



Capitalism in Brazil in the Light of its Structures: Race, Class, Gender and Sexuality

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Abstract

The constitution and consolidation of capitalism in the world is based on structures and hierarchies of race, class, gender and sexuality. This is a central analysis key to understanding the current processes of oppression and exploration of Brazilian society marked by racism and sexism. This text contributes to a reflection on such processes.

Keywords: Capitalism; Breed; Class; Genre; Sexuality

Introduction

A first assumption for the debate is the due consideration of the historical-concrete dynamics of global coloniality, whose central analysis key is the trilogy inseparable between Eurocentric Western modernity, colonialism and globalization of capitalism. Trilogy that structures racial, geopolitical, class, gender and sexuality hierarchies – concretely expressed in the social, sexual, racial and international division of labor, dynamizing the inequalities between center x periphery of capital. This presupposition already brings, in itself, the due material and ideological basis that supports the analysis of the theme, and is guided by a Marxist and feminist theoretical and categorical framework (of Marxist ballast and also of black, decolonial and third-world feminism) that deserve to be presented. By material and ideological basis I mean the mercantilist economic expansion and the consolidation of capitalism in the world, together with Renaissance ideas, which later confirm the liberal-enlightenment-bourgeois project, as signaled by Silvio A [1], an important Brazilian Marxist black intellectual in the field of Law. It is also worth mentioning that this project can be understood in the light of the theoretical-

political formulation of the Brazilian Marxist feminist, Saffioti IB [2], namely: that capitalism is built in symbiosis with patriarchy and racism, structuring social relations. This scheme of thought is fundamental, because thinking about these three social structures in a symbiotic way, shows that “there is, on the one hand, patriarchal domination and, on the other, capitalist exploitation. Once “they are two faces of the same way of producing and reproducing life”.

The Structures of Race, Class and Gender in the Constitution and Consolidation of Capitalism

Silvio A [1] points to race as one of the technologies of European colonialism for the destruction of peoples in the Americas, Africa, Asia and Oceania. Decolonial and Marxist-backed feminists analyze the imbrication of race, gender and class. Indeed, racism does not exist in itself, since, historically and structurally, it is linked to class and gender structures. Taking as a reference, Angela D [3], Carla A [4], and Silvio A [1], for example, analyzes should give attention to class and gender as structuring, along with race. Recall that Angela D

[3] has as its thesis the understanding that race is the way class is lived. Silvio A [1] centrally argues that structural racism is a constitutive part of the economic and political organization of society. Carla A [4] brings the importance of considering the existence of a modern colonial matrix, because in it are the power relations that are intertwined (racism, capitalism, CIS heteropatriarchy). This perspective is relevant in order to avoid the analytical deviation to just one axis of oppression-exploitation, as Carla A [4] calls attention. Therefore, what we want to say here, from the outset, is that there is no primacy of one oppression over another.

Patriarchy and racism were, historically, a colonial strategy in the construction and consolidation of capitalism in the world. They operate, from modernity to today, in symbiosis. A strategy of class, gender, race and sexuality domination by classifying/hierarchizing social groups based on race/ethnicity and sex, dividing races, men and women as a workforce (to better explore it), which does not occur without also dividing women on their race, ethnicity and sexuality, as well as dividing black and Amerindian people by their gender. With Silvio A [1] and Domenico L [5,6] an Italian Marxist critical of liberalism, who debates the national/racial issue and the hierarchies that promote who is the “universal civilized subject”-we know that the liberal-enlightenment-bourgeois project of modernity (liberal-imperialist in the words of Domenico L [6]) and the philosophical knowledge of the 16th-18th centuries, which engendered the liberal revolutions, demarcated what is human and non-human, positioning the white European man (CIS heterosexual and Christian) as the universal subject holding the status of humanity and citizenship. As Silvio A [1] comments, comparisons and classifications of the most different human groups were produced based on physical and cultural characteristics, giving rise to the anthropological philosophical distinction between civilized and savage.

On this subject, Domenico L [6] highlights that colonial expansion, considered by bourgeois philosophy, “as an essential moment in the process of unification of the human gender, of the production of the world market and of world history”, also supported on religious prejudices designing a dominant continent (the West), and a certain race (white), as superior, for the “sacred mission of conquering and “civilizing” the entire world, without worrying about the human and social costs” [6]. Colonial brutality triggered torture, rape, the burning of villages, the massacre with iron and fire, including children, as pointed out by Domenico L [6]. Complements the author, who exercised unlimited powers of life and death without moderation (a necro politics quite current in our Brazilian social fabric, by the way). This makes the very delimitation of what is civilization and what is barbarism problematic, concludes the Italian intellectual.

The positivist thinking of biology and physics formulated explanatory models of human diversity in which biological (biological and physiological characteristics) and geographic (climate and environmental aspects) determinism should be the explanatory elements of the moral, psychological and intellectual differences between the different races. Thus, with the liberal revolution of the XVII century, Domenico L [6] writes that racial slavery expanded and marked a period of dehumanization based on racial demarcation and discrimination (blacks and whites) and spatial (colony and metropolis), delimiting the community of the free and the enslaved, the borders of the human and the non-human. These borders, rationalized by “natural”/biological explanations, demeaned blacks and indigenous natives of hot climate regions (the soil of the “modern barbarian world”), removing their human status and assigning them the character of merchandise and property to be exploited [6].

It is worth remembering that biologicalism also removed the status of humanity and citizenship from women (especially black and Amerindian women). The Enlightenment was the philosophical foundation of these divisions. The precursor feminists (white suffragettes, of the so-called classical liberal feminism) already pointed out and fought against the contradiction of the Enlightenment-liberal “democratic” discourse arising from the French Revolution, which, until the present, covers up the exclusions it promotes, as pointed out by Scott JW [7]. They demonstrated that sexual differences were transformed into political differences, such as the discourse that women would not be intellectually able to decide about the country, or even because they had natural attributes for household chores. These feminists brought the contradictory reality of the ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity, with which the fact that women were relegated to social and political ostracism coexisted.

Pateman C [8], from the critique of political theory to theorists of the contract, and in the light of the historical process of the Enlightenment and the constitution of civil society engendered by the original contract, states that civil liberty is not universal, it is a masculine attribute. For her, the social contract is a story of freedom and the sexual contract is a story of subjection the original contract creates both freedom and domination. Man’s freedom and woman’s subjection. Therefore, the social-sexual contract is the means by which modern patriarchy is constituted. These are feminist readings that bring an important legacy, but do not advance in the concreteness of the effects of the inferiorization and subordination of women; after all, the category of woman has other social determinations in its constitution, such as race, class and nation, in view of the social, sexual, racial and international division of labor with capitalism.

The Articulations of Race, Gender and Sexuality in the World of Work

The use of race as a colonial strategy was briefly developed along previous lines. Its imbrication with gender, in a decolonial perspective, is also important. The feminist Lugones M [9] suggests the “modern colonial gender system”, placing gender subordination at the center of the debate as a colonizer’s control strategy over the colonized people in modernity/coloniality, whose imposition of what is human (colonizer) versus the non-human (colonized), demarcates power in the white, (cis) heterosexual, with property and Eurocentric. The formulations of decolonial Argentines, such as Lugones M [9] and Mendoza B [10], give centrality to sexuality and race, in addition to gender, to think about the intrusive colonial project. According to them, gender, sexuality and race are colonial constructions, which did not exist in non-modern societies, differing from other formulations, since this is not a consensus. However, the consensus is that capitalism transforms the references of gender and sexuality in the village-world. Segato RL [11], for example, is another decolonial Argentine who will understand the existence of a low-intensity patriarchy before imperialist capitalism and a high-intensity modern patriarchy with its consolidation and globalization.

With all this initial exposition, it is therefore worth clarifying the centrality of work as an ontological category, especially concrete work transformed into abstract work, bringing the particularity of the Brazilian State to the international division of labor. According to the Brazilian Marxist from Recife, Oliveira F [12], Brazil, with its structurally dependent and peripheral capitalism, fulfills the historical function of providing elements for the accumulation of capital in the center. Thus, we are required to regress rights. We are therefore part of the process that Ricardo A [13] calls “structural precariousness of work”, a dismantling of the social legislation protecting work with the flexibilization of labor rights, forced by global capital.

In this way, the sign of precariousness prevails as “the center of the dynamics of flexible capitalism” [14], which is not only in the deconstruction or corrosion of contracted and regulated work. We live today in a profound precariousness of living conditions, taking as a reference the “civilizing” level that has already been acquired in the course of the history of capitalism with regard to the conquest of rights and social policies, currently plundered, which affects, greatly, in the living conditions of women (cis, trans, white, black, rural, urban), black and LGBTI+, as an impoverished working class.

Giovanni A [15] speaks in terms of existential precariousness, and not just salary precariousness, providing

new landscapes for the social question of the 21st century in the context of global capitalism. With the new historical temporality of capital, the social question is vigorously reinstated, which appears not only as the exposure of the new precariousness of wages, where the precariousness of work becomes a structural element of the world order of capital, but with the explanation in the within the new social metabolism of capital, the precariousness of human existence conditions suitable for the new stage of civilizational development or reduction of natural barriers [15].

With these reflections, Giovanni A [15] concludes that today there is a new social poverty semantically linked to the spiritual poverty expressed by the era of social barbarism, laying bare the limits of capital as a civilizing force. We have to give concreteness to this barbaric feature in the world of work, which assumes the face of a black woman. This feat would not have been possible without the contribution of Lélia G [16], an important black Brazilian intellectual. When we study her vast production, we see that she dedicated herself to thinking about racism in Brazil through the triad: sexual and racial division of labor, miscegenation and the myth of racial democracy, contributing to shed light on the situation of black and Amerindian women in Latin America. According to her, based on the criticism that the sexual division of labor must consider race, there is a triple discrimination against these women: gender, racial and class, given the fact that they are the majority of the immense Latino proletariat. American [16]. Racial discrimination, according to Leila G [16], structures classes, allowing racism to benefit not only “white capitalism”, but also white workers, even if poor. The social stratification of the workforce, based on sexism and racism/racial privilege, places blacks (especially black women) in underemployment and in worse jobs (more precarious, without legislation and labor rights), or even as a large unemployable “marginal mass”. With this, Lélia G [16] brings an important reflection: the mass of white workers, even if debased by savage capitalism on the soil of a peripheral and dependent country like ours, receive the dividends of racism.

In “Racismo e Sexismo na Cultura Brasileira”, Lélia G [17] criticizes the representations of the black woman (the black mother, the domestic and the mulatto) and how they interact on the living conditions of black women. One of them is the precariousness of the work of black women in domestic work for the white middle classes, or even in generic low-paying occupations called servant. Within the scope of studies of the sociology of work from a feminist perspective, it appears that precarious work is mostly female, and the cleaning service sector is one of the poles of the bipolarization of female employment. A type of occupation with less social prestige – in contrast to university careers with greater responsibility,

prestige and salaries – fundamentally because it intersects the female workforce, with black color/race/ethnicity and low schooling.

Regarding the LGBTI+ population, as shown in the research by Rodrigues MC, et al. [18], many of these subjects are socially projected in place of “social disaffiliation”, just because as a subculture, they are in the semantic field of social dissociation or invalidation. Thus, they are also a segment of the working class with difficulties in becoming employable. For those employed LGBTI+ people, there is a (degrading) job niche in the service sector: telemarketing work. Venco S [19], from the sociology of work, identifies the sign of productivity on these bodies. According to her, there is an interest on the part of management in hiring this population (as well as black, young and fat people) because they see productivity beyond the average, a higher rate of achievement of goals and low levels of absenteeism. Faced with this, it is worth remembering that the industrial reserve army pressures wages down to the same extent that it undermines the encouragement of those who are working to claim their rights. David H [20] realizes that, in contemporary times, in addition to the availability of an industrial reserve army, the workforce must be flexible, docile, disciplined and qualified when necessary.

Final Considerations

The exposition of this text sought to highlight the determinations of class, gender, race, sexuality (and nation), from the symbiosis between capitalism-patriarchy-racism structuring social relations, in an attempt to enrich the category social division of labor as proposed by Marx K [21], in addition to pursuing the analysis of the social totality. It is worth recalling that, in the Economic Manuscripts (Grundrisse), Marx K [21] states that production is a totality and that bourgeois society itself is a concrete totality. This production/totality is associated with consumption, distribution and exchange (circulation). In its analytical basis, the conception of the sphere of distribution is that distribution, before being the distribution of products, is the distribution of instruments of production and distribution of the members of society, and with it there is the “[...] subsumption of individuals under certain production relations”.

There are still, unfortunately, many theses that capitalism only uses gender and racial oppression, subsisting on them, or that it is not structurally linked to these oppressions. Arruzza C [22,23] is an important Marxist feminist author to refute these theses. In her analysis, she demonstrates that the capitalist order has “its core constituted by relations of exploitation, domination and alienation”. Lélia G [16] makes us reflect that capitalism depends on racial and sexual

discrimination [24-26]. From the above, I sought to reflect that the distribution of members of capitalist society - the distribution of the workforce - is mediated by patriarchal gender and racial relations, and how racism and patriarchy not only benefit capitalism, but are structuring.

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