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## Eugenics, social thought and identity discourses in Brazil: between “heróis capengas” (stumbling heroes), “urupês de pau podre” (wood ear mushrooms) and “manchas loiras” (blond spots)

Eugenia, pensamento social e discursos identitários no Brasil:  
entre “heróis capengas”, “urupês de pau podre” e “manchas  
loiras”

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Maria Julieta Weber\*

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6172-8597>

### Abstract

The study aimed to address the eugenic debates and their repercussions in Brazilian social thought and in national and regional identity discourses. In this sense, it dealt with recurrent conceptualizations around emblematic characters of Brazilian literature, such as Monteiro Lobato’s “Jeca Tatu” (1882-1948) and Mário de Andrade’s “Macunaíma” (1893-1945). In the first part, the relations of eugenics in social thought were discussed, relating elements referring to sanitation, hygiene, and national identity construction; in the second part, the intellectual production of identity representation in southern Brazil was addressed in the arguments of Bento Munhoz da Rocha Netto (1905-1973) and Wilson Martins (1921-2010), both writers, politicians, and university professors from Paraná, who established a counterpoint to the regionalist theoretical model of Brazilian formation elaborated by Gilberto Freyre (1900-1987). Therefore, this article proposes to uproot the past and bring to debate the appropriations of those productions of eugenic principles, in order to discern the historiographical scope of the identity idealizations treated.

**Keywords:** Eugenics. Social Thought. Identity Discourses. Paraná. Brazil.

### Resumo

O estudo teve como objetivo tratar dos debates eugênicos e das suas repercussões no pensamento social brasileiro, especialmente no que diz respeito aos discursos identitários de cunho nacional e regional. Nesse sentido, tratou-se de conceitualizações recorrentes em torno de personagens emblemáticos da

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\* PhD in Sociology, Federal University of Paraná. Associate Professor at the State University of Ponta Grossa, linked to the Education Department, History Postgraduate Program, and Education Postgraduate Program. E-mail: [julieta.weber@yahoo.com.br](mailto:julieta.weber@yahoo.com.br)

literatura brasileira como o “Jeca Tatu”, de Monteiro Lobato (1882-1948), e “Macunaíma”, de Mário de Andrade (1893-1945). Na primeira parte, discutiu-se sobre as relações da eugenia no pensamento social, relacionando elementos referentes ao sanitarismo, ao higienismo e à construção identitária nacional; na segunda parte, abordou-se sobre a produção intelectual de representação identitária no Sul do Brasil nas argumentações de Bento Munhoz da Rocha Netto (1905-1973) e Wilson Martins (1921-2010), ambos escritores paranaenses, políticos, professores universitários e que estabeleceram uma contraposição ao modelo teórico de orientação regionalista sobre a formação brasileira elaborada por Gilberto Freyre (1900-1987). A proposição deste artigo foi, portanto, desenraizar o passado e trazer ao debate as apropriações dessas produções aos princípios eugenistas, a fim de discernir sobre o alcance historiográfico das idealizações identitárias tratadas.

**Palavras-chave:** Eugenia. Pensamento Social. Discursos Identitários. Paraná. Brasil.

## Introduction

This article addresses eugenic debates and their repercussions in the Brazilian social thought, mainly regarding national and regional identity discourses. The notion of region considered originates in previous research developed by the author, which analyzed the constitution of a legitimate discourse of the state of Paraná social and historical formation<sup>1</sup>, as well as the intellectual production of a blond and European Paraná<sup>2</sup>. Such studies pointed out the production, circulation, and appropriation of ideas around identity idealizations, for example an alleged “blond spot” in southern Brazil or the fact that the state of Paraná was considered a “different Brazil”, which ended up resulting in a noticeably singular regional history writing.

Such arguments have appeared repeatedly in the production of some relevant intellectuals in the political, educational, and scientific spheres, mainly in the Brazilian context of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Among

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<sup>1</sup> WEBER, Maria Julieta. *Tinguis, pioneiros e adventícios na mancha loira do sul do Brasil: o discurso regional de formação social e histórica paranaense*. Thesis (Sociology Doctoral Program) – Curitiba: Universidade Federal do Paraná, 2009.

<sup>2</sup> WEBER, Maria Julieta. “Produção intelectual de um Paraná loiro e europeu: o Brasil que nunca foi diferente” In SUASNÁBAR, Claudio; WEBER, Maria Julieta; OLIVEIRA, Natália Cristina de (Orgs.). *Os intelectuais em contextos nacionais e internacionais: educação, intervenções e culturas*. Porto Alegre, RS: FI, pp. 211-237, 2022.

the intellectuals approached, Bento Munhoz da Rocha Netto<sup>3</sup> and Wilson Martins<sup>4</sup> outstood. They were writers, politicians, and university professors from Paraná. Therefore, they were publicly recognized as intellectuals who established opposition to the regionalist theoretical model of Brazilian formation proposed by Gilberto Freyre (1900-1987).

As regards Bento Munhoz da Rocha Netto, he defended that the South was “white” and the state of Paraná was the “blond spot in southern Brazil”. Regarding the mixed-race issue, as addressed by Gilberto Freyre, Bento Munhoz da Rocha Netto thought that there was a contrast in the southern populations, which he considered a diversified region in relation to a supposed Brazilian normality, due to the flow of white immigrants in the south of the country. That author appropriated Gilberto Freyre’s analysis model; however, he twisted the issue by introducing the white European immigration heritage in southern Brazil. In such analytical inversion of Gilberto Freyre’s<sup>5</sup> theory, he defended, for example, the need to worship the “Blonde Mother” in opposition to the “Black Mother” cult, to honor blond traces against the mixed-race idea. However, he advocated that the criterion should not be racial, but rather cultural, which evidenced the entanglement of conceptual appropriations between race and culture. This means that the intellectual

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<sup>3</sup> Bento Munhoz da Rocha Netto (1905-1973) was full professor at the University of Paraná (currently UFPR), occupying the chair of American History. In his trajectory, he was linked to the Partido Republicano Paranaense — PRP (Republican Party of Paraná), becoming a Federal Deputy in 1946, Governor of the state of Paraná in the 1951-1954 term, Minister of Agriculture 1954-1955, and Federal Deputy in the 1959-1963 term. The party, PRP, had already been in power with Caetano Munhoz da Rocha, his father, in the 1920-1924 and 1924-1928 periods, in alternation of the family power during the Brazilian First Republic with Affonso Alves de Camargo, also from PRP, who ruled in Paraná in the 1916-1920 and 1928-1930 terms.

<sup>4</sup> Wilson Martins (1921-2010) was a literary critic and full professor in the literature area at the Federal University of Paraná (UFPR). He was also a professor at the University of New York. In 1943 and 1944, he occupied a position in Manoel Ribas’s office staff (the latter was appointed intervenor of Paraná in 1932, and headed the state government during the 1932-1945 period, outstanding as one of the strongest supporters of Getúlio Vargas). Later, Wilson Martins approached the political current led by Bento Munhoz da Rocha Netto.

<sup>5</sup> Gilberto Freyre, in the preface initially written in Lisbon in 1931 of the first edition of the book *Casa-grande e senzala: formação da família brasileira sob o regime da economia patriarcal* (Main house and slaves’ accommodation: Brazilian family formation under the patriarchal economy regime) published in 1933, indicated from his contact with the anthropologist Franz Boas (1858-1942), what he considered the “fundamental difference between race and culture” as well as “the effects of purely genetic relationships and those of social influence, cultural heritage, and the environment”. It seems relevant to emphasize that the book was divided into 5 chapters, as follows: I General characteristics of the Portuguese colonization in Brazil: formation of an agrarian, enslaving, and hybrid society; II The indigenous individual in the formation of the Brazilian family; III The Portuguese colonizer: background and predispositions; IV The black slave in the Brazilian sexual and family life; V The black slave in the Brazilian sexual and family life (continued). FREYRE, Gilberto. *Casa-grande & senzala: formação da família brasileira sob o regime da economia patriarcal*. 51. ed. São Paulo: Global, 2006, p. 32.

from Paraná defended the cultural criterion departing from racial criteria for categorizing the argument by the individuals' skin color.

Wilson Martins wrote an essay that achieved great repercussion at the regional level called "A different Brazil: an essay about acculturation phenomena in Paraná". The text defended the idea of "a different Brazil" in the formation of the state of Paraná as an "original civilization" since according to that author, the history of the state had been constituted "without slavery, without Black people, without Portuguese people, and without the indigenous people, in other words, its human definition was not Brazilian"<sup>6</sup>. He evidenced racial aspects by defending a "physical type" from Paraná, in which the white immigrant presence was fundamental in the Brazilian meridional formation.

Regarding the inversion in relation to Gilberto Freyre, both Wilson Martins and Bento Munhoz da Rocha Netto did not question, but rather reinforced the Luso-tropicalism consecration value, a thesis that formulated utterances from cultural assumptions that sometimes soothed, other times romanticized domination and colonization relationships. According to Patrícia Ferraz de Matos, Gilberto Freyre's Luso-tropicalist thesis was supported by the argument that "the Portuguese, for having received several influences, including from Northern Africa, were more inclined to mingle amicably with other peoples". This thesis was elaborated in 1930; however, it was only incorporated in the 1950s by the *Estado Novo* regime in Portugal (1933-1974), aiming to achieve "legitimacy to perpetrate colonial violence based on race,"<sup>7</sup>. It seems relevant to highlight that the study of the alleged Portuguese plasticity provides indication for the denaturalization of intellectual productions whose principle is the cultural differentiation by pigmentation features.

Therefore, the initiative to revisit such conceptions and set a regional perspective is based on the idea of uprooting prejudice. Ideas of a "different Brazil" or a "blond spot" represented, in their production context (mid-20<sup>th</sup> century) a legitimate language and, therefore, authorized in the definition of guidelines for regional history studies, but also one inserted in a broader project of thinking national formation criteria and framing such parameters within different territorial belongings in the country. An important example of this type of discursive approach was introduced by Oliveira Viana (1883-1951), an author that was highly respected by Bento Munhoz da Rocha Netto

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<sup>6</sup> MARTINS, Wilson. *Um Brasil diferente: ensaio sobre fenômenos de aculturação no Paraná*. 2. ed. São Paulo: T. A. Queiroz, 1989, p. 446.

<sup>7</sup> MATOS, Patrícia Ferraz de. "As cores do racismo português: do colonialismo à actualidade" In *Público*, 31 January 2021, Ano XXXI, n. 11237, 2021, pp. 16-17.

and Wilson Martins. In *Populações Meridionais do Brasil* (Populations in the south of Brazil), work published in 1918, Viana addressed the historical formation and the land ownership and rural background in the country. When referring to the Brazilian ethnic composition and the “mixed-race individuals” as a historical product of large rural properties”, drawing attention to what he called “genesis” in the “nationality formation”<sup>8</sup>. The “Luso” presence was described as the one that came “alone and single” and found “sexual relief” in “vast and rough gynoecia-like”, or “slaves’ accommodations”, the place of encounter of the “Luso’s licentious lust” and the idyllic figures of the “sweet and slender indigenous women” and the “hot and affectionate black women”.

Among the representatives of the three ethnic groups, competing with land ownership, the Luso (Portuguese individual) was the only one that came alone and single, in his quality of adventurous man. Diving in the wonders of the tropical nature, with hyperexcited nerves due to the effect of our sun, he was attracted, when looking for sexual relief, to those vast and rough gynoecia-like environment that were the accommodations of slaves. They were full of healthy and strong women, and the place where they could find the sweet and slender indigenous women, with their aristocratic and beautiful shape, along with the hot, affectionate, prolific, and seducing black women, who presented excellent host’s abilities, to satisfy the Luso’s licentious lust<sup>9</sup>.

This article aims to desacralize past discourses that were produced and disseminated by intellectuals that represented the Brazilian social thought and were highly acknowledged. It also proposes to investigate how such arguments acted in the formation of prejudice and also uproot conceptualizations around the conflict between “race” and culture. Therefore, it focusses on discriminatory arguments or, more appropriately, prejudiced and disseminators of conceptual confusion.

It seems also relevant to mention that the analysis of some positions of those literate intellectuals might be understood by what Mbembe pointed out, when addressing the black reasoning critique, that is, the “race delirium”<sup>10</sup>. Such delirium was made of a type of “codified madness” exactly

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<sup>8</sup> VIANA, Oliveira. *Populações meridionais do Brasil*. (Edições do Senado Federal, v. 27). Brasília: Senado Federal, Conselho Editorial, 2005 [1918], p. 128.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> MBEMBE, Achille. *Crítica da razão negra*. Lisboa: Antígona, 2014, p. 11.

for being a codification that assigned the “skin and the color the status of a biological appearance fiction”. Such codification model also regards the identity characterizations in the south region of the country since when the inhabitants of that state were considered “different” from the inhabitants of other regions of the country, they defined ideally the “blond” aspect of that population. It seems relevant to mention that the arguments put forward by the intellectuals referred to in this article configure as a cultural aspect of the analysis, but in essence they are intrinsically related to the hygienic debates and the eugenicist purposes sedimented by the social thought originated in the sanitizing campaigns in Brazil. This is addressed below.

### **Eugenics and social thought: an “ill Brazil” in a “Brazilian nature”**

The early 20<sup>th</sup> century was crucial for the production and circulation of the eugenicist thought as well as the ideas and projects about racial, mental, and educational hygiene along with the spread of sanitizing campaigns throughout the country. However, intellectual productions resulting from the movements disseminating eugenicist ideas might gain a new dimension when considering the interconnections between Europe and America since the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

As an illustration of the production and circulation of ideas from eugenicist movements, it seems interesting to think about the places and contexts of creation of eugenicist societies. Those societies would employ approaches related to social selectivity, based on anthropometric analyses that triggered proposals and guidelines of mental prophylaxis and contraceptive methods aiming at genetic improvement, along with eugenicist education teaching projects to provide better education to those considered “gifted”.

For example, in Europe several institutions were created such as the German society for Racial Hygiene (Germany, 1905), the Eugenics Education Society (England, 1907), the French Eugenics Society (France, 1912), the State Institute for Racial Biology (Sweden, 1922) and the Portuguese Society of Eugenics Studies (Portugal, 1937, whose bylaws had been approved in 1934). Several institutions were also created in the American continent, as follows: the Eugenics Record Office (United States of America, 1910), the Eugenics Society of São Paulo (Brazil, 1918); the Brazilian League of Mental Hygiene and the Brazilian Eugenics Institute, in 1931, the Brazilian Eugenics Central Committee (Brazil, 1923 and 1929, respectively); the Mexican Eugenics

Society for the Improvement of the Race (Mexico, 1931), and the Argentinian Association of Biotypology, Eugenics and Social Medicine (Argentina, 1932).

It seems relevant to mention the First International Eugenics Congress held in London in 1912, the creation of the International Federation of Eugenic Societies, and the International Latin Federation of Eugenic Societies, in 1935, whose member countries were part of a so-called Latin cultural and linguistic community, and where the statistician and eugenicist Corrado Gini (1884-1965) outstood. He was also a director of the Italian Committee for Population Problem Studies. Such committee aimed to develop scientific expeditions between 1933 and 1940 and research based on criteria related to the “degeneration” of the human races<sup>11</sup>.

The actions of the intellectuals involved in the debate of a Latin type of eugenics or eugenicist thought in countries considered of Latin origin refer to the issues related to the political culture consolidated by authoritarianism simultaneous to the modernization process of State-Nations<sup>12</sup>. In fact, thinking about eugenics in Latin America also implies taking into account interrelations between race, gender, and nation, as pointed out in Nancy Stepan’s<sup>13</sup> classical work. For this reason, we considered necessary to relate approaches referring to sanitation and hygiene as well as the echoes of those thoughts in the national identity construction, with the purpose of analyzing possible achievements of those societies and the eugenicist social movements.

Nísia Trindade Lima and Gilberto Hochman called attention to the relations between sanitation, interpretations of the country and social sciences since “the texts by hygienist writers of the three first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century went beyond the health debate limits and disseminated broader representations of society”<sup>14</sup>. Those authors mentioned the rural pro-sanitation movement of the First Republic (1889-1930), which “played a central and prolonged role in the construction of the national identity based

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<sup>11</sup> BERLIVET, Luc André. “A laboratory for Latin eugenics: the Italian Committee for the Study of Population Problems and the international circulation of eugenic knowledge, 1920s-1940s” In *História, Ciências, Saúde – Manguinhos*, Rio de Janeiro, v. 23, 2016, pp. 51-72.

<sup>12</sup> TURDA, Marius; GILLETTE, Aaron. *Latin Eugenics in Comparative Perspective*. Londres: Bloomsbury, 2014.

<sup>13</sup> STEPAN, Nancy Leys. *The Hour of Eugenics: Race, Gender, and Nation in Latin America*. Ithaca/London: Cornell University Press, 1991.

<sup>14</sup> HOCHMAN, Gilberto; LIMA, Nísia Trindade. “Pouca saúde e muita saúva’: sanitário, interpretações do país e ciências sociais” In HOCHMAN, Gilberto; ARMUS, Diego (Orgs.). *Cuidar, controlar, curar: ensaios históricos sobre saúde e doença na América Latina e Caribe* [online]. Rio de Janeiro: Fiocruz, Coleção História e Saúde, pp. 492-533, 2004, p. 495.

on the identification of illness as a distinctive element in the condition of being a Brazilian”<sup>15</sup>.

The idea of an “ill Brazil” indicated the formation of a Brazilian individual whose habits related to laziness, and at this point, the relation and the echoes of the sanitizing ideas can be noticed in the Brazilian social thought. Considering illness or laziness as distinctive features of the national identity found support in the production of intellectuals who represented the Brazilian politics and literature such as Mário de Andrade (1893-1945), who wrote *Macunaíma*<sup>16</sup> (1928) and portrayed allegorically and critically the folk indigenous universe through the narrative of the life of a “hero with no character”; a contradictory individual whose life was characterized by the endless laziness and the prevalence of sexuality. The “stumbling hero” who struggled “on a land without health, but with a lot of ants”: “In the depth of the virgin forest, Macunaíma was born, the hero of our people. He was jet black, the son of fear of the night”<sup>17</sup>.

Another reference of that period was Monteiro Lobato (1882-1948). In *Urupês*, written 1918, that author described Jeca Tatu, a “caboclo” who lived in the interior of São Paulo, devoid of a “country feeling”, even if “the most important fact in his life” was “to vote for the government”: “He votes. He does not know exactly for whom, but he votes. He rubs the ink pen on the voting book, drawing some entangled doodles that he calls ‘his signature’”<sup>18</sup>. It seems relevant to highlight that 1918 was also the year when the Eugenics Society of São Paulo was created. Monteiro Lobato was a member of that society and exchanged letters with Renato Ferraz Kehl (1889-1978), one of the most representative intellectuals linked to eugenics in Brasil. He was the founder of that society and also of the Eugenics Brazilian Institute, in 1929 (when the First Brazilian Eugenics Congress was held in Brazil), among many other significant activities linked to the eugenicist movement in his intellectual trajectory<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Considering the universe of readings available to the intellectuals of the first half of the 20th century, Mário de Andrade inspired his writing of “Makunaimã”, in the studies carried out by the German ethnologist Theodor Koch-Grünberg (1872-1924), who developed relevant research in Amazônia. Some of the results can be accessed, among others, in the book by that researcher entitled *Do Roraima ao Orinoco*, which was thoroughly read by Mário de Andrade.

<sup>17</sup> ANDRADE, Mário de. *Macunaíma: o herói sem nenhum caráter*. 17. ed. São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 1979 [1928], p. 217.

<sup>18</sup> LOBATO, Monteiro. *Urupês*. 2. ed. São Paulo: Globo, 2009 [1918], p. 173.

<sup>19</sup> SOUZA, Vanderlei Sebastião de. *Renato Kehl e a eugenia no Brasil: ciência, raça e nação no período entreguerras*.



The hostile tone used by Monteiro Lobato to contextualize the character Jeca Tatu in matters such as the country’s politics, his daily life, and his relationship with nature around him is quite impressive. When describing the “Brazilian nature” permeated by “blooming ipes” and “rich in shapes and colors”, he portrays Jeca Tatu as follows: “the *caboclo* is the gloomy wood ear mushroom, stagnated in silence at the bottom of caves”, and adds that even surrounded by such “Dionysian life” only the *caboclo* “does not speak, does not sing, does not laugh, does not love. Only he, in the middle of so much life, does not live”<sup>20</sup>. Later, Monteiro Lobato reconsidered some of Jeca Tatu’s characteristics in relation to his environment and created, in 1947, the character called Zé Brasil, an individual that suffered with the Brazilian land ownership reality. However, the crucial point is that *Urupês* strongly supported ideas and proposals of an eugenicist character and had great national and international repercussion, and an important role in the dissemination of the Jeca Tatu’s image as somebody who liked very little or did not like working at all, that is, the inhabitant of the interior of the country, destined to be lazy and unable to be aware of his own political action.

Even if the degree of respect gained by those authors and the circulation of their work can be measured, it is necessary to highlight that the population mixed-race issue was the central point in the discussions put forward by many intellectuals in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Gilberto Freyre is a referenced author regarding the understanding of the Luso-tropicalism, idea whose contours corresponded, and still correspond, to the fallacy of an alleged Brazilian racial democracy. It seems relevant to emphasize that “in the Luso-tropicalism definitions, associations with the work produced by Gilberto Freyre are very often found. But the readings of his work are several and can be understood in different ways or meanings”<sup>21</sup>. Basically, questioning the abstraction of a hypothetical exceptionality of the Portuguese in the tropics is necessary since “Continuing to reproduce the idea that the Portuguese colonization was different and better than other colonizations neither enriches the present, nor contributes to an understanding of the past”<sup>22</sup>.

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Guarapuava: Editora Unicentro, 2019.

<sup>20</sup> LOBATO, op. cit., p. 177.

<sup>21</sup> CAHEN, Michel; MATOS, Patrícia Ferraz de. “New Perspectives on Luso-tropicalism. Novas Perspetivas sobre o Luso-tropicalismo” In *Portuguese Studies Review*, v. 26, n. 1, pp. 1-6, 2018, p. 4.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

In the education context, since the National Constituent Assembly (1933-1934), eugenics has been repeatedly evoked. The text of the 1934 Constitution declared that it is the State (nation, state, municipalities) responsibility to stimulate eugenicist education. Taking that into consideration, Giesbrecht and Matos developed a study on the appropriation of the medical-anthropological discourse by the Brazilian Legislative Branch and pointed out the need for “reflecting on the perpetuity of paradigms that permeate the eugenicist movement of the last century”<sup>23</sup>.

Therefore, it seems essential to understand eugenics in its contexts of production, considering the scientific discourse essentially supported by medicine and social sciences and even more specifically by anthropology, that is, by intellectuals who used scientific arguments to assign anthropometrically degrees of deficiency or inaptitude (physical and mental) to the collective. They established connections in the realms of science and the political sphere, mainly by means of public health and public education, to devise proposals of school and family education programs based on sanitizing and racial criteria.

Jerry Dávila analyzed how social policies in Brazil in the 1917-1945 period, were structurally marked by racial bias. This is a historical process that advertised a “racially democratic national identity”, by synthesizing racial segregation in the country by means of “discrete and daily mechanisms that reproduced and renewed historical inequalities”<sup>24</sup>.

In this sense, ideas of heritage and “degeneration” were associated with clinical and pedagogical interventions in the context of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Brazil and Portugal, for example. Relying on the protagonism of a socially and politically well-positioned intellectuality, the production of ideas of improvement of the human race from childhood aimed to “promote a civilization standard, according to which (and also for willing to make it prevail) it was necessary to prevent different or deviant existences”; presumably, those intellectuals were supported by “scientific studies on health (physical and mental) in childhood and by demonstrative practices of the children’s social place in the family, school and institutional environments”<sup>25</sup>.

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<sup>23</sup> GIESBRECHT, Daniel Florence; MATOS, Patrícia Ferraz de. “A apropriação do discurso médico-anropológico pelo poder legislativo brasileiro: a eugenia como utopia regeneradora na Constituinte de 1934” In *Poiésis*, v. 16, n. 29, pp. 37-54, jan-jun, 2022, p. 51.

<sup>24</sup> DÁVILA, Jerry. *Diploma de brancura: posição social e racial no Brasil - 1917 - 1945*. São Paulo: Unesp, 2006, p. 16.

<sup>25</sup> WEBER, Maria Julieta; MATOS, Patrícia Ferraz de. “Melhorar a espécie humana desde a infância: eugenia e higiene mental no Brasil e em Portugal (primeira metade do século XX)” In *Zero-a-Seis*, v. 25, n. 47, pp. 16-40,

To sum up, there are several issues that might be listed from the scientific proposals and conjectures on the population’s eugenics, hygienic, and educational problems and their correlation with identity idealizations linked to the criteria of formation of an excluding nationalism marked by prejudice. It seems fundamental to uproot such thoughts and reverse the reproduction of practices they originated. One of these practices refers to the appropriations of the eugenicist discourse in regional historiographies.

### **A “different” and “blond” Brazil: the intellectual production of identity representation in Southern Brazil**

The “blond spot” as an analysis category proposed by Bento Munhoz da Rocha Netto was based on historical and sociological arguments supported by the criteria of social and cultural formation of the south region of the country. This category was formed by the populational conformation of specific regions, following cartographic delimitations of what was defined, on the one hand as the “*tingui*” or traditional Paraná, a region that produced mate, and on the other hand as the “pioneer” or new Paraná, where coffee was produced. Regionalism was the central point in Bento Munhoz’s analysis. The idea of the tradition of the elite that produced mate defined, according to him, the political and administrative limits of what corresponded to the formation of the state of Paraná. It seems relevant to emphasize that the economy resulting from the mate production in the state funded a large number of productions with this bibliographic content.

One should consider that the regionality issue for Bento Munhoz da Rocha Netto permeated the idea of nationality from the framing of a European and/or North American civilization, which agreed with other intellectual movements of that time in South America<sup>26</sup>. Following such perspective, that intellectual was one of the greatest representatives of the discourse of regional identity in Paraná, whose cultural matrix of production and dissemination of ideas called “*paranistas*” focused on the city of Curitiba. The legitimate discourse of idealization of a regional identity in Paraná was produced in the capital of the state<sup>27</sup>.

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Jan/Jun, 2023, p. 35. Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina. Dossiê infância, racismos e educação infantil.

<sup>26</sup> WEBER, Maria Julieta. “Bento Munhoz da Rocha Netto e a sua interpretação das Américas” In *Cadernos de História*, v. 18, n. 29, pp. 675-684, 2017.

<sup>27</sup> To know more about this topic, see: BEGA, Maria Tarcisa Silva. *Sonho e invenção do Paraná: geração simbolista e a construção de identidade regional*. Thesis (Sociology Doctorate Program) – São Paulo: Universidade de São Paulo, 2001; OLIVEIRA, Ricardo Costa de. *O silêncio dos vencedores: genealogia, classe dominante e Estado*

The book *Presença do Brasil* (Brazil's Presence) by Bento Munhoz da Rocha Netto, published in 1960, showed a mix of praise and opposition to the theoretical model of regionalist orientation by Gilberto Freyre since for the former author, the south of the country was not included in the explanatory approaches of the intellectual from Recife. The miscegenation issue is another factor to be mentioned for being understood as the element that differentiated the idea of mixed race in the Brazilian formation. That author stated: "The south is white. It is the blond spot in the south of Brazil", while "The Brazilian miscegenation establishes a contrast with the Southern populations" and that such "diversification in relation to the Brazilian normality" involved "a vague intuition that the cultural influence necessarily implies in racial influence, as in Europe"<sup>28</sup>.

This hypothetical diversification of a supposed Brazilian normality suggested that in the south there was a predisposition to "understanding and sympathy toward the foreigner". Even if that author stated that "one cannot confuse race and culture at this level of sociological and anthropological knowledge"<sup>29</sup>, it was his opposition to Gilberto Freyre's proposal that supported the argument of a different formation in southern Brazil due to the considerable white immigration flow: "The blond individuals are the ones who work from dawn to dusk; the ones running risks in agriculture and earning their money with hard work. White is the blue collar, the servant, the subordinate, the poor, and the humble", and added, "The blond is the one that sets fixed residence and keeps their aspirations and ideals limited to the region"<sup>30</sup>.

As observed, Bento Munhoz da Rocha Netto also appropriated Gilberto Freyre's model of analysis. However, he reversed the issue by focusing on what he really wanted to emphasize, that is, the European and white heritage in southern Brazil. That author highlighted the importance of regionalism in the "national assimilation process" or by the "regionalism nationalizing

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no Paraná. Curitiba: Moinho do Verbo, 2001; PEREIRA, Luís Fernando Lopes. *Paranismo: o Paraná inventado. Cultura e imaginário no Paraná da I República*. Curitiba: Aos Quatro Ventos, 1997; WEBER, Maria Julieta. "O paranismo e o processo de produção historiográfica paranaense: o episódio do Cerco da Lapa" In *Revista de História Regional*, Ponta Grossa, v. 12, n. 2, pp. 151-190, 2007; WEBER, Maria Julieta. *Bento, Brasil e David: o discurso regional de formação social e histórica paranaense*. Curitiba: Ed. UFPR, 2016.

<sup>28</sup> ROCHA NETTO, Bento Munhoz da. *Presença do Brasil*. Rio de Janeiro: José Olympio, 1960, p. 73.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62.

function”<sup>31</sup>, supporting his view in the argument that the regional diversity in the south was mainly provided by the white European immigration.

In the south, considering the analytical inversion of Gilberto Freyre’s theory, also resided a “problem of assimilation, of psychological reaction”<sup>32</sup>. For example, as previously mentioned, the need to worship the “Blonde Mother” as opposed to the cult to the “Black Mother”: “in the south, for some generations, the persistence of the flow of blond currents of immigrants provoked, with the maintenance of the Black Mother, another figure that equaled the former in dedication and affection, that is, the Blonde Mother of clear eyes”<sup>33</sup>. Thus, the author insisted that the criterion was not racial, but rather cultural. However, the skin pigment was the predominant element in the cultural differentiation in his analysis. It seems also relevant to notice the assignment of value when considering the loss of “cultural meaning” by the mixed-race individual in opposition to the tradition perpetuated by the “blond spot Brazilian”. According to Bento Munhoz da Rocha Netto:

The conviction that the mixed-race, *mulato* individuals are unarguably Brazilians is rooted in the country. And, in fact, they are. The motivation of such conviction is much more cultural than racial. The Brazilian features of the *mulato* and black individuals are supreme and unquestioned. Even they would not be able to explain their origins in another way. They know about their African origins, but they lost the cultural meaning of such origin and the ability to compare their values with the ones that currently characterize them. This is a different attitude from that of the blond spot Brazilians, who are aware of their origin and compare, by the tradition they experienced and was communicated to them either verbally or in writing, that is, the cultural values of their past and the ones that define them in the present<sup>34</sup>.

This idea of superiority regarding “cultural meaning” only found in the “blond spot Brazilian” was also rooted in the proposal of *Um Brasil Diferente: ensaio sobre fenômenos de aculturação no Paraná* (A Different Brazil: an essay about acculturation phenomena in Paraná) by Wilson Martins, published in 1955, with a revised edition in 1989, whose first edition was dedicated to Bento

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 60.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 72.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 64.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., pp. 72-73.

Munhoz da Rocha Netto. Among the oppositions that the book provoked, there was an article by Cecília Maria Westphalen<sup>35</sup> (1927-2004), published in 1997 by the *Revista da Sociedade Brasileira de Pesquisa Histórica* (Historical Research Brazilian Society Journal), whose title already questioned “After all, was there an enslaving regime in Paraná or not?”. It seems relevant to evidence the time lapse between the formulation of that issue by Wilson Martins, 1955 and the response given by Cecília Maria Westphalen, 1997, that is, 42 years after the first publication and 8 years after its reviewed edition. That author limited territorially the analysis to the coast of Paraná and the region called Plateau of Curitiba and Campos Gerais, from a survey carried out in documents that recorded the population of the state of Paraná between 1772 and 1854. Such documents included general maps and lists of inhabitants kept in the Public Archive of São Paulo, a statistical essay by Daniel Pedro Müller, from 1836, and a report by Zacarias de Góis e Vasconcelos, first president of the Province of Paraná, of 1854, where he presented an organized report of the population one year after the political emancipation of Paraná from the State of São Paulo. The Brazilian census of 1772 did not describe the color of the population and, according to Cecília Maria Westphalen did not include data from the place called “*Povoação do Iapó*” (Iapó Village); however, the number that author referred to as the population of Paraná, included the color criterion, which when adding “mixed-race (*mulatos*) and black individuals” or “slaves and their descendants”, should result in an effective percentage that “was never below 40%, and might have reached 46.3%”<sup>36</sup>.

Mendonça wrote about *Escravidão, africanos e afrodescendentes na “cidade mais europeia do Brasil”* (Slavery, Africans, and African descendants in the “most European city in Brazil”) and reported that the academic production “defining parameters” of a regional history based on the characteristics of the European immigration, ended up minimizing the “importance of slavery in the regional history, and the participation of African individuals and their descendants in the conformation of the local population”<sup>37</sup>. About the repercussion of Wilson Martins’s book, she mentioned:

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<sup>35</sup> It seems relevant to highlight that Cecília Maria Westphalen, throughout her academic life, was highly favorable to the consecration of Gilberto Freyre’s work. To know more about this topic, see: WESTPHALEN, Cecília Maria. *A palavra do sul. Cem anos de Gilberto Freyre*. Curitiba: CD, 2000.

<sup>36</sup> WESTPHALEN, Cecília Maria. “Afiml, existiu ou não, regime escravo no Paraná?” In *Revista SBPH - Sociedade Brasileira de Pesquisa Histórica*, Curitiba, n. 13, pp. 25-63, 1997, pp. 26-27.

<sup>37</sup> MENDONÇA, Joseli Maria Nunes. “Escravidão, africanos e afrodescendentes na ‘cidade mais europeia do Brasil’: identidade, memória e história pública” In *Tempos Históricos*, UNIOESTE, v. 20, n. 1, pp. 218-240, 2016, p. 225.

When studying what he considered acculturation phenomena in Paraná, which he thought resulted from the contact established between foreigners from different European origins, Wilson Martins concluded that the social formation of the region did not result from the interaction between indigenous, Portuguese, and black individuals, as occurred in the social environment studied by Gilberto Freyre. He justified his view by explaining that the history of Paraná was completely different from the history of the rest of the country<sup>38</sup>.

Therefore, when Wilson Martins defended the idea that Paraná was a “Different Brazil” in his “essay about the acculturation phenomena in Paraná”, he ascribed the formation of the state to an “original civilization built up from pieces of all the others”. That author justified the argument as a “sociological point of view”. He also stated: “Without slavery, without black, without Portuguese, without indigenous individuals, one could say that its human formation is not Brazilian”. “This is Paraná”, he wrote when concluding the work<sup>39</sup>. Addressing essentially the white immigration in Paraná, he characterized what he thought constituted the “Brazilian from Paraná”. In one of the subtitles of the book called “There was no slavery in Paraná” Wilson Martins was firm in his arguments regarding racial aspects and indicated a specific “physical type” as a result of “acculturation phenomena”:

such handsome physical type, suntanned and with brown hair outstood from other Brazilians, due to a trace of fundamental importance, namely, he did not mix with black individuals, which existed in reduced number in the whole province throughout its history, and for this reason, did not invade sexually the habits of those rustic primitive men<sup>40</sup>.

He also stated that Paraná “suggested advanced projects of social hygiene”<sup>41</sup>, and that along with immigration, the “inexistence of large-scale slavery was the most characteristic aspect of the social history in Paraná”, differentiating it “unmistakenly from other Brazilian regions such as Rio de Janeiro and the Northeast, for example”<sup>42</sup>. Wilson Martins differentiated the “miscegenation of the South and the north of the country” and defended a

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 224.

<sup>39</sup> MARTINS, op. cit., p. 446.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., pp. 127-128.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 135.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 128.

type of ideal miscegenation characterized by “white individuals from different origins” as opposed to “white and black individuals”. In short, he characterized a “physical type of the south of the country” exhibiting “noticeable signs of mixture of European bloods, mainly among the different *dólicos* peoples<sup>43</sup> among themselves”<sup>44</sup>:

The height, hair and eye color, the blood conformation, are some of the aspects to observe when setting a scientific measure of miscegenation that occurred and still occurs here more among white individuals from several origins (therefore, in a fusion of incalculable proportions) than among white and black individuals, which is the most common type of miscegenation in northern Brazil and its subclasses<sup>45</sup>.

From what that author understood as “miscegenation”, he alleged that there was not a typical mixture of races in the south of the country, that is why he considered it a “different Brazil”:

When talking about mixed-race in the states of Paraná and Santa Catarina, it is difficult to consider the *mulato* or *mameluco*, who are seen in minimal proportion, what must be considered is the mixture of several elements of the white race, which scientifically is not a mixture of races in the strict meaning of the expression<sup>46</sup>.

Defending a “typical foreign cultural influence in the southern populations of Brazil” includes considering what the author classified as an “industrial type of civilization” as opposed to the “agricultural and cattle breeding aptitude” of the “north of the country”<sup>47</sup>, and also something he characterized as the “now sub-race of Paraná”, who “very soon shall dominate the whole state, a population whose basis is mostly formed by the European

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<sup>43</sup> Gilberto Freyre, op. cit., 2006, pp. 65-67, defended the thesis of “predisposition of the Portuguese to a hybrid and enslaving colonization in the tropics” or the simulated “aptitude to the tropical life”, and explained what he called “ethnic, or better, cultural past” of the Portuguese colonizers as an “undefined people between Europe and Africa”. Therefore, he refers to a “mass of dark *dólicos*” as the representatives of the formation of such an “unstable population”. He cited, among other authors, Mendes Correia (1888-1960) and his study on “The Portuguese Offenders” (1914), addressing issues related to the “anthropological basis of the Portuguese people”. About Mendes, see: MATOS, Patrícia Ferraz de. *Anthropology, Nationalism and Colonialism: Mendes Correia and the Porto School of Anthropology*. Oxford & New York, Berghhan Books, 2023.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.



immigration current, mainly Polish, German, and Italian”<sup>48</sup>. This reinforced the argument of the “absence of Portuguese people” in the south when compared to what Gilberto Freyre indicated in Northeastern Brazil. He also stated that it was not only “the whiteness of the skin that impressed the observer of the inhabitants of the state of Paraná”, but rather the “set of European physical traces that substituted those of the classical definition of the ‘typical Brazilian’ features”<sup>49</sup>.

Márcio de Oliveira, when addressing biographical elements of Wilson Martins, questioned the “objectives sought by a convinced literary critic”, when writing “a book about sociology and anthropology and the cultural identity of Paraná” He counter-argued Wilson Martins’s appropriation of the sociological proposal presented by Gilberto Freyre, since the objective was to write for the south of Brazil “producing what Gilberto Freyre had presented regarding the country as a whole in *Casa Grande & Senzala*”<sup>50</sup>. In this sense, Wilson Martins “aimed to understand the processes of acculturation of the non-Portuguese European elements in the south of the country” since he “called his work ‘An essay about acculturation phenomena in Paraná’<sup>51</sup>. Wilson Martins, when referring to Gilberto Freyre’s thought, mentioned that there were some “details that scaped the shrewdness and erudition of that renovator of the Brazilian sociology”<sup>52</sup>. He established some analogy with astronomy when referring to the “behavior” of planets, and listed “disturbing elements”, “details”, which ascribed “a completely different character from that of the region specifically studied by Mr. Gilberto Freyre”, which apart from the “Brazilian northeast” also included “the vast realms of the Lusotropical culture”. The main factor was, therefore, the immigrant presence first, and then the absence of Portuguese individuals and the inexistence of slavery, in such a way that the second and third factors did not appear as relevant sociological forces” to the “states of the south”<sup>53</sup>.

Although that author approached the south of Brazil, the emphasis of his work was in the state of Paraná: “I mention southern states due to a thoughtless generalization since the studies I carried out focus exclusively on

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 135.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> OLIVEIRA, Márcio de. “O ‘Brasil Diferente’ de Wilson Martins” In *Caderno CRH - Centro de Estudos e Pesquisas em Humanidades*, Salvador, v. 18, n. 44, pp. 215-221, May/Aug, 2005, p. 217.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> MARTINS, op. cit., p. 5.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

the state of Paraná”<sup>54</sup>. It seems relevant to emphasize elements of comparison with the Luso-tropicalist approach employed by Gilberto Freyre regarding the issue of “plasticity” in the characterization of “Northern-European men” who, inversely, were considered the “Portuguese of the South”. According to Wilson Martins:

The immigrant, in an extraordinarily short time, stopped to feel like a foreigner, and felt completely comfortable in the new land, since they shaped it to their own habits, experiences, and traditions. Therefore, North-European men and, due to “empathy”, those of other ethnic groups, showed in the temperate climate of Paraná the same interesting plasticity Mr. Gilberto Freyre verified in the Portuguese individuals “found” in tropical zones. They were, considering these aspects of the acculturation process, the Portuguese of the south<sup>55</sup>.

Such regional argumentation of territorial occupation sometimes by Portuguese settlers, other times by European immigrants was based on cartographic delimitations of what was called demographic gaps. According to the study by José Rogério Beier, the denomination “Sertão desconhecido” (unknown wilderness) is found in the “*Mappa Chorographico da Provincia de São Paulo*”, the first printed map of that province, by Daniel Pedro Müller. However, the term was not properly introduced or created by him since that expression had been in use to refer to maps in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, as observed in the “*Mappa da Capitania de São Paulo*”, which is part of the collection of the public archive of the State of São Paulo. Thus, describing an “empty” space as “unknown wilderness” ended up including a vast “well-established and limited area, that is, the Province of São Paulo”, which demonstrated “the interest of the province administration in guaranteeing their possession of an area considered ‘unoccupied’”<sup>56</sup>. At the same time, it considered the need to disseminate the existence of a demographic gap, that is, unoccupied area; therefore, “the importance of printing several copies and sending them to the administrative offices of the Court and other provinces of the Empire”<sup>57</sup>. At this point, it seems reasonable to ask: what were the possible consequences of the idea of an unknown, empty and unoccupied

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>56</sup> BEIER, José Rogério. “Daniel Pedro Müller e a trajetória de seu Mappa Chorographico da Provincia de São Paulo (1835-1842)” In *Revista Brasileira de Cartografia*. Rio de Janeiro, n. 67/4, pp. 817-836, 2015, p. 825.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

interior area? How much silencing and invisibility resulted from this type of production and dissemination of information?

Nísia Trindade Lima wrote about the interpretations of Brazil and the geographical representations of the national identity and approached regionalism in direct correlation with literary and scientific productions, as observed in her discussions of the “imagined wild areas” and the “(re) discovery” of civilizing expeditions and missions in the interior of the country, which included sanitizing campaigns that adopted a scientific approach in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. If the “medical perspective adopted when looking into the *Brazilian wild areas* was transformed into a culture and shared political issue” it is exactly because “for the intellectual scientists of the first Republican period, the term ‘wild’ is in the same semantic field as incorporation, progress, civilization, and conquest”<sup>58</sup>.

## Final Considerations

This study was mainly justified by the current political context of racism upsurge and return to the notion of “race” as well as sectarian and selective positions regarding excluding identity propositions at the national or regional level. The idealization of a “blond and European” state of Paraná was achieved by the identity representation that designed a historiography with a production context considered legitimate, authorized, and one that defined the guidelines for the study of the regional history. The analyses of Bento Munhoz da Rocha Netto’s and Wilson Martins’s intellectual production presented in this report, and which were anchored in their own academic and political experiences, refers mainly to the aspect that both ascribed it to a hypothetical inversion of analysis, which did not question that value of the assertive consecration of the so-called plasticity defended by Gilberto Freyre.

The proposal of this article was to investigate those intellectual productions defending that it is fundamental to uproot the past and call to debate the approximations of such productions to eugenicist principles to open a path to other writings of history aiming to understand the effects of such idealizations in current times. If eugenics-related issues used to be treated as scientific principles motivated by the hygiene, social, mental, educational, and racial instigation of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, certainly their correlations with social thought regarding identity idealizations still persist in other formats. They might appear in the regionality views marked

<sup>58</sup> LIMA, Nísia Trindade. *Um sertão chamado Brasil*. 2. ed., aumentada. São Paulo: Hucitec, 2013, p. 107; 146.

by the idea of “stumbling heroes”, either in the representation of a mixed-race population, or in ideas of “regeneration” of the lazy “Jecas Tatus”. Such projects were supported by a type of savior nationalism and, therefore, they were excluding and strongly marked by prejudice and discrimination.

For this reason, analyzing intellectual actions and movements is important to understand historiographic debates of these days correlated to memory issues, including forgotten and silenced details. Moreover, resizing regional differences and historical processes of territorial occupations, to oppose identity representations based on projects of populational “regeneration considered scientific is also fundamental as well as deconstructing ideas intentionally mistaken of demographic gaps, alleged cultural superiority, and fragmented identity positionings.

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Article submitted for publication on 11/07/2024

Approved on 26/07/2024.