

Moving Away from Brazil to Interpret Brazil:

Gilberto Freyre and Sérgio Buarque de Holanda in Perspective

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Abstract: *The sociologist and anthropologist Gilberto Freyre (1900-1987), author of The Masters and the Slaves (1933), and historian Sérgio Buarque de Holanda (1902-1982), author of Roots of Brazil (1936), are considered two of the main interpreters of Brazilian society, having both produced works that continue to impact the understanding of Brazil. According to some, these were the works that “invented Brazil”. In this essay, I seek to analyze these authors’ experiences while abroad and the impact this had on the production process of their best-known works. In the case of Gilberto Freyre, I highlight his academic training in the United States, and in the case of Sérgio Buarque de Holanda, his free training in Germany. As this work shows, different academic and cultural experiences abroad led to different interpretations of Brazil. Based on the analysis of their biographies and best-known works, I highlight how some of the main interpretations of Brazilian society were made possible by the particular “intellectual diaspora” in which they participated, and identify some of the key influences permeating their work.*

Resumo: *O sociólogo e antropólogo Gilberto Freyre (1900-1987), autor de Casa-Grande & Senzala (1933), e o historiador Sérgio Buarque de Holanda (1902-1982), autor de Raízes do Brasil, são considerados dois dos principais intérpretes da sociedade brasileira, tendo ambos produzido obras que continuam a impactar a compreensão do Brasil. Segundo alguns pesquisadores, estas foram as obras que “inventaram o Brasil”. Neste ensaio, busco analisar as experiências que esses autores tiveram no exterior e o impacto que isso teve na produção de seus trabalhos mais conhecidos, no caso de Gilberto Freyre destaco sua formação acadêmica nos Estados Unidos, e no caso de Sérgio Buarque de Holanda, sua formação livre na Alemanha. Como esse trabalho demonstra, diferentes experiências acadêmicas e culturais no exterior levaram a distintas interpretações do Brasil. Partindo da análise de suas biografias, assim como em trabalhos mais conhecidos, destaco como que algumas das principais interpretações da sociedade brasileira se fizeram possíveis devido à particular “diáspora intelectual” da qual eles participaram e identificaram algumas das influências principais que incidiram em seus trabalhos.*

Introduction

Interpretations of Brazil have always related in some way with the foreign perspective, with the possibility of estrangement from our own reality; distancing ourselves to see ourselves better. In 1840, the Brazilian Historical and Geographical Institute (IHGB) announced a competition to find the best proposal of how to write the history of Brazil. The winner was the German naturalist Carl Von Martius (1794-1868), who described Brazil's formation as a confluence of three rivers, representing the American, white, and black races, the white being the "superior" race that would incorporate the other two.

This estrangement of Brazilian reality was not only the result of a foreign perspective, but also of the possibility of seeing Brazil from afar and, thus, finding new aspects to explore. In contrast to other Latin American countries, higher education institutions were only founded in Brazil in the 19th century with the arrival of the Portuguese royal family in 1808. Therefore, Brazilian elites have always had a tradition of sending their children to study abroad, especially to the University of Coimbra in Portugal. The first Brazilian universities began to emerge in the early 20th century. However, some areas, such as the social sciences, were still developing¹, and the

¹ The first decades of the 20th century saw a trend of merging individual colleges to form the first universities in Brazil. Regarding undergraduate programs in the social sciences, the first programs were not founded until the 1930s.

training of specialists depended as much on foreign professors coming to Brazil as it did on Brazilians going abroad to study in the United States and Europe.

Gilberto Freyre (1900-1987) and Sérgio Buarque de Holanda (1902-1982) belonged to the same generation of intellectuals and had many points in common in their trajectories. Both studied abroad and wrote profoundly significant works to interpret Brazil. Both *The Masters and the Slaves* and *Roots of Brazil* are works that reflect the profound impact of these authors' personal and academic experiences abroad, and both started being written while still outside Brazil, in Portugal² and Germany, respectively.

In this article, I highlight how Gilberto Freyre and Sérgio Buarque de Holanda produced their interpretations of Brazil while abroad. I am interested in understanding how their experiences outside Brazil influenced the elaboration of their interpretations of Brazil, without implying a reproduction of foreign ideas but rather elaborating new interpretative possibilities of Brazilian society and culture.

It is important to mention the methodological clipping I have made for this study since I am not analyzing the first editions of *The Masters and the Slaves* and *Roots*

² Gilberto Freyre began writing *The Masters and the Slaves* when he went into self-exile in Portugal after the 1930 Revolution, but he wrote this book between 1931 and 1933, as he put in the preface for the first edition: "Lisbon 1931, Pernambuco 1933". In 1931 Freyre left Lisbon for the USA where he was invited as a visiting professor at Stanford University's Department of Social History. He wrote *The Masters and the Slaves* in at least three different countries. All these experiences abroad were fundamental to building his identity as an anthropologist (Motta, 1987).

of Brazil. Even though I consider them for the analysis, I am analyzing the consolidated versions, in which there is an incorporation of the criticisms made, reflecting how, over the years, the authors have re-signified the influences received abroad. Therefore, there is a dialogue with the field of intellectual history, but I place my work within the Brazilian social sciences tradition of what is conventionally called Brazilian Social Thought.

Thinking About Brazil from the United States

Gilberto Freyre came from a family with a significant amount of cultural capital. His father, Alfredo Freyre (1875-1961), was a renowned local intellectual who would have introduced him to reading English language authors from an early age (Oliveira, 2023). Both Gilberto Freyre and his older brother studied at the American Baptist College, where he established contacts to continue his studies in the United States. This particular school had a tradition of sending students to Baylor University in Texas, where Freyre was sent in 1918.

This path had profound consequences on how Freyre would interpret Brazil in his later writings, since it gave him a privileged position from which to compare the Northeast of Brazil to the South of the United States. There, he observed the existence of a societal formation characterized by *latifundia*, monoculture, and slavery. Despite their similarities, Freyre soon realized that race relations in the two countries were

substantially different. Diaries from his youth and letters exchanged with Oliveira Viana (1883-1951) make clear his progressive discovery of the *Deep South* (Freyre, 2012). This idea is reinforced in several other works, such as in the preface to the first edition of *The Masters and the Slaves*:

Louisiana, Alabama, Mississippi, the Carolinas, Virginia - the so-called "Deep South". A region where the patriarchal economic regime created almost the same type of master, almost the same type of slave as in the North of Brazil and certain parts of the South. The same taste for the sofa, the rocking chair, the good kitchen, the woman, the horse, the game. Which suffered and still bears the scars, if not the open wounds, still bleeding, of the same devastating regime of agrarian exploitation - fire, deforestation, coivara, "the parasitic farming of nature", as Monteiro Baena refers to Brazil. Every scholar of Brazil's patriarchal formation and slave economy needs to know about the so-called "deep South". (Freyre, 2003: 30-31)

It is important to indicate that the comparison between race relations in Brazil and the United States was not something new. Said comparison recurrently took as a basis the similar colonization process of both countries, and ultimately interpreted that race relations were more harmonious in Brazil. Until the middle of the 20th century, Brazil was perceived as a racial example to be followed by the United States. As Sansone (2011: 540) points out:

(...) from the nineteen twenties many United States based scholars as well as black intellectuals represented Brazil as an alter ego of segregationist United States. Besides reading Hellwig's book, one can browse the letters addressed by Du Bois to Brazilian presidents, as well as articles by Ralph Bunche, Richard Pattee and Alain Locke and others in several American

journals such as the *Journal of Negro History*, *Journal of Negro Education*, *Crisis* and *Phylon*. For these African-American scholars, Brazil was a positive model for the future of race relations in the United States.

One can infer that this interpretation of race relations in Brazil, and their uniqueness against those of the US, also influenced Freyre's work. However, as Lehmann (2008) points out, Freyre's position on the issue of race changed over time, even through the 1920s:

(...) Yet four years later he was still expressing admiration for the traditions of the Deep South, writing with benevolence about the Ku Klux Klan and its colorful rituals in the name, inter alia, of showing Pernambuco sugar planters the way to technical progress. This twenty-something-year-old was in a state of constant intellectual *disponibilité*. (Lehmann, 2008: 214).

Attending Colombia University in New York – one of the vanguards of the global debate on race at the time – certainly played a decisive role in the reflective and interpretive turn that was to come in Freyre's work.

Although his master's degree was in Social History³, with Professor Carlton Hayes (1882-1964) as his supervisor, Freyre did not shy away from making numerous references to Franklin Giddings (1855-1931) and especially Franz Boas (1858-1942). His praise of their work and references to it would only expand over time (Oliveira, 2019a).

There is a well-known passage in the preface to *The Masters and the Slaves*, where Freyre

³ His master's thesis, titled *Social life in Brazil in the middle of the 19th century*, was published in the journal *Hispanic American Historical Review*, volume 5

states that "Professor Franz Boas is the teacher who has left the greatest impression on me to this day" (Freyre, 2003, p. 31), attributing to Boas the fact that he learned to distinguish race from culture. This distinction was a basic assumption for the American cultural anthropology that was emerging at the time. It proved to be an important thread for criticizing theories in favor of the racial whitening of Brazilian society, which were very popular at that time. It is known that Freyre attended courses in the Anthropology and Sociology departments at Columbia University during his master's degree. The continuous references to these authors may also have reflected Freyre's intentions to establish himself as a sociologist and anthropologist in Brazil, and perhaps more so, to establish himself as a pioneer in these fields⁴.

The fact is that Freyre had significant access to a series of discussions that were still only incipient in Brazil at the time. In the United States, the social sciences had already been institutionalized since the beginning of the 20th century, with the creation of the Department of Sociology at the University of Chicago in 1910, whereas in Brazil, the first social science programs were only created in the 1930s (Oliveira, 2021). As Burke & Pallares-Burke (2008: 44) point out:

To sum up, the years that Freyre spent outside Brazil were important for his development not only because they enabled him to discover new

⁴ Gilberto Freyre recurrently claimed that he was the first sociology professor in Brazil to teach sociology in association with research, referring to the sociology course he taught at the Escola Normal de Pernambuco in the late 1920s. He also indicated that he was possibly the first professor of cultural anthropology in Brazil, referring to the period he taught at the Universidade do Distrito Federal in the 1930s (Freyre, 2003). However, it is important to mention that such a narrative is linked, above all, to the author's self-representation, which has been questioned in more recent research (Araújo, 2005; Motta, 2008).

intellectual worlds but also because they encouraged him to take his distance from his own culture. One is reminded of a story by one of Freyre's favourite authors, Lafcadio Hearn, *Kokoro*, about a young ex-samurai who returns to Japan from a stay in Europe with an increased respect for Japanese culture. The author comments that 'Foreign civilization had taught him to understand, as he could never otherwise have understood, the worth and the beauty of his own.

Besides the influences that Gilberto Freyre continually reinforced in his publications, others contributed to his analytical framework. Pallares-Burke (2012) highlights how his friendship with Rüdiger Bilden (1893-1980), who had been his fellow student at Columbia University, anticipated some of his ideas and decisively influenced some of the central theses of Freyre's work, even though references to Bilden's work gradually reduced over the years⁵. On the other hand, Motta (2008) highlights the influence of Charles Maurras (1868-1952), who was linked to the *Action Française* and spread ideas associated with the rehabilitation of tradition.

According to Freyre, it was during his stay in the United States that his need to interpret Brazil emerged. This interpretation involved, above all, the issue of miscegenation, understood as a biological and cultural phenomenon. In the preface to the first edition of *The Masters and the Slaves*, he indicated the following:

I believe that no Russian student, of the Romantics, of the 19th century, was more intensely concerned with the destinies of Russia than I was with those of Brazil at the stage when I met Boas. It was as if everything depended on

⁵ It is relevant to point out that Freyre and Bilden were part of an international network with other Brazilian and American scholars. The network was fundamental to the constitution of Afro-Brazilian Studies (Oliveira, 2019b).

me and those of my generation; on our way of solving secular issues. And of the Brazilian problems, none worried me so much as miscegenation. (Freyre, 2003: 31)

Miscegenation as the central axis of analysis of Brazilian society emerged for Gilberto Freyre during his time in the United States. However, after his time in North America, Freyre also traveled in Europe, broadening his cultural experiences and academic contacts.

As Meucci (2015) highlights, Freyre had a very close relationship with the local oligarchies and became secretary to Estácio Coimbra (1872-1937), who had been vice president of the Republic (1922-1926) and governor of the state of Pernambuco on two occasions (1911-1911, 1926-1930). This proximity to the local oligarchies is relevant to understanding his interpretation of Brazil since he observed the country from its deep relationship with the idea of tradition and regionalism. This connection also had implications for his destiny after the so-called revolution of 1930, which brought Getúlio Vargas (1882-1954) to the presidency. In this period, Estácio Coimbra was removed from power and went into exile in Europe, accompanied by Gilberto Freyre.

During the period the Gilberto Freyre was a visiting professor at Stanford University (1931) he began to organize the material that would result in his best-known work, *The Masters and the Slaves*. It was there that Freyre started writing about Brazil from afar.

Thinking About Brazil from Germany

Sérgio Buarque de Holanda was born in São Paulo to a middle-class family. His father was from Pernambuco, as was Gilberto Freyre. His early education took place in the capital, where he was a student of Afonso de Taunay (1876-1958) who nurtured his passion for history from an early age. Living in São Paulo also made it possible to engage with the modernist movement of the 1920s, so that when he moved to Rio de Janeiro with his family in 1921, he was appointed by Mário de Andrade (1893-1945) and Oswald de Andrade (1890-1954) as the representative of Klaxon magazine in the city. It is important to understand that the modernist movement assumed the role of the cultural vanguard in Brazil, establishing what Miceli (1979) called "import substitution" of cultural goods, thus stimulating new production of the country's interpretation of diverse phenomena. Holanda studied at the University of Brazil in Rio de Janeiro, earning a bachelor's degree in legal and social sciences.

While still a law student, Holanda began to combine his studies with writing articles for newspapers and magazines. He also worked for *O Jornal*, which was later incorporated into the *Diários Associados* of Assis Chateaubriand (1892-1968). In the 1920s, strongly influenced by the modernist movement, Holanda founded the magazine *Estética* together with Prudente de Moraes Neto (1902-1977). It only ever published three issues, between 1924 and 1925. After the magazine's failure, Holanda distanced himself from literary criticism and gradually distanced himself from the

modernist movement too. This turning point was marked with the publication, in 1926, of the article "O lado oposto e outros lados" (The opposite side and other sides).⁶ It is also worth mentioning that in *Roots of Brazil*, Holanda resumes his critique of national intelligence, which he claimed was based on illustrated knowledge and functioned predominantly by importing solutions or ideas from abroad (Holanda, 1995).

In 1929 he was sent by *O Jornal* to cover events in Poland, Russia, and Germany and remained in the latter country until 1931. He could not obtain a visa for Russia and did not adapt to the excessive cold in Poland, and so he eventually settled in Berlin. It was in this period that Holanda made his transition from literary criticism to history. Therefore, Holanda discovered himself as a historian in Berlin, even though he was also an observer of everyday life in Hamburg and Leipzig (Costa, 2014).

I discovered an interesting book - I still have several books from that time - a book by Kant about Frederick III. I remembered Nietzsche telling him the great Frederick was the II, so I was intrigued and bought it. Not only the first volume - later, in the United States, I found the second volume in a bookshop and managed to buy it. The fact is that from there came to me the idea for these historical subjects, for a larger approach. I have always been somewhat curious about this. (Holanda, 2004:7).

⁶ In this article, Holanda demarked his distance to more who he considered the traditional writers in Brazil, some of them he nominated: Graça Aranha (1868-1931), Guilherme de Almeida (1890-1969), Ronald de Carvalho (1893-1935), that would continue the tradition of "poesia e literatura bibelô" (trinket poetry and literature). He also criticized modernists, especially those who engaged in an intellectualist conception of Brazilian culture. In the end, he emphasized those writers he considered to be the most brilliant of that generation, such as Oswald de Andrade (1890-1954), Prudente de Moraes Neto (1904-1977), Couto de Barros (1896-1966), Antônio de Alcântara Machado (1901-1935), Manuel Bandeira (1886-1968), Mário de Andrade (1893-1945) and Ribeiro Couto (1898-1963). It is worth noting that Ribeiro Couto coined the term cordial man, which would later become central to Holanda's work.

During this period, authors such as the historian Leopold von Ranke (1795-1886), and other German intellectuals, decisively influenced Holanda's education. In his own words:

In Berlin I attended, very unsystematically, lectures by Friedrich Meinecke. They suggested new paths. I read Ernst Kantorowicz on Frederick III and then Sombart and, through Sombart, I came to Weber. I still have, here on my shelf, works of Weber that I bought at that time. (...) I may have been the first Brazilian to cite Weber in print. But the principal immediate effect I soon shrugged off: mystic philosophy and irrationalism. My best memories are still of the worldly bohemian euphoria of those last days of the Weimar Republic. I also remember interviews with Thomas Mann, as well as with some avant-garde literary figures. (Holanda, 1982: 5).

It is worth noting that Holanda highlights both the intellectual influences he received in Germany as well as the broader social, cultural, and political experiences he had in the country. During his time in Germany, he experienced the height and early decline of the Weimar Republic and the rise of Nazism. At the same time, Brazil was experiencing the so-called Revolution of 1930, which signaled the beginning of a period of democratic inflection in the country, which deepened later with the Estado Novo (1937-1945) and enacted the beginning of a civil dictatorship. We can say that this contrast of experiences also influenced Holanda's time in Germany and the ideas that he would later develop.

Over time, *Roots of Brazil* became known as a radical defense of liberal democracy, and the passage from the first to the second edition was key to the process.

However, it is undeniable that his contact with the specific sociopolitical context of Berlin at the time allowed Holanda to perceive the possibilities opened up by the liberal democracy.

The above extract also makes a relevant point regarding his affinity with irrationalist and antidemocratic authors. Even though he categorically states his distancing from such thinkers, what can be effectively observed in the passage from the first to the second edition of *Roots of Brazil* is that these authors are literally or symbolically purged (Waizbort, 2011). Some contemporary authors have even questioned Meinecke's influence on his work. Mata (2016) has pointed out that the courses offered by Meinecke in the period that Holanda was in Germany turned to topics that hardly coincided with the themes or the historical periods addressed by *Roots of Brazil*. The author also states that such courses were only offered as *privatim* modules, meaning they would have taken place in the German historian's home and would only have been open to a very limited number of participants. Without being a regular student at the University, he argues, Holanda would hardly have had access to any of these particular courses' sessions.

What we are also analyzing here is a self-representation process, since the sedimentation of Holanda into the disciplinary field of history occurs *a posteriori*. These speeches therefore represent Holanda's retrospective interpretation of his own trajectory. As Carvalho (2017: 707-708) points out:

The historian then endeavors to delineate a new beginning from the trip to Germany, five years after the end of activities around *Estética*. He says that when he was sick of reading, he even distributed his library among his friends before he left, "especially the literature books". Considering the cultural experience of displacement, the period abroad seemed the appropriate opportunity for the "revision of old ideas" (Holanda, 1979: 29). Nevertheless, the Buarque de Holanda, who was now revisiting his past, regretted that part of that experience had resulted in mistakes. If, on the one hand, the displacement contributed to the formation of a different view of things in Brazil, on the other, the German readings of that time no longer appealed to him.

However, it would be an exaggeration to say that Holanda was late in conceptualizing his role in the field of history since, in addition to being the chair of Comparative Literature, he also took over the chair of Economic History at the newly created Universidade do Distrito Federal⁷. Holanda participated intensively in Berlin's cultural life, attending concerts and events. Besides his activities with *O Jornal*, he also wrote for *Duco* magazine, published by the German-Brazilian Chamber of Commerce, and translated German films into Portuguese. In terms of social capital, he became friends with the writer Theodor Däubler (1876-1934), interviewed Thomas Mann (1875-1955), and was part of the academic circle around the poet Stefan George (1868-1933).

⁷ This university was founded in 1935 and was short-lived. In 1939, it ceased to exist, having been incorporated into the Universidade do Brasil.

In addition to writing about events in Germany, Holanda was also in charge of demystifying certain stereotypes about Brazil for foreigners. He started writing regularly for the *Brasilianisch Rundschau* magazine, in which he wrote about the country's history as well as the social, cultural, political, and economic formation of Brazil. This exercise of translating from his own culture into another society implied an intellectual effort on Holanda's part, which provided him with a unique opportunity to re-examine the Brazilian reality. As he indicated, it was from this reflection of his own culture for a foreign audience that he started the project of his book *Roots of Brazil*.

For the bilingual magazine I wrote articles attempting to explain Brazil to the Germans. It is only when you get far away that you begin to see your own country whole. You get a different perspective. And Brazil is not easy to understand; it's hard. When they stopped publishing the magazine and I returned to Brazil at the end of 1930, I brought with me an old notebook of some 400 pages for a book I intended should be called *Teoria da America*. I never published it, but two chapters of what eventually (in 1936) became *Raizes do Brasil* were drawn almost intact from those messy pages. (Holanda, 1982: 5-6).

Thus, Holanda returned to Brazil with the embryo of what would become *Roots of Brazil*, which he would only finish five years later. When he traveled to Germany, he already had some notes, mainly from conversations with Prudente de Moraes Neto, but the German authors reoriented his reflections. It is possible to state that, besides the intellectual influences he experienced abroad, he was also influenced by the works published in Brazil in the gap between his return to the country and his book's

publication. Nonetheless, it should be noted that this narrative produced *a posteriori*, besides seeking to legitimize Holanda's place in the field of history, also aims to reinforce the *locus* of the Universidade de São Paulo in the field of human and social sciences in Brazil.

In 1933 Gilberto Freyre published *The Masters and the Slaves*, presenting theses that were largely criticized by Holanda in later works, especially regarding the predominance of patriarchy in Brazil. Notably, the first edition of *Roots of Brazil* has more similarities with *The Masters and the Slaves* than the second. This is most apparent in Holanda's evaluation of Iberian heritage. If in the first edition this heritage represents a firm obstacle to modernization, in the second it is reconfigured as an increasingly rapid breakdown, given that the process of modernization would point to the consolidation of public space, depersonalization, and rationalization (Feldman, 2013).

Back in Brazil, Holanda continued to work as a journalist, and in 1936 he was appointed professor of History at the Universidade do Distrito Federal. When the institution was closed in 1939, he began working at the National Book Institute. In 1946 he moved to São Paulo, where he directed the Paulista Museum and taught at the Free School of Sociology and Politics in São Paulo. In 1958, he became a professor at Universidade de São Paulo, presenting his *Livre Docência* (habilitation) thesis entitled *Visions of Paradise*, another work he began while away from Brazil, this time in Rome.

Brazil and Its Mirrors

Gilberto Freyre and Sérgio Buarque de Holanda share certain elements in their trajectories. Besides belonging to the same generation, both belonged to middle-class families with a large amount of cultural and social capital. While Holanda approached the modernist movement of the 1920s, Freyre led the regionalist movement in the same decade, thus placing himself at the other pole of the cultural and intellectual discussion in Brazil. In any case, even though they participated in distinct intellectual groups in the 1920s, both were engaged in the cultural transformation that Brazil was going through at that time. Nevertheless, they represented two conflicting cultural and intellectual projects (Rocha, 2012).

According to Vianna (1995), the celebration of miscegenation and popular culture as emblems of “authenticity” was present among the São Paulo modernists of the 1920s. However, it was Freyre's work that best synthesized the affirmation of miscegenation in Brazil. Even though they took different paths and made different proposals, both the modernist movement to which Holanda came close and the regionalist movement of which Freyre considers himself the main leader proposed approaching “Brazilian culture”, which also implied finding and delimiting it.

The idea that Brazilian culture could be understood as the mixture of different races and cultures was not new. It was present in the national imaginary before both their time, even if this imaginary also presumed the existence of a certain hierarchy

among these races. In this sense, we could say that Brazilian society was formed not only by miscegenation but also by separation and hierarchization.

According to Bastos (2006), from the 1920s, certain aspects of the authors' written works show similarities:

I found two elements in these essays as main thematic points - the cultural issue and the search for national identity - elements that give them unity. In other words, the authors seek answers to the question: after all, what kind of country is this? The texts are marked by the need to discuss the formation problem, a characteristic of the intellectual production of the regions with a recent national constitution.

In the context in which they are produced, these works assume an imaginary character: they seek to "invent" culture to legitimize the "invention" of national identity. The author who articulates these two elements will have deciphered the dilemma and will leap to a new stage in social studies. (Bastos, 2006: 61).

These more general issues certainly permeated Freyre's and Holanda's works, but this would not be enough to indicate the existence of unity. For example, Botelho (2010) points out that the search for unity among the interpretative essays on Brazil produced between the 1920s and 1940s is more an exercise in attribution than in inference that has been produced by later generations of social scientists. It means that although we can find some common ground in these papers, especially regarding subject matter, there is a deep internal heterogeneity among the works.

Both *The Masters and the Slaves* and *Roots of Brazil* have been modified over time, incorporating and responding to criticism throughout new editions. Among these modifications, there are even dialogues between the two works. This draws attention

to the fact that *Roots of Brazil* inaugurated a collection titled *The Brazilian Documents* from the publishing house, José Olympio. The collection was directed by Gilberto Freyre, who also wrote the preface to the first edition of this book. However, from the second edition on, this preface was not included. Mata even goes as far as to highlight the hypothesis that the changes made in the second and third editions aimed to mitigate the sociological component of the book and obliterate Gilberto Freyre's influence (Mata, 2016). It is worth mentioning that the passage from the first to the second edition is decisive for *Roots of Brazil* because, as Feldman (2013: 120) rightly points out:

Throughout these editions, the changes made by Sergio Buarque affected not only the *decisive questions* of 1936 but also and above all, certain *crucial answers* offered at that time, which were subject to significant reorientations. Therefore, outlining the concerns and solutions presented in the book is a task that requires a diachronic approach.

Along these lines, we can summarize the changes that occurred between the first and subsequent editions as follows: Holanda moved away from pragmatic resignation with cordiality and skeptically approached a promise of civility so that the *classic status* of the book was elaborated based on these changes. In Freyre's case, the various editions of *The Masters and the Slaves* relied mainly on new prefaces written by the author himself to respond to the criticisms that arose, whose tone was modified over time, especially when the first generations of professional social scientists emerged in Brazil. As Sorá (1998) points out, Freyre was repeatedly classified as a

regional author by sociologists associated with the Universidade de São Paulo.

Nonetheless, we must consider that:

The idea of the region is very powerful in Brazilian cultural history. Nothing prevents us from thinking that Florestan and those of "his generation" were thinking more of São Paulo than Freyre thought of Recife. Both were competing to represent Brazil with civilizing projects and in a world of nations. Both were seeking the glory of universality and creating arbitrariness over their country. (Sorá, 1998: 138).

On the other hand, *Roots of Brazil* underwent more substantive modifications between its different editions, the most considerable being between the 1936 and 1948 editions, in which there is an evident distancing from the German influences Holanda was exposed to. For Schlegel (2017):

The Iberian heritage takes on a predominantly negative sign in the revised edition. Affectivity, familism, and personalism are barriers to political modernization, and democracy has no fundamental incompatibility with the country. The disconnection from the traditional defines the road to modernity. The country needs a vertical revolution to bring out its "most vigorous elements". (Schlegel, 2017: 10).

It is also worth mentioning that *Roots of Brazil* was published in the same year as Freyre's *The Mansions and the Shanties: the Making of Modern Brazil*, considered a continuation of *The Masters and the Slaves*, whose second edition was also published in 1951, with a preface that responded to criticisms made by Holanda (Oliveira, 2019c).

Perhaps we can consider as the main thread of our argument that both works interpret the Iberian tradition, relating to theoretical references each of the authors incorporated from their experiences abroad. On the one hand, Freyre rehabilitates the image of the Portuguese colonizer, reaffirming the importance of his plasticity to the formation of Brazilian society, whilst simultaneously indicating the importance of Black and Indigenous populations in contributing to Brazilian hybridity. On the other hand, and despite positively describing certain aspects of Iberian heritage in the first edition of *Roots of Brazil*, Holanda demonstrates in the 1948 edition how this cultural heritage has been an obstacle to the consolidation of democratic society.

In both Freyre's and Holanda's interpretations, we find the "other" to be a continuous comparative element, enabling the elaboration of Brazil's interpretation. In *The Masters and the Slaves*, Brazil is presented as a *suis generis* society, which, based on a set of influences in its formation, managed to produce "the first civilization in the tropics" through miscegenation at the biological and cultural levels. Slavery in Brazil would have been "sweeter" than in other parts of the world. The Africans would have occupied a civilizing role in Brazilian society, being considered co-colonizers (Bastos, 2006).

Although his emphasis is different to that of Freyre, Holanda pointed out that in Brazil had a "relative inconsistency of race and color prejudices", a factor that facilitated the dissemination of democratic ideas in Brazil (Holanda, 1995, 1984). In this

sense, we can say that Holanda was also influenced by what is known as the “myth of racial democracy”. Indeed, the expression “racial democracy” was not coined by Freyre, nor did he ever use it in any of his works (Lehmann, 2008). Nonetheless, it is continuously attributed to his work due to the lack of emphasis he places on racial and color prejudice in Brazil (Motta, 2000).

It is undeniable that Brazil has a highly miscegenated population and that its culture reflects this phenomenon. Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge that miscegenation does not occur in the context of power symmetry. In this regard, we follow Hall (1999) in his analysis of Caribbean society, which also experienced the colonial process.

This is not to suggest that the different elements in a syncretic formation stand in a relation of equality to one another. They are always differently inscribed by relations of power - above all the relations of dependency and subordination sustained by colonialism itself. (Hall, 1999: 8)

These issues were not on Freyre’s horizon in the terms that Hall presents them. In contrast to the experience of the United States, he saw more symmetries than asymmetries in Brazil. Briefly, we can say that for Freyre, miscegenation amalgamated racial relations (Oliveira, 2017), enabling what he called a “balance of antagonisms” between the master and the slave.

Holanda's comparison unfolded into a very negative evaluation of the Brazilian reality, indicating that democracy there had never been more than "a misunderstanding" (Holanda, 1995). It is quite true that his critique of personalism became more emphatic after the 1948 edition of *Roots of Brazil* (Schlegel, 2017), however, this analysis was essentially based on a comparison between Brazil and other democratic models.

Souza (2019), in a blunt critique of the analysis of Holanda and other interpreters of Brazil, refutes the idea that personalism or the "jeitinho" could be idiosyncratic characteristics of Brazil since the use of social capital in everyday life is also present in other societies, including where the sociohistorical formation is substantially distinct from that of Brazil.

Finally, it is worth pointing out that Freyre, despite his US academic background, also incorporated German intellectuals in his readings, while Holanda himself assisted in the translation of those texts. However, Freyre's use of authors such as Georg Simmel (1858-1918), or even Max Weber (1864-1920), took him in another direction. In his preface to the second edition of *The Mansions and the Shanties: the Making of Modern Brazil*, Freyre indicates a departure from Simmel's distinction between form and substance to assert that patriarchy, even though it assumes various forms, remains central to the formation of Brazilian society in different regions (Oliveira, 2019c). For Motta (2000, 2008), Freyre represents a profoundly anti-Weberian

position in the interpretation of Brazil by defending the idea that Brazilian modernity is based on a Portuguese-Catholic culture, rooted in traditions, and not on the growing process of rationalizing life, along the lines of Protestant culture.

Final Considerations

In this short essay, we have explored some of ways that living abroad has impacted two key interpreters of Brazilian society, demonstrating the ways that their best-known works were influenced by their academic and cultural experiences abroad. There are substantive differences between the two formative experiences. Freyre completed his higher education in the United States, while Holland studied more freely in Germany, which has also been problematized in the text. It is important to understand that both were responsible for the diffusion of ideas and concepts that until then were unknown in the Brazilian intellectual environment.

Significantly, Freyre's and Holanda's substantially different assessments of Brazilian society reflect their different theoretical frameworks and the appropriation they made of them. Similarly, later editions of their key works also reflect reassessments that were made in relation to their influences. Freyre increasingly came to reassert himself as a disciple of Boas, to the extent that Holanda made his work *Roots of Brazil* less and less German.

Both authors found it necessary to move away from their homes, leave their country, observe Brazil, and think about its dilemmas and challenges. Freyre finds in his displacement elements common with Brazil abroad, especially in the Southern United States. It leads him to a search for understanding of Brazil's cultural uniqueness, for understanding how such similar realities could simultaneously be so different. On the other hand, Holanda finds a totally different reality, rooted in the fundamental principles of liberal democracy, and wonders why it is not flourishing in Brazil.

It is fair to say that without these displacements and distances, such interpretations of Brazil might not have been possible. Thinking about the country from new references and new horizons was a task faced by Freyre's and Holanda's generation, which possibly finds in these two authors its most emblematic figures.

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