Imperialism and racial oppression in the metropolis.
A sociological interpretation essay

Rita Matos Coitinho (Instituto Brasileiro de Museus /Ibram)

This essay analyzes the relationship between the processes of exclusion in the United States of America that motivated the recent massive protests under the banner of Black Lives Matter and the US's international role in maintaining the unipolar social order. Losurdian analyses of colonialism and racial despecification are tied to the formulation produced on race relations and social stratification by the Brazilian sociologists Octavio Ianni and Florestan Fernandes. The study also presents some possible interpretative parallels between class structures and their connections with racism in Brazil and the United States.

As we will show, there is a significant approximation between the authors in their approach to the issue of racism. For Ianni, imperialism extends internally to the dominant nation so that the same fundamentals which govern external economic and political relations also manage internal political and economic ties. Therefore, economic-social and political development within the metropolis is also unequal. This process, which he called "internal colonialism", is based on racist conceptions against part of the population, as Togliatti pointed out when he wrote that «the Liberal doctrine is based on a barbaric discrimination between human creatures».

According to Losurdo, «beyond the colonies, such discrimination also spreads in the capitalist metropolis itself, as shown by the case of Black Americans, largely deprived of fundamental rights, discriminated against and persecuted» We start from the observation that the difficulties currently experienced by the United States, whose world hegemony is in decline, are also expressed at the national level by the deepening of internal colonialism and the re-emergence of racist movements on the American political scene. Based on this research, we highlight the strength of Losurdo's interpretation concerning the centrality of the fight for recognition as a real and effective manifestation of the class struggle in contemporary times.

Racism; Class Struggle; Racial Despecification.

Introduction

This year, a television series recalled the bloody massacre that occurred one hundred years ago in Tulsa, a city located in Oklahoma. On May 31, 1921, a mob of white people invaded and destroyed the Greenwood district, one of the most prosperous Black communities in the USA, nicknamed the "Black Wall Street"[1]. In this incident, which could easily be compared to the *pogroms* against the Jews in the Russian Empire and Poland, more than a thousand homes and businesses were looted and burned, leaving about three hundred dead and ten thousand homeless. According to Ellsworth[2], «Tulsa had erupted into one of America's worst racial nightmares, leaving scores dead and hundreds of homes and businesses destroyed». The event «took place during an era of deep racial tensions, characterized by the birth and rapid growth of the so-called second Ku Klux Klan and the determined efforts of African Americans to resist attacks on their communities, particularly in the matter of lynching»[3].

What happened in Tulsa was purposely forgotten by official American history. Racial violence, however, was not overcome because, despite the achievements of the Black movement in the following decades - which managed to put an end to the discriminatory laws in force, thereby removing the legal backing of the American supremacist regime -, racism remained as a constitutive factor in the social structure of the US, a society in which the formation of classes and the capitalist social order was tied to a brutal regime of ethnic elimination (of the indigenous) and racial oppression. Externally, the same ideological justifications served the imperialist domination of other peoples and nations.

Movements like the one recently organized under the banner of *Black Lives Matter* – which started in 2013 after the acquittal of George Zimmerman for the death of the African American citizen Trayvon Martin - are frequent on the American scene. It is what happened after the decease of George Floyd, a Black man asphyxiated by a Minneapolis police officer on May 25, 2020. Under the same slogan born in 2013, as reported

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[1] https://tinyurl.com/yestyrja.
[2] ELLSWORTH 1992. Digital Book (2020).
[3] ELLSWORTH, *apud* https://tinyurl.com/yestyrja.

by the international press, at least 7,750 demonstrations took place in two thousand locations throughout the fifty states and the District of Columbia, according to an estimate by Princeton University and the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED). According to the survey, nearly one in ten adult US citizens said they had participated in one of these demonstrations. Another study, published in June by the firm Civic Analytics, states that half of those who claimed they had participated in the protests said that it was their first time demonstrating[4]. Perhaps the most widespread of the racially motivated mass protests, it bears strong similarities to the 1992 demonstrations in Los Angeles. On that occasion, the trigger was the acquittal of four police officers on charges of violently beating Black citizen Rodney King, who had already surrendered. The verdict set the city ablaze and spread to other parts of the country. In 1965, in California, a young Black man named Marquette Frye was stopped by police officers, who then used great violence to subdue him. Seeing the scene, dozens of neighbors got involved, resulting in a confrontation followed by six days of violence in the city's suburbs, with looting, arson, many arrests, and the mobilization of more than two thousand soldiers to fight the protesters.

The first modern democracy, erected under the aegis of liberalism and constitutionalism, conflated odes to liberty and free enterprise with racial oppression. As Domenico Losurdo pointed out, the accommodation between liberalism and slavery evident in the 1796's Federal Constitution resulted from a «twin birth» from which emerged a «country characterized by the stable and direct link between slave property and political power»[5], as both the Constitution and the number of slave owners ascending to the highest institutional office reveal in a clamorous way[6]. Even in those states of the federation where slavery did not exist and where free wage labor predominated, the constitutional norm indirectly sanctioned the institute since it mandated the "return" of the runaway slave to his Southern master.

Losurdo reconstructs, both in *Liberalism: A Counter-History* and in *Class Struggle: A Political and Philosophical History,* how, after the

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[4] https://tinyurl.com/y4na8jm9.
[5] DAVIS, *apud* LOSURDO 2006, p. 33.
[6] LOSURDO 2006 p.72.

American Civil War and the dismantling of the servile institution and subsequent granting of legal equality to Blacks, a regime of discrimination based on skin color was instituted in the US, aimed at keeping Blacks and the other "colored races" on the periphery of the current system. The discriminatory laws against Blacks had the same ideological basis as the territorial expansion campaigns, founded on the genocide or deportation of the indigenous. Likewise, in the expansion southward over Mexican lands, the ideology of *Manifest Destiny* was combined with racialism, which provided moral and ideological justification for the invasion and usurpation of Mexican territory, to which enslaved Black people were also sent.

Significantly, Losurdo reconstructs the history of racial despecification in the US in connection with the flourishing of liberal ideas. It is a theoretical operation that illuminates the same debate waged in Brazil, where it is often claimed that liberal ideas had no penetration since the establishment of an absolutist monarchy marked independence. There was an accommodation between liberal principles and slavery and liberal guidelines and the old regime.

As we have already demonstrated elsewhere[7], liberal ideas came to Brazil through the children of the elite who went to study in Europe. These ideals, understood by Robert Schwarz as «ideas out of place», were accommodated to the country's reality, apparently contrasting with its most elementary principles. The fact is that in Brazil, the ruling class retained from liberalism those principles consistent with a change within the order and, perhaps because of this, the ideas were not "out of place" but "translated", as in the Gramscian notion of "translatability". In addition to Losurdo, Susan Buck-Morss also presents arguments that put Schwarz's thesis in check. Extrapolating her analysis – which covers Haiti but also, tangentially, the newly independent USA – to account for the same problem in Brazil, we may affirm that European liberalism coexisted well with the maintenance of the slaveholding order in the colonies, which guaranteed extraordinary profits so that the apparent strangeness of the slavery-liberalism binomial loses force. Analyzing the problem of slavery in Haiti and the connections of the slave rebellion on that island

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[7] COITINHO 2019.

– which culminated in its independence – with the events of the French Revolution, Morss shows that slavery

«(...) was not a system of European antiquity, a pre-capitalist system (...). No. Slavery reached its peak precisely with the development of capitalism (...). Slavery, the objectification of the human worker, was a fundamental practice at the dawn of the modern world: essential for the development of Europe and the development of the global economy»[8].

The thesis demonstrates its strength when Buck-Morss describes the conditions in which France, under Napoleon, sought to revoke the freedom of formerly enslaved people from the Caribbean colonies: fundamentally, the economic crisis that ravaged France had among its main reasons the decline in profits – previously extraordinary – extracted from the colonies by exploiting slave labor. The logic applied by those in favor of maintaining slavery viewed freedom as a fundamental right for the continental peoples but not for the Blacks from the colonies. Therefore, it is not surprising that the liberalism imported by the ruling class of independent Brazil concurred with the maintenance of privileges for the agrarian aristocracy from slavery and (why not?) for the constitutional monarchy itself.

In general, a similar process occurred in the other Latin American social formations, in which the transition from colonial society to free and capitalist national states took place while preserving discrimination against the indigenous – subjected to the cruel regime of the *mita* or *repartimiento* in Spanish America, which in some countries lasted until the mid-twentieth century – and the discrimination against Blacks, who remained enslaved in independent Brazil until 1888 and, once "free", were relegated to the periphery of wage labor, prevented from migrating to uninhabited places by the land law of 1850, and excluded from the best urban jobs, including jobs in the nascent industries, which preferred European immigrants. The "whitening ideology" common to Brazil and the Southern Cone countries (especially Uruguay and Argentina) has many points of contact with the racist ideologies adopted by the USA's white

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[8] BUCK-MORSS 2011, pp. 131-171.

supremacist regime. It is a nuanced situation from country to country, but it allows for critical interpretative parallels.

These approximations enable us to point out other contact points between realities where racialism was constituted as a structuring element of social formation. We align with Dennis de Oliveira[9] when he states that «racism must be seen as a *structural* question». This is because it worked in Brazil and, we might add, also in the United States as a "structuring element" of class division. Violence, as a «permanent and not episodic political practice» insofar as it concerns the action of the state or even of parastatal groups, served and still serves in these two countries towards the «maintenance of a social order under these terms – racist and concentrating wealth», because continued repression leads to the permanent practice of treating social demands as «police cases», reducing the space for negotiation to a minimum.

While the two social formations are close in terms of the place of racism in shaping structures of domination, they are separate in their role on the international scene. On this point, to focus on Brazil and the United States is to deal with a hierarchical relationship in which the internal social structures of one respond to the socio-political pressures and determinations of the other. It is a theme that is also illuminated by Losurdo's studies when he addresses the issue of colonialism and imperialism.

We will investigate the relations between racism, imperialism, and class society in the following pages. We aim to understand the role of these three societal structures and their implications in the social constitution of the contemporary metropolis (the US) and the subordinate country (Brazil). To this end, the first section will summarize the theoretical contributions developed by Domenico Losurdo concerning the articulations between class struggle and anti-racist and anti-colonial struggles, seeking to apply them to an interpretative sketch of the American racial question. The second section introduces the studies produced by the Brazilian sociologists Octavio Ianni and Florestan Fernandes, who examined the links between race and class society in Brazil. In the third part, aiming to propose a conclusion, we put forward a connection between Losurdo's ideas and the concept formulated by Ianni about the effects of "internal colonialism" for the metropolis (the US), from which

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[9] OLIVEIRA 2016, p.32.

we try to demonstrate the connections between imperialism and oppression within American society, in a kind of extension inside the central country of the very structures that serve to subjugate other peoples. We then return to the formulation regarding the struggles for recognition as a true manifestation of class struggle in our times.

1. *Racialism, Colonialism and Class Society in the USA*

> «I came from a country where race was not an issue; I did not think of myself as Black and I only became Black when I came to America» (Ifemelu, protagonist of the novel *Americanah*, by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, p. 464).

Frantz Fanon, reflecting on the relationship between racism and culture, identified the former as the «systematized oppression of a people»[10], noting that it is possible to find something constant in the behavior of the people who oppress. Achille Mbembe argues that «it is not enough to state that race has nothing innate or of an essence that proves it, but rather that it is necessary to emphasize its role as a mechanism of domination within power relations and its concept that is neither fixed nor stable»[11]. According to him, «race simply consists of the practices that constitute it as such»[12]. Racism is, therefore, a set of systematic practices aimed at the domination of one people by another. At the same time, these practices oppress a particular human group and relegate its cultural codes to a subordinate place, granted they do not achieve their erasure, shape the dominant actions and ideas in the midst of the society that sustains the regime of oppression.

This reasoning was already present in Marx and Engels when they dealt with English rule over Ireland, interpreted by the two theorists as barbaric colonial oppression, which, according to them, tells us more about the characteristics of English capitalism than about the Irish people. The domination mechanisms adopted also act internally on the

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[10] FANON 2021, p.71.
[11] CALLEGARI 2018.
[12] MBEMBE 2014, p. 65.

society that oppresses, insofar as the agreement of the various parts of the population concerning the oppression regime directed at the "other" is processed. Moreover, concerning the annexation of Poland by Germany, Engels observed that «one nation cannot be free and at the same time continue to oppress other nations. Therefore, there can be no freedom for Germany unless Poland is liberated from German oppression»[13].

These observations by Marx and Engels, highlighted by Domenico Losurdo[14], show how the understanding of the two philosophers was far from restricting the understanding of the historical dynamics to binary logic. On the contrary: they observed with interest the unfolding of conflicts motivated by what Losurdo calls, in his work *The class struggle, a political and philosophical history*, "struggles for recognition". The Italian philosopher recovers in Marx and Engels' thoughts the bases for an extensive interpretation of class struggle; that is, he breaks with the binary interpretations of the concept that emanate from a particular schematic understanding of Marxism produced and spread by the theoreticians of the Second International. At the very beginning of the book, he states that

«(...) the passage from the singular to the plural clearly makes it evident that the one between proletariat and bourgeoisie is only one of the class struggles and that these, traversing universal history in-depth, are by no means an exclusive characteristic of bourgeois and industrial society (...) it is not only the 'class struggles' that are inflected in the plural, but also the 'forms' they assume in the different historical eras, in different societies, and in the different concrete situations that progressively arise»[15].

Thus, according to Losurdo, «the radical revolution invoked by Marx and Engels pursues not only the liberation/emancipation of the oppressed class (the proletariat) but also the liberation/emancipation of the oppressed nations». This articulation between class oppression and colonial oppression is often taken up by Marx and Engels when they describe, in the *Manifesto,* the logic of the exploitation of one class by another and

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[13] ENGELS, *apud* LOSURDO 2015, p.118.
[14] LOSURDO 2015, p.15.
[15] Ivi, p. 22.

that of the enrichment of one country at the expense of another. An understanding of the struggles between oppressed and oppressors, in their most diverse forms, is also that of universal history. In Losurdo's words, the class struggle intends to «illuminate the historical process as such»[16], and it is not restricted to the binomial of capital and labor, although this is the fundamental contradiction of the capitalist social order, from which the various contradictions that characterize the conflicts of our time branch out. According to him, these are the «three great oppressions», a concept he extracts from his studies of class struggles. As he points out,

«It is necessary (...) to put forward a second distinction, more precisely, a tripartition: the class struggle that has as protagonists the peoples in colonial or semi-colonial conditions or of colonial origin; the struggle waged by the working class in the capitalist metropolises (on which the reflection of Marx and Engels is concentrated); the struggle of women against "domestic slavery"»[17].

In this way, he believes each of these three struggles calls into question the prevailing international, national, and family division of labor. The fundamental "relation of coercion" in bourgeois society is the one that «exists between capital and labor». Still, the same consideration can be made for the other two relations. The three struggles for emancipation call into question the three fundamental «relations of coercion» that constitute the capitalist system. In this manner, the theory of class struggle «is configured as a general theory of social conflict»[18]. As Losurdo shows[19], it is Engels himself who highlights this interpretative key when he points out that «Marx was the first to discover the great law of historical evolution, the law by which all the struggles of history (...) are only the more or less clear expression of struggles between social classes», which happens independently of the protagonists or the form that these struggles present themselves in each era and each place. As such, Marx's theory appears as a «radical epistemological break with naturalistic ideologies» in that the class struggle «locates social conflict on the terrain of

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[16] Ivi, p. 46.
[17] Ivi, p. 64. Bold highlight added.
[18] Ivi, p. 63.
[19] *Ibidem.*

history». It is «precisely because it provides a key for reading the historical process» that the class struggle leads us to take «into account the multiplicities of forms through which social conflict manifests itself».

Losurdo thus paves the way for the study of the phenomenon of *racial despecification* as a typical result of the social relations that emerge from the establishment and development of the capitalist system. As he points out, the Western bourgeoisie itself «imposed an international division of labor founded on the enslavement of Blacks and the expropriation, deportation, and even annihilation of Amerindians»[20]. It is an interpretation that is not far from what Marx proposed in *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte,* as judged from a more dogmatic point of view. As Losurdo asserts,

«(…) as far as the North American Republic is concerned, even abstracting it from Black slavery, it is necessary to consider that across the Atlantic, "class boundaries have developed incompletely: class collisions are increasingly concealed by the westward emigration of proletarian overpopulation" (Marx, *apud* Losurdo, *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*) an emigration that presupposes the expropriation and deportation of the indigenous peoples and, therefore, a brutal dictatorship exercised against them»[21].

In this way, it may be seen why the American social formation cannot be defined solely by the fundamental opposition between bourgeoisie and proletariat, although they are at the core of the social structure. As the independence of the Thirteen Colonies and their autonomous connection to the international market take place, the following come together: i) the "typical" forms of capitalist exploitation of labor power, especially in the North, which industrializes at great speed – particularly after the adoption of protectionist trade measures –; ii) the expansion of the small agricultural property, at the expense of expelling the indigenous natives in the West and the war of conquest against the Mexicans, in the Southwest; and iii) the slave plantations in the cotton planting South.

Free wage labor – or «wage slavery», in the words of Marx and Engels – typical of modern capitalist production is provided mainly by the

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[20] Ivi, p. 48.
[21] *Ibidem.*

immigrant population, coming from Europe, acquiring a Europeanized face. The colonists of British origin, already adapted to American soil for a few generations, were the main agents of the expansion over the indigenous lands to the West. In the South, slave labor was maintained until the end of the American Civil War, having been permitted until then by the federal constitution, and gained an addendum a few years after its promulgation to oblige the "slave-free" states of the North to return runaway slaves to their "rightful owners" in the South.

While it is true that the founders of Marxism considered wage-earning to be the new slavery – «modern slavery» – it is also true that they thought the existence of property rights on slave lives in the American South to be an even more serious problem, to be extirpated first. It is no wonder they followed with great interest the outbreak and course of events during the Civil War, the initial reasons for which lay in the disagreements between Northern and Southern elites over customs policy. The Northerners wanted to extend the isolation of the United States in order to strengthen its industry, while the South, an agrarian exporter and therefore oriented to international trade, advocated greater tariff freedom. As events unfolded, the Northern leaders saw abolitionism as a significant social force that could deal the South a fatal blow. The natural right to liberty, hitherto denied to Blacks, metamorphosed into a universal right, and abolitionism was incorporated into the Union flag. According to Losurdo,

It is understandable that when the Civil War broke out, the two philosophers and revolutionary militants firmly placed themselves in favor of the Union. From the beginning of hostilities, they pleaded to fight a revolutionary war against the South for the abolition of Black slavery; however, in the North, the slavery to which wage workers were subjected is alive and well, that one which a few years later *The Capital,* taking up the declaration of the Baltimore General Workers' Congress, defines as «capitalist slavery». The fact is that the "indirect slavery of whites in England" is not the same as the «direct slavery» of Blacks on the other side of the Atlantic. The «immediate forced labor» to which the slave is subjected is not comparable to the indirect economic coercion that weighs on the salaried worker, who is at least formally "free". On the contrary, while the Civil War is raging in the United States – which has no shortage

of Southern sympathizers in Europe – it seems that Marx wants to avoid any disagreement: by quietly repeating his traditional denunciation of the «indirect slavery» inherent in the capitalist system, he insistently calls for a struggle in favor of the «free labor system» and against the «slavery system»[22].

The system of slavery authorized the enslaver to dispose of the bodies and lives of his slaves. For the creators of Marxism, there is no doubt that this was a much crueler system than "wage slavery", in which the owner of the means of production can dispose of his employee's ability to work but not his life. Moreover, in the US, the coexistence of the two systems within American society created two distinct strata of the exploited based on racial despecification.

With the victory of the North over the South and the abolition of slavery, the United States went through a short interstice in which Blacks, in theory, could exercise the same rights as whites, at least by the letter of the law. But nothing changed for the indigenous peoples. Mass deportation, isolation in remote areas, or murder continued unabated, justified by a general idea of civilization against the "barbarians" and "the indolent". Similarly, after the Civil War, the concept of *Manifest Destiny* develops in the US. The behavior of US Foreign Policy towards Latin American and Caribbean neighbors and towards indigenous people is shaped. The abolition of slavery did not eliminate from American society the idea of the existence of a superior race, whose civilizing mission justified the oppression – and extermination – of the other "races".

In the period following the victory of the North over the South, US continental action gained momentum as the country's industrial economy strengthened and new markets were sought. Three fundamental tenets guided US foreign policy, now reinforced by the defeat of the secessionists: isolationism; a certain missionary sense – grounded in the doctrine of "*Manifest Destiny*", well expressed in the verses of the English poet Kipling (published in 1899 in the exaltation of the civilizing "mission" of the US in the war with the Philippines) – and the "Monroe Doctrine", which since 1823 had proclaimed an «America for Americans» and which at the end of the 19th century gained a corollary, provided by Theodore Roosevelt:

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[22] Ivi, pp. 79-80.

«Chronic wrongdoing, or the impotence resulting from a general relaxation of civilized society, may in America, as elsewhere, ultimately require the intervention of some civilized nation, and in the Western Hemisphere, the adherence of the United States to the Monroe Doctrine may force the United States, however reluctantly, in flagrant cases of such wrongdoing or impotence, to the exercise of international police power».

Thus, if the Monroe doctrine synthesized isolationism and the repudiation of European intervention, Ted Roosevelt's corollary justified the unilateral imposition of conditions for guaranteeing the private business of American citizens on the continent, already seen as a natural extension or even "vital space" of American society, whose manifest destiny was to "civilize" other peoples. "America for Americans", a summary of President Monroe's declaration on December 2, 1823, postulated the existence of a system that included the entire Western Hemisphere outside effective European control.

Therefore, the "superior race" was unified around a civilizing mission – *The White Man's Burden* – through which it seeks to shape and absorb its own internal problems. Since the birth of the US as a nation, "Manifest destiny" has been the unifying ideology through which it has sought to soothe distributional conflicts and justify the permanence of racial despecification.

A few years after the abolition of slavery, the South stirred again on the US political scene, threatening Northern customs interests, and achieving the establishment of a racial segregation regime in the states, in exchange for its adherence with the central government. In this regard, Losurdo observes that «the second American revolution», the abolitionist revolution, which took place between the end of the Civil War and the so-called *Reconstruction* period (the short interstice in which Black citizens were able to enjoy the constitutional rights previously granted only to whites), was quickly defeated, in a process in which ideas that dehumanized Blacks, equating them to "savages" – who had always been deprived of any rights – were once again disseminated. Thus, «in the US of white supremacy, the program of reaffirming social hierarchies is closely linked to the eugenicist project»[23], where the aim is to prevent

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[23] LOSURDO 2021, pp. 101 and 105.

miscegenation, deemed «*race suicide*», as per the term coined by Edward Alsworth Ross. Interracial marriages were forbidden, and the children of these forbidden unions, the *mestizos*, were subject to the same discriminatory institutes reserved for African Americans.

Excluded from the «major national associations» (including unions), African Americans are cordoned off (...) even at the legal level, they continue to be subjected to two different legislations or one legislation interpreted very differently depending on the race to which they belong, as confirmed later by the lynchings reserved for Blacks and the «deportation and annihilation of indigenous people»[24].

These discriminatory policies inaugurated a racialist school of thought that would have an enormous influence on the development of Nazism in Germany and the apartheid regime in South Africa. The notion of the *underman*, which presupposed the existence of naturally subordinate human beings, was widely adopted by the theorists of Nazism, who directed it at the Slavic peoples of Europe, the Jews, and the "impure". To a lesser extent, it can be said that it also served as a school of thought for the ideologies of whitening adopted in Brazil and Argentina, also at the end of the 19th century, a time when Europeans immigrated to the Americas in large numbers. Losurdo, however, calls attention to the fact that

«(...) what at first sight is presented as "race war" is, in reality, class struggle. For example, it is clear that in the United States of Black slavery and white supremacy, the destiny of African Americans is marked in the first place by belonging to the "race". Under these circumstances, raising the "racial" (or national) question in no way means removing the social conflict but rather confronting it in the concrete and peculiar terms in which it manifests itself»[25].

What Losurdo highlights here is precisely «the role developed by the class struggle in contradictions, clashes, and trials of strength that seemed to be of a purely national and racial character»[26]. Referring to Engels'

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[24] Ivi, p.107.
[25] LOSURDO 2015, pp. 66- 67
[26] *Ibidem.*

criticism of the British writer Carlyle, when the latter expressed himself in a racist way regarding the Irish, Losurdo states that

«(...) this all has very little to do with "race". In a society like the one prevailing in the United States, where even after the formal abolition of slavery, the ruling oligarchy proudly displays its *otium* and imposes "all productive labor" on Blacks, social arrogance manifests itself in racial arrogance and contempt for "productive labor" is disdain at the same time for the servile or semi-servile race obliged to provide it»[27].

The operation is complex but highly effective in structuring the class hierarchy in the US. It creates categories of jobs, more or less worthy on the social scale. The "races" considered inferior, when not deported and extirpated from American soil (as in the case of the indigenous), are relegated to the peripheral positions on the social scale, being responsible for that kind of work considered unworthy even for the proletariat of European origin. Losurdo rightly points out that the same process occurs with immigrants of Asian origin because, according to the ideologues of racialism, Asians are part of the three groups of "colored races", hence inferior on the social scale, domestically, or justifiable targets of imperialist domination abroad. Latin Americans, «mixed races, and therefore colored people, occupy the same place».

Racial despecification thus has a double function: 1) inside US society, it stratifies the working class itself through prohibiting Blacks and "racialized" immigrants (Latinos, Asians) from participating in union associations or having access to the best positions in the wage market. According to the American social standard, the less "dignified" professions – manual labor, domestic service, seasonal and strenuous jobs – are earmarked for the "inferior races", just as access to higher education is forbidden to them at least until the second half of the 20th century. 2) Outside the US, the relationship with Latin American, Caribbean, and Asian countries, to which the US imperialist enterprises are directed, is viewed as a "civilizing mission", with justified interventions, armed invasions, and assassinations since these are inferior, infantile, savage races.

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[27] Ivi, p. 50

If we look closely, racial despecification, which was also used by European states in their neo-colonial ventures, plays a vital role in the causes that led to the First World War. This is what Losurdo highlights:

«(…) the First World War is not only an expression of the class struggle, but it has a triple connotation. It refers a) to the struggle for hegemony among the capitalist bourgeoisies of the major powers; b) the social conflict in the metropolis, which the ruling class hopes to neutralize and deflect through a test of strength on the international level and colonial conquest; c) the oppression and exploitation of peoples under colonial and semi-colonial conditions for whom, in the language of Marx regarding Ireland, the "social question" is posed as a "national question»[28].

Regarding English colonialism, Marx and Engels pointed out how colonial oppression served as an escape valve for the internal contradictions between capital and labor. The improvement in living conditions for the English working class was at the expense of the colonial world, to the point where workers' organizations and even socialists supported the expansion of the British Empire. The same happened in Germany, where the social democracy embraced colonialism as a 'civilizing task' and a necessary stage for the subsequent overcoming of capitalism, to the point of voting in favor of war credits and pledging its support to the inter-imperialist war. In this way, «bourgeois society exacerbates inequalities at the national and international level that can only be confronted through class struggle»[29]. This is particularly true of US society, where "colonial oppression" also turned inward, providing the political and ideological basis for the conquest of indigenous territories and oppression based on racialism as early as independence, but quite radically in the first decades of the 20th century.

After the Russian Revolution, in which the issue of nationalities (and therefore also ethnicities) was absorbed by the Bolshevik program, which proclaimed itself the enemy of all forms of exclusion, including the white supremacist regime in force in the US, some Black and working-class American leaders adhered to the principles of the October Revolution.

[28] Ivi, p. 65.
[29] Ivi, p. 74.

The deepening of racial divisions marked the post-First World War period in the US. Along with other repressive aspects at the behavioral level – such as the prohibition of alcohol, passed in 1918 – racialist regulations ravaged the US, also affecting Jews, associated with communism, Asian and Eastern European immigrants, whose immigration was forbidden, and the Black population, subjected to persecution, arbitrary imprisonment, public lynchings, and other degrading tortures, sometimes advertised in pamphlets as actual entertainment events. The massacre in Tulsa that we referred to in the introduction dates from this phase. In addition, at this time (with the endorsement of Woodrow Wilson, then governor of New Jersey and an enthusiast for eugenics), the sterilization of criminals, people with epilepsy, and people with mental illnesses were authorized. Sterilizations of "undesirables" were also widely used in California. The Ku Klux Klan, which had shrunk considerably after the defeat of the South in the Civil War, experienced a revival and became a very influential organization in more than one state: Indiana, Colorado, Oregon, Oklahoma, and Alabama, sending hundreds of delegates to the 1924 Democratic convention[30].

In this internal dispute within American society, the principles of Marxism were quickly identified as enemies to be extirpated, a process that gradually deepened until World War II, after which the US plunged into McCarthyism and anti-communism that resulted in the Cold War. In this dispute, more than a few leaders of movements for the end of the supremacist regime aligned themselves in some way to Marxism, such as certain members of the Black Panthers and some of the Black Muslims led by Malcolm X. They were supporters of direct action against the State, in which they identified the origin of racial oppression. In the 1950s and 1960s, there were large demonstrations for the end of segregation, which began after the action of Rosa Parks, who refused to give up her seat on public transportation. The wave of protests, in which Martin Luther King's leadership played a key role (a religious leader and not a communist, as the press accused him), led to the systematic boycott of public transportation for three hundred and eighty-two days (a period in which Luther King was imprisoned, abused, and had his house bombed). It culminated in the US Supreme Court ruling that racial segregation was

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[30] STONE — KUZNICK 2015, chapter 2.

illegal in 1956. Amid the climate of the Cold War, many leaders of the Black movement were accused of collaboration with the Communists, national treason, and terrorism. It is remarkable that, even while they denied Marxism, the US ruling classes knew how to identify the fight against racial oppression with the class struggle, which manifested itself in their immediate action aimed at the imprisonment of the foremost leaders, the prohibition of Black political organizations, and the persecution of intellectuals and artists in any way linked to those movements. With the Supreme Court's decision, an accommodation of interests involved the prohibition of segregationist policies adopted by certain states, abolishing the supremacist regime in the US legal framework. The structures based on racial despecification, especially regarding the historical, social exclusion of Blacks and the permanent violence of the state against African Americans and other "people of color", however, remained and were extended internally to the immigrant population from Latin America, Africa, and Muslims, and externally in the police-like behavior of the US towards Latin American countries. In official U.S. statistics, the *Black population* refers to the sum of these groups, showing how the idea of "race" in the US is directly related to a subordinate position in the general structure of class society.

2. *The connection between race and social class in Brazil: an interpretative parallel*

> «To be Black in Brazil is frequently to be the object of a biased gaze. The so-called good society seems to consider that there is a predetermined place, down there, for Blacks, and so it quietly behaves».
> (Milton Santos)

As Silvio Luiz de Almeida points out, «contrary to liberal readings claim, racism is not just an ethical problem, a legal category, or a psychological fact. Racism is a social relationship that is structured politically and economically»[31]. This is the approach of a significant number of

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[31] ALMEIDA 2016, p. 23.

studies produced in Brazil about the phenomenon of racism, among which we may highlight, for the purposes discussed here, the formulations of Florestan Fernandes and Octavio Ianni. We do not intend to assert that these are definitive studies, after which nothing more could have been added. On the contrary, the formulations of these authors are part of a vast field of studies that has been producing results to this day. Our choice is based on the points of contact we found between these formulations and those we presented by Domenico Losurdo in the first part of this study: the general understanding of racism as a manifestation connected to class society and the phenomena of colonialism and imperialism.

Florestan Fernandes and Roger Bastide located the conformation of racism in the constitution of the estate society in the colonial period, showing that

«(...) the social conditions of economic exploitation of slave labor favored the formation of social symbols and behavior patterns polarized around race or color, which were linked, as a cause or as an operating condition, to the determination of the dynamics of adjustment between Blacks and whites (...)»[32].

Far from being the manifestation of a prior moral determination, the racialization of the population obeyed the needs of the social regime's conformation of exploitation based on slavery. The position occupied by the "races" in the classification system of colonial society thus resulted from the system of material relations, «thereby constituting a product of the social processes that operate at the economic level of social life»[33]. This observation was already present in the studies of a racist like Oliveira Vianna, who pointed out that by the end of the 18th century in Brazil, there were already «three rural classes»: the enslaved people, made up of Blacks; the *foreiros* (renters), mostly *mestizos* (mixed race); and the masters, all white[34]. In this way, the color of one's skin also came to designate one's position in the rigid structure, to the point of freezing the hierarchies by forbidding interracial marriages, a way of guaranteeing the

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[32] BASTIDE — FERNANDES 1972, p. 364.
[33] Ivi, p. 365.
[34] Ivi, p. 366.

exclusion of the Black and mixed races from the core of the «family of possessions» and freezing their social position. The color was thus selected «as a racial mark that would serve to socially identify Blacks and *mestizos*. It became a symbol of social position»[35] legitimizing the dispossessing action of the masters, based on a "natural" right marked by the claim of racial superiority, so that «color prejudice contributed to perpetuate the prevailing lordly order to the extent that it operated as a factor of social segregation»[36].

With the growing presence of the abolitionist movement and the progressive increase of the free Black and mixed-race population, through the institution of manumission, which could be bought by the enslaved person or granted by the master (in this case, it was more common in the case of mixed-race people, many of them children of the enslavers themselves), the importance of interdictions to interracial marriages and the blocking of Black and mixed-race people from the functions and positions assigned to whites to maintain the caste structure was amplified. In José do Patrocínio, a great abolitionist figure in Brazil in the 19th century, «the colored man needs to prove that he is free»[37], since he is first seen as a slave. After abolishing slavery, which occurred belatedly to adapt the Brazilian social structure to the capitalist modernization process, the stigma about Black and mixed-race people was maintained. The abolition of slavery occurred along with the adoption of policies to encourage the immigration of Europeans. This policy was adopted because some of these immigrants already had some contact with the manufacturing system (although the vast majority were farmers) and, above all, to the spread of ideas about whitening the population.

The Land Law of 1850 already prevented Brazilians from migrating within their territory and appropriating small plots of land, forcing "free" workers to remain within the latifundia and in subordinate positions as "partners" or "sharecroppers". After the adoption of free labor, many former slaves remained on the estates in this position that differed little from slavery. Those who were in or migrated to the cities were not accepted in the most valued jobs, constituting a kind of "sub-proletariat"

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[35] Ivi, p. 368.
[36] Ivi, p. 372.
[37] Ivi, p. 367.

below the incipient urban "proletariat" that also found it hard to form as a class, given the instabilities and incipience of Brazilian industrialization. In any case, the stigma of color remained, and the Black and the *mestizo* were integrated into the class society in a subordinate position even concerning poor whites. As Clóvis Moura showed, racism penetrated as an ideology within the working class itself[38].

This is also Octavio Ianni's interpretation, who points out that «in the game of preferences, based on economic reasons and according to cultural conditions inherited from slavery, the Black was passed over in favor of the immigrant. Thus, it is the Black that will form the army of the unoccupied, of those without jobs»[39]. Along this line, Florestan Fernandes points out that Brazilian society left the Black to his own fate, laying on his shoulders the responsibility to re-educate and transform himself to correspond to humankind's new standards and ideals created by the advent of free labor, the republican regime, and capitalism[40].

In the modernization process of Brazil's social formation, in which agrarian and urban interests were accommodated, cultural codes molded on the estate society remained. The Black becomes legally free but «is not defined as a citizen, in the full sense of the concept». The transformation of the slave caste into free and worthless men (we may recall here the idea of the *underman,* formulated in the USA), members of the mass of available workers to be incorporated into the productive process, occurs within a system of reclassification of free men. The possibilities for social mobility, typical of capitalist society, are different for Blacks and whites, although mobility is legally possible. Once again, liberalism is readjusted to the objectives of the dominant classes, and the idea of a competitive social order, in which the "most capable" have access to the best positions, masks the original exclusion of the "colored" populations (including not only Blacks but also *mestizos* and those of indigenous origin). This is where the "whitening ideal" of the people and customs operates. If all work was considered unworthy before the capitalist modernization, and therefore, "slave work", with the expansion of the capitalist social order, work is re-signified and reclassified. Certain occupations are now

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[38] FARIAS 2016, p. 39.
[39] IANNI 1966, p. 18.
[40] FERNANDES 1964, p. 5.

considered edifying, and white workers are assigned to them. Blacks and mixed-race people are left with jobs considered undignified, forced, or humiliating. In addition, the cultural practices of Blacks are also repressed and viewed as a police matter. The exoticism of part of the population goes hand in hand with the criminalization of their practices and the institutionalization of state violence directed at these populations, who gradually group together in communities to escape persecution and maintain some of their cultural traditions.

The racial ideology of whites promotes or facilitates the predominance of whites in social situations in which Blacks and *mestizos* are also present, whether when we consider circles of social coexistence or concerning the levels of social structure[41]. A racial ideology of the Black is also constituted based on a relationship of inferiority regarding the white, in which the former imagines himself in the terms in which he is conceived by the latter. Therefore, the first step in articulating the anti-racist struggle is the self-recognition of the Black person and the resistance, at the level of culture and ideology, to the racialist stigma. As we can see, in the conformation of Brazilian society, racism integrates the dynamics of the structuring of class society, meaning that the racial oppression of Blacks must be viewed, before anything else, «from the social position that [the Black person] occupies in the social system and from how his/her *blackness* was generated via the class system»[42]. Here emerges the radical thought of Clóvis Moura, for whom to lay bare the myth of Brazilian "racial democracy" is a potentially revolutionary task for the Black movement, forged within a doubly oppressive society: racist and classist.

Another theme required to understand the complexity of the racial question in Brazil and its connection to the conformation of the capitalist social order is that of internal colonialism, directed primarily at indigenous peoples, but which can also be applied to the rural communities that were isolated before and after abolition, such as the *quilombolas* and, in a broader sense, to all classes and class fractions that somehow create conflicts with the existing social order. The concept arose from criticism related to the indigenist policies adopted in the Republic, especially after the Vargas government instituted the *Serviço de Proteção ao*

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[41] IANNI 1960 p. 210.
[42] IANNI 1966, p. 53.

Índio (Service for the Protection of the Indian - SPI). The government began to encourage a kind of "March to the West", that is, a state policy to stimulate migration from other regions to the west of the Brazilian territory, which was characterized as a replay of practices identified with colonialism. The native Indian, who had come to be seen since Romanticism as a heroic and, at the same time, naive figure, was converted into a population deprived of a civil personality and dependent on state protection policies. This "protection" actually promoted what scholars like Ianni and Darcy Ribeiro called the "detribalization" of entire groups since missions were organized to find and "pacify" isolated tribes that, later, with the creation of the Xingu National Park, were forced to live together with rival groups in the same space. The central argument was that if they remained isolated, they would be the target of violence from land grabbers, landowners, and miners. Instead of guaranteeing their self-determination, the Brazilian state imposed a containment policy in "preserved" areas, in which they continue to be targets of predatory capitalism to this day.

These measures were problematized by Brazilian scholars, which eventually led to the general reorientation of indigenist policy to give the Indians some degree of self-determination within their territories. What we see in practice, however, is that the intermediate solution did not succeed in removing from Brazilian society the stigma towards the indigenous people, who are subject to both racial prejudices, which classify them as childish, lazy, and savage, and to the crudest interests of the "white man", that is, the Brazilian capitalist and landowner, over their territories. We have witnessed the continuity of the looting, justified by colonialist ideas and notions of a superior civilization. The indigenous peoples in Brazil are faced with the need to organize themselves as a social class in political movements to fight for recognition of their original right to the lands they occupy and to self-determination.

This brings us back to the thesis with which we began the first section, formulated by Marx and Engels and taken up by Losurdo to address the relations between colonialism, racial despecification, and class struggle, insofar as the various oppositions that are established amid the capitalist social formation encourage the emergence of new struggles for

recognition that energize social conflicts and call into question the system as a whole.

It is possible to broaden the application of this category of analysis to look at the internal difficulties experienced by capitalist states. From the perspective of subaltern states in the global system, the dominant classes themselves are viewed from a subaltern bias. Racialist ideologies act on the bourgeoisies of Latin American countries themselves, who accept the general idea of the "superiority" of the dominant classes from the metropolis. At the internal level, however, the various oppositions to the *status quo* force the dominant classes to develop a response to accommodate their interests to keep the social structure as it is. These solutions, in general, are expressed in the deepening of what we called above internal colonialism, a state action aimed at the containment, by violence if necessary, of social struggles. This systematic policy of containing the desire for recognition keeps the unemployed or overexploited masses away from any possibility of resistance, given the systematic use of the repressive state machine. However, this permanent repression sometimes results in disorganized social explosions or, in certain situations, gives rise to new formats of resistance struggles that may at times take on an anti-systemic character.

This is what Losurdo proposes:

«(…) the inadequate and mistaken character of the merely economicist reading of the Marxian conflict theory becomes evident. What is at stake in the class struggle? The subjected peoples, the proletariat and subordinate classes, and the women subjected to domestic slavery, these subjects so different among themselves can present the most diverse claims: national liberation; the abolition of slavery itself, and the conquest of the most elementary forms of freedom; better living and working conditions; the transformation of property and production relations; the end of domestic segregation. The subjects are different, and so are the contents of the class struggle; nevertheless, we can identify the minimum common denominator: on the economic-political level, it is constituted by the goal of changing the division of labor (on the international level, in the scope of the factory or within the family); on the political-moral level, through the goal of surmounting the processes of dehumanization and reification that characterize capitalist society, to obtain recognition»[43].

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[43] LOSURDO 2015, p. 104.

3. *Conclusion: the Hegelian paradigm of struggles for recognition as a theoretical basis for understanding the connections between imperialism and class struggles*

The struggles for recognition, a Hegelian paradigm taken up in the Losurdian interpretation of class struggle, present themselves as a real historical movement, thus negating the interpretative schematism about the "real" class struggle. As we have tried to demonstrate, both in the dynamic center of world capitalism, the United States, and in a country considered "peripheral" to the world system, Brazil, the constitution of the class system encompasses a series of complexities, among which we highlight the role played by racialism in the hierarchical relations of class society.

To the extent that it lends itself to the social totality, racist ideology is also absorbed by the subaltern classes, functioning as a structuring agent of social relations within and between classes. At the same time, as Marx and Engels already pointed out when looking at the Irish colonial question, the ideologies justifying colonial oppression operate in two directions: outward, functioning as acceptable justifications for the inhumane treatment of the conquered peoples; inward, as propaganda for the system and as a redistributive mechanism that, by raising the standard of living of the subordinate classes in the metropolis at the expense of plundering the colonial peoples, gains the support of the proletarian classes for the imperialist action of the state to which they belong. Marx himself highlights the relationship between the colonial question and the social question in the capitalist metropolis. According to Losurdo,

The presence of the Hegelian paradigm of the struggle for recognition manifests itself with particular clarity concerning the relationship not between empirical individuals but between peoples, that is, concerning a realm that Hegel did not explicitly consider when he developed his analysis of the struggle for recognition. We note that on several occasions, Marx and Engels state that «a people cannot be free if it oppresses another». *The Phenomenology of Spirit* immediately comes to mind, which thus summarizes the result of the dialectic of servant and master: «They recognize each other as recognizing each other reciprocally». As the

Encyclopedia puts it: «I am free when the other is also free and is recognized by me as free»[44].

From here, we can move towards what we mentioned in the introduction of this essay: the intersections between imperialism and class oppression within the metropolis. For an author like David Harvey, the aggressive foreign policy adopted by the United States in the 20th century does not only respond to capital expansion needs. It is also directed at controlling the internal difficulties generated by the increasing accumulation and concentration of wealth. «An immigrant and extraordinarily multicultural society driven by an inflexible competitive individualism» with a chronically unstable (if not impossible to control) democracy permanently needs an external enemy capable of generating internal solidarity.

At the same time, the wealth drained from the periphery into the American state allows this society to guarantee that a significant part of its population may boast conditions and consumption that are absolutely unthinkable at the edge of the system. This relative comfort, even if it does not extend to the totality of the American people, is enough to ensure adherence to the government's foreign policy, which can be measured in the considerable support obtained for the *regime-changing* operations organized in the periphery of the system. As Harvey points out, the end of the Cold War brought with it the end of the "red" threat and, as such, significant difficulties regarding internal cohesion. The policy of "empire" came to life in the early 1990s with Presidents George Bush and Bill Clinton, and in the "War on Terror" of Bush Jr.'s administration, a policy maintained in President Obama's two administrations, despite the democratic and institutionalist rhetoric. However, all this effort to maintain US supremacy on the world stage has not had the desired effect. The decline in the country's relative position on the world stage has had a disintegrating impact on American society. It is no wonder that with Trump, the isolationist discourse has been dramatically expanded, combined with a certain anti-communist paranoia, along the lines of the "new right", clinging to strange conspiracy theories and medieval dogmas, as well as a revival of White Supremacy practices and symbols. Both the aggressiveness in foreign policy and the emulation of internal enemies – Blacks, civil rights activists, immigrants, "globalists", etc. – respond to

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[44] LOSURDO 2015, p.113.

the permanent need to fabricate an enemy capable of generating internal cohesion. According to Harvey,

«(…) imperialist practices, from the point of view of capitalist logic, typically refer to the exploitation of the unequal geographical conditions under which capital accumulation occurs, equally taking advantage of the asymmetries inevitably arising out of the spatial relations of exchange»[45].

These asymmetries guarantee the sustenance of the system. Under capitalism, Lenin already pointed out, development is always unequal. We may add that this disparity between "center and periphery" does not only occur between different nations but also internally within capitalist countries. These internal inequalities, usually made explicit by the existence of states that are more industrialized or more technically developed than others, are also expressed in social hierarchies, especially in the conformation of a sub-proletariat, a "race" of semi-proletarianized men and women, generally identified by origin (immigrants) and skin color. As Octavio Ianni pointed out,

«(…) imperialism extends internally within the dominant nation itself. The same fundamentals that govern external economic relations and policies also govern internal political and economic ties. Thus, inside the metropolis, economic-social and political development is unequal, and the contradictions persist and worsen (…). Therefore, the problem's basis lies in the class society's character that develops [in the country].[46] From this interpretation perspective, it becomes possible to explain the internal manifestations of imperialism, that is, of internal colonialism»[47].

One can identify an intertwining of external domination and struggles for recognition. While external oppression serves, for the most part, as an instrument of internal accommodation, movements organized around the banners of recognition are influenced by the struggles of colonial peoples. In the second half of the 20th century, in the United States, since the insurgency against the Vietnam War, a series of movements for

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[45] HARVEY 2013, p. 45.
[46] Our bold highlight.
[47] IANNI 1998, p. 9-10.

recognition has gained importance on the political scene. The anti-colonial revolutions also exerted enormous influence, «propelling African Americans into the struggle against segregation, discrimination, and the persistence of White supremacy»[48].

In this way, the ideological dispute over the features of these movements is imposed. The liberal agenda seeks to impose itself, capturing these struggles to use in a diffuse agenda of civil rights enclosed within the system's limits. At the same time, the economic crisis that has been steadily eroding the opulence of American society brings the dimension of the struggle for recognition and the plan of rebuilding the welfare state ever closer. The distributive conflict, more current than ever at the center of the system since the outbreak of the economic crisis in 2008, pushes the unemployed and the working poor into social revolt. Historically marginalized groups – blacks and immigrants – swell the crowds of protesters against police violence. Other groups, however, see in the rescue of isolationism and segregation the possibility of returning to the "golden age" of the opulence of American capitalism, becoming supporters of far-right politicians.

This ideological dispute that takes place at the center of the system, parallel to the decline of its position as a world power, reveals the existence of a life and death dispute between the old imperialist structures, which no longer encounter the international environment of the past and therefore find it difficult to renew themselves, and a new social conformation that still has no face is not defined and hence cannot be born yet. Liberalism, the fundamental doctrine of American society, seeks to renew itself but no longer has anything to offer. Liberalism has always been tied to the discrimination of portions of human beings and can only sustain itself by renewing this structure of domination. Along these lines, Losurdo highlights Palmiro Togliatti's polemic with Norberto Bobbio:

«When and to what extent were the liberal principles upon which the English state of the 19th century was said to have been founded applied to the colonial peoples, the model, the creed of the perfect liberal regime for those who reason

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[48] LOSURDO 2015.

like Bobbio? The truth is that the "liberal doctrine [...] is founded on barbaric discrimination between human beings»[49].

Hence, it is in this way that the «pursuit of the universal», that is, the building of a society finally free from all forms of exploitation and domination, disputes space with liberalism, despite the coexistence that the latter had, from the beginning, with the classification of human beings as equal and unequal. But this dispute, which is the realization of the class struggle, «is realized through an always determined effort, which targets and combats war, fascism, colonial expansionism, and national oppression»[50].

Since the effective possibilities for increasing the plunder of nations worldwide have become more and more restricted, given the relative decline in American power, the tendency is for internal conflicts to become more and more frequent. With the reappearance of the supremacist movements, which embody a kind of revival of an era perceived as the "golden age" of American capitalism, it is natural that the reaction of the most oppressed groups subjected to state violence would be to direct their energies to racial confrontation, as seen recently.

However, despite what certain positions claiming to be more "faithful" to Marxism predict, this does not mean that racial conflicts at the system's center are devoid of connection with the class struggle. On the contrary:

«(...) the general call launched by Marx and Engels arouses an enormous echo for a straightforward reason: the two revolutionary thinkers could absorb and elaborate on the theoretical and political level a rather diffuse demand for recognition. Then, the starting point can be identified in the Hegelian *Phenomenology of spirit* and the dialectic of servant and master that it presents»[51].

The general idea that the reification of social roles affects both the master and the slave so that the liberation of one is the condition for the other's freedom, points to the formulation that the concretization of

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[49] Ivi, p. 310.
[50] Ivi, p. 117.
[51] *Ibid*. Our bold highlight.

universality in specific struggles refers to a general critique of the conditions in which class society is structured, even at the center of the system. Thus, according to Losurdo, «humanism is real only insofar as it succeeds in identifying and concretizing universality in specific struggles». Losurdo refers us to Hegel and Marx, stressing the «paradigm of the struggle for recognition», from which he concludes that every class struggle begins with the battle for recognition. From this struggle, the contours of class society are revealed, and one can come to question totalizing social structures.

Finally, looking at Brazil, whose social structures respond to a double determination, internal and external, it can be observed that the struggles for recognition permanently assume the space of democratic struggle, which, due to the reduced space for the accommodation of popular wishes, leads to the questioning of the established social order itself.

On the one hand, the relative decline of the United States' predominance on the international stage presents Brazil with a set of risks and opportunities. The risks are defined by the permanent connection of the dominant classes, given their subordinate condition to the interests of American capitalism, so that they adhere with relative ease to the political agenda of the metropolis, despite the social costs that this implies for their own population. The opportunities refer to the connections of the subordinate classes that encounter possibilities for alliances in the international space outside American hegemony in cases where they manage to sustain a political coalition capable of reaching the country's command. On the other hand, the rise of the struggles for recognition in the metropolis stimulates certain popular sectors towards democratic claims for land, indigenous rights, civil rights, anti-racist demands, etc. These struggles, *seemingly* compatible with the capitalist social order, actually find very little room for accommodation within the order. They can thus quickly come to assume explicitly anti-systemic and universalist contours. Nonetheless, these have little chance of prospering without a systemic change in the international order, or at least in the continental, Latin-American environment, given the subordinate nature of Brazil's international placement.

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