more relevant.

My second and last observation points to the thought-provoking and innovative emphasis on slavery, rather than the race issue, to explain the social position and specific status of free and freed Afro-Descendants in the context of their respective *social figurations*. How to establish such a clear distinction in societies such as those of America, where slavery was tied to the Black race in such an absolute manner?

Finally, I would like to underscore the quality of the two articles and the relevance of historical studies such as these, which concentrate on the popular strata as protagonists by discussing not only how they inserted themselves in the world and struggled for their autonomy, but also the way in which they saw themselves in these processes. The questions arising about the forms of intervention on the part of the people as agents, individually and in groups, as well as in regard to their ties with the processes of defining and redefining political players and identities remain open to additional and indispensable studies.

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