FROM MILLS TO *LATIFUNDIOS*: A REFLECTIVE ESSAY ON BRAZILIAN AGRIBUSINESS AS A CONTINUATION OF THE COLONIAL SYSTEM OF EXPROPRIATION OF THE BLACK BODY

DOI: 10.61623/cpe.en.v2n3.a03
Honourable Mention in the Mônica de Menezes Campos Prize
ISSN: 3086-2434 | e-ISSN: 3086-3554.

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Abstract

This article presents a reflective essay on racial capitalism as a mechanism for the expropriation of Black bodies. Through contributions from activist thinkers from the Black movement, combined with the account of Olaudah Equiano, a young Nigerian sold into slavery, it argues that Brazilian agribusiness represents the continuation of colonial structures, particularly in its alignment with policies implemented during the Bolsonaro administration, marked by increased land concentration and the legitimacy of violence. The analysis is conducted in light of Rosa Luxemburg's critique of militarism as a tool for the expansion of capitalism. The work then examines the myth of racial democracy, highlighting its ideological role in maintaining racial inequalities in Brazil. Finally, it articulates an analysis of W.E.B. Du Bois's studies on "color lines" in processes of exploitation. Thus, the article proposes identifying the persistence of colonial structures in the Brazilian agro-export system and its naturalization of racial violence.

Keywords: Agribusiness. Colonialism. Slavery. Expropriation. Racial Democracy.

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DOS ENGENHOS AO LATIFÚNDIO: UM ENSAIO REFLEXIVO DO AGRONEGÓCIO BRASILEIRO ENQUANTO CONTINUIDADE DO SISTEMA COLONIAL DE EXPROPRIAÇÃO DO CORPO NEGRO

Resumo

Este artigo se apresenta como um ensaio reflexivo acerca do capitalismo racial enquanto mecanismo de expropriação do corpo negro. Através da contribuição de pensadores ativistas do movimento negro, somado ao relato de Olaudah Equiano, jovem nigeriano vendido como escravo, argumenta-se que o agronegócio brasileiro representa a continuidade de estruturas coloniais, sobretudo em seu alinhamento a políticas implementadas durante o governo de Bolsonaro, marcado pelo aumento da concentração fundiária e pela legitimidade da violência. A análise é feita à luz da crítica ao militarismo como ferramenta de expansão do capitalismo proposta por Rosa Luxemburgo. Em seguida, o trabalho examina o mito da democracia racial, evidenciando seu papel ideológico na manutenção das desigualdades raciais no Brasil. Por fim, é articulada uma análise dos estudos de W.E.B Du Bois acerca das "linhas de cor" nos processos de exploração. Dessa forma, o artigo propõe a identificação da permanência de estruturas coloniais no sistema agroexportador brasileiro e sua naturalização da violência racial.

Palavras-chave: Agronegócio. Colonialismo. Escravidão. Expropriação. Democracia racial.

DE LOS ENGENIOS AL LATIFUNCIO: UN ENSAYO REFLEXIVO SOBRE EL AGRONEGOCIO BRASILEÑO COMO CONTINUACIÓN DEL SISTEMA COLONIAL DE EXPROPRIACIÓN DEL CUERPO NEGRO

Resumen

Este artículo se presenta como un ensayo reflexivo sobre el capitalismo racial como mecanismo de expropiación del cuerpo negro. A través de la contribución de pensadores activistas del movimiento negro, sumada al relato de Olaudah Equiano, un joven nigeriano vendido como esclavo, se argumenta que la agroindustria brasileña representa la continuidad de las estructuras coloniales, sobre todo en su alineamiento con las políticas implementadas durante el gobierno de Bolsonaro, marcado por el aumento de la concentración de la propiedad de la tierra y la legitimación de la violencia. El análisis se realiza a la luz de la crítica al militarismo como herramienta de expansión del capitalismo propuesta por Rosa Luxemburgo. A continuación, el trabajo examina el mito de la democracia racial, poniendo de manifiesto su papel ideológico en el mantenimiento de las desigualdades raciales en Brasil. Por último, se articula un análisis de los estudios de W.E.B. Du Bois sobre las "líneas de color" en los procesos de explotación. De este modo, el artículo propone identificar la permanencia de las estructuras coloniales en el sistema agroexportador brasileño y su naturalización de la violencia racial.

Palabras clave: Agronegocio. Colonialismo. Esclavitud. Expropiación. Democracia racial.

1. Introduction

Slavery and the transatlantic trade of black people constituted not only an economic system rooted in the past, but also the basis of a logic of exploitation and domination that spanned centuries and shaped the foundations of modern capitalism. Testimonies such as that of Olaudah Equiano (1789), combined with the analyses of authors such as W.E.B. Du Bois (1903; 1935), Eric Williams (1944), and Abdias do Nascimento (1980), reveal how the Black body was transformed into a central instrument of capitalist accumulation, not only through the force of its labor, but as a symbol of a racialized order. In this process, slavery consolidated a social organization that naturalized hierarchies, legitimized the systematic use of violence, and institutionalized inequalities.

In Brazil, which received the largest share of the enslaved African population[2], this legacy was even more profound, marking its agrarian structure and defining political life and the very ideal of citizenship. Independence in 1822 did not mean a break with the past, nor did abolition in 1888. On the contrary, the maintenance of large estates and the absence of reparatory policies perpetuated marginalization and established an ideal of mutilated citizenship. This was a reflection of the permanence of an exclusionary model that still bears the visible marks of the whip.

This pattern of historical exclusion reinvented itself in the 20th century and took on new contours with the rise of agribusiness. Presented as a symbol of modernity and progress, the sector preserves colonial characteristics of land concentration, land expropriation, and the precariousness of Black life. Thus, the rhetoric of efficiency and productivity only masks the persistence of a logic of accumulation, which is sustained by violence and degradation (Pereira *et al*. 2018).

During Jair Bolsonaro's administration, these structures gained new momentum: the state intensified its alliance with the agrarian elite, expanded the militarization of the countryside, and legitimized violence against Black and peasant populations. Even so, the myth of racial democracy has been one of the main ideological instruments since the 20th century. Far from being a mere misinterpretation, it represents a political project of historical and cultural erasure, reinforcing exclusion by sustaining a narrative of democracy that never existed.

At the heart of the discussion is the question: How does the current Brazilian agro-export model perpetuate colonialist structures based on land

2 Data available in the *Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade* Database (2025).

concentration, expropriation of black labor, and violence in rural areas, and how does this arrangement contribute to stifling Brazilian democracy and the very concept of citizenship?

To this end, Rosa Luxemburg's (1970) critique of militarism as an arm of capitalist expansion and the role of the state in capital accumulation will be analyzed. Her writings provide an assertive lens for understanding the articulation between racism and capitalism at the roots of Brazilian agribusiness. Furthermore, W.E.B. Du Bois's conceptions of "color lines" as a structural category of social life will allow for an in-depth analysis of Brazilian democracy and its social hierarchies.

2. Methodology

The article adopts a historical methodological perspective by combining nationalism and internationalism with a literature review focused on reflecting on the black struggle, both in the history of the colony that preceded Brazil's existence and in Brazil after the Proclamation of the Republic. The analysis is based on classic texts from the black movement and theoretical works that discuss racial capitalism, criticism of state militarism, and the myth of democracy.

The methodology is based on a historical and structural reading, articulating Rosa Luxemburg's (1970) critiques of militarism as an instrument for capital accumulation and theories proposed by W.E.B. Du Bois (1903), such as "color lines" and the myth of racial democracy propagated by Gilberto Freyre (1933).

3. Racial Capitalism and the Expropriation of the Black Body

When we sweat,
doesn't our body sweat like a white person's?
When you beat us,
don't we bleed the same?
[...]
When you shoot us,
don't we die as well?[3]

Slavery is not just a "historical institution" or a "production model," but a way of relating between human beings (Pinsky 1992). For almost four

3 *Ó Pai, Ó*, directed by Monique Gandenberg (Brazil, 2007). Author's translation.

centuries, black bodies were kidnapped, gagged, whipped, and stripped of all humanity. More than ten million human beings were torn from their lands and chained in filthy ship holds built for a single purpose: the transport of goods.

Thrown into the sea, death was nothing more than another passenger, and sometimes desired over a life of slavery. The disposal of dead black bodies was so frequent that, according to testimonies from the time, it caused changes in the behavior of entire schools of sharks in the Atlantic Ocean, which began to follow the trail of blood left by European ships (Rediker 2007).

Olaudah Equiano, a young man born in 1745 in the province of Eboé, in what is now southern Nigeria, and sold into slavery at the age of eleven, recounts in his book *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa, the African* the horrors faced by him and thousands of enslaved Africans during the crossing aboard slave ships.

> Indeed, such were the horrors of my visions and fears at that moment that, if ten thousand worlds were mine, I would have freely parted with them all to exchange my condition for that of the humblest slave in my own country. When I looked around the ship and saw a large copper furnace boiling, and a crowd of blacks of all kinds in chains, each with their faces expressing discouragement and sadness, I no longer doubted my fate (Equiano 1789, 53-54).
>
> I feared being killed, because white people seemed and acted, as I thought, in such a savage manner; for I had never seen among any people such examples of brutal cruelty; and this did not apply only to us blacks, but also to some of the white people (Equiano 1789, 54).
>
> The proximity of the location and the heat of the climate, added to the number of people on the ship, which was so crowded that each person barely had room to turn around, almost suffocated us. This caused profuse sweating and the air soon became unfit to breathe, causing an illness among the slaves, from which many died, victims of the short-sighted greed of their buyers. [...]. The cries of the women and the moans of the dying made it an almost inconceivable scene of horror (Equiano 1789, 58).
>
> One day, when the sea was calm and the wind moderate, two of my weary compatriots, preferring death to such a miserable life, managed to climb over the nets and jump into the sea. Another fellow, quite worn down by his illness, also followed their example, and I believe that many others would have done the same if they

> had not been prevented by the ship's crew. [...]. Two of the wretches drowned, but they rescued the other and then mercilessly flogged him for trying to prefer death to slavery (Equiano 1789, 65).

Upon disembarking, the atrocities committed on land were even more brutal and dehumanizing. Open-air markets offered the lives of black men, women, and children as commodities. It was a system that classified black people and cattle together (Du Bois 1903). Also in his book, Olaudah describes the sale of slaves as a moment of "euphoria and anxiety" for buyers, who, upon hearing the signal, immediately ran to the courtyard where the enslaved were displayed and chose the "lot" that most pleased them.

Equiano ends the second chapter of his book with the following quote:

> It is not enough that we are torn from our country and our friends to work for your luxury and lust? [..]. Will our dearest friends and relatives still be separated from each other and thus prevented from brightening the gloom of slavery with the small comfort of being together and sharing their suffering and sadness? Surely this is a new refinement in cruelty which, although it has no advantage in atoning for it, thus aggravates the anguish and adds new horrors even to the misery of slavery (Equiano 1789, 79).

From cotton plantations in the United States to intensive sugar production in the Caribbean, from gold and diamond mining to large coffee mills in Brazil, from cocoa harvesting in Venezuela to tobacco plantations in Cuba. Slavery in the Atlantic was undoubtedly the first major experiment in agricultural industrialization on a global scale (Du Bois 1935).

The slave ship was a profit machine, and the transatlantic slave trade was one of the most lucrative activities of the 18th and 19th centuries (Rediker 2007). World powers and entire economies fed off the expropriation of black bodies, and their whipped labor was the foundation upon which industrial capitalism was built (Williams 1944). Between the 1830s and 1840s, New York merchants and bankers granted loans secured by enslaved people and turned these debts into bonds, which were later sold on Wall Street. These securities were traded alongside canal and railroad bonds, and the profits extracted from the forced labor of thousands of Black people, used to finance industries and strengthen institutions, flowed through the financial heart of the United States (Baptist 2014).

However, beyond a purely economic perspective, slavery also shaped patterns of exploitation based on "racial lines." Researchers, anthropologists,

biologists, and doctors, mostly European and American, developed theories of biological determinism, which defended the existence of an intellectual hierarchy. The then "racial science" of the 19th century postulated inherent differences between races and legitimized, through highly biased research, that black bodies were biologically inferior, had less rational capacity, and were closer to "nature" than to "civilization" (Du Bois 2022).

Such assumptions gained the status of "legitimate science" and were used as ideological fuel to justify and legitimize systems of domination. It is understandable that it was extremely advantageous for the European colonialist machine to give slavery a natural and, in a way, "inevitable" appearance. How could racial segregation and the dehumanization of black bodies be challenged if, first of all, these bodies were not seen as human beings like whites and, as a result of their "intellectual and biological inferiority," the use of their labor was sold not as a cruel social and ideological construct, but as an inevitable reflection of biology?

In this way, science was used as a political weapon, with the aim of naturalizing and softening racial inequalities, ideologically underpinning the belief in white superiority, and justifying slavery (Du Bois 2022). This relationship, not only of exploitation but also of expropriation of the black body, defines the basic essence of racialized capitalism, that is, a mode of accumulation that is simultaneously a system of domination (Fraser 2016).

Violence and coercive power are central to understanding the capitalist movement and the contribution of slavery to global economic development (Burnard and Riello 2020). Violence plays a crucial role in the expropriation and domination of territories and bodies, while coercion is focused on the task of assigning categories, that is, distinguishing those who are citizens from those considered "inferior." Explicitly racialized from the outset, the capitalist structure systematically produced hierarchies, creating groups that were "by nature" predisposed to slavery (Burnard and Riello 2020).

The existence of racial division anchored the roots of the capitalist machine, which created, reproduced, and disseminated racist and fallacious ideologies based on pseudoscience, which fed back into it for centuries. Thus, the concept of "race" emerged as a means of selecting those who "deserved" freedom and exonerating those responsible for barbarism.

In Brazil, the tentacles of racial capitalism and slave violence found fertile ground. The country alone was responsible for importing almost five million Africans, accounting for about 40% of all Atlantic slave trade (Luna and Klein 2010). From the sugar mills in the Northeast to the expansion of coffee plantations in the Southeast, through gold and diamond mining in the

interior. The entire colonial economy was built on the expropriation of the bodies and labor of enslaved Black people. No other territory depended for so long, and with such intensity, on slavery to sustain and drive its economic growth (Schwarcz and Starling 2015).

The country's proximity to slave trade routes facilitated the purchase of enslaved Black people at a much lower price compared to other colonies at the time. So cheap, in fact, that it was more economical to acquire new slaves than to care for those already on the farms, who were sick and debilitated as a result of torture and overwork (Nascimento 1980).

More than an economic institution, slavery represented a social logic, shaping political and cultural dimensions and the very notion of citizenship in Brazil (Chalhoub 2012). This was one of the opportunities to insert the colony that preceded Brazil into global capitalism, while creating an agrarian elite highly dependent on monoculture and exports. The plantation system was not only a productive machine, but also a space that strengthened land concentration and profound racial inequality, marked by extreme violence and the dehumanization of Black bodies. Drawing on Rosa Luxemburg's (1970) analysis, the logic of imperialist expansion that followed this historical period aimed to violently expand the capitalist way of life to non-capitalist areas.

Hand in hand with slavery, monoculture shaped the formation of Brazil as we know it today. As one of the largest, if not the largest, slave-owning nation in the world, the ideological dismantling of racist mentality did not end with the abolition of slavery in 1888. It was redefined in new and dynamic forms of exploitation and exclusion, keeping Black people on the margins and the agrarian elite in power (Fernandes 1978). The country proudly continued to follow the Portuguese model, having been one of the first to enslave Black people and the last to free them from captivity (Nascimento 1980).

The first Land Law of 1850, ruthlessly signed less than a month after the enactment of the Eusébio de Queirós Law, which prohibited the trafficking of black people in Brazil, contributed substantially to making enslaved black people and their descendants even more invisible within the country's legal and territorial ordering process (Leite 2010). Land was transformed into a commodity and access to property by the black population was systematically denied, which ensured the concentration of land ownership in the hands of the elite. By denying them citizenship, land, and rights, the law established one of the cruelest, yet most efficient, mechanisms of territorial expropriation.

Brazil's colonial and slave-owning past is not merely a memory, but rather a structure that can still be perceived today. Violence against black bodies has not ceased, and contemporary agribusiness, often portrayed as a symbol

of modernity, success, and efficiency, still carries at its core the legacy of the sugar mills. The history of slavery still underpins the country's agricultural production and keeps turning the imperialist wheels of the colonial era, which never disappeared, but merely reinvented themselves.

3.1. Brazilian Agribusiness as a Continuation of the Colonial Project of latifundios

In a country where independence maintained slavery and abolition maintained large estates, the challenges faced by the black community and the landless are two sides of the same coin (Villas Bôas 2011). After the formal abolition of slavery in 1888, enslaved people gained the "legal status" of citizens. At the same time, the Black presence became undesirable, marginalized, and excluded from any political, economic, and social rights. If slavery was a heinous crime against 300 million Africans, the manner in which they were emancipated was no less cruel a form of genocide (Nascimento 1980).

In truth, the only thing they abolished was the responsibility of landowners towards the large mass of newly freed slaves, which Abdias do Nascimento, university professor, politician, and civil and human rights activist for the black population, called "a perfect transaction carried out by whites, for whites, and for the benefit of whites" (Nascimento 1980, 63), without any concern for the true struggle of the black population against the oppressive, violent, and expropriating regime of slavery.

Enslaved Black people and their descendants were thrown into a freedom that denied them employment, housing, land, and state assistance. Those in power remained the same, and the newly freed population, left to fend for themselves, was systematically deprived of the economic and territorial possibilities for survival. To think about the Brazilian countryside is to think about the inequalities that structure our society, fundamental parts of large landholdings. However, without thinking about Black people, it is impossible to think about Brazil (Bastos 2024).

The countryside was not defined by the democratization of land, but rather by concentration. This logic perpetuated the reproduction of an agrarian elite that, once wielding whips, now sells the idea of modernity and progress through agribusiness, without sharing a single penny with those truly responsible for the origin of their fortune. Far from representing the triumph of the country, agribusiness is the modernization of slave-owning *latifundia*: monoculture, export-oriented, and, above all, expropriating.

For Antônio Canuto, a member of the Pastoral Land Commission, agribusiness is part of a process of conservative modernization that attempts

to hide, behind supposed advances in production, the same land ownership structure and labor relations that have been in place since colonial time (Canuto 2004). To understand what the Brazilian agrarian bourgeoisie is, it is essential to analyze the classes it produces, not only in terms of their place in the capitalist production chain, but also from the ideological point of view of maintaining power (Barros 2018). A violent and unifying force of the interests of a dominant group, which evokes oppression, exploitation, and land concentration, characteristics familiar to the old sugar mills.

Agribusiness "does not have and does not want to have" a definition or even precise parameters. However, it can be identified by its modus operandi: with billion-dollar tax exemptions, degradation of the social and environmental context in which it operates, exclusively business-oriented goals, exorbitant public financing, and production of commodities, but not food (Filho 2021). The current Brazilian *latifundio* keeps half of the land in a country of continental proportions in the hands of only 1% of landowners (Frigotto 2021). This is an emblematic structural example that still has its roots in slavery and land expropriation.

The Brazilian agrarian elite is sustained by the triad of "land monopoly + control of the means of production + political and electoral power" (Boechat 2021), and this arrangement has allowed former slave-owning oligarchies not only to be renewed but also to capture the support of the state. In this way, agribusiness becomes an economic strategy that, through the association between capital, large land ownership, and violence, maximizes profits, which are legitimized and financed by the state.

Thus, agricultural culture not only survived the end of slavery and reinvented itself in the Brazilian imagination, but also gained new momentum in 2019 with the government of Jair Bolsonaro. By presenting himself as a representative of "Agro-Brazil" Bolsonaro further deepened the alliance between the state and the agrarian elite, making agribusiness the centerpiece of his economic policies. Under his administration, ministerial reforms dismantled the cross-cutting nature of public policies, especially on the issue of land distribution, and his public statements repeatedly dehumanized Black communities and their struggle for access to land.

The Bolsonaro administration's policy applied colonial power from within and outside the agencies responsible for protecting and defending environmental and social rights, turning state structures into predatory machines (Missiatto *et al*. 2021). As proof, one of his first measures as

president, through Decree No. 9.667 of January 2019,[4] was to transfer the responsibility for environmental licensing, previously held by the National Institute of Colonization and Agrarian Reform (INCRA), to the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock. This was a cruel attempt to dismantle the institution and dismantle land redistribution policies that ran counter to the economic interests of his government, which was strongly aligned with the agro-export sector.

Under the leadership of Ricardo Salles, then Minister of the Environment, Jair Bolsonaro's administration adopted a highly permissive stance on environmental issues, with policies that weakened oversight, control, and efforts to combat predatory extraction. Also in 2019, the government sanctioned Decree No. 10.108,[5] which linked the Palmares Cultural Foundation, responsible for promoting the preservation of cultural and economic values of African influence in the country, to the Ministry of Tourism. The Foundation was influenced by a reactionary ideology, anti-environmentalist tendencies, and aggressive communication (Santos *et al*. 2021).

> Unlike other governments which, although they have been inefficient in implementing environmental protection codes, have maintained the institutional nature of environmental agencies, ensuring public debate and transparency around environmental issues, Jair Bolsonaro's government stands out for its radical transformation of public environmental protection institutions. [...] Although colonialism has been present to a greater or lesser extent throughout the country's political history, what is currently unfolding is its most virulent, aggressive, and unrestrained form (Missiatto *et al*. 2021, 92. Author's translation).

More than just agricultural policy, the Bolsonaro government represented and reinforced an ideology: agribusiness as "national identity." This rhetoric, however, masked the structural violence of the sector, reaffirming the expropriation of land and the erasure of Black bodies. Bolsonarism constituted a kind of "internal neocolonialism" in which the state acts as the armed

4 This regulation approves the Regulatory Structure and the Table of Commissioned Positions and Positions of Trust of the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, and Supply, reassigns commissioned positions and positions of trust, transforms commissioned positions and positions of trust, and amends Decree No. 6.464, of May 27, 2008 (Decreto n. 6.464, de 27 de maio de 2008), which provides for the appointment and performance of agricultural attachés to Brazilian diplomatic missions abroad (Decreto n. 9.667, de janeiro de 2019).

5 Annex to Decree No. 9.660, dated January 1, 2019, which provides for the affiliation of indirect federal public administration entities (Decreto nº 10.108, de 1º de janeiro de 2019).

wing of large landowners, legitimizing armed violence in the countryside (Fernandes 2004).

When considering the structural violence that sustains Brazilian agribusiness, it is possible to bring Rosa Luxemburg's critique of political militarism and the use of force as a form of social coercion into the analysis. In *The Accumulation of Capital*, the author (1970) analyzes militarism as a vital part of the capitalist accumulation process and exposes an almost inseparable link between them. For her, the use of violence has always been a resource for capital to support it in its expansionist struggle, making it a device that guarantees its economic reproduction and the maintenance of the so-called "social order."

> Capital makes more energetic use of militarism to assimilate, through colonialism and world politics, the means of production and labor forces of non-capitalist countries or strata [...]. The more violently militarism exterminates non-capitalist strata, both abroad and at home, and the worse the living conditions of the working strata, the more the daily history of accumulation in the world is transformed into a series of catastrophes and upheavals (Luxemburg 1970, 411. Author's translation).

Capitalist accumulation uses a systematic method of expropriation and annihilation of non-capitalist social organizations. Each new expansionist incursion must, without exception, be accompanied by violence, responsible for dismantling social and economic relations that do not follow the capitalist march, violently dispossessing everything in its path. Thus, militarism establishes itself as an agent of containment of insurgent social forces, guaranteeing bourgeois order.

Furthermore, Rosa Luxemburg points out the importance of the state as a tool to support capital accumulation and its alignment with the interests of the ruling classes. For her, capitalism is incapable of operating without state support and its various forms of institutionalizing and instrumentalizing violence (Luxemburg 1970). Thus, the state ceases to be a representative of social welfare and becomes a class state, in which there is no possibility of "development" that is not inevitably violent and oppressive (Luxemburg 2011).

The fallacy of "development" is inserted into society through authoritarianism and militarization, based on brutal exploitation, expropriation of land and resources, and subjugation of peoples considered "inferior" for centuries. It should be understood that "development" used as a marker of progress

and civility has an expansionist core, destined to colonize and adjust all dimensions of social life to its logic. It acts not only as an economic system, but as a model of production and reproduction of social life (Mariutti 2015).

By applying this critique to the Brazilian context, it is possible to identify how the militarization of the agrarian issue fulfills the exact role identified by Rosa Luxemburg. The state, far from acting as a neutral mediator and guarantor of social welfare, acts as a historical propagator of land violence. With greater intensity during the Bolsonaro administration, this process has been strengthened through the relaxation of access to weapons,[6] the encouragement of rural militias, increased violence in the countryside[7] and financing for the agro-export sector.

During his administration, Bolsonaro encouraged the cult of violence as a way to nullify the political struggle for territorial rights, strengthening an imperialist economic policy that reduces everything it can to market logic, including human life. By associating the expansion of agribusiness with the idea of a national project, Bolsonaro converted the Brazilian state into a veritable "armed wing of large landowners," mobilizing state forces in defense of the landowning elite. This dynamic highlights what Rosa Luxemburg had already criticized since the beginning of the 20th century: militarism as a form of organized coercion, which guarantees the reproduction of capital and represses the struggle of historically expropriated peoples.

For sociologist Francisco Cavalcanti de Oliveira, Brazil's conservative commercial reality tends to use violence as a bargaining chip, and the Brazilian agrarian bourgeoisie identifies with the use of totalitarianism as a project of social apartheid (Oliveira 2006). Bolsonaro represented a policy that governs for the rich, producing an impoverished, cruel, violent, and exclusionary social reality. His speeches reinforced an authoritarian and aggressive rhetoric, culturing the use of violence as a means of maintaining social order. In reality, this only resulted in increased repression and violence in rural areas.

Bolsonaro's government and its almost intimate relationship with the military core highlight the instrumentalization of force as a tool for maintaining

6 The facilitation of access to weapons during the Bolsonaro administration has contributed to increasingly violent actions by agribusiness against traditional communities. Decree No. 9.847, dated June 25, 2019 (available at: https://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/_ato2019-2022/2019/decreto/d9847.htm), granted greater permissiveness for the carrying of firearms, which increased the occurrence of violent attacks and the action of militias in defense of private property in rural areas.

7 In the first two years of government, there was a significant increase in armed conflicts in rural areas. According to data from the Annual Report on Conflicts in Rural Areas, published by rhe Pastoral Land Commission (available at: https://cptnacional.org.br/produto/conflitos-no-campo-brasil-2019), 2019 was marked by the highest level of violence in rural areas in 14 years, with armed conflicts over water and land, led by ruralists, land grabbers and illegal loggers.

inequality in Brazil, serving as a foundation for strengthening a logic of domination, oppression, and violence. Armed violence in rural areas is not sporadic; it reveals the colonial and expropriatory face of Brazilian agrarian capitalism. By aligning itself politically, economically, and ideologically with agribusiness, the state confirms Rosa Luxemburg's diagnosis: militarism is an instrument for the expansion of capital.

Agribusiness, as an update of slave-based large-scale farming, is only sustained through systematic violence against those who claim the land and denounce its long expropriation and concentration. Without the physical and symbolic erasure of what does not suit it, the Brazilian land structure cannot sustain itself. Thus, militarism in Brazil not only guarantees capitalist and land accumulation in the countryside, but also acts as a device for maintaining racism and coloniality. Capital expands and drags militarism along with it as the armed guardian of its needs (Luxemburg 1970).

3.2. Social Justice and the Pillar of Democracy

If the Brazilian countryside is organized around land concentration, the expropriation of Black bodies, and militarization, urban life cannot escape the same logic. The structural violence left behind by centuries of racism has manifested itself not only in land ownership, but also in the very definition of citizenship. From the outset, the construction of democracy in the country was marked by a slave-owning legacy of exclusion and racial inequality. In this boiling cauldron, one of the most powerful ideological narratives of the 20th century was consolidated: the myth of racial democracy.

Spread by intellectuals and institutions, this belief supported the idea that the process of miscegenation and coexistence between whites, blacks, and indigenous peoples in Brazil had produced a society free of racial conflicts. Based on an idealized interpretation, widely disseminated by Gilberto Freyre (1933) in his book *Casa-Grande & Senzala* (The Masters and the Slaves), the narrative created the image of a country whose harmonious coexistence had dissolved possible racial clashes and antagonisms.

Far from corresponding to reality, the myth became useful as an ideological mechanism of concealment, masking the structural inequalities inherited from slavery and denying the exclusion faced by the black population politically, economically, and socially (Fernandes 1978). By naturalizing racial injustices, the narrative hindered the formulation of policies aimed at correcting these inequalities, which undermined the very concept of Brazilian democracy.

This ideological operation represented a true symbolic genocide by making the denial of the black population a foundation of national identity (Nascimento 1980). The myth of racial democracy not only masked violence, but reproduced it through historical and cultural erasure. And it is not possible to talk about democracy without addressing the problem of the century: the color lines (Du Bois 1903).

In this sense, the contributions of W.E.B. Du Bois have become fundamental to understanding the inseparability of race and democracy. In his work *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), the author argues that so-called color lines are not only a social barrier, but a continuous global division that cuts across access to rights, resources, and the idea of humanity. Thus, democracy cannot be thought of as an abstract ideal of equality; it must be examined through concrete evidence of racial exclusion. This perspective broadens the democratic debate by revealing racial inequality as an integral part of historical construction, rather than a mere "contradiction."

When applied to Brazil, Du Bois' criticism exposes the fragility of the myth of democracy at its core. By selling itself as an example of coexistence between blacks and whites to be celebrated, the country hides centuries of social, political, and economic exclusion. Brazilian society is marked not only by its slave-owning heritage, but also by laws, decrees, and regulations that institutionalized exclusion and systematically compromised the rights and history of the Black population.

One of the cruelest examples was Decree No. 370, dated May 2, 1890,[8] signed by Ruy Barbosa, then Minister of Finance. The document authorized the burning of records of slave purchases and sales, an incisive way of erasing documentary evidence of slavery. This action made it difficult to claim reparations and recognition of property, contributing to the historical erasure of the brutal experience of Black people in the country.

The First Republican Constitution of 1891[9] prevented the black population from accessing the ballot box by imposing literacy as one of the requirements in a country that had recently emerged from slavery. In addition, the Brazilian Penal Code[10] in force criminalized aspects of black culture, creating laws that prohibited its manifestation, such as the Capoeira Law, considered a crime of disturbing the peace.

8 Note the regulations for the implementation of Decree No. 169A of January 19, 1890, which replaces Laws No. 1.237 of September 24, 1864, No. 3.272 of October 5, 1885, and Decree No. 165A, dated January 17, 1890, on movable credit operations (Brazil 1890b).

9 Brazil 1891.

10 Brazil 1890a.

In 1951, the Afonso Arinos Law (No. 1.390)[11] became the first to criminalize discriminatory practices based on race or color in public spaces. However, it was limited to situations with witnesses or *flagrante delicto*, which hindered its effective application. It was only in 2010, with Law No. 12.288,[12] that the country recognized racism as a structural problem. Such legislation, mostly exclusionary or ineffective, contributed to keeping the black population at an institutional, political, historical, and cultural disadvantage. Its effects, however, spanned generations and can still be felt today.

The abolition of slavery did not mean the full incorporation of the black population into society. On the contrary, it consolidated their marginalization. Instead of breaking old chains, abolition operated in continuity with the logic of slavery, since the political, territorial, and institutional conditions for effective democracy were not created. In fact, the state actively worked to undermine any possibility of the black population ascending to the social order.

Therefore, Brazilian democracy is incomplete, and the narrative of a "racial democracy" has only served to perpetuate inequalities (Fernandes 1978). By ignoring the racial dimension, the country has merely reinforced a false democratic universality, creating an appearance of equality while keeping the social mechanisms of discrimination intact. This paradox has contributed to keeping the Black population without access to political representation, rights, and space to fight for their cause: a mutilated citizenship.

A democracy that excludes black people is not a true democracy (Du Bois, 1935).

4. Conclusion

Historical analysis of slavery reveals that its legacy is not limited to the past, but remains a central structure of racial capitalism. The expropriation of black bodies, legitimized by pseudoscientific theories and institutionalized by the state, not only drove the process of primitive accumulation, but also laid the foundations for social and racial inequality in Brazil. In the countryside, abolition did not mean land redistribution or democratization of access to citizenship, but rather the continuation of a large landownership model that,

11 It includes among criminal offenses the practice of acts resulting from prejudi based on race or color (Brazil 1951).

12 It establishes the Statute of Racial Equality; amends Laws No. 7.716, of January 5, 1989, No. 9.029, of April 13, 1995, No. 7.347, of July 24, 1895 and No. 10.778, of November 24, 2003 (Brazil 2010).

under a new guise, kept the Black population marginalized, precarious, and deprived of fundamental rights.

The intertwining of slavery, monoculture, and land concentration ensured the reproduction of a racially privileged agrarian elite, while relegating Black people to structural exclusion. Thus, understanding slavery as the foundation of global capitalism and the Brazilian social order means recognizing that racism is not a colonial remnant to be overcome, but a constitutive element that still shapes relations of power, labor, and territory today.

An analysis of Brazilian agribusiness from a Luxemburgist perspective reveals that its strength lies not only in its productive capacity or economic dominance, but also in the structural violence that sustains its expansion. The Bolsonaro government has made this aspect even more evident by mobilizing the state as the armed wing of large landowners, deepening the militarization of the countryside and reaffirming racism as the foundation of the social order. As Rosa Luxemburg pointed out, militarism is not an exception to capitalist logic, but an essential element of accumulation, indispensable for ensuring the expropriation of territories and bodies considered disposable.

In Brazil, this violence is rooted in a long tradition of slavery, reinterpreted and adapted to the demands of global capital. Recognizing this continuity is essential to exposing the myth of agribusiness as an engine of national development and revealing its true nature: internal neocolonialism sustained by expropriation, repression, and denial of citizenship, which, far from being overcome, has been reinterpreted.

Similarly, the historical trajectory of the Black population in Brazil shows that abolition did not mean inclusion. The erasure of documents, voting restrictions, the absence of reparatory public policies, and the criminalization of cultural practices represent a systematic silencing by the State. Thus, the myth of racial democracy served as an ideological tool, creating a false illusion of equality.

In light of Du Bois' contributions, it becomes clear that a democracy that does not address color lines remains incomplete. By denying the centrality of racism in its social formation, Brazil has remained trapped in a fictitious ideal that marginalizes and silences the Black population. As Florestan Fernandes pointed out, Brazilian democracy has never been realized because it has not incorporated all of its citizens. Thus, racial democracy should not be understood as an ideal to be preserved, but as a myth to be debunked.

Only by recognizing the historical and structural exclusion of black people and placing their experiences at the center of the social project will it be possible to think about democracy.

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