

Brazilian Culture

Professor Dilma de Melo Silva

Univerisidade de Sao Paulo

We'll talk about the formation of the Brazilian culture. I'll refer mainly to articles, to the material included in this book 'Brasil, Sua Gente, Sua Cultura' which I have organized. This small series mostly published for foreign students at USP is divided into three parts.

And the first part focuses on our culture formation giving the students specific information, quantitative too pointing out the matrices on indigenous issue, for instance. In Brazil, when the Portuguese arrived here in order to take possession of land belonging to them according to the treat signed much earlier with Spain they found, as we know today around five million Indians somewhat spread about in the territory.

We have material that I can present to you later showing this distribution. Just in a parenthesis, if we consider it today from these five million Indians, Indian nations existing here we have around 235,000. That is millions of people, of human beings in this 'meeting' of cultures in this shock, this conflict. Or, using Prof. Darcy Ribeiro's Expression in this 'clash' of cultures our indigenous communities were extremely impaired.

Another important group to be considered as a matrix is the Lusitanian group which came from the Iberian Peninsula with very distinct characteristics. So, when we think that Portugal, in the Iberian Peninsula was dominated by 600, 700 years, by the Moors in fact, what really came here was a Moorish culture that had already assimilated very strong elements from the culture of North Africa and of Arabic origin from the Arabic Peninsula.

And they came to this land carrying very distinct traits different from what one can imagine in a pure European. Secondly, the third important matrix to focus on is the African origin. Africans who came to this land, too came from different origins. They came in human 'tides'. First, Bantus, then, Sudanese, Iorubás, Fon, Aussás, etc. So, when we consider the map of Africa we see that these 'tides' came, as of the 16th thru the 19th in different contingents. We know today that around six or seven million

Africans were brought to this land and were dispersed here. This means that since its origin, the first century of settlement our most characteristic trait has been miscegenation.

It's an 'imbrication', it's a conjunction it's this exposure to different cultures that are also different in their origins. Imagine five or six million Africans, Bantus different from Iorubás who are different from Fons. And different from Aussás for instance, who were Mohammedan. This group, in contact with indigenous communities, also with different languages different religions and under Portuguese control. I consider this important. We have to keep this in mind. In this huge process of trans-culture the Lusitanian, the European, white, Christian matrix was a factor, it exercised hegemony on the others.

For example, language imposition, a very important factor. Slaved Africans were set apart in the ships they were left in the ports, ethnic groups set apart. They couldn't use their language, their religion. They were not able to live their culture in Brazil. The same thing happened to the Indians. In the catechism process, for indoctrination, evangelization exercised by the Portuguese, mostly by Jesuits we see, then a very strong presence of the Jesuit mentality whereby the axis, Christianity, the Portuguese language were to be considered as the most important factors. This imposition of two values religion and language will result in a significant trait in these first centuries. And what does it happen in the 19th century? We saw this process in the 16th -19th period.

Or 300 years where cultural plurality came from these clashes and contacts. In the 19th century, an important fact takes place. Brazil is no longer a colony. The Portuguese royal family comes to Brazil, Rio de Janeiro. There's a court. We are United Kingdom of Portugal and Algarve. And the presence of the court brings a new tide of Europeans. More Portuguese subjects come, those related to the court a large number of Frenchmen, the famous French mission who came in 1816, 1818. And a new form of treatment within culture, a new esthetic. We have an important formation a very strong one linked to neoclassicism, academicism, eclecticism.

The 19th century, thus, will be marked by this presence new Europeans arriving here in the first reign and later in the second reign. With Pedro I. Pedro II brings new scholars, researchers. He lends culture a strong dynamics. By the end of the 19th century, two important events took place. First, formal liberation of slaves through the Golden Law,

in 1888. Second, in the following year, the republic proclamation. A new cycle of Brazilian history is closed the empire period and we begin life in the Republic the transition from the 19th to the 20th century.

In the 20th century, what do we face? During the first two decades, intense mobilization a large tide, now, of European immigrants too from Spanish, Italian, German Turkish, Syrian, Lebanese origins. In the following moment, Asian, mostly Japanese. And they bring a new element along to the discussions formed around this idea of a Brazilian nation the idea of a Brazilian nationality.

I always ask my students: what is it to be a Brazilian? What is it that makes me different from an Italian, a Russian, a Pole? What elements, what ingredients are there present in our life, in our routine to make us identify ourselves with each other in relation to an 'alter idem' in relation to another. Who is this other? In this process, in the '20s an important event takes place here in São Paulo the 1922 Modern Art Week. In February 1922, here, in our Teatro Municipal a movement emerges, for three days. An event of great importance like a landmark, a breakaway, a before and an after.

Present are Mário de Andrade, Oswald de Andrade, Tarsila Pagu, Anita Malfati, Pedro Monteiro, etc. A large group of artists, writers, musicians. We can't forget Villa Lobos whose music was booed, since no one understood it. What did these intellectuals, these artists want? They wanted to break away from the previous period and to have a new proposition. Our culture, our art, our artistic expression should have a national aspect. Brazil should express itself. And how could it express itself?

Let's see Tarsila's paintings. Tarsila has two icons, in my point of view. One of them is here, at USP's Contemporary Art Museum. And this is the Negro woman. If necessary, we could show it and you would have contact with this Negro figure. She takes this emblematic figure of a Negro woman a nurse, the one who gave, the wet nurse and Tarsila is probably recalling her own wet nurse in a Capivari farm, where she was born where she was raised, as a farmer's daughter.

And the other icon, her other work is Abaporu the image of an Indian. They are thus seeking in the two mentioned matrices the African and the Indian symbols of what this new Brazil should be. This Brazil that is going into modern times going into a process of being tuned with European languages. It's no longer a copying process when they're simply transferring from there to here things that were made in France, for instance.

But it's a sense of anthropophagi as Oswald de Andrade would refer to it. We will "swallow" the other. I'm going to assimilate languages, forms, elements whatever is my interest to transform what is mine, what is ours.

His proposition, then as a matter of fact, there's a beautiful manifesto the Anthropophagic Manifesto proposing these elements. In 1948, Mário de Andrade presents a lecture in Rio de Janeiro, in the Casa do Estudante and analyzes the 1922 movement. He says, more than 20 years later "We wanted to have the right to experiment the right to seek characteristic elements of our country of our nationality we wanted to be tuned with whatever happens abroad but with a national conscience".

Thus these propositions contain a tension between mine and the other's, ours and what is not ours. And the issue of the "alter idem" emerges as element of a first proposal to form our culture. As of the '20s and '30s we see new esthetic movements other artistic movements where the social dynamics issue emerges. Our interest, it's important to emphasize studying culture is the identification of present elements which I identify myself with, I create my identification. I look around and I see myself. Or I don't see myself. I notice what the links are in this dynamics.

In an up-to-date study of Brazilian culture it seems to me that it's of crucial importance that we have a look at this trajectory historical and chronological, of culture. And for the time being, for contemporary times mainly as of, I think the '70s. And I'll refer now to a very interesting article by Professor Alfredo Bosi called 'Cultura Brasileira, Culturas Brasileiras', plural. Prof. Bosi says that there are niches, spots, culture stances where I lean myself over. He does it as an analysis describing each one of those niches.

And he says there's an erudite, educated culture to speak of educated culture is redundant. But a culture based on schooling on reading, on writing. So we imagine these are people who have gone through schools fundamental, medium, superior and who withhold a cultural capital. In the extreme opposite of this educated niche we have a popular culture where the most important element is verbal communication knowledge transmission by oral tradition. In a general way, these are cultures without written texts. And this transference is made day to day transmitting knowledge withheld by the group.

The other two described by him is the autodidact or a collective creation culture when an individual though living in circumstances that don't allow for education he manages

to follow through and face life difficulties to arrive at the educated system, the erudite niche. And there are several examples in arts and politics that we could use for the autodidact culture.

From the '70s on, the massive culture.

There's the introduction of mass communication means. Massively. In this case, television is important. We feel now, we are reached, What expression should I use? We're affected within the internationalization, globalization process. Whatever the line adopted Prof. Otaviani's, or even Bosi's, or Nilton Santos'. They all analyze, under different perspectives how Brazilian culture, or Brazilian cultures are affected by models, by paradigms by manners, procedures, different life forms than those we lived in the '40s and '50s. Or in the previous period. From the '70s on Alfredo Bosi's analysis will help us a lot to understand how the Brazilian culture is defined today since it's television, the television image, mainly that gives an important reference for a person to be situated in a new environment, the world.

And how can we bring all these information to present day? I have cultural, ethnic matrices that come from colonial times. We have a white hegemony we have a distinction between erudite, educated and massive, autodidactic. And a popular culture that is put aside. Now, we imbricate all these levels. And we'll see that it's not by chance that both in the autodidactic niche and in the popular niche these two matrices are present. Afro-descendants, for instance, 'Indian descendants' who are deprived as if there was a barrier a partition between those niches and the erudite culture ones. And access for an Indian child for a quilombola family of second, third, fourth generation, I don't know of former slaved Africans to study in the university I discuss this with my students. I've been a professor at Escola de Comunicação e Artes, ECA, since 1981.

I had only one student majoring in the course a Music student, Cândido, a Negro, from a Negro family. I do have students, but in pos graduation courses. Students who come from private schools and colleges. Here, in the university, it's really difficult. There's this culture element, presented by Prof. Bosi with matrices a social class element. Today access to information is a product from capitalism. To have the chance to study in the university, to buy books to have time to study. These are difficult things for a family. It's not easy.

Let's consider the possibility, access that this large contingent of people who along all

those 350 and some years of the European matrix hegemony or of other European migratory tides have lent the process an uneven balance. Disparity is heavier today on the plate of the scale with descendants of those matrices obviously, combined, as we have said not only to a cultural factor, to a racial origin to the phenotype, but today to a social class issue. How come I belong into a group that has access to jobs, that has education that lives in its own house, that counts on transport, or, that has possibilities and resources. What would we have to think over to minimize this problem?

The answer is to discuss the matter in all stances and to insist with public institutions most of all, which are paid with our taxes the question of public policies that would bring into our institutions layers and layers of the social segment presently excluded. I can't imagine another way but through a strong, concrete manner, of political willpower from the part of authorities to solve the social disparity problem.

In our case and this program discusses race and social disparity this factor, my origin. For instance, I am the granddaughter of Lebanese. Lebanese colony celebrates 120 years in Brazil. What's that? What does it mean my grandfather to have come with a suitcase to have been a street peddler, selling door to door? Does it make a difference to me? If on the contrary I had been the descendant of a slave, of a slaved man whose trajectory was made in a senzala and barely had contact with the urban process, with the commercial trade process with a structured mentality as is the case of the Lebanese commercial circuit to accumulate capital, to sell, to profit. These are mentalities that are formed. My father had a shop. I spent my life helping at the counter. I mean, that's a proposition to tune in, alright with this economic system present here. But you take a descendant from socially marginalized layers.

How can we pretend to have them in equal conditions? There's unbalance. If we don't read our History more attentively we notice interdiction. Even in the 1946 Magna Carta religious cults were forbidden. Should you meet a man with a berimbau on the street he'd go to jail. Should he carry a guitar, he'd be a suspect. He'd probably take part in a 'bate-cum'. Extremely pejorative expressions are still used, as 'macumbeiro'. And that's lack of information. What does 'cumba' mean? 'Cumba' is drum. A person who plays the drum. To this datum is added infamous information. Disparity linked to an economic factor, thus. I don't have freedom, another has bought it.

And to that we add cultural disparity. Something coming from Africa is unworthy. It doesn't have meaning, it doesn't have importance. And these characteristics are transmitted between generations. What should we do today? To clean our school books. Because many times in literature still used in classrooms there's a description of Indians as lazy beings not apt to work. On the other hand, Africans are shown as dangerous people who don't cooperate. But to cooperate with what? To be exploited? Not to have right to family, to language to culture, to happiness?

All these questions, for me should be thought over, each one of them maybe somewhat considering differences on African origins with such different results today. Bantu groups, for instance whose religion is more connected to umbanda. Another professor is going to develop that in class. Iorubás, whose religion is more connected to candomblé. There are different nuances in their origins. When I say it's a multi racial, pluri cultural country what do I mean by that? That our characteristic is that of an interbred people.

Miscegenation is something we have to accept. And within this miscegenation there are contingents extremely impaired. They didn't benefit from this process. All they did was to pay the check. They received punishments. But they received no advantage from all their work and effort. This series, with various articles this is the book I use in classroom. It discusses in this chapter, 'Brasil, Sua Gente' this ethnic formation. And in the culture chapter, Prof. Bosi's propositions and various manifestations. If you are interested, you'll find here manifestations in cinema, theater, television, music printed media, audiovisual media.