

THE PROCESS OF SELF-AFFIRMATION OF BRAZILIAN IMMIGRANTS IN THE UNITED STATES.

Oswaldo de Paula Mendonça¹

ABSTRACT

The objective of this study is to analyze the formation of cultural characteristics of the Brazilian people, based on historical facts that have contributed to the formation of this population. This article aims to develop a critical analysis of historical events and compare them with the present, in order to establish a parallel and then develop an understanding of what is now called "Brazilian identity" or the way Brazilians are, a sentiment often felt by immigrants in the United States. Bibliographic research was conducted considering the contributions of authors such as SOUSA (2015), FRAGOSO (2014), seeking to establish a parallel between the past and the present regarding the cultural formation of Brazilians, as well as to provide insights for a better understanding of historical events. It was concluded that many historical events, even when they did not directly influence the cultural formation of Brazilians, already showed a tendency towards it, suggesting that the formation of Brazilians is more closely related to the culture itself than previously assumed. Additionally, it was concluded that the unique way Brazilians perceive life is the result of a long historical process that has undergone some adaptations, which becomes even more evident in foreign territories.

Keywords: History. Culture. Society. Colonization.

INTRODUCTION

The present work focuses on the analysis of the self-affirmation process of Brazilian immigrants in the United States and how their cultural background influences the adaptation process in a foreign land.

This formation is demonstrated through an analysis of colonization and the historical context of the country, drawing parallels with the present, where it is observed that the socio-economic development of Brazilian society has been marked, from its inception, by a persistent gap between the State and society.

¹ Academic in the International Master's program in Theology at Ivy Enber Christian University.

It can be said that the State precedes the organization of an independent social structure, as in various political changes that have occurred, including the formation of the Republic, everything has happened without social mobilization and has been presented to society as a pre-determined and detached outcome from reality.

This happens because in Brazil, cultural identity is not entirely nationalist, at least not to the extent seen in other countries. Brazilians do not idolize the national flag like Americans do, they do not "sink" with the boat like the Greeks, and they do not sing melodies to their rivers like the Portuguese. In fact, the very "Brazilianness" of our people is a subject of controversial studies, as it is difficult to define it precisely.

The concepts of "being Brazilian," nationality, etc., depend greatly on the perspective from which they are viewed. The people are passive and tranquil, not inclined towards many conflicts, and disdain the bellicose sentiment seen in other nations, especially in the USA. Although they may harbor some sympathy for American imperialism, they do not share its warlike nature and culture.

On the other hand, it is necessary to conduct a thorough analysis of the factors that imply this "Brazilianness" when it comes to understanding the nature of citizens who, once seeking new directions, immigrate to foreign lands.

Therefore, it is necessary to conduct research that delimits the concepts of nationality, "Brazilianness," and the social performance of individuals, based on the perspective of their historicity, i.e., the concepts that were established throughout the formation of the Brazilian State.

This work, the result of extensive bibliographic research, was based on previously published works by theorists well-versed in the subject matter, especially Fragoso (2014) and Souza (2015), where opinions were analyzed to form a broader overview of the subject, resulting in this work.

THE FORMATION OF BRAZILIAN IDENTITY.

The first letter about Brazil, written by Pero Vaz de Caminha to the Portuguese king Dom Manuel, remained unpublished and unknown until 1773, hidden in Portuguese archives. It is the letters of Amerigo Vespucci that, perhaps because they were addressed to Lorenzo de' Medici and, through him, to the literate European public, brought fame to the Land of the True Cross (Terra de Vera Cruz) and its inhabitants (CUNHA, 2015).

The famous letter by Pero Vaz de Caminha, which was actually a ship's log, records the events of the expedition from April 22nd to May 10th, 1500. Through it, one can see that Christopher Columbus's first impression of the Brazilian natives was that they were naked and wild: "brown-skinned men, all naked, without anything covering their private parts, holding bows in their hands and their arrows" (CAMINHA, 1968, p. 25).

Cunha (2015) states that this image of nudity, with less literary talent, would be revisited by Vespucci, who in turn associates the natives with the idea of innocence. Caminha, establishes the contrast between the commercial naivety and initial trust of these men who rest on the ship's deck, displaying complete trust in the invader.

It can be observed in this context that the authors were already exploring the formation of the Brazilian character, the passivity and innocence that would become a constant feature in the aspects of what would later be known as "Brazilianness."

This characteristic of receptiveness towards foreign peoples seems to have survived throughout this time, as it still presents itself today as a genuinely Brazilian behavior (FRAGOSO, 2014).

The occupation of the land by the Portuguese occurred in a slow and gradual manner. In terms of mercantile exploitation, Portugal held a monopoly

over the exploitation of Brazilwood. Interestingly, only a small portion of explorers had authorization from the Portuguese Crown for such exploitation. Among them was Fernando de Noronha (SOUSA, 2015). It is notable in this emergence of the relationship between the State and the elite how the character of personal favoritism for a minority began in the country.

An interesting aspect of the formation of Brazilian society was expressed in the basic principle of exclusion that distinguished social categories. It was based on the principle of blood purity. The so-called "impure" individuals included New Christians (converted Jews), blacks (even when free), indigenous people to some extent, and various types of mixed-race individuals. They were prohibited from participating in politics, holding public positions, receiving noble titles, and joining prestigious brotherhoods, among other restrictions. It was only in 1773 that a law abolished the distinction between Old Christians and New Christians, although religious and racist prejudice never completely disappeared from the country (SOUSA, 2015).

Fausto (1996) states that there were two basic institutions aimed at organizing the colonization of Brazil: The State and the Catholic Church. Although they worked in distinct ways, both cooperated to ensure that the Portuguese Crown established itself as the owner of the new lands. The author emphasizes that the concept of secularism did not exist at that time, meaning that "the religion of the State was Catholicism, and the subjects, that is, the members of society, were expected to be Catholics" (FAUSTO, 1996, p. 35).

Sousa (2015) states that during the period of the First Reign, the status of Brazil as a "colony" came to an end, initiating a series of transformations in the country that defined its position as a politically sovereign nation. However, despite the historical significance of this change, it can be observed that the process of emancipation did not allow for more significant changes in society, as the privileges of the ruling classes and the impoverished condition of the population remained unchanged. Nevertheless, it is noted that during this

period, significant actions were necessary for the organization of the Brazilian state.

D. Pedro I, the first king, showed a leadership spirit that was not very convincing. The constitution he himself drafted and the payment of a burdensome indemnity to the Portuguese treasury raised doubts about his loyalty to the country he governed (FRAGOSO, 2014).

What followed was even more disastrous. The departure of Dom Pedro I marked a new phase for national politics. His son and heir to the throne, Dom Pedro II, was very young and had to wait until he came of age to become king. He just assumed the throne at the age of fifteen, thanks to a political maneuver (FRAGOSO, 2014).

As it still happens today, the political landscape achieved a certain stability thanks to the favorable economic situation. Sousa (2015) states that the consumption of coffee in the international market turned the production of this crop into the main support of the Brazilian economy during the Second Reign. With the strengthening of the economy, it significantly contributed to the advent of the industrial economy that followed shortly thereafter.

The Political Influence On The Formation Of Brazilian Identity

What can be observed from these historical facts is that Brazilian society has always been on the sidelines of the political process, which is consistently exercised by the elite, the military forces, and those already in power. As for the common people, they are left with the leftovers.

The proclamation of the Republic revealed a political power game controlled by the military classes. Based on positivist ideals, the new government promised to use the hierarchy and rigidity of the military sphere as powerful instruments to change the chaotic state that had taken hold in the country.

Although the proposal was for a provisional government, Deodoro da Fonseca's administration brought about significant changes in Brazilian politics, including the annulment of the legal effects of the 1824 constitution and governing through decrees (FRAGOSO, 2014).

One positive aspect of the first President's tenure was the separation of the State from religion and the reformulation of the Penal Code. The country was experiencing the first notions of secularism, although the Catholic religion was so prominent and influential that even today, secularism exists only in theory.

However, Deodoro authorized the issuance of a large amount of paper currency. What was unknown to political agents at the time is now well studied by economists and other scholars in the field. The economy is an area that requires extensive knowledge and firmness from public administration.

Well, one cannot produce currency without producing goods and services. Often, it is necessary to reduce the purchasing power of the population to contain inflation, as some presidents did later on. The most famous case was on the first day of President Collor de Mello's term in 1992. The unpopularity of this measure ultimately cost him his power (TATUINE, 2015).

Deodoro's government did not last long. The military authoritarianism he imposed caused discontent throughout the country, which mobilized various segments of society against his government. Popular and military pressures forced the government to resign, which occurred on November 23, 1891.

Silva (2015) states that the subsequent period became known as the "Old Republic," and history records a series of presidents of the Republic alternating in power, sometimes from Minas Gerais and sometimes from São Paulo. In 1930, the gaúcho Getúlio Vargas orchestrated a coup d'état, in an

act known as the Revolution of 1930, establishing himself as one of the most emblematic presidents to have ever governed Brazil (SILVA, 2015).

The following period was tumultuous and encompassed various factors that require a systematic analysis of the country's political situation. Brazil experienced the dictatorship of the period known as the "Vargas Era," followed by twenty years of military dictatorship. Then came the process of democratization, the influence of neoliberal policies, and finally the rise of socialist-oriented politicians to power.

Throughout this time, the character of the Brazilian people has been shaped to what is now globally known as the "Brazilian way" or "jeitinho brasileiro." Through the analysis of historical events, it is evident that this "jeitinho" has always been part of the national politics. Since the establishment of the Republic, the distinct Brazilian way of governing has shown that there is no room for amateurs.

The Brazilian population has doubled in recent years and now exceeds two hundred million (Census, 2010). Therefore, governing a country of this magnitude requires theoretical support and intellectual formation.

On the other hand, there is also a sense of complacency in this whole process, with the population expressing itself only when facing problems arising from economic crises. It seems that corruption, incompetence, and other vices that persisted since Marshal Deodoro da Fonseca's time do not bother the population enough to trigger a reaction.

Without much difficulty, one can list some aspects that characterize the country as a region with specific geographic and political boundaries, as well as its autonomy in the economic and legal spheres. However, problems arise when we try to identify the characteristics that would be peculiar to Brazilians with a common identity for all.

Initially, we question how a country historically marked by social inequalities and numerous ethnic, regional, and cultural differences could present a cultural unity. Indeed, for some scholars, the common ethnocultural aspects observed in language, religions, cuisine, and forms of social organization define the Brazilian way of being, which possesses a singularity that also defines Brazilian culture.

The national consensus is that being Brazilian means embracing the libertarian ideal within one's soul, wearing green and yellow even when the national team is not on the field and no swimmer stands on the podium under the national flag. But the characteristic of being Brazilian is much broader. It is related to a sense of pride in the simplicity of life's things. Brazilians like good and accessible things. However, this does not mean they are idle and averse to work. Foreign testimonies discourage this definition, given by some as a matter of bad taste (TATUINE, 2015).

The great problem for Brazilians lies in their simplistic view of politics. The limited understanding of social order leads Brazilians to a state of complacency that often leads to deplorable practices of welfare dependency.

In this context, public policies related to healthcare, education, housing, etc., end up being relegated to a secondary role, often used for electoral purposes. Any state action in this regard should result in a set of programs, actions, and activities developed by the government to ensure the right to citizenship. However, they often end up being limited to mere cheap welfare that does not lead individuals to independence.

It is evident that an effective intervention is necessary to propose a change in this cruel and unjust scenario. The expansion and consolidation of citizenship become imperative, considered a primary task for the entire society, aiming to guarantee the civil, social, and political rights of the working classes. For this, the country needs to look back, learn from its mistakes, and celebrate its achievements, so that the future can be even more promising.

IMMIGRATION AND THE EMERGENCE OF BRASILIDADE IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

It is no secret that Brazilians, despite all the desirable conditions that the South American country offers, seek better opportunities in foreign lands. In fact, the migratory character seems to be part of the national identity, perhaps due to the number of nationals from different countries that Brazil has already welcomed and continues to welcome.

So, if the country offers opportunities for foreigners, there are those who believe that these opportunities are not available to its own citizens. As a result, the vast majority of the working-age youth who are dissatisfied with the country's employment policies have either already immigrated, are currently in the process of doing so, or are planning to immigrate to the United States.

In fact, the first records of Brazilian immigrants in the United States emerged in the 1960s. Prior to that, Brazilians were included in groups composed of those from South America and were not classified separately. Within the volume of 234,761 people from South America who arrived in the United States between 1820 and 1960, it is believed that a small number were Brazilians. This is based on the fact that in the mid-1960s, the report from the United States Census Bureau counted 27,885 Americans of Brazilian ancestry (JEFFERSON, 2022).

Between the 1960s and 1980s, the phenomenon of mass immigration of Brazilians to the United States occurred. Data indicate that around 2,300 Brazilian immigrants arrived in the country each year. In general, impoverishment in Brazil was one of the most crucial factors for this immigration (JEFFERSON, 2022). By the end of the 1980s, as a result of hyperinflation at the end of the military dictatorship, the volume of immigration reached 1.4 million Brazilians, who were now also seeking European countries and Japan as their final destination. A survey conducted in 1990 in the United States recorded the presence of 60,000 Brazilians living



in the country. Other studies point to the existence of 100,000 Brazilians living in the New York metropolitan area, in addition to other communities in various cities (SILVA, 2020).

Therefore, the presence of Brazilians in the United States is well-documented, and although it is not as ancient as, for example, the Azoreans, this community has developed much more, expanding Brazilian culture and influence in American society. In the city of New Bedford, Massachusetts, Portuguese immigration, specifically from the Azores, dates back to the 19th century, while Brazilian immigration began in the late 20th century. Despite this, Brazilians have managed to make themselves culturally visible just as much as those communities, despite the difference in immigration time.

It can be concluded that while other people seek to adapt to the country they have chosen to live in, Brazilians do the opposite. It is not uncommon to observe that the Brazilian identity that flourishes in American lands is the result of a desire to return to the country with some money, which could be indicative of a lack of motivation for cultural adaptation. In other words, it seems that Brazilians adapt only as much as necessary to achieve their goals, namely, to accumulate the highest amount of dollars in order to return to Brazil and assume a new standard of living. With very few exceptions, the "brazuca," as they are called there, does not intend to establish permanent residence in the country.

In general, Brazilians seek states that are less hostile to immigration, such as Massachusetts. While some groups proclaim a national urgency to build a wall on the Mexican border and halt illegal immigration, cities in Massachusetts prove to be very immigrant-friendly, providing not only job opportunities but also establishing policies to protect those who come from other countries.

An example is the city of Framingham, located 36 kilometers from Boston, the capital of the state. The city has an estimated population of 72,000

inhabitants, according to the U.S. Census. According to the census, 26.8% of the population was born outside the United States, which amounts to around 19,300 people. Brazilians account for approximately 9,000 individuals in various legal statuses (SILVA, 2020).

The considerable presence of Brazilians in various American cities is mainly observed in existing organizations formed by other Brazilians. These associations seek minimal adaptation, in places where the language is not as necessary, and the cultural shock is less pronounced.

According Sales (2005)

Like most immigrants arriving in a foreign country, Brazilians also initially sought the comfort of churches in the Boston area. One of the Catholic churches sought by Brazilians was St. Anthony's in Cambridge, built by the Portuguese and with masses celebrated in Portuguese by one of the first priests who arrived in Boston to serve the Brazilian community. (SALES, 2005 p. 25).

Brazilians, in general, do not seek to influence American society with their country's culture as strongly as the reverse. While the American way of life has been promoted in Brazilian lands, Brazilian identity presents itself in the country as an almost exotic characteristic.

Indeed, there are quite a few Americans who observe with surprise the Brazilian way of life, sometimes criticizing it for not understanding that cultures are different. Some even use stickers on their cars with the phrase "welcome to America, now speak English" as a literal translation of their sentiment. There is a xenophobic sentiment initially aimed at Spanish speakers who refuse to use English but eventually extends to all immigrants in general. Not many Americans understand that Portuguese is spoken in Brazil, not Spanish. Therefore, they welcome Brazilians and other peoples, but expect them to at least adapt to the local language. And often, it does not happen.

In this sense, the process of self-affirmation for Brazilians involves not adopting American culture. Although it may seem contradictory, it is

important to note that the behavior of Brazilians in American lands differs greatly from that observed in other immigrants.

In this sense, Sales (2005) highlights that

Brazilian students sometimes get excited when they attend leadership meetings and offer to help the community. Deep down, what excites them is to be part of the political mobilization atmosphere, which usually intensifies during campaigns for certain demands, such as legalization or amnesty. Brazilian leaders, sometimes with a less solid social base than other immigrant groups, have the ability to take the lead in these struggles precisely because of the knowledge and experiences they brought with them from Brazil. (SALES, 2005, p. 28).

Therefore, the characteristic known as "Brazilian-ness" seems to truly emerge in foreign lands only when there is a cause to defend, an interest to pursue. This self-assertion as a Brazilian immigrant, seemingly dormant, tends to awaken in opportune moments. This may be the most remarkable characteristic of Brazilians, as, in general, other immigrants demonstrate a greater ability to adapt to the social customs of the hosting country.

CONCLUSION

Nationality is much more than a prerogative acquired in a registry office. It is a distinct and broad concept of identification with a people, a culture, music, and a worldview that surrounds it. The construction of nationality is achieved through the affirmation of values that range from civil to religious aspects.

Brazil is a diverse country, with a tendency towards tolerance and the blending of religions, sometimes resulting in new denominations. In music and drama, Brazilians build their citizenship with their own identity, albeit with some external influences, but with a genuinely national essence. This implies that Brazilian identity is not as lacking in references as some claim.

However, in political aspects, Brazilian culture does not appear as strong, despite all the crises experienced. It seems that Brazilians have not yet assumed their position within their own society in this regard, whereas in foreign territory, it is habitual.

It is also imperative to highlight that the Brazilian view on the role of the State is well-defined, if not uniform. The paternalistic culture inherited from the old republic probably influenced this stance and continues to reflect in the behavior of even the young individuals in today's society.

All of these concepts take on a new interpretation when Brazilians are outside their homeland, especially in the United States, the subject of this study. The Brazilian way of being, which has been the subject of various studies, becomes more evident abroad. This may go against the commonly associated view of a simplistic socio-political reality. The engagement of Brazilians in political and social issues in "America" demonstrates this fact.

Indeed, the struggle for the guarantee of rights as a strategy to strengthen the working class and as a fundamental and urgent mediation in the process of building a humane society, based on secular, transformative, and emancipatory education that looks towards the future without forgetting the lessons of the past. Observing the fight of Brazilians living in foreign lands shows that the alleged passivity of Brazilians in political matters does not align with the reality of their personality.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the Brazilian is a conscious citizen capable of developing their cultural characteristics, with the only need being the fostering of the environment in which they find themselves. If this Brazilian has been passive and uncommitted in their own country and more participative abroad, it is worth reflecting on why this happens.

However, that will be a question to be addressed in another research work.

REFERENCES

CAMINHA, Pero Vaz de. **Carta a El Rey Dom Manuel Rio de Janeiro** Rio: Ed. Sabiá, 1968.

FAUSTO, Boris. **História do Brasil**. Edusp (1996). Disponível em <http://www.conisul.com.br/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/historiadobrasil.pdf>. Acesso em 25 junho 2022.

FRAGOSO, Ramon Lopes. **História Geral**. Vol. Único. São Paulo: Unida, 2014

FREYRE, Gilberto. *Ordem e Progresso*. São Paulo: Global, 2004.

JEFFERSON, Alphine W. (2022) **A Countries and Their Cultures: Brazilian Americans». Countries and their cultures**. Disponível em <https://www.everyculture.com/multi/A-Br/Brazilian-Americans.html>. Acesso em 25 de agosto de 2022

MONTAIGNE, Michel de. **Os Canibais**. Ensaio.vol.1Paris: Garnier, 1952

SILVA, Tiago Ferreira da. **República Velha** (2015). Disponível em <http://www.infoescola.com/historia-do-brasil/república-velha>. Acesso em 23 junho 2022

SALES, Tereza. **A organização dos imigrantes brasileiros em Boston, EUA**. Disponível em <https://www.scielo.br/j/spp/a/9DgKYhjinRWQVtbJ5JVtc5D/>. Acesso em maio de 2023.

SOUSA, Rainer Gonçalves. **Período Pré-colonial** Brasil Escola. Disponível em <<http://brasilecola.uol.com.br/historiab/periodo-precolonial.htm>>. Acesso em 30 de junho 2022.

TATUINE, Leandro. **Conhecer História**. São Paulo: Unida, 2015.

VIEIRA, S. L.**Política educacional no Brasil: introdução histórica**.Brasília: Líber Livro, 2007.