

Brazilian Indifference to Racial Inequality in the Labor Market

by

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Statistical data show that the perverse inequality between blacks and whites in the Brazilian labor market has not caused the society to develop and implement concrete proposals to eliminate racism in Brazil. There are various explanations for this moral indifference. One element that is essential to any analysis of it is that Brazilians have been socialized by images disseminated by the mass media that prevent blacks from being considered ordinary citizens or even human beings.

Keywords: *Labor market, blacks, racial discrimination, socialization, moral indifference*

In the late 1970s, when there was a resurgence of social movements of Afro-Brazilians protesting the racial discrimination that they suffer every day, the myth of Brazilian racial democracy was still generally accepted and proclaimed. Although there had been some earlier research indicating that Afro-Brazilians were indeed discriminated against (Bastide and Fernandes, 1955; Fernandes, 1972; 1978), there were no current statistics that provided concrete evidence of this racism. Brazil was then still living under a military dictatorship that had even deleted the question about race from its 1970 census on the pretext that it would have been racist to have left it in. And if we take into account the fact that the results of the previous census, that of 1960, were not released until 1978 (Berquó, cited in Turra and Venturi, 1995:40-41), then Brazil had gone almost 20 years without any statistical information on the color or race of its population.

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With the inclusion of a question on color/race¹ in the censuses of 1980 and 1991 and some components of the National Survey of Sample Households, it became possible to obtain more accurate statistical information on the reality of racial inequalities in Brazil. This is when the data assembled by the Brazilian federal government and by certain nongovernmental organizations confirmed both the existence of racism in Brazil and its extent. Since then, racial discrimination has ceased to be just the daily experience of blacks and become something that has been expressed objectively through statistical data. These data show that Afro-Brazilians, by the mere circumstance of their ethnicity, receive the lowest wages and suffer the most unemployment, besides losing out on other socioeconomic rights.

In any case, we have now had over 20 years during which statistics have shown the amount of racism practiced against Afro-Brazilians without their having had any moral impact on society's behavior, and it is this lack of impact that forms the subject of this article. We do not intend to analyze yet again the details of racial discrimination in the labor market, although we shall mention it in passing. Our aim has been rather to try to find out why, when Brazilian society is presented with statistics on racial inequality, especially in the labor market, the statistics have no impact. Understanding the motives for our inertia in seeking solutions to our pattern of racial inequality and our lack of reaction to Brazilian racism when we are shown the objective proof of its existence must become a priority if we wish to rid ourselves of it.

Our basic working hypothesis in trying to account for our lack of moral indignation at Brazilian racism is that our present-day culture is primarily visual and that the image is becoming the fundamental vehicle of socialization. We are socialized not to regard Afro-Brazilians as ordinary citizens, our equals in law, because the Brazilian mass media have made them either invisible or stigmatized and, as their brainwashed consumers, we are simply unaware of any discrimination against them.

RACIAL INEQUALITY IN THE LABOR MARKET

It seems to be the consensus among economists that the last two decades of the twentieth century represented a net loss, economically, for Brazil. The country's gross domestic product (GDP) grew on average only 1.66 percent a year between 1981 and 1990 and just 2.5 percent a year in the period 1991 through 2000, whereas reducing unemployment would have required an annual average growth rate of 6 percent throughout these decades (*Correio Braziliense*, December 26, 2000). We are all familiar with the consequences: increased unemployment, freezing of wage rates, and the rest. These being the

facts, it is fair to ask for whom the two decades were a net loss. For all Brazilians? Clearly not. The country did grow economically, and the rich got richer (*Veja*, April 11, 2001), but the poor stayed poor and Brazil achieved the rank of second in the world in inequality of income distribution (cf. *Journal* news program on TV Globo, January 25, 2001). It seems equally fair to ask another question: Did all Brazilian workers suffer the same consequences from these two “lost decades”?

The statistics, both the official ones supplied by the state and the unofficial ones from private institutions, have shown that Afro-Brazilians (from real blacks to off-whites) suffer the most prejudice in the labor market. They suffer the highest unemployment rates and are paid the least, even for the self-same jobs. The Survey of Living Standards carried out in 1998 by the Fundação Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (National Institute of Geography and Statistics—IBGE) showed that white women with 12 years or more of schooling in both the Southeast and the Northeast of Brazil made, on average, less than white men but more than Afro-Brazilian men and women in the same condition. In other words, while there were some who were more exploited than others because of their sex or race or both, race weighed more as a negative factor in determining wage rates in the 1990s than sex. Although lack of pay parity between Afro-Brazilians and whites has been present as long as Brazil has had a functioning market for free labor, everything would seem to point to the introduction and consolidation of a generalized racial inequality² in this market in the last decade of the twentieth century.

Table 1 shows that, according to the 1987 National Survey of Sample Households, 19 percent of Brazilians, regardless of sex or color, received only the legal minimum wage or less while 4.2 percent made 10 times this minimum wage or more. While 15.4 percent of whites received the minimum wage or less and 6.1 percent made 10 times the minimum wage or more, among “blacks” (i.e., darker-skinned Afro-Brazilians), 27.7 percent made only the minimum wage or less and only 2.9 percent made 10 times the minimum wage or more, and among the lighter-skinned (“brown”) Afro-Brazilians, 23.6 percent made the minimum wage or less while 1.5 percent made 10 times the minimum wage or more. These racial inequalities in the labor market persisted into the 1990s³ (IBGE, 1994).

It is apparent that in the 1980s the labor market was more sexist than racist, since women (whatever their race) received an average monthly wage inferior to that of men (Table 2). All the same, wage inequality affected Afro-Brazilian women far more than it did white women. The real average income of white women in the 1980s was almost 100 percent above that of Afro-Brazilian women. In 1987 white women had a real monthly average

TABLE 1
Distribution of Brazilians (Percentages) of 10 or More Years of Age
by Skin Color and Income Group, 1987–1990

<i>Income Group and Skin Color</i>	<i>Percentage Distribution of Those over 10 by Year</i>			
	<i>1987</i>	<i>1988</i>	<i>1989</i>	<i>1990</i>
Total population ^a	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Minimum wage or less	19.0	20.9	19.6	17.5
1–2 times the minimum wage	14.0	24.8	13.7	12.8
2–5 times the minimum wage	16.2	14.4	15.5	16.1
5–10 times the minimum wage	5.8	5.3	5.8	7.3
10 times the minimum wage or more	6.1	6.0	7.4	7.9
No income ^b	39.0	38.4	38.4	39.2
No declaration of income	0.5	0.6	0.4	0.5
White	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Minimum wage or less	15.4	17.4	15.5	13.7
1–2 times the minimum wage	13.2	14.4	13.0	11.6
2–5 times the minimum wage	18.3	16.6	17.7	17.8
5–10 times the minimum wage	7.5	7.0	7.6	9.3
10 times the minimum wage or more	6.1	6.0	7.4	7.9
No income	39.0	38.4	38.4	39.2
No declaration of income	0.5	0.6	0.4	0.5
Black (darker-skinned Afro-Brazilian)	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Minimum wage or less	27.7	28.7	27.6	25.9
1–2 times the minimum wage	18.2	18.6	17.7	18.0
2–5 times the minimum wage	14.0	13.0	13.6	14.9
5–10 times the minimum wage	2.9	2.7	3.6	4.5
10 times the minimum wage or more	0.9	1.1	1.3	1.5
No income	36.1	35.4	35.8	34.7
No declaration of income	0.2	0.5	0.4	0.5
Brown (lighter-skinned Afro-Brazilian)	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Minimum wage or less	23.6	25.8	24.8	22.0
1–2 times the minimum wage	14.9	15.0	14.3	14.0
2–5 times the minimum wage	13.0	11.1	12.3	13.9
5–10 times the minimum wage	3.3	3.0	3.4	4.6
10 times the minimum wage or more	1.5	1.5	2.1	2.1
No income ^b	1.5	1.5	2.1	2.1
No declaration of income	0.3	0.4	0.4	0.3

Source: IBGE, National Survey of Sample Households.

Note: The table excludes the rural population of Acre, Amazonas, Pará, Rondônia, and Roraima.

a. Including East Asian–descended Brazilians and those not stating their ethnicity.

b. Including those whose only income consists of social welfare payments.

income of Cr\$9,964, whereas that for lighter-skinned Afro-Brazilian women was Cr\$4,997 and for darker-skinned Afro-Brazilian women Cr\$4,644. Three years later, although “brown” Afro-Brazilian women had advanced to Cr\$5,409 and “black” Afro-Brazilian women to Cr\$4,803, white women had reached Cr\$10,604. Comparing the real average income of white men with that of Afro-Brazilian women, we find the astronomical difference shown in Table 2.

As we have said, however, the labor market became much more affected by racism in the 1990s. Data from a 1998 survey in five major metropolitan areas—São Paulo, Salvador, Recife, Brasília (the Federal District), and Porto Alegre—show that, from this decade on, white women began making more money than Afro-Brazilian men (Table 3). The corresponding survey of a sixth metropolitan region, Belo Horizonte, was exceptional in showing that although Afro-Brazilian males made less than white men did, they still had an average monthly income higher than that of white women.

It is Table 4, however, that really shows the preponderant influence of racism on Brazil’s wage inequality. The survey data for 1999 tabulated by the Instituto de Pesquisa Econômica Aplicada (Institute for Applied Economic Research—IPEA)⁴ show that, on a national level, the average monthly income from the principal employment of Afro-Brazilian men is less than that of whites, both men and women. Afro-Brazilian men received only 79.78 percent of what white women earned and only 53.31 percent of what white men received. The picture for Afro-Brazilian women was one of extreme inequality; Afro-Brazilian men received 1.7 times their income, white women 2.13 times it, and white men 3.64 times it (Table 4).

The increase in racism in the Brazilian labor market is even more obvious when we look at the unemployment rates for Afro-Brazilians and others (Table 5).

In all six metropolitan regions surveyed, Afro-Brazilians suffered the most unemployment. Their situation was worse in Salvador, where Afro-Brazilians were roughly 80 percent of the population and the difference in unemployment rates between Afro-Brazilians and Brazilians of all other ethnic groups was 45 percent. São Paulo, despite being far more industrialized and economically developed than Salvador, was not far behind it. Race/color is in both three cities and also in Porto Alegre a more significant determinant of discrimination than gender (Table 6).

When we look at racism together with sexism, we are faced with the outrageous situation of Afro-Brazilian women in the Brazilian labor market. Suffering double discrimination for being both Afro-Brazilian and female, they have the highest rates of unemployment in all six metropolitan regions surveyed in 1998, and in 1999 they had the highest unemployment rate nationally,

TABLE 2
Nominal and Real Monthly Incomes (in Cruzados or Cruzeiros) of
Brazilians of 10 or More Years by Skin Color and Sex, 1987–1990

<i>Skin Color and Sex</i>	<i>Year</i>			
	<i>1987</i>	<i>1988</i>	<i>1989</i>	<i>1990</i>
Nominal^a				
Total	5,055	37,866	594	15,978
Masculine	7,879	58,989	930	24,156
Feminine	2,377	17,936	278	8,238
White	6,477	49,179	776	20,782
Masculine	10,195	77,445	1,233	31,831
Feminine	3,023	23,087	358	10,604
Black	2,840	22,709	320	9,076
Masculine	4,202	34,352	473	12,863
Feminine	1,516	11,751	171	5,409
Brown	3,019	21,969	340	9,428
Masculine	4,671	33,968	524	14,140
Feminine	1,409	10,363	160	4,803
Real^c				
Total	16,662	16,390	19,572	15,978
Masculine	25,971	25,533	30,643	24,156
Feminine	7,835	7,763	9,160	8,238
White	21,350	21,286	25,569	20,782
Masculine	33,605	33,522	40,626	31,831
Feminine	9,964	9,993	11,796	10,604
Black	9,361	9,829	10,544	9,076
Masculine	13,851	14,869	15,585	12,803
Feminine	4,997	5,086	5,634	5,409
Brown	9,951	9,509	11,203	9,428
Masculine	15,397	14,660	17,265	14,140
Feminine	4,644	4,486	5,272	4,803

Source: IBGE, National Survey of Sample Households.

Note: The table excludes the rural population of Acre, Amapá, Amazonas, Pará, Rondônia, and Roraima.

a. In cruzados for 1987–1988, in new cruzados for 1989, in cruzeiros for 1990, corrected to September 1990 values.

b. Including “yellow”-skinned Brazilians and those not stating their skin color.

c. Inflation-adjusted to September 1990 values.

TABLE 3
Average Monthly Income in December 1998 Reals of
Workers in Metropolitan Regions by Race and Gender

<i>Metropolitan Regions</i>	<i>Afro-Brazilians</i>			<i>Others</i>		
	<i>Total</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>
São Paulo	512	399	601	1,005	750	1,188
Salvador	403	297	498	859	647	1,051
Recife	363	272	427	619	462	739
Brasília (Federal District)	765	614	898	1,122	923	1,306
Belo Horizonte	444	319	670	735	548	883
Porto Alegre	409	334	472	628	504	715

Source: DIEESE/SEADE (and regional agencies), Survey of Employment and Unemployment.

TABLE 4
Average Monthly Income (in Reals) from Principal
Employment by Race and Gender, 1999

Afro-Brazilian men	333.42
White men	714.14
Afro-Brazilian women	195.80
White women	417.92

Source: National Survey of Sample Households.

TABLE 5
Unemployment Rates (Percentages) by Ethnicity,
Metropolitan Regions, 1998

<i>Metropolitan Region</i>	<i>Unemployed as a Percentage</i> <i>of the Labor Force</i>		<i>Difference between Rates</i> <i>for Afro-Brazilians and Others</i>
	<i>Afro-Brazilians</i>	<i>All Others</i>	
São Paulo	22.7	16.1	41.0
Salvador	25.7	17.7	45.0
Recife	23.0	19.1	20.0
Federal District	20.5	17.5	17.0
Belo Horizonte	17.8	13.8	29.0
Porto Alegre	20.6	15.2	35.0

Source: DIEESE/SEADE (and regional agencies), Survey of Employment and Unemployment.

TABLE 6
Unemployment Rates (Percentages) by Gender
and Ethnicity, Metropolitan Regions, 1998

<i>Metropolitan Region</i>	<i>Afro-Brazilians</i>		<i>All Others</i>		<i>Difference between the Rates</i>	
	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Afro-Brazilian Women and All Other Women</i>	<i>Afro-Brazilian Men and All Other Men</i>
São Paulo	25.0	20.9	19.2	13.8	19.6	51.4
Salvador	27.6	24.9	29.3	15.2	36.0	57.9
Recife	26.3	20.5	22.6	16.2	16.4	26.6
Federal District	22.4	18.9	21.0	14.2	6.7	33.1
Belo Horizonte	20.5	15.8	16.8	11.5	22.0	37.4
Porto Alegre	22.7	19.2	18.3	13.1	25.4	46.6

Source: DIEESE/SEADE (and regional agencies), Survey of Employment and Unemployment.

13 percent. (The figures for the other groups were 11 percent for white women, 9 percent for Afro-Brazilian men, and 7 percent for white men.)

In fact, wage inequality between Afro-Brazilian and white workers in Brazil should not be understood as just the product of the last two decades of the twentieth century. Brazil's lack of economic growth has meant that most workers have had no wage increase and a considerable number have lost their jobs, temporarily or for good, but the problems of white workers have been nothing like the penury to which Afro-Brazilians have been reduced, nor has the gender discrimination against white women in the labor market been anything like that suffered there by Afro-Brazilian women. It is racism that lies at the root of this inequality (DIEESE, 1999; DIEESE-CIO/INSPIR, 1999; Hasenbalg, 1979; Hasenbalg and Silva, 1983).

Although activists in the Afro-Brazilian movement and some intellectuals have been effectively challenging the myth of Brazil as a "racial democracy" ever since the 1970s, a failure to see the data persists in government, trade unions, and social movements. The fact that official and private data have clearly shown the perverse inequality between Afro-Brazilian and white in the workforce has made neither the Brazilian state nor civil society feel any need to consider or implement concrete measures against the country's racial prejudice. Organized civil society in Brazil recognizes the existence of racial discrimination but, with a few honorable exceptions,⁵ does nothing to put this problem on the national political agenda.

In Brazilian society, talking about racism is still completely tabooed, but Brazilians are by no means color-blind. It seems that we are blind to racism and its malignant consequences because neither causes us any moral difficulty

either as human beings or as citizens. We practice discrimination against nonwhites but are loath to admit it. According to a survey by Datafolha, the research institute of the *Folha de São Paulo*, 89 percent of Brazilians agree that our society is racist, but only 10 percent admit to being racist themselves (Turra and Venturi, 1995: 13). The inference from this survey would be that racism is something that happens in some other neighborhood, in some other business, in some other city or state or country, among other people and never among ourselves. However much the data tell us that something is going on, we remain convinced that we have nothing to do with it.

It would seem that this conviction is part of our ethos. Moral indifference with regard to the social fate of individual nonwhites is so widespread that we remain unaffected when we are faced with Brazilian racial inequality. They do not touch us or bother us, not even as citizens who expect and insist on a full and total application of the Brazilian constitution. It is as if Afro-Brazilians did not exist, as if they were not part of Brazilian society and played no role in it. Denying their existence, dehumanizing them in this way, is in fact the essence of racism. It is this denial that Afro-Brazilians are human beings that makes us “unconscious” of racial inequality.

But why does this happen? There are a number of explanations on offer. The situation clearly derives from a combination of many causes, but we believe that one element has to be present in any attempt to explain it: we have been (and still are) being socialized⁶ against seeing nonwhites as ordinary citizens.

SOCIALIZATION AND THE INVISIBILITY OF AFRO-BRAZILIANS

The way in which the norms of social behavior are learned in Brazil excludes living with nonwhites as our equals both abstractly and practically. This is what defines or characterizes our vaunted Brazilian racial democracy. Afro-Brazilians are “the others,” socially constructed as unequal or inferior, that is to say, negatively stereotyped, and this allows us to discriminate against them without embarrassment.

Our postmodern culture is, in a certain sense, extremely visual. Socialization is becoming more and more visual because of the fast pace, the extreme competitiveness, the impersonality, and the individualism of modern society. We are in a rush to acquire the pattern of behavior that suits the market society. There is never time for many of the tasks we have to accomplish such as obtaining information, working, resting, child care, being a partner, falling in love, studying or getting professionally qualified, taking part in politics (exercising full citizenship), enjoying leisure, and so on. Our

daily tasks range from those deriving from our emotional relationships to those imposed by business and economic needs—these latter being the most important, according to the defenders of the market economy—and in order to get all of them done in 16 or 18 hours (we have to have at least 6 hours' sleep) we have had to create a new language of socialization as fast-paced as our modern lifestyle. And this is where the media come in, using a language that reaches us primarily through images. These images “speak,” and they socialize individuals when they become internalized as patterns of social control that used to be provided overwhelmingly by the family. With each advance of science and technology we come to think of ourselves as “slaves” of time when in fact we are “slaves” of the values of the market economy: consumerism, conspicuous consumption, exploitation, discrimination, being made to feel inferior, etc. This is the way, in an era of information, ruthless competition, constant rush, and lack of time, in which images are being transformed into basic (but inadequate) vehicles of the socialization process.⁷

Nowadays, images seem to be one of the principal passports for the entry of children, young people, and adults into a world that the speed and greed of the market are making ever more fast-paced and less reflective. It is not just by pure chance that we have thousands of images strewn everywhere throughout our cities by means of billboards and electronic panels, and all of us who internalize these images and their messages are being socialized or integrated into our society's culture. Images and the phrases that are effectively associated with them orient and shape the individual. Because we lack the time to think deeply about it, we end up incorporating the social norms that the media present us with through advertisements, television soaps and weekend entertainment programs, and so on. The problem is not just the information that these contain but, more important, the way in which the carefully chosen images (usually accompanied by a musical background) influence our socializing orientations. Images may not yet have become the principal vehicle of the socialization process, but they are, beyond doubt, steadily replacing the family as one of the main agents of socialization.⁸ Talking with our children (to orient them socially) takes up a lot of time and effort in a period when we have no time. On top of this, it is a process that is becoming ever harder in modern societies, where usually both parents have to go out to work. Children are generally left with servants or relatives, and these, having their own tasks, depend on a basic ally, television, as the infant's pacifier of the postmodern world.

This is how our socialization proceeds. Reading a book containing basic information about the social standards of living together takes time, and besides, reading a book is no guarantee that the knowledge and/or information

it contains will stay in the minds of those “with no memory” in this hurried era of ours. Yet the images we have been bombarded with stay with us forever, whether we know it or not. What, for example, have we read about Africa, even at school or university (two other agents of socialization)? Almost nothing! And what do we know about Africa? Very little, certainly, but this little is much more the fruit of media images than of more accurate knowledge. Memories of the continent of Africa are fundamental in shaping our imagination of this continent and its inhabitants. Pictures of wretchedness, hunger, sickness, wars, and so on, arise and persist in our minds whenever we think about Africa. There are specific images that we extend willy-nilly to every country and every nation in Africa and to their descendants too. Generally, we look upon every human being with the characteristic phenotype of a black African or something close to it as bearing the negative stereotype that such images give us of the inhabitants of Africa. It becomes almost impossible for us to dissociate these images from the lives lived by people of black African descent. In other words, we end up, consciously or unconsciously, looking at all blacks and people of partly black descent, African or not, as more or less forming the negative part of our society or even of the whole world. This has something to do with the absence of Afro-Brazilians from the world of the Brazilian mass media. According to a survey carried out by the *Folha de São Paulo*, blacks appeared in 17.8 percent of Brazilian television commercials in 1995, but a black is the main character in only 10.3 percent of such commercials (*Folha de São Paulo*, October 14, 1995). In another piece of research carried out in 1981, the social scientist Carlos A. Hasenbalg analyzed pictures of blacks in television commercials and in advertisements carried in an assortment of magazines⁹ and found that only 3 percent of the total included blacks (Hasenbalg and Silva, 1983: 186). Analysis of this material led him to the following conclusions (187, 188, emphasis added):

Advertising is not immune to the dynamic of the symbolism that determines race relations in Brazil. By design or default, it is an effective tool in perpetuating a Caucasian aesthetic loaded with racist implications. Blacks are underrepresented in Brazilian advertisements; they are played down both as consumers and as a segment of the population, thus strengthening the tendency to make them invisible, “wiped off the scene.” Advertisements repeat cultural stereotypes of the black person, thus helping mark out, on the level of ideology, “his proper place.”

Such conclusions are repeatedly drawn by researchers who analyze the presence of blacks in the media such as Rial (quoted in *Journal do Brasil*, October 25, 1995) and Couceiro de Lima (1996–1997). Through their images, the media socialize children, young people, and adults of

every skin color. According to the researcher Solange Couceiro de Lima (1996–1997: 64–65).

These messages reach not just whites, but also Afro-Brazilians too, not just grown-ups but white children, who receive a negative picture of blacks, and nonwhite children, who construct their identity on the basis of a picture entirely different from the one they see in their mirror. The Afro-Brazilian woman who sees herself imprisoned in the stigma of the half-caste, the “so-and-so.” Someone who is clearly not an ordinary woman who studies, works, loves, and suffers like white women! We know that identity formation is a process of construction that in complex societies is the result of manifold agents, among which communication plays an important part. The warped and stereotyped picture of the Afro-Brazilian that we find in a wide range of products of social communication is responsible for constructing new identifications based on it.

Without a doubt, Brazilians assimilate the invisibility of nonwhites in the media, with their underlying prejudices and consequent discrimination against them, and feel no guilt about this situation. The images carried by the mass media have contributed significantly to our failure to feel any moral outrage when faced with the facts about racial inequality in our country. Because we have been (and are still being) socialized to live with racial discrimination and inequality, we believe them to be normal and in accordance with a social role that we should respect. This is our so-called Brazilian racial democracy, and this is why we think we are free from racism.

It is worth pointing out that such behavior is based on a historically constructed logic. While we have no wish to adopt the simplistic position that present-day racism is a mere reflection of colonial slavery, the interdependence between today’s images and those of the past cannot be denied. In terms of propaganda in the broad sense, the role played by the media today is equivalent to that played in the past by religious organizations, educational institutions, and the arts. In other words, the questionable use of images that focus on the otherness of nonwhites has a basis in other images crystallized by different means that have, over time, caused racism to seem quite natural. The absence of any collective indignation at this stage of affairs results from our ideal of the Brazilian, created to satisfy the needs of the dominant culture and those alone. We have to realize this if we are ever going to understand that postmodernity offers few opportunities to the socially excluded. Even when we talk about inclusion, it is important to know whom we are including, with what aim, and for what purposes, because, as a rule, the differences we see in the other tend to acquire a negative value.

In the specific case of the communications media, there is no way we can establish a fair critique of them unless we take into account the way in which they are managed. We are always being told that the world is being made

more democratic because of the impact of the mass media. The global village of Marshall McLuhan (1969) constitutes the most outstanding example of such desperate arguments. Despite all this, what we find is the maintenance of a clearly Eurocentric culture. Brazil, as a Westernized, postcolonial society, does not depart from this general picture. The production of images in the media here follows an order that, in the final analysis, determines the control of information, a restricted market, and the exercise of power for those blessed with a white skin even if a remote black man may be lurking in their family tree. As I have already said, what matters is how individuals look. Awareness of this process of emphasizing race in mass media images is an antidote, although not the only one, against contamination by this naturalization of the absurd.

It is not just a question of under- or overrepresentation: we need to work out what the objective of it all is. We Brazilians, considered as an abstraction, are the recipients of a model of our nation that seeks to dilute our ethnic and racial categories, ignoring their cultural, social, economic, and political differences. Clearly, this will cover such notions as the “multiculturalism” that drives the thinking of our dominant classes, aimed at neutralizing the tensions produced by diversity. In this way, we socialize a belief that we are all “the products of racial mixing” even though our ethical and aesthetic aspirations are directed toward an ideal of whiteness. It is this attitude and no other that rules the labor market. Whenever we come across the notorious “good appearance” phrase in a classified job advertisement, we know that the selection of candidates will have whiteness as a basic prerequisite, regardless of their skills and abilities. Overcoming such prejudices in a society as conservative as that of Brazil will require superhuman effort. And as we strive for a utopia that will have done with racism once and for all, we must understand that, in the first instance, what is presented as a dangerous development is the strengthening of a counterhegemony that might in any way threaten the current situation. The slogan that, more than 30 years ago, demanded that we respect our differences is still a clarion call (Silva, 2001), even though most Brazilians refuse to hear it. It is essential that we substantially increase the quantity and improve the quality of the images that refer to negritude, and this means establishing a new order in the mass media that will depend on placing legal limits on the actions of corporate executives in the communications field. As to the argument that this would constitute an attack on “freedom of expression,” we would suggest for the moment that such a concept of freedom is based on a way of thinking that in reality imprisons every one of us because it reduces “others” (non-Caucasians) to less-than-human status while it keeps “us” (whites) tied to the most awful mediocrity insofar as “we” are persuaded to see ourselves as the sole and exclusive representatives of humankind.

CONCLUSION

The production of negative stereotypes of Afro-Brazilians by the mass media is no longer acceptable. If our style of socialization keeps on imposing such stereotypes or simply makes black people invisible, it will be very hard for us ever to free ourselves from racism and from the inequities that this imposes on Afro-Brazilians. Recognizing the power wielded by the media in the socialization of children, young people, and adults and their assumption of the role of guides to behavior, I believe that it is necessary to think of alternative models of producing and distributing images that will increase the visibility of Afro-Brazilians in the communications media and no longer represent them in a negative way. Presenting such ideas may lead to our being attacked by the advocates of so-called abstract universalist thought (Pierucci, 1999; Rouanet, 2001) for considering human beings only in terms of groupings of cultural significance such as race and gender. When we use such terms to analyze the concrete (in)equality of Brazilians, we may be thought to be defending skin color as an aspect of identity more important than other identifiers such as being Latin American, Brazilian, or coming from Brazil's Northeast, South, São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Minas Gerais, Bahia, or being working-class, or having a particular religion, and, above all, as something more important than just being a member of the human race. Consequently, according to the universalist thinkers' way of looking at the world, those who see things our way will be condemning themselves to perpetual imprisonment by race because they will be making an ideal of racial identity instead of fighting for its abolition. According to Sergio Paulo Rouanet (2001),

In its contemporary form, the idea of identity has changed its nature. What we are still determines our consciousness, but now we are identified by our culture and no longer by our socioeconomic status. Culture has acquired a sacrosanct character, and as a result cultural identity is all-important. This is not something we should free ourselves from but something we must love. In times when ideas of ourselves had a social and economic character, we could, up to a point, escape our conditioning and take on different mental structures. Now that identity is culture-dependent, we are condemned to be locked up forever within the culture in which we happen to be born, from which we cannot escape unless we want to appear to others as an apostate. The American Indian, the black, the Muslim have been condemned to move only within their respective identities, to see the world within the limits of visibility imposed by the status of being an aborigine, by the condition of being an Afro-Brazilian, by membership of Islam.

Thus our analysis of Brazilian indifference to racial inequalities may cause us to be accused of being epistemologically quixotic (Rouanet, 2001) when

we use the categories “race” and “gender” to understand racial inequality and discrimination in Brazil. But we believe that defenders of abstract equality need to develop some mechanism for seeing and understanding that we do not yet have equality among all human beings. Perhaps we need to know who is and is treated as a human being or, more precisely, to recognize the pitfalls of equality, especially because we are blind to racism and deal with it only in the abstract.

We think that such issues require a response before any black person is accused of not having fully escaped to modernity and before any such accusations are aimed at intellectuals who use categories such as race and sex or gender in their analyses. Even more, we think that universalist thinking needs to ask why the dominant culture of the Western world seldom if ever sees people of African descent separately from or unconditioned by their ethnicity. Their race (or their skin color, their nappy hair, their sex, the size of their genitalia, etc.) has always been an indelible mark (Pierucci, 1999), a way for the dominant Western culture to assert inequality between blacks and whites and engender negrophobia.

In sum, we believe that, in order to understand racial inequality in Brazil and our indifference to it, scientists of all types, together with other individuals, social movements, and institutions, need to discuss the subject freely rather than accuse each other. The struggle against racism is difficult and the present situation is discouraging, but the future is not yet determined: as Giddens (1996) says, we live in an era of uncertainties.

NOTES

1. The term “race” is to be understood not as a biological concept denoting physically and mentally distinct varieties of human being but as used by the sociologist Antônio Sérgio Alfredo Guimarães (1999: 9): “Race is a concept denoting only a form of social classification, based on a negative attitude toward certain social groups, and informed by a special notion of nature as something self-defining. Race, as a reality, is therefore limited to the social world.”

2. “Generalized racial inequality” means that Afro-Brazilians, male and female, receive less pay and fewer other benefits than white women, who in turn are disadvantaged in relation to white men—in other words, that racism is a greater determinant than sexism in shaping the pattern of wage inequality in Brazil. We could call this racialization, although not in the sense that this term has been used by Appiah (1997).

3. Beyond this, as the economist Sergei Soares has observed, 1990 was the year of the tightest wage negotiations in the past 40 years.

4. These data have been supplied by Sergei Soares of IPEA, to whom we express our thanks.

5. The Movimento Sindical Brasileiro (Brazilian Trade-Union Movement), through its four constituent confederations, is beginning to accept the question of race as a subject that is relevant and is worth discussing. To that end, in November 1995, the Central Única dos Trabalhadores (Union Central of Workers—CUT), the Força Sindical (Union Force—FS), and the Confederação

General dos Trabalhadores General Confederation of Workers—CGT) came together and, with the help of a North American trade union confederation [the AFL-CIO—Translator’s note] and several Latin American ones, established the Instituto Interamericano pela Igualdade Racial (the Inter-American Institute for Racial Equality—INSPIR). Before this, the Brazilian trade-union confederations had already held two international conferences on racial equality. As Maria Aparecida Silva Bento has stated, “this does not mean that the race question has become a priority concern of Brazilian labor unions and certainly not an uncontentious question for their leaders, or even that there is any real understanding of the problem. But it does amount to a break with the traditional attitude of union leaders, denying that there was any problem or treating it as of no importance” (Bento, 2000: 329).

6. The concept of socialization we are using here is that employed by Berger and Berger (1977: 204): “the process whereby the individual learns to be a member of society” or “imposing social norms on an individual’s conduct.” We want to emphasize, however, that “although the term socialization is generally used in regard to children, the process is generic and therefore applicable also to adults. An individual may be introduced to new groups and acquire their values at any age” (Silva, 1987: 1139).

7. According to Mariza V. M. Santos and Maria Angélica Madeira, there was in the 1980s and 1990s an intensification of consumerism and, at the same time, a consolidation of certain social movements. There therefore “also appeared original aesthetic experiences, showing the power of culture and art in renewing contemporary social practices. In this way, generalization and intensification of the processes of change became an unmistakable mark of reflection on modern culture. This was when media outlets took on many of the characteristics previously peculiar to traditional socializing institutions such as the family, school, and church. The media took on the role of guides to behavior. Today’s media culture should also be judged by the growing effectiveness and sophistication of its performance as an opinion former, as creator of ‘consensus technologies,’ in an expression of Noam Chomsky, intervening directly in the sphere of politics” (Santos and Madeira, 1999: 195–196).

8. “An agent of socialization is said to be anything that actively helps the individual to become fully integrated into the society in which he or she lives. In a more limited and restricted sense, it may be defined as a factor that actively seeks to integrate people into the culture and the society in which they are developing” (Silva, 1987: 1139).

9. This research was carried out in the state of Rio de Janeiro. The television stations researched were channels 4, 7, and 11, and the magazines examined were the April 1981 issues of *Fatos e Fotos*, *Playboy*, *Status*, *Manchete*, *Veja*, *Isto É*, and *Cláudia* (Hasenbalg and Silva, 1983).

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