

The National Myth of Receptivity in Brazil¹

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Cultural Myth

The existence of the myth is part of the surface of the collective. Where there is society there is myth; no society exists without myths. Myth, according to Douthe, is personalized collective desire (Douthe, 1909). Mythical constructions are inherent in the human condition and the human condition is not without reference to collectivity. Several scholars have studied the phenomenon of social and political myth. For Sigmund Freud the key of myth creation was traced to the emotional parts of individuals (Freud, 1900/1913). According to Freud, myths are like dreams: they express unconscious fantasies in disguised form and fulfill unconscious wishes. Thus they relieve pressure from the unconscious and fulfill psychological needs. The emotions attached to the unconscious fantasies give myths their great appeal and allow other ideas – such as moral and political ideals – that are woven into myths to receive an emotional charge as well. Freud also claimed that myths, like dreams, are censored. They therefore have both manifest and latent content. Manifest content is the surface narrative, while latent content is the unconscious wishes and fears. The latent content is disguised in the manifest content. Disguise takes several forms, and the role of the analyst is to unpack this meaning.

The phenomenon of myth was a determinant factor of pre-modern societies too. According to Eliade, the purpose of myth was to return to the time before time, before the gods or tribal ancestors (supernatural beings) created the world. This pre-cosmic state is sacred time, and according to Eliade it is the aim of the religious person to go beyond the natural/profane world of space and time, through ritual or storytelling, and enter into the sacred space of eternal time, thereby experiencing the primal power in the form of a hierophany that gives order to the laws of culture. This storytelling is the actual discursive construction and expression of cultural myth.

According to Barthes, 'myth is a type of speech' (Barthes, 1977: 1). For him, myths serve the ideological function of *naturalization* (Barthes, 1957). Their function is to naturalize the cultural – in other words, to make dominant cultural and historical values, attitudes and beliefs seem entirely 'natural', 'normal', self-evident, timeless, obvious 'common-sense' – and thus objective and 'true' reflections of 'the way things are'. Contemporary social scientists argue that social groups tend to regard as 'natural' whatever confers privilege and power upon themselves. Barthes saw myth as serving the ideological interests. With this he basically developed his theory of mythification and claimed that all social phenomena are political in the sense that they reflect some kind of personal or group interest but that these interests are concealed. Thus they do not look political at all even though they are inherently political. Consequently, for Barthes, human interests that guide social behaviour remain concealed behind images and discourses that don't look political. Thus, for him, a 'myth' is not a fictitious tale. Rather, myth is a perpetration of mass culture upon the world. Barthes' definition of myth is actually more aligned to a definition of ideology such as Terry Eagleton's in *Ideology: An Introduction* (Eagleton, 1991). He writes: 'A dominant power may legitimize itself by promoting beliefs and values congenial to it; naturalizing and universalizing such beliefs so as to render them self-evident and apparently inevitable;

¹ Study conducted under the auspices of the FAPESP Thematic Project Observatório das Migrações em São Paulo: fases e faces do fenômeno migratório no Estado de São Paulo (Observatory of Migration in São Paulo: phases and facets of the migratory phenomenon in the state of São Paulo), NEPO/UNICAMP.

denigrating ideas which might challenge it; excluding rival forms of thought, perhaps by some unspoken but systematic logic; and obscuring social reality in ways convenient to itself. Such “mystification”, as it is commonly known, frequently takes the form of masking or suppressing social conflicts, from which arises the conception of ideology as an imaginary resolution of real contradictions’ (1991: 5). Consequently, the essence of the process of myth creation is that of naturalization and masking. All the thinkers mentioned share the notion of a socially constructed reality which is passed off as natural and self-evident.

Thus, myth is an important concept in relation to (i) historical immigration to Brazil and (ii) the related contemporary myth construction of Brazil as an extremely receptive country, which is almost xenophile. We attempt here to unpack this contemporary cultural myth, which in turn leads Brazilians to construct an identity as unquestionably receptive to foreigners and foreign cultures.

Land of Promise

It is a matter of record that Brazil has been characterized by centuries of immigration from all parts of the world: the systematic settlement of European invaders, in particular the Portuguese, but also the Spaniards, the Dutch, the English and the French, began more than three hundred years ago (Milliet, 1941; Prado Jr, 1970; Holanda, 1989; Hall, 1989; Levy, 1974, Bassanezi, 1996; Fausto, 1975; Cano, 1977). This historical fact has been elaborated into a discourse of justification and has led to the construction of the myth of receptivity which works to deny the presence of xenophobia in society. Two points need to be noted at this stage in looking at this historical process.

First, historical immigration and the co-existence of various ethnic, national and religious groups as well as the integration of the immigrants was not that friendly a process (Alvim, 1986) and not as smooth as has been assumed by the myth of receptivity. Second, even if Brazil has had a past of receptive acceptance of immigrants, as is fantasized, this would in no way guarantee that contemporary acceptance of newly arrived immigrants in Brazilian society is non-conflictual (Simai & Baeninger, 2011a; 2011b). Thus the receptivity of Brazilians as a nationally fantasized characteristic became a mere normative discourse and is used to justify social processes that have nothing to do with each other, such as being a country of immigration historically and the contemporary existence of or lack of xenophobia in society. Therefore, before looking at the problem of the myth of receptivity, we briefly review the history of immigration to Brazil.

Initially, numerous indigenous Indians were enslaved, predominantly to work on the sugar-cane plantations (Monbeig, 1941; Petrone, 1968). Enslavement, displacement and extermination led to the annihilation of many Indian peoples: of an estimated 5 to 6 million indigenous people at the time of the arrival of the first Europeans, only about 600,000 remained by the end of the colonial period (Ribeiro, 2002). In the 16th century, Portuguese colonialists began to bring slaves from Africa to Brazil. They originated from territories known today as Guinea, Angola, Mozambique, Nigeria and more. As early as the 17th century the number of displaced Africans exceeded that of settled Europeans (IGBE, 2008).

According to Bassanezi (1996), up to 1850 immigration to Brazil was linked to the colonization process of the Portuguese settlers. A diversified and non-forced immigration wave began only after this date, as only in 1850 was the import of slaves banned, with the Law of the Extinction of Slave Traffic. Thus the time of the so-called ‘big migration’ to Brazil began in the second half of the 19th century; around 5 million European immigrants entered Brazil between 1885 and 1930 (Levy, 1974).

The first of three phases of mass immigration (1880 to 1909) lasted until the early years of the 20th century. The immigrants in this phase originated primarily from Europe. The strongest increase was firstly among the Italians, with 1,188,883 immigrants (Table 1). However, immigrants also came from Portugal (519,629), Spain (307,591), Germany (49,833), the Middle East (31,061) and, in smaller numbers, from various other countries such as Ukraine, Poland, Russia and Korea (Levy, 1974; Lesser, 1999). The total number of immigrants in the period after the abolition of slavery was between 50,000 and over 200,000 per year.

Table 1: Immigrants in Brazil by country of origin from 1880 to 1969

Period	Portugal	Italy	Spain	Germany	Japan	Middle East	Others
1880–1909	519,629	1,188,883	307,591	49,833	861	31,061	171,498
1910–1929	620,396	245,003	263,582	101,703	85,716	79,102	266,598
1930–1969	464,055	142,334	140,538	56,606	160,735	30,301	232,939
Total	1,604,080	1,576,220	711,711	208,142	247,312	140,464	671,035
Shared	31%	30%	14%	4%	5%	3%	13%

Source: Lesser, Jeffrey (1999): *Negotiating National Identity. Immigrants, Minorities and the Struggle for Ethnicity in Brazil*.

In this first phase of mass immigration, European migrants were needed above all as workers in the agricultural sector, for coffee cultivation in south-eastern Brazil and later for the spread of industrialization (Singer, 1968; Graham & Holanda, 1973; Cano, 1977; Vainer, 1991). The Brazilian upper classes were, moreover, anxious to bring themselves into line culturally, socially and ethnically with Europe by means of European immigration (Hall, 1989; Lesser, 1999).

In a second wave of immigration between 1910 and 1929, more than 1.5 million immigrants entered the country to be employed, once again, in agriculture (Levy, 1974; Camargo, 1981). They again originated primarily from Portugal, Italy, Spain, Russia and Germany, many of them looking for a fresh start after the First World War. However, migration to Brazil also increased from Syria and Lebanon after the beginning of the 20th century (Truzzi, 2001).

After Canada, the USA, Mexico and Argentina had tightened up their immigration conditions in the mid 1920s, Brazil became the main migration destination for the Japanese. By 1929, 86,577 Japanese had arrived in the country, assisted in their emigration by the government in Tokyo, which gave them financial support as well as helping to organize their emigration. The Japanese immigrants were predominantly employed in agriculture.

From 1930 President Getúlio Vargas operated an immigration policy that aimed primarily at assimilating Brazil's minorities and which made immigration more difficult (Vainer, 1996). To 'protect Brazilian identity', the use of foreign languages was forbidden in public life (Seyfert, 2001). Owing to the fall in coffee sales in the incipient world economic crisis, it had become difficult anyway for immigrants to find work (Alvim, 1986). The restrictive immigration policy was determined by a quota system introduced in 1934 whereby (with the exception of the Portuguese) only a very small number of new immigrants were allowed to join their respective group of migrants who

had already entered the country. Not until 1946 were the discriminatory laws repealed, after the fall of the Vargas regime (Bassanezi, 1996).

The third wave of immigration between 1930 and 1969 turned out to be smaller than those in the preceding decades. The largest group of new immigrants, comprising 160,735 persons, originated from Japan. For the newly emerged industrial sector, migrants were recruited from Syria and Lebanon in particular (Truzzi, 2001). After the Second World War new immigrants entered Brazil and there were special policies for Spanish immigrants needed for the industrialization of São Paulo between 1950 and 1960 (Jordão, 1963). The recruitment of foreign workers ended with the military coup in 1964 and internal migration gained importance for the country's economic development. As can be observed in Table 2, while between 1960 and 1969 a total of 197,587 immigrants entered Brazil, between 1970 and 1972 only 15,558 did so (Bassanezi, 1996).

Table 2: Immigrants in Brazil by country of origin from 1960 to 1972

Period	Portugal	Italy	Spain	Germany	Japan	Other	Total
1960–1969	74,129	12,414	28,397	5,659	25,092	51,896	197,587
1970–1972	3,073	804	949	1,050	695	9,017	15,558

Source: Bassanezi, Maria Silvia (1996): International Immigration to Brazil: A Historical View. Based on the works of Levy, M. S. (1974).

The importance of international migration appears again in Brazil in the 1980s, in connection with both the number of Brazilians emigrating (Patarra, 1995) and the entrance of foreigners, in particular to the city of São Paulo.

Nationalism(s) in Brazil

At this point it is important to make a quick reflection on the notion of nationalism in Brazil. It was San Tiago Dantas (1975) who first differentiated between positive and negative nationalism in the Brazilian context. Dantas referred to a patriotic concern for improving one's country's economic and social conditions and its constructive role in world affairs and distinguished this from unreasoned and often counter-productive hostility to all things foreign, in American slang known as "jingoism" (Gordon, 2003). With its post-colonial background, Brazil understandably developed a nationalist political outlook in order to cope with colonial oppression. Then, after its independence and in the new world order, Brazil needed to further develop this political framework and related political attitudes to react to the Washington Consensus. In other words, nationalism as a form of resistance has long existed in Brazilian political thought. Here I would like to refer only to the obscure side of this political tendency.

The negative version of nationalism first appeared in its modern form during the Vargas era, especially in his post-war term as elected president (Dantas, 1975). In practice, Vargas continued to maneuver between extremes and to offset concessions to the Left by gestures toward the Right. In proposing the creation of Petrobras, he made much of the slogan "The oil is ours", but his initial plan would have permitted private participation in exploration and drilling. In that respect he was overridden by negative nationalists, who insisted on a government monopoly.

A particular bias against foreigners and foreign investment in natural resource industries has traditionally been very strong in Brazil, although it appears to have diminished since the early 1990s. Xenophobic migratory policies were first developed

during the Vargas era and became worse during the military dictatorship (Sales, 2005), and only recently has there been some sign of policies that accept and respect immigrants into Brazil, with initiatives such as the amnesty for immigrants who have no papers. However, plans for immigrants to be granted the right to vote (for instance) were recently rejected. From this perspective we can say that, although nationalism played an important role in liberating Brazil during the colonial and post-colonial eras, it is this same ideology – negative nationalism, as Dantas (1975) put it – that still creates obstacles between Brazilians and foreigners who live in the country.

From Land of Promise to the Myth of Receptivity

The obscure side of the great surface pride of the Brazilians in their multinational country is that the conscious migratory policy encouraging immigrants to come to Brazil was born out of the existing racism against blacks. In the late 1800s Brazil embarked upon a ‘whitening’ programme (Vainer, 1996), right after the emancipation of the slaves in 1888. They encouraged immigration from Europe, more than likely frightened of the huge mass of Africans who formed the overwhelming majority of the population. Table 1 shows the statistics of the various ethnic groups that immigrated to Brazil after the abolition of slavery (1888). The paradox of an apparently xenophile immigration policy born of racism is the basis of the myth that Brazil created as a strategic political move and which it still maintains today.

Brazil slowly developed a number of strategic, ideological instruments that were able very powerfully to reinforce the cultural myth of the receptivity of Brazilians as a political agenda. Such instruments include the media, governmental and non-governmental organizations linked to migration work, and even academic institutions. The two main, and most powerful, TV channels were eager to produce soap operas to reinforce the idea of Brazilians as all being the descendants of immigrants and therefore that the nation was constructed by immigrants. They were eager to convey a message of a multicultural Brazil as an extremely receptive nation. The idea of being a multicultural and culturally sensitive nation is a fantasy that is dear to everyone. Who would not want to claim to have such characteristics in a world where intolerance is one of the main socio-cultural problems? Thus the fantasy was attractive to all Brazilians, and therefore the political agenda was easily implemented.

In 1981 the Bandeirantes Channel began to show the soap opera *The Immigrants*. This programme portrayed the saga of immigrants who helped to construct and develop Brazil. It traced the migratory route of these newly arrived people, leaving their country of origin in search for a better life in Brazil. In 1999 another successful soap opera was produced by the Globo Channel, entitled *Terra Nostra* (Our Land). This historical soap opera tells the story of Italian immigrants. It focuses on the relationship of Giuliana Esplendore and Matteo Batistella, who meet each other during the journey to Brazil. Giuliana and Matteo immediately fall in love and plan a life together at their new home in Brazil. Unfortunately, fate and certain people do not see it that way. A series of mishaps befall the couple and keep them apart. When they finally reunite, their conduct affects not only their own lives, but also other people they have met along the way. This all shows that the form of a historical reconstruction of a national fantasy very much relies on people’s emotions. These soap operas tell emotional stories, life stories that touch the viewer emotionally, and thus the internalization of the conveyed message is truly successful.

In addition to the role of the media, the government has also contributed to the construction of the myth of receptivity in Brazil. Since the 1980s, the visibility of Brazilian emigration and the increased entrance of foreigners into Brazil have brought

about a national political agenda of *land of immigrants* in Brazil. The government has planned and funded a number of publications that were apparently historical in order to reconstruct historical migrations to Brazil but which ended up with an extra connotative message too: to reinforce the idea of a country where people of various origins live together happily without conflict. In 2009 *The Migratory Profile of Brazil* was launched. This publication was elaborated and written by the Ministry of Labour with the collaboration of the National Commission of Population and Development (CNPD) and the International Organization for Migrations (IOM) as well as with that of the National Council of Immigration (CNig). At the launch event for this book, the former Minister of Labour gave a speech in which he claimed that the book reconstructing the history of immigration to Brazil was a true portrayal of Brazil. He also added that 'our country is very receptive to migrants: in Brasilia we have a majority of north-eastern people (Nordestinos); in Rio de Janeiro live more than a million of people from Minas Gerais (Mineiros), and São Paulo is a cosmopolitan city. As well as receiving fellow citizens from various parts of the country very well, Brazil has many foreigners and it is a pacific country that accepts foreigners very well. We are an example of immigration, a model for other countries. We are an open-hearted country that receives people from anywhere'.² The message was conveyed well and it seems that there is a real gap between the historical reconstruction of immigration to Brazil and the construction of an idea of Brazil and of Brazilians as very receptive to contemporary migrants. The publication did not deal with the receptivity of Brazil and Brazilians, but simply put together historical and statistical facts to reconstruct a historical period in Brazil.

Various academics have now begun to revise the normative discourse of receptivity – in other words, to question the myth of receptivity in Brazil – but such work and the general academic debate is still in its infancy. Unfortunately, such intellectual cultural criticism is practised by only a minority of academics in Brazil. Outside Brazil, Jeffrey Lesser has published a critical work on the minority and migratory context and the co-existence of various ethnicities in Brazil from a historical perspective. However, critical works on the contemporary relationship of foreigners, minorities and the majority of society are still lacking in Brazil. Critical works have been started at the Judaic Study Center of the Federal University of Minas Gerais by some individual academics. Some recent publications on the denial of racism have also illuminated certain aspects of this question (Simai & Baeninger, 2011; Tonini, 2011), and still others point to the unrealistic portrayal of Brazil as a country receptive to immigrants (Sales, 2009; Gomez Carreira, 2009). For instance, a recent study by Tonini (2011) shows that racism, xenophobia and discrimination are criticized when they occur elsewhere, outside Brazil, but when they happen inside the country there is a tendency to deny it. Simai and Baeninger (2011) provide empirical evidence for the contemporary discourse of Brazilians as holding xenophobic views and for their being eager to deny it via the rhetoric of the receptivity of Brazilians. Sales (2009) points to the role of immigration policies in Brazil that are not at all helpful in integrating newly arriving immigrants, and Gomez Carreira (2008) analysed the various xenophobic stigmas and stereotypes that Portuguese immigrants historically faced in Brazil.

However, this field of study is very much contested, and the myth does not provide much room for criticism or for self-reflection on this particular characteristic, receptivity, of Brazilians. Therefore, with all this in mind, we conducted fieldwork with university students in São Paulo to see what they thought about modern-day immigrants in the country.

² The speech was transcribed at the event and freely translated from Portuguese.

Discursive Study Presentation

We conducted focus groups with Brazilians to allow more engagement in the study of contemporary social rhetoric about immigrants in São Paulo. We taped the focus-group discussions and then had the tapes transcribed and used as texts for discourse analysis. Overall, this section of the article offers a discursive reading of the data from the focus groups on contemporary forms of discursive elaborations on immigrants in São Paulo. The focus groups³ were conducted between February 26 and 28, 2011 with 24 graduate students from a university setting. Groups from the departments of psychology, communication and economics were selected at the São Paulo campus of the University of São Paulo. These participants all claimed to be from São Paulo and their age ranged from 18 to 50 years. Their ethnic background was as follows: 5 Asians, 8 Afro-Brazilians and 12 whites.

We were particularly interested in how ‘the other’ is constructed by Brazilians and what discursive resources are employed in the constructions and for what purposes. For us, grappling discursively with the function of a particular construction means engaging with the socio-historical resources that underpin it and the conditions that make it possible, as well as with its material and ideological contexts. In this sense, discursive constructions inform and regulate what can and cannot be done and thought (Burman & Parker, 1993). How people position themselves and others, however, occurs both actively and passively; subjects can exercise agency in choosing their constructs while also being defined by the availability and accessibility of discourses. What people say, then, is discourse in action, ideology that has become lived experience.

During data analysis, a number of linguistic, semantic and discursive categories were identified and a typology of the rhetoric of the denial of racism was reconstructed. The hypothesis was then reapplied various times to the text, resulting in the findings presented in this paper. References were made to the researcher as moderator and to the respondents as informants.

At a more general level, Brazilian students showed strong in-group favouritism. Their choices of vocabulary and their associations concerning the immigrants continuously reinforced this positioning in their discourse. They rigidly minded the gaps between the positive *we* (Brazilians) and the negative or exotic *others*. A positive self-presentation of Brazil and Brazilians was very common. Brazilians were described as very receptive to and respectful of various ethnic and racial groups from anywhere in the world. Counter-attacks were also commonly used to emphasize that Brazilians also suffer a lot abroad. Various disclaimers such as discursive choices of denial were used frequently, and a number of types of this will be discussed in the sub-section below, including empathetic, apparently ignorance-based, transference-based and explicitly denial-based disclaimers. We termed such discourses ‘but-discourses’, and this is how we are going to categorize the various rhetorical forms of denial of xenophobia found in the focus-group discourses below.

A close analysis of the discussion helps us to map the main topics that surfaced. The choice of topics tells us a lot. Earlier studies on conversations about immigrants conducted in the US and various European countries show a number of particularities to do with topic choices. According to Teun Van Dijk (1984, 1987), when respondents were casually asked about their neighbourhoods, many of them often spontaneously began to speak negatively about foreigners (Van Dijk, 2004; Wetherell & Potter, 1992; Wodak et al., 1990). Interestingly, in everyday conversations about other people or

³ Focus groups conducted in Portuguese were translated into English and transcribed.

about each other, many diverse topics can be approached, but when it comes to immigrants, the discussion topics have been shown to be limited, and these are dominantly negative.

‘They are different from us’

The main discursive work of Brazilians when they talk about foreigners involves the concept of themselves as being Brazilians and the others as being different from the hosts as non-Brazilians, foreigners. Most of the associations linked to this difference were negative. Positive topics did also occur in cases of emphasizing differences between others, such as considering foreigners as exotic or as providing cultural enrichment. Below are a number of narratives taken from the focus groups:

1. INFORMANT: ‘[...] I know that they have lots of difficulties here in São Paulo, that they are semi-slaves at work.’

2. INFORMANT: ‘I heard that in the slum (*favela*) near here there is a strong contingent of Bolivians. So... so they are different from us. For instance, it’s normal for them to hit a woman [...] They have difficulties in a lot of the work they do... they come here to find work ...’

3. INFORMANT: ‘[...] their culture is very old and you have the impression that people are carrying this antique thing around, indigenusness in their lives and their culture [...] so they are very culturally rich.’

4. INFORMANT: ‘[...] I visited the country. The impression I had was that you do not understand anything when you are there, you know what I mean. MODERATOR: No, not really. INFORMANT: Well, because everything is so different, you look around at stuff curiously but you don’t really understand anything.’

We see from these excerpts that the discussion in the focus groups focused principally on three areas. One was the difficulties that foreigners, in particular Bolivians, may face in São Paulo. The second was their exotic nature, the idea of foreigners being so different that one might *not understand anything*, as seen in excerpt 4. The third idea was the concept of morally unacceptable, aggressive foreigners, as described in excerpt 2. All topics discussed were negative and associated with difficulties, strangeness and immorality; the only positive view put forward was when Brazilians approached the exotic others who are culturally rich, as was summarized in excerpt 3.

‘Brazilians are much more receptive to foreigners than other countries’

The participants in the focus groups believed that their group or country is essentially tolerant and receptive towards immigrants. Positive self-representation is an important ingredient in daily discourse and should be understood as the argumentative denial of accusations of anti-racism (Van Dijk, 2004; Billig, 1997).

5. INFORMANT: ‘I think that Brazil is a country that has always accepted different cultures and there should not be any reasons for Brazilians to exclude others. Immigrants can maintain their cultures and still integrate into our society. For instance, you see the Japanese district in São Paulo where it is clear that they maintain their Japanese traditions while at the same time being part of the larger Brazilian society.’

6. INFORMANT: ‘The experience I have in travelling through neighbouring South and North American countries is that Brazilians are much more receptive to foreigners than other countries. I do not claim that the situation here is perfect, but we Brazilians are more permissive and receptive.’

7. INFORMANT: 'I think that as our country was developing there were so many different people who participated from abroad that I think that, for our people here in São Paulo, it is easier to live together with other races and ethnic groups. As we are diverse, we accept diversity easily.'

We can see from these excerpts the positive self-presentation of the history of immigration to São Paulo, the diversity of the population in the city and, generally, the constructed image of Brazilians as more permissive and receptive people, and these all lead to in-group favouritism among Paulistas (people from São Paulo) and Brazilians in general. One participant goes so far as to express that this is self-evident:

8. INFORMANT: 'Everyone here in São Paulo is, in one way or another, an immigrant, not indigenous or native. All of us are descendants of the Portuguese, or Italians, or French, etc., you know. The whole city is composed of immigrants... so...'

So positive self-presentation is fundamental to the denial of *our* bad side and *their* good side, and it shows a tendency to derogate the other and praise and glorify one's own history, background and past. As Teun Van Dijk put it, 'All these different structures at different levels[...] contribute to the overall strategy of positive self-presentation and negative other presentation. We have seen that precisely such structures may derive from and be geared towards the construction of similar mental structures, that is, negative attitudes and ideologies on minorities and immigration' (Van Dijk, 2004).

'It's not that we are excluding or being racist, but we are victims, too. We suffer from racism and exclusion elsewhere'

Counter-attack in discourse about immigrants refers to a strategic rhetorical move whereby the subject is reversed. Thus this type of rhetoric works through reversal and it goes like this: *It's not that we are excluding or being racist, but we are victims, too. We suffer from racism and exclusion elsewhere.* Discursively the speaker changes the subject of the discourse and projects him- or herself into the place of the immigrant. In the focus groups, this appeared in complaints about how Brazilians are seen abroad when they are immigrating. Although the focus group was really about the immigrants living in São Paulo, one speaker made this strategic discursive comment (narrative 9):

9. INFORMANT: 'I think this is about another issue, too, which is legalization. If, for instance, a Brazilian goes abroad and has the opportunity to work as a manicurist or waitress or babysitter, she is seen by others as being from a country of service workers. If she was able to take normal jobs as well it would be different. If everyone who goes abroad becomes a manicurist, then we Brazilians are seen as a country of manicurists.'

What is interesting about this type of denial is that, for it to occur, one basically needs to identify a symbolic enemy and to say that whether we are intolerant or not is not really the main question. The real issue (to her) is that others are intolerant towards *us*.

'This is a more important issue elsewhere, like Europe for instance'

Earlier conceptual analyses of contemporary rhetoric have shown that the use of euphemisms or generally minimizing the act or the responsibility of the accused is very common among groups with a tendency to exclusion.

10. INFORMANT: 'I have the impression that this is a more important issue elsewhere, like Europe for instance. We can see on TV how difficult it is in France for Islamic immigrants to integrate into society. So I don't think this is so much an issue here in Brazil. Maybe we should take this more seriously, but I do not think that it is an issue in Brazil at all.'

As narrative 10 clearly shows, the rhetoric of redistribution of responsibility and the distancing of the problem both psychologically and geographically is a common discursive strategy. The psychological logic of discourse like this is that *it is not we who are principally responsible for tensions but rather the problem lies elsewhere*. The responsibility is someone else's.

'But-Discourse'

'But-discourse' is a disclaimer in discourse analytical studies. A disclaimer is a semantic device that contains an apparently neutral part regarding 'us' and a clearly negative part regarding 'them', or the 'other'. This semantic structure is so typical that a number of sub-forms can be distinguished here. Participants in the focus groups have often used this discursive recourse and ended up expressing but-discourses while referring to immigrants.

11. INFORMANT: '*I do not know much about this topic, but* I have heard from others that even though they claim they have [...]'.

12. INFORMANT: '*I have not participated, but* I heard quite a lot of comments on the bus, like [...]'

13. INFORMANT: '*I am sure that they have many difficulties, but* Brazil is also full of problems, so we cannot help them any more than we already are [...]'

All this reinforces the idea that but-discourses use the grammatical structure of the Neutral part plus the BUT plus the Negative aspect of the OTHER. According to Dimitrina Petrova, 'A personal disclaimer is so typical of most contemporary racist discourses that it can be seen as an ideological marker' (2000: 32).

Conclusion

In this article we have stated that Brazil has constructed a fantasy of the receptivity of Brazilians and worked this fantasy into a normative discourse at the societal level. This discourse is based on and justified by historical facts of international immigration to Brazil and the romanticized co-existence for centuries between immigrants and Brazil-born citizens. Although researchers have shown that the strategic initiation of European immigration to Brazil after 1888 was born out of a racist ethos (Bassanezi, 1995; Lesser, 1999; Ribeiro, 2003) to whiten the race and colour shade of the country's population, the fantasy has not diminished of the benevolent and receptive characteristics of Brazilians. In addition to this, Lesser (1999) and Sales (2001) have shown that migratory policies were racist and discriminatory during the main mass-migratory period. Despite all efforts to the contrary, the myth of receptivity has nourished itself and grown into a national discourse.

We have pointed out several strategic paths by means of which this national normative discourse was reinforced. We have also cited an empirical study as powerful evidence of the existence of the belief in Brazilians as receptive and its rhetorical elaboration into everyday discourse. Therefore, we would like to state two important things to conclude this essay.

First, if myth is a 'type of speech' (Barthes, 1977: 1) with a function of naturalization which has a disguised or latent content (Freud), then the discourse of the receptivity of Brazilians can be considered a myth, a myth of receptivity. If this myth really exists at a societal level (and it does, as we have shown above), then it is used to justify certain obscure characteristics of contemporary relations between immigrants and Brazilians. We suggest that the myth of receptivity is currently applied discursively to deny the existence of the contrary (non-receptivity) in the country. That is, as we have shown in our empirical study, it denies the existence of the ethos of non-receptivity and xenophobia.

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