


ARTICLE

The Overvaluation of the Portuguese Influence on the Formation of Brazilian Society in *Raízes do Brasil*

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Abstract

In this article, I argue that Sérgio Buarque de Holanda's sociohistorical analyses of the formation of Brazilian society in *Raízes do Brasil* are based on a non-sociohistorical assumption. Holanda prioritizes the influence of the Portuguese colonizer on that formation based on a determinist-organicist standpoint. Although he also attributes deleterious traits to the Portuguese, he describes them as endowed with a consistent character able to adjust to adverse natural conditions and other ethnicities. As for African and Indigenous peoples, conversely, besides deprecating their temperament, Holanda reduces their influence to a peripheral and reinforcing function to the Portuguese temperament. Furthermore, he attributes the leading role in shaping Brazilian identity to the Portuguese. As I demonstrate, Holanda's overvaluation of the Portuguese and his oversimplification of African and Indigenous peoples' contribution to the sociohistorical development of Brazil reflect his view of peoples' identities as naturally given, as organic-like features, and not as socially constructed.

Keywords: Portuguese colonizer; African and Indigenous peoples; Brazilian identity and sociohistory; a determinist-organicist view

Resumo

Neste artigo, defendo que as análises sócio-históricas de Sérgio Buarque de Holanda sobre a formação da sociedade brasileira em *Raízes do Brasil* baseiam-se em um pressuposto não sócio-histórico. Holanda prioriza a influência do colonizador português nessa formação a partir de uma perspectiva determinista-organicista. Embora ele também atribua traços deletérios aos portugueses, descreve-os como dotados de um carácter consistente, capaz de se ajustar às condições naturais adversas e a outras etnias. Quanto aos povos africanos e indígenas, pelo contrário, além de depreciar seu temperamento, Holanda reduz sua influência a uma função periférica e reforçadora do temperamento português. Ademais, atribui aos portugueses o protagonismo na formação da identidade brasileira. Como demonstro, a supervalorização dos portugueses e a simplificação excessiva da contribuição dos povos africanos e indígenas para o desenvolvimento sócio-histórico do Brasil por parte de Holanda refletem sua visão das identidades dos povos como dadas naturalmente, como características orgânicas, e não como construídas socialmente.

Palavras-chave: O colonizador português; povos africanos e indígenas; identidade e história social brasileira; visão determinista-organicista

Raízes do Brasil was first published in 1936. Many other editions followed the first, with substantial changes, most of which were implemented in the second edition. Some of my points were more clearly drawn, added to, or even resulted from important changes in the second and third editions. The author himself revised four of these editions: the 1948, 1956, 1963, and 1969 editions. The first and all the revised editions were published in different political periods in Brazil. As Schwarcz and Monteiro (2016, 17) assert about *Raízes do Brasil*: “Books such as this one, fundamental to the thinking of the country, do not come out complete and finished. . . . The birth of such a classic work lasted three decades.” Comprehending which specific changes impact the development of his arguments will be strategic to understanding his views regarding some issues discussed in this paper.¹

National identity was a familiar theme not only among Brazilian thinkers but also among other Latin American thinkers from the nineteenth century until approximately the mid-twentieth century as a way of dealing with the past and the present. All these thinkers reflect on their countries’ identity from the perspective of the colonial past, from a time when the history of their countries—or their prehistory, as Novais (2011, 414) remarks—was mingled with their colonizer’s history.² For nations born from an alienated condition, it was reasonable to question their past, eager to find a way to their own identities. As Devés-Valdés (2022, 83) claims of Latin Americans, “The defense of our culture, our way of being, our race, will be an important basis for constituting a nationalist discourse.”

Around the world, the idea of race became quite appealing for defining societies from the nineteenth to the first half of the twentieth century. Among Latin Americans, it was commonplace to devalue non-European peoples from a biological perspective. As Eduardo Devés-Valdés (2022, 83) explains: “The interrelated race and character are the two topics around which there is the most speculation in the beginning of the century. More than that, the mixing of European and non-European races in Latin American societies was considered the cause of their setbacks as negative traits were associated with Indigenous and African peoples.”

The Bolivian Alcides Arguedas (1909, 438–440), for example, claims that “the mestizo governors, with their way of being and knowledge of the process, are the ones who slow down the advancement of the Republic.” The Nicaraguan thinker Salvador Mendieta resorts to a collective organism to illustrate the peoples of Central America. He deems as morbid symptoms some characteristics he describes as laziness, moral cowardliness, and lack of initiative. For him, these traits are like diseases requiring a deep investigation (Devés-Valdés 2022, 79). As a further example, after analyzing the three races predominant in Latin America, in *Nuestra América*, the Argentinean Carlos Octavio Bunge posits that “the Spanish give us arrogance, indolence, theological uniformity, decorum; the Indians, fatalism and ferocity; the blacks, servility, malleability” (as cited in Devés-Valdés 2022, 74).

At that time, there was an urgent demand for safeguarding development, stability, and unity in the face of inescapable changes, mostly among those who, like Latin Americans, faced continuous social and political turmoil after they became independent nations. The Uruguayan José Enrique Rodó, for example, in his essay *Ariel*, in 1900, reveals a similar concern not at the national level but regarding Latin America as a whole. Overlooking the

¹ I use *Raízes do Brasil*’s critical edition (*edição crítica*), published in 2016 in Portuguese, because it collects all *Raízes do Brasil* editions revised by Holanda. Since I found some inconsistencies in *Raízes do Brasil*’s English translation published in 2012, which was based on the last edition revised by the author, I occasionally translate into English some of my citations to be more loyal to the original in Portuguese. Moreover, I translate citations from other authors from Portuguese.

² A non-Brazilian example is Domingo Sarmiento’s (1998) *Facundo: Or, Civilization and Barbarism*, published in 1845, which proclaims the gauchos, a social group from rural Argentina, as heirs to the barbarian frontier past. On the contrary, Sarmiento claims that the new urban and “civilized” Argentines offered the social model for a future, modern Argentina.

ethnic diversity among Latin Americans, he comes to proclaim a common Mediterranean heritage of all Latin Americans, a basis of a shared identity and fate (Nuccetelli 2002, 197). Even though the Mediterranean region includes non-European peoples, African and Indigenous cultures are not contemplated in Rodó's Latin America, despite their meaningful presence in the region. In fact, Rodó thinks of ancient Greece and early Christianity as the basis of a modern common identity (Schelkshorn 2019, 196).

As for the Brazilian thinkers, as Schwarcz (2002, 76) posits, the racial paradigm prevailed in all important accounts of the Brazilian character until the 1930s. Names such as "Silvio Romero, Nina Rodrigues, Euclides da Cunha, João Batista Lacerda, Manuel Bonfim, Manuel Quirino, Joaquim Nabuco e Oliveira Viana" are some prominent examples of those who define the Brazilian people from a biological perspective colored by a eugenic tone. In some way or another, all identify racial disparities as the cause of Brazil's social or political backwardness and aim to overcome them by undervaluing non-European people, which was the rule, or by idealistically overestimating them. Silvio Romero, for example, leans toward an ideal of a developed civilization achieved by purging it of elements associated with inferiority and backwardness supposedly occasioned by the influence of non-European races. In turn, as Antonio Candido (1967, 359), one of the most important of Holanda's commentators, mentions, Brazilian romantics assign an idealized purity, spontaneity, and authenticity to Indigenous people and nature while undervaluing the civilized world and Europeans, who are seen as responsible for the decay of naturalness—and I suppose Candido is thinking here mostly of Indianist Jose de Alencar and his novel *Iracema*.³ Besides privileging the racial paradigm to explain Brazil's social deadlocks, these authors overvalue one of the racial poles as a way to annihilate its supposed opponent.

That mythological view of the natives continued to inform Brazilian mentality throughout the 1920s. Despite Oswald de Andrade's commitment to valuing and expressing a genuine and original Brazilian identity, as one of the representatives of Brazilian modernism,⁴ his *Manifesto pau-brasil* from 1924 and *Manifesto antropófago* from 1928 do not signify a real paradigm shift. As Murari (2018, 360) posits on these two works by Andrade, "We should pay attention to the fact that the figure of Indigenous people in the formation of the national being remained but a myth in the two versions."

In the 1930s and 1940s, the social, political, and economic environment started to change while the country gradually became more open to foreign influences. A new generation of Brazilian thinkers become sensitive to the urgency of rethinking their people's idiosyncrasies in the face of not only domestic changes but also a wave of modernization from Europe, which clashed with traditional values and customs. Most previous Brazilian thinkers resort to the country's history to account for the Brazilian character. As the previous generation does, the new one continues tracking the past to make sense of Brazilian identity. They actually break with their previous counterparts insofar as they abandon purely biological explanations in favor of more sociological, anthropological, or economic ones, like Gilberto Freyre with his *Casa Grande e Senzala* in 1933, Sérgio Buarque de Holanda with *Raízes do Brasil*, published in 1936, and Caio Prado Júnior in 1942, in *Formação do Brasil Contemporâneo*, almost a decade after *Casa Grande*. However, it does not mean that the racial paradigm was completely abandoned by these authors, mostly concerning Freyre (Murari 2018, 361) and Holanda. Speaking about the

³ In 1923, in some of her texts, the Chilean poet Gabriela Mistral describes Mexican Indigenous women as almost idealized beings gifted with lofty and pure beauty (Devés-Valdés 2022, 122–23).

⁴ Brazilian modernism began in the first half of the twentieth century. The artistic, cultural, and literary movement had its official milestone with Modern Art Week in São Paulo in 1922. Influenced by European modernism, the movement's guiding objective was to break with the paradigms and rules of traditional aesthetics. Its originality lays in the valorization of national artistic expression, the use of simple language in literature, and the desire to represent Brazilian ethnic, social, and cultural identity through art.

approach to race by Latin American thinkers at the beginning of the twentieth century, Odile Cisneiros (2006, 203) remarks on their contradictory perspectives since they appropriate “Western cultural and scientific discourses, attempting to subvert them to a certain extent, but frequently also succumbing to the vicious logic of their definitions.”

Prado Júnior (2011, 88–118) does not assign race a central role in determining Brazilian identity. In fact, he dilutes the problem of identity within an explanation of the social and economic structure built through a historical materialist analysis of the Brazilian past. As Candido (1967, 357) believes, in *Formação*, Prado Júnior is concerned with an “interpretation of the past in accordance with the basic realities of production, distribution and consumption” to show that, though the present was bringing about new solutions, it was still grounded in old socioeconomic structures.

Freyre distances his analysis from the deterministic and eugenic interpretations of African and Indigenous ethnicities as primitive and unfit for developed societies, a perspective prevalent in Brazil at the time, by advancing the idea that the affability and intimacy of the non-Iberian races allowed a gradually more personalized and interactive and, hence, less hierarchical Brazilian society (Souza 2000, 90). He believes that Brazilian traditions, which historically were maintained by the rural and patriarchal family structure, provided durable order and stability because they created a balance among contradictory factors while preventing the eruption of social conflicts (Bastos 2016, 406). For Freyre, the class conflicts and contradictions of the inherited colonial system of masters and servants had been progressively overcome by interethnic and intercultural exchanges, which reinforced miscegenation in Brazil’s rural and patriarchal society and created what Souza (2000, 65–70) calls tropical patriarchy as the basis of a racially mixed identity. Freyre (2006, 33) notes that “the miscegenation that was practiced in Brazil corrected the social distancing, which would have been preserved between the master’s rural big house and the tropical forests; between the big house and the slaves’ quarters.” Independent of evaluating whether Freyre is right to assert that miscegenation diminished social and economic disparities, his use of it as a social parameter demonstrates that he still resorts to a racial paradigm to address Brazil’s social disparities.

In contrast, according to Alfredo Melo (2016, 454), “In *Roots of Brazil* there will be no celebratory and nostalgic defense of a tropical and mestizo Brazil.” In fact, Sérgio Buarque de Holanda overlooks the contribution of Brazil’s ethnic and cultural diversity to the formation of Brazilian society, supposing a tenacious and adaptable Portuguese colonial temperament, as he describes it. It is important to keep in mind that, in *Raízes do Brasil*, Holanda’s social and historical account of the Portuguese colonizers’ attitudes reveals his assumption of a nonsocial origin and unity of such attitudes. Because he assumes that the Portuguese bear a more consistent and adaptable temperament, he attributes to them an active role in passing their traits on to future Brazilians. In the end, Holanda considers solely the Portuguese as protagonists in modeling Brazilian society, without providing a sociological reasoning for that.

Holanda explains the Portuguese colonizer’s temperament mostly in parallel with or in opposition to other peoples. Here, although I focus on Holanda’s approach to the Portuguese, African, and Indigenous people and their relationships throughout Brazilian colonization, I dedicate part of this article to his own parallel between the Portuguese and the Spanish colonizer, intending to better present Holanda’s account of the Portuguese temperament.

While Holanda also resorts to sociological descriptions in *Raízes*, these accounts are mostly descriptive of social patterns, which he assumes as starting points, as objects of his analyses. Sociologists such as Weber are mentioned or assumed to be a theoretical basis for his typology. Weber’s ideal typology and theory of rationalization of modern Western societies serve as the basis of Holanda’s differentiation of the Portuguese as a special kind of Iberian. Although he describes the Portuguese personalism in the Americas as Iberian by

contrasting it to the predominant European rational standards, he distinguishes the Portuguese colonizer, as the sower type, from the Spanish colonizer, as “the tiler” type, also having in mind the modern rationalization as a parameter. On the other hand, inspired particularly by Weber’s Protestant ethics, Holanda still opposes the Portuguese adventurous type to the worker type.

Notwithstanding Holanda’s efforts to provide sociohistorical descriptions of both the Iberians and the Portuguese separately, his narrative and arguments indicate that he does presuppose innate roots for their sociohistorical attitudes. That can be identified in recurrent determinist explanations and expressions he interpolates in his analyses. Indeed, in all Holanda’s accounts, whether of the Iberians, the Portuguese, the Spanish, Indigenous peoples, or Africans, he does not explicitly profess that peoples’ worldviews and customs derive from predetermined features. However, he does not explain sociologically the origin of such features but fundamentally assumes them as given constructs, to the point of resorting to organic-like expressions to describe them. As Martins (2019, 115) claims, in *Raízes do Brasil* “the Portuguese people hold primacy in the genesis of national culture in terms of the form, which is functionally superior in the model of the sociological understanding adopted.”

Conversely, when turning his attention to African and Indigenous peoples, Holanda alludes only briefly to them as a strategy to cement his view of the significant adaptability of the Portuguese to diverse peoples. In the end, he mentions Africans and natives as interacting with the Portuguese during the long period of Brazilian colonization, without providing a broader sociohistorical picture of their attitudes and behaviors. In fact, Holanda does not distinguish the Portuguese from Africans and Indigenous people as he assumes that the two latter represented somewhat worse versions of the Portuguese inconsequential temperament. He aims to demonstrate their reinforcing influence over the unsettling qualities of the Portuguese, which, as he assumes, they shared with their colonizers. In addition to not attributing positive qualities to African and Indigenous peoples, Holanda undervalues their impact on the formation of Brazilian identity.⁵

The preface to the 1967 edition of *Raízes do Brasil* by Antonio Candido (1967, 355) established the essay, among others from the thirties, such as *Casa Grande e Senzala* by Freyre and *Formação do Brasil Contemporâneo* by Prado Júnior, as a symbol of intellectual radicalism standing against the previous hierarchical and authoritarian accounts of Brazilian society. Candido goes so far as to say that those essays “bore a denunciation of race prejudice, a valorization of the colored element, a criticism of the agrarian and ‘patriarchal’ foundation, a discernment of economic conditions, a demystification of the liberal rhetoric” (Candido 1967, 358). At the turn of the century, nonetheless, *Raízes do Brasil* has been more and more an object of deconstruction of Candido’s classical

⁵ Holanda synthesizes the Brazilian identity as heir of the Portuguese personalist, emotional, pedestrian, and adventurous character into a concept he calls the cordial man or cordiality. In a note to the 1948 edition of *Raízes do Brasil*, Holanda explains that he borrowed the expression “cordial man” from the Brazilian modernist poet Ribeiro Couto, who mentioned it in a letter to the Mexican writer Alfonso Reyes, Mexico’s ambassador in Rio de Janeiro in the 1930s, which was included in Reyes’s *Monterrey, correo literario de Alfonso Reyes* (Holanda 2016, 265). In the same edition, Holanda excludes expressions from the first edition that suggest an equation of cordiality with spontaneous friendship and sympathy. For example, the word *goodness* was removed from the sentence “Good principles are not simply created by cordiality, which means goodness” (Holanda 2016, 327). In effect, from the 1948’s edition on Holanda defines Brazilian cordiality as an emotive character, driven from the heart as the center of emotions, good and bad, affectionate, or hostile, rather than naturally good. In the same year, Cassiano Ricardo, a Brazilian essayist and journalist, wrote the essay “Variations on the Cordial Man” to reinforce Brazilian cordiality as natural goodness, friendship, and politeness, probably reacting to Holanda’s comments in the second edition (Ricardo 1948, 395). As Holanda later writes in a formal response to Ricardo, “Letter to Cassiano Ricardo,” published in *Raízes*’ 1956 edition along with Ricardo’s essay, “besides people’s belief, for good or for bad, that the heart is the basis of feelings, my new explanation that enmity ‘can be as cordial as friendship,’ given that both are born in the heart, is, if you want, an addition rather than a retraction” (Holanda 2016, 400).

interpretation. Authors such as João Kennedy Eugênio, Leopoldo Waizport, and Roberto Schlegel are emblematic references in criticizing the essentialist and conservative stances of *Raízes do Brasil*, which were disregarded by Candido in an effort to make the essay match Holanda's later more democratic mindset.

However, specifically questioning Holanda's selection of the Portuguese as the founding fathers of Brazilian society has not been the focus of most of the commentators on *Raízes do Brasil* since its original publication in 1936. Only in 1992 Eduardo Viveiros de Castro identifies in his description of the cordial man features he claims are original to the Indigenous Tupinambás, who occupied the coastal areas of Brazil during the first centuries of colonization. In 2019, while revisiting Castro's argument about *Raízes do Brasil*, Andre Martins (2019, 118) remarks that "the entire argumentative evolution of the book, it is worth repeating, presupposes the Portuguese as protagonists in the historical process in which Brazilian culture, itself not very distant from the Portuguese, is formed." With this article, I hope to contribute to the still-nascent discussion around Holanda's questionable stance on the leading role of the Portuguese in modeling Brazilian society in *Raízes do Brasil*.

The nonhistorical approach to Brazilian identity in *Raízes do Brasil*

I agree with Luiz Feldman that in the original edition of *Raízes*, Holanda focuses on the force of the past in imposing limits to modernization, while from the 1948 edition on, he is concerned with the conditions for modernization even at the expense of the past. However, I also believe, like Feldman (2013, 120), that although Holanda is convinced of the urgency of modernization, he recognizes the difficulties of modernization in a society in which traditions were kept alive.⁶ Although from the second edition on, he attempts to reduce the positive references to Portuguese heritage, he still champions it as the main influence in shaping Brazilian identity.

The conflicting ideas about the urgency for the country to modernize versus the endurance of a traditional mentality resonate with what Holanda says in 1967 about the limits for changing *Raízes* as imposed by the essay itself: "Whatever it was, it was not useful to alter, except superficially, what I had, in fact, said . . . Such a monolithic, peremptory mentality was maintained, always equal to itself, resistant to all influence coming from outside and to every possible change" (cited in Mata 2016, 76). As a result, *Raízes do Brasil* expresses in its definitive form a contradictory approach to some important issues, to the point of many of its commentators consider its discursive structure, as Feldman (2013, 120) recalls, a "tense universe" (Monteiro, 2008), "methodology of opposites" (Candido 1967), "negative dialectics" (Wegner 2000), "counterpoint dialectics" (Vecchi 2005) or "fragile synthesis" (Avelino Filho 1987).

As for cordiality specifically, from the 1948 edition on, although Holanda admits that it could change over time given the decay of the old patriarchal and rural social structure (Holanda 2016, 254), he keeps many original assertions which suggest that Brazilian identity could remain despite all social changes. In the end, from the same revised edition on, *Raízes* exhibits some contradictory approaches to cordiality. For example, Holanda (2016, 254) removes the original excerpt "they form an aspect well-defined of the national character" from a paragraph describing the features of the cordial man." I agree with Feldman's (2013, 124) claim that, with that change, Holanda intends to disconnect national character and cordiality. However, in the same paragraph, he keeps a sentence that posits that the features defining the cordial man "represent, in fact, a defined trait of the

⁶ In 1949, Leopoldo Zea claims something similar about Hispanic America in his *Dos etapas del pensamiento in Hispanoamérica: del romanticismo al positivismo*, "The problem seems insoluble: Latin America is once again presented, as in the past, divided into two large parts, one with its head still turned towards a colonial past and the other with its head oriented towards a future without reality yet" (cited in Davis 1968, 35).

Brazilian character” (Holanda 2016, 254). Thus, despite his removal of a second sentence expressing the same idea, the paragraph continues to assert the cordial man as the representative of national identity.

The Iberian colonizer’s temperament in the Americas

In the first four chapters, Holanda analyzes the Portuguese colonial social structure in Brazil, as well as the personality traits and behavior patterns of the Portuguese colonizer in the context of Brazil’s four-century colonization. Mostly in the first chapter, he characterizes the Portuguese and the Spanish as Iberians different from the Europeans from beyond the Pyrenees. He asserts that personality is the defining trait in the evolution of Iberians (Holanda 2016, 41). According to him, the culture of personality includes overvaluing the human person, their independence, and even their self-sufficiency in relation to others. Each person is considered a result of his own efforts and virtues. Such an assumption is reflected in the Iberians’ proud posture and features, which is well expressed in the Portuguese word *sobranceria*, indicative of an idea of overcoming and triumphing over others. The culture of personality that developed historically early in the Iberian nations prevented the development of a sense of social organization among them. Holanda assigns principles such as free will, merit, and personal responsibility to Iberian personalism.

This self-centered temperament could be identified historically as early as in the medieval age in the Iberian weak social structure and lack of systematized hierarchy, which was mirrored in loose hereditary privileges (Holanda 2016, 41–44). That means that the Iberian aristocracy was never too stratified or too static a social structure because personal prestige, as compared to hereditary prerogatives, was also a decisive factor in occupying higher social ranks and for social mobility. Thus, different from other European people, Iberians had already significantly eroded the base of European autocracy before the advent of bourgeois revolutions from which the modern ideas of equality became a political principle, probably because they had, from early in their civilization, greater familiarity with people of different cultures and customs. Through this acquaintance with cultural diversity, they may have learned to relativize political and social status as well as prerogatives (Holanda 2016, 47).

According to Holanda, different from the other European countries, where aristocratic privileges were challenged directly by the bourgeois revolution, the Iberians did not have to break radically with a social organization that they had already adapted to their personalism, keeping aristocratic values. In the Iberian nations, urban artisans and merchants could develop their profitable activities without contesting old social prestige standards or could even use the prestige of these activities to associate themselves with powerful nobles to rise socially. The result was that noble prerogatives started to be measured by individual indicators of merit as traditional values continued to regulate social relationships (Holanda 2016, 50).

While addressing this issue again in the fourth chapter, Holanda points out that, insofar as members of the popular classes could rise socially, once ascended, they abandoned their previous class mentality and identified with the dominant class. The consequence was that traditional, aristocratic values lost their original inspiration. The old pride, austere customs, and attachment to individual glory give place to ostentation and mannerism. At the same time, the noble ethic of glory and greatness, which supposes a transcendence over ordinary issues, was adjusted to a realistic and practical worldview characteristic of the ascending low classes of merchants and tradesmen. Resorting to the Portuguese professional choices inspired by this pedestrian spirit to illustrate his point, Holanda (2016, 199) explains that because many had not dared to exchange soldiering for trade, which was

then a low profession, they exchanged it for the toga, as well as for civil administration and literary positions, to safeguard their dignity, comfort, and convenience.

The typological difference between the Portuguese and the Spanish the colonization in the Americas: The sower and the tiler

In the first chapter, Holanda approaches the Iberian colonizer, whose character applies to both the Portuguese and the Spanish people in the context of colonization. However, the fourth chapter, “The Sower and the Tiler,” is mostly built on a dialectics between the Portuguese and the Spanish colonial temperaments, contrasting the rural Portuguese colonization of Brazil with the urban Spanish colonization of the New World. Holanda (2016, 163) believes that the Spanish maintained their political, economic, and military power in their American colonies because they were able to create stable and ordered urban settlements. According to Holanda (2016, 164), “From the very start, the design of urban centers in Spanish America reflected a determined effort to overcome and correct the capricious fantasy of the rude and rough landscape: it is an act of human will.” By this, he means that, instead of merely adjusting to the new natural conditions, the Spanish imposed a regular, linear, and abstract urban plan driven by a will to impose their standards on the conquered world.

On the contrary, compared to the planned Spanish colonization, the Portuguese colonization of Brazil was guided by a realistic perspective, informed by topographical conditions rather than knowledge. In this sense, as Holanda claims, the Portuguese merchant ethic, still inspired by medieval patterns, prevented systematic and widespread control and ordering of the colonial domain. Thus, the scope of their control was restricted to safeguarding personal gains from immediate and easier profitable exploitative activities and, hence, was averse to any impersonal efforts to establish national power. Compared to the Spanish effort of ordering, the Portuguese’s endeavors in Brazil seemed timid and poorly equipped (Holanda 2016, 169). This is the reason Holanda (2016, 203) calls the Spanish the tiler and the Portuguese the sower.

For Holanda, given the long coastal colonization by the Portuguese and their commercial and agrarian model of exploitation, Brazilian cities were paltry compared to the cities of Spanish America (Holanda 2016, 185–186). According to Holanda (2016, 193), “Everything there was so irregular that even the principal square, where the viceroy’s palaces were built, seemed to have been placed by chance.” That is in contrast to colonial Spanish cities, where the central squares were geometrically laid out at the center from which all streets stemmed (Holanda 2016, 167). While Portugal was focused on commercially exploiting its colonies, not developing them, Spain wanted to turn its American cities into extensions of Spanish cities. As Holanda asserts, Spanish urban planning presupposed the idea of arbitrary human control over nature and history. Decades later, the Uruguayan writer Ángel Rama (1996) showed in *The Lettered City* that the Spanish colonies’ urban ordering and planning was a result of a broad Spanish process of rationalization of the Americas. The Portuguese colonizers, on the contrary, were guided not by plans and goals but by successive and groping experiences, not always organized. Thus, as Holanda (2016, 194) points out, the principle of their actions was routine instead of reason, which he assumes to be the principle of the Spanish colonizer’s actions. Clearly, Holanda suggests that although the Spanish were as moved by personal interests as the Portuguese, they were more rational than the Portuguese and, hence, could build planned and ordered colonies.

The Portuguese adventurous type as opposed to the worker type

In the second chapter, “Work and Adventure,” Holanda (2016, 61–62) focuses specifically on the Portuguese as an adventurous temperament, endowed by a malleable, personalistic, and careless attitude toward colonial endeavors. Holanda makes use of a dialectical differentiation to explain the Portuguese character. Reflecting Weber’s sociological typology, Holanda (2016, 62) compares the Portuguese adventurer type with the worker type as two opposing regulative principles of human activity. Here, the influence of Weber, who, following Benjamin Franklin, refers to capitalist virtues such as honesty, punctuality, promptness, and frugality as the ethical basis of the modern work, is remarkable (Weber 2004, 45).

Holanda recalls that, according to Weber, the capitalist work ethic of humble efforts, anonymity, and personal disinterest has a Puritan and Calvinist origin, as Weber (2004, 151) himself confirms: “Puritanism bore the *ethos* of the bourgeois rational company and of the rational organization of work.” However, although Holanda endorses Weber’s sociological theory of modern rational behavior, he does not explain the sociological origin of the Portuguese egocentric and irrational attitudes, even contrasting them to the impersonal and rational ones required by modern capitalism. Instead, he explains that the modern work ethic, predominant in the Northern European countries, was not valued among the Portuguese. For Holanda, manual and mechanical activities require that individuals subject themselves to goals unrelated to or, sometimes, contrary to personal prerogatives, given that it does not add anything to individual dignity and renown (Holanda 2016, 51–52). When resuming the analysis of this point in the fourth chapter, Holanda (2016, 198) adds that bourgeois economic virtues, such as “stubborn intelligence, parsimony, preciseness, punctuality, and social solidarity,” did not develop among the Portuguese because such virtues suppose a renouncement of subjective claims in favor of impersonal and abstract goals.

As Holanda believes, each human type has its own psychological features. The adventurer targets the final result of his activity, attempting to avoid the intermediate steps and efforts involved in building it. Psychologically, he is driven by audacity, lack of foresight, irresponsibility, instability, and the vagabond spirit, “his ideal is to pick the fruit without planting the tree” guided by a pedestrian view of the world, as Holanda ironically claims (Holanda 2016, 63). On the contrary, the worker is driven by regularity, persistence, efficiency, and economy of the labor process, praising the gradual and unrewarding efforts as aiming toward a stable and safe world (Holanda 2016, 63).

According to Holanda, the worker was not the predominant type in the Portuguese colonization in the tropics. In this sense, as he argues, the Brazilian social structure bears the resilient and adaptable traits of the Portuguese adventurer, despite Brazil’s original ethnic diversity, to which he does not refer in *Raízes do Brasil*. Regarding this last point, Holanda agrees with Freyre, who, in *Casa Grande & Senzala*, also views, for example, the style of colonial Portuguese residences in Brazil as an adaptive strategy. However, while Freyre (2006, 42) posits that the colonial house was the result of the Portuguese propensity to stability, which he contrasts to the nomadism of the mestizos, Holanda ascribes it to the adventurous-nomadic Portuguese character.

Holanda also believes that the agrarian activities in Brazil, which he hesitates to call “agriculture,” reflect the exploitative and wasteful model of sugarcane plantations implemented by the Portuguese. The Portuguese rarely adopted sophisticated agricultural techniques, counting instead on mostly the human labor of a continuously renewed population of slaves brought from Africa. As Holanda (2016, 72) remarks on the colonial agrarian system, “Without slave labor and ample land—land that could be wasted and ruined rather than carefully protected—such farms would not have succeeded.” Thus, as many of Holanda’s historical narratives highlight, the rural structure built throughout

colonization in Brazil was the effect of the Portuguese temperament, not the condition of the emergence of that temperament.

The Portuguese colonizer type as an organic construct and the origin of Brazilian identity

In the *Raízes do Brasil's* opening paragraph, Holanda warns Brazilian readers, including himself, to consider their Portuguese origin and social patterns before praising their achievements as national acquisitions. He suggests that looking at Brazil's future depends on looking back as a way of learning to what extent the present Brazilian experience is informed by a past built by the Portuguese colonizers. This original alienation gives way to a feeling of actual displacement in one's own country. As Holanda claims (2016, 39), "We have brought our forms of association, our institutions, and our ideas from distant countries . . . we remain exiles in our own land." However, in the closing of the first chapter of *Raízes*, Holanda (2016, 55–56) attributes the basis of a supposed feeling of Brazilian homogeneity and unity, Brazil's "common soul," to a resilient Portuguese heritage. That truly suggests his essentialist and simplistic tone as despising the multi-ethnic composition and formation of the Brazilian people: "We are still associated with the Iberian Peninsula, especially Portugal, through a long and active tradition, active enough even today to nourish our common soul, despite all that separates us" (Holanda 2016, 55–56).

In fact, Holanda often praises the Portuguese clumsy and adventurous temperament as a gift for its great adaptability to adverse environments and to other ethnicities and customs and its ability to remain consistent in adjusting to new conditions (Holanda 2016, 67). As he posits: "It appeared, in the end, that the success of the latter came precisely from their unfamiliarity or their inability to distinguish properly between the world they came from and the one they came to settle. Their weakness was their strength" (Holanda 2016, 96). Hence, he truly believes that a Portuguese combination of resilience and plasticity passed over to Brazilians explains the cordial man's enduring through time, even after the decline of the colonial sociopolitical order.

It is true that the second edition on Holanda (2016, 48–49) adds an excerpt rejecting Iberian identity as immutable and inextricably biological, stating, "Even if Iberian peoples exhibited similar characteristics with remarkable consistency, it does not necessarily mean that these characteristics came from some unchangeable biological destiny, or that they could exist, like the stars in the sky, apart and distant from conditions of life on earth."

Indeed, in the revised editions, Holanda excludes many of the organicist expressions. In the first edition of *Raízes*, for instance, he repeatedly uses terms such as *natural*, *organic*, *organism*, and *creature* to describe Brazilian society. Most of them, however, were excluded from the second edition on. As for the word *organism*, in the second chapter of the original edition, Holanda (2016, 32) describes colonial Brazilian society as "an amorphous and invertebrate organism," but in the revised 1948 revision, he substitutes "an incoherent and amorphous whole" (91) for the phrase. Similarly, when admitting that there are political solutions other than tyranny to promote a stable social and national organization, in the 1948 edition, he also substitutes the word *whole* (*conjunto*) for *organism* in the expression "social and national organism" from the first edition (Holanda 2016, 328).

However, the few expressions that Holanda does not change demonstrate that he continues to hold to an organicist view concerning cordiality as heir of the Portuguese colonizer. In the same opening paragraph in the original edition of *Raízes*, while asserting that Brazilian society has a foreign origin, Holanda (2016, 39) notes that Brazilian people "seems to *fatally* belong to a style and a system of evolution *natural* to another climate and

landscape.” Besides stressing *natural*, Holanda combines it with and also stresses *fatally*, which adds a more determinist tone to *natural* in expressing the origin of Brazil’s way of life and pattern of development. In the 1956 edition, Holanda changes the sentence to “seem to belong to a system of evolution consistent with another climate and landscape.” Here, *natural* could actually be replaced by *consistent*, insofar as both words mean “what belongs to.” However, different from *consistent*, *natural* has a determinist tone. I nonetheless believe that the exclusion of both *fatally* and *natural* from the third edition on does not fully remove the paragraph’s determinist tone. “System of evolution” alone, kept in the subsequent editions, is enough to connote a biological parameter for the idea of social development.

As another example, the adjective *natural* excluded in the opening paragraph is preserved in the book’s closing paragraph in all editions revised by the author. In fact, a few other words and expressions from this important paragraph, besides *natural*, also imply that an organicist perspective continued to inform *Raízes* after its revisions. In the sentence “to wish to ignore that world is to renounce our own spontaneous rhythm, the law of reflux and flow, in favor of a mechanical beat and a false harmony,” there are indicators of an organicist perspective of national identity, as Holanda (2016, 331) aims to contrast abstract and mechanical external solutions to the vitality, spontaneity, and self-sufficiency of Brazilian reality, all characteristics of any living organism. As Waizport (2016, 468) says while explaining Holanda’s understanding of Brazilian identity in *Raízes do Brasil*, the matter for Holanda “is always ‘our’ rhythm, ‘our’ structure of personality, ‘our’ social structure that should evolve, according to its own logic, ‘organically,’ without denying what we are, rather affirming it, even if we are in the process of changing.” Waizport’s words suggest that, for Holanda, Brazilian identity is like the heart beating within the “organism,” the society. In the end, as Waizport (2016, 468) again asserts, Holanda assigns to the “organism the vital model and organizational logic” for society.

In 1967, three years after Brazil’s military coup d’état, Holanda was invited by the military to lecture about *Raízes do Brasil*. In that lecture, while being self-critical, he suggests that *Raízes* reflected its historical moment, and he explains the purpose and reason he then resorted to an unambiguous collective identity. Referring to the widespread feelings throughout societies at the time, he asserts that “each people seemed to want to be dependent on its own energies,” based on which they sought to “find elements capable of changing the course of society, saving it from a supposedly effervescence of corruption” (cited in Eugênio 2016, 435). Then, Holanda himself admits that *Raízes* emerged in a context of social and political instability and uncertainty and, as such, was committed to demonstrating that Brazilian national identity was the true source of social and political cohesion, stability, and progress as the “shared soul” or “normative solid element, innate in the people’s soul,” inherited from a consistent and homogenous original identity, as Holanda (2016, 327) claims.

Many of Holanda’s own revisions to the original text of *Raízes do Brasil* evidence a genuine attempt to erase the organicist and essentialist tone of the essay regarding Brazilian identity. Some changes introduced in the 1948 edition demonstrate his intention. For example, in an appendix added in the 1956 edition, he admits that cordiality was expected to change due to a gradual decay of the colonial socioeconomic conditions (Holanda 2016, 401). He shows that the historical convergence between the social structure inherited from colonization and the Portuguese temperament, built across almost four centuries, was dismantled in the nineteenth century by historical events that became emblematic of Brazilian history: the abolition of slavery and the proclamation of the Republic (Holanda 2016, 301).

In “Tradição and transição,” he reinforces a dynamic perspective of identity by saying that most communities “never became perfectly static groups, homogenous, well-balanced

and compact cultural organisms” (Holanda 1979b, 132).⁷ In this sense, Holanda sees the Portuguese or Brazilian identity derived from it not as a transcendent and ahistorical biological entity or trait but as a set of adaptable psychosocial characteristics, which not only accommodate given social conditions but also absorb other ones while keeping consistent with itself as essentially apt to constant variation and adaptation. This collective core bears a quality of an “identity *in the change* and *change in the identity*,” as Eugênio (2010, 20) says.

The exclusion of African and Indigenous peoples as protagonists in the formation of Brazilian society

In *Raízes do Brasil*, Holanda also attributed negative social traits to the colonizer, ones usually associated exclusively with non-European people. Surely, that marked his relative difference from previous Brazilian thinkers, who exclusively attributed Brazil’s backwardness to its native and African populations. In fact, Holanda (2016, 78) does not see the Portuguese as strictly European to the point of asserting that they were already a mestizo people deprived of significant racial pride before colonizing Brazil due to their Latin origin as well as their proximity to Muslim Africa. In the opening chapter of the book, introducing the framework of his analysis, Holanda (2016, 40) makes clear that the Iberians were a people on the edge of Europe: “On what bases do the patterns of society rest in this indeterminate region between Europe and Africa, from the Pyrenees to Gibraltar? . . . They make up a frontier and transition zone somewhat less laden with the Europeanism . . . They became societies that in some respects developed on the margins of their European counterparts.” As for the specific contact of the Portuguese with Africans, around the middle of the sixteenth century, African descendants accounted for up to one-fifth of Portugal’s population. Racial purity was not a defining element of the Portuguese people.

As Holanda (2016, 98) himself contents, in Brazil, the Portuguese really mixed with Indigenous and African cultures: “They yielded docilely to the attractions of the customs, languages, and sects of the natives and the black more than any other European people. They became Americanized or Africanized when necessary. *They became negroes*, according to a venerable expression of the African coast.” However, for Holanda, Brazilians were the way they were—passionate, irrational, lacking discipline and a sense of organization—thanks to their founding fathers.

While Holanda (2016, 82–83) posits that racial exclusivity was never a significant issue for the Portuguese, at the same time, he remarks how Africans were more stigmatized than the Indigenous throughout colonization. He believes that Africans and African descendants were discriminated against by the Portuguese mostly on the basis of the undignified work they endured (Holanda 2016, 83–85). What is important here is the colonists’ low regard for manual and strenuous work, mostly in cases where excruciating hardship was involved. That possibly explains their aversion to agricultural work compared to the socially praised maritime adventures and glories of war and conquest (Holanda 2016, 74). The slavery structure of Brazil kept the Portuguese and their Brazilian descendants socially disassociated from strenuous activities. Later, as Holanda asserts, when slavery was abolished in Brazil, the introduction of agricultural techniques was motivated more by a desire to reduce the associated labor than by a desire to increase productivity (Holanda 2016, 102).

⁷ “Tradition and transition.” This article, not yet translated into English, was originally published in 1948 in the newspaper *Diários de Notícias*, and later included as a chapter in his 1979 book *Tentativas de Mitologia*.

Given that the natives were less apt to perform servile activities, they were less socially associated with slavery. Native nomadism, evident in the Indigenous hunter-gatherer culture, suited the adventurous colonizer's character (Holanda 2016, 62). In fact, although the natives had legal protective status, they were granted civil liberties because the Portuguese recognized in them a similar noble idleness. As Holanda (2016, 83) asserts, "Their indolence, their aversion to all disciplined effort, their lack of foresight, their intemperance, and their marked taste for predatory rather than productive activities—matched the traditional lifestyles of the noble classes." According to Holanda, an eagerness for effortless prosperity, honorific titles, positions, and easy wealth—and before that, a passion for adventures—rather than any kind of racial pride, defined the Portuguese colonial attitudes toward other peoples and the land.

In fact, Holanda's association of the Portuguese and Indigenous indolence and aversion to work is more evident in *Raízes*' original edition. In the second edition, urged by the necessity of the modernization of Brazil, Holanda not only reinforces the negative tone on these traits, previously considered noble qualities, but also associates them mainly with Indigenous people. He replaces a significant part of the original edition, in which he matches Portuguese and the Indigenous passivity, with another in which the Portuguese are somehow associated with the Europeans as endowed by a sense of organization and uniformity required by a civilized society (Holanda 2016, 69–70). As Martins (2019, 111) remarks: "The Portuguese, in the 1936 excerpt, is a generally passive creature, easily adaptable to Indigenous uses when these seem to save him effort, not imposing very great mental demands on his daily life. In the addendum of 1948, the Portuguese remain adventurous and averse to work but gain a second nature of certain notions of order, constancy, and accuracy that are absolutely "inaccessible" to Indigenous peoples."

Although Holanda (2016, 91) remarks that the Portuguese saw Africans as less worthy than Indigenous people, he mentions that the Portuguese were quite receptive to the black slave's temperament to the point that "early on, an affectionate and sugary sweetness invaded all aspects of colonial life." More than that, Holanda (2016, 92) speaks of a slave morality reinforcing an already disorganized social order consistent with the colonizer's irrationality: "The 'morality of the slave quarters'—which was sinuous even in its violence, a negator of all social virtues, and a system that temporized and enervated any really productive energy—came to dominate the administration, the economy, and the religious beliefs of the people of that period." In the end, Holanda mentions African and Indigenous people in *Raízes do Brasil* mainly to demonstrate his point that the Portuguese were more susceptible to temperaments to which they were akin.

Conclusion

Different from most Brazilian thinkers of his time, Holanda does not see both natives and slaves, the colonized, as responsible for Brazil's backwardness. Instead, he ascribes to the colonizing Portuguese most of Brazil's contradictions inherited from colonization. In this sense, Holanda identifies negative temperament traits in all the main ethnic groups that participated in colonial Brazil. However, despite his ironic tone when describing the Portuguese colonizers as sloppy and inefficient due to their adventurous, personalistic, and almost instinctive temperament, he nonetheless ascribes only to them a leading role in modeling Brazilian identity.

I assert that disregarding the protagonism of other people and cultures in shaping Brazilian identity was also a way for Holanda to homogenize it. In the same way, the parallel between the Portuguese colonial character and the patriarchal social patterns and

structure throughout three centuries of colonization allowed him to describe Brazilian society as socially consistent in the past and expected to be consistent in the future. However, even though his determinist view of Brazilian ethnicities strategically allowed him to formulate an essentialist national identity, that does not exclude the fact that the Portuguese character was prioritized as the basis of Brazilian identity. The lack of a reasonable explanation for choosing the Portuguese—instead of the Africans and the Indigenous people, who, according to Holanda, shared these same qualities with the Portuguese—as responsible for passing their qualities on to Brazilians reveals Holanda's arbitrary choice.

Notwithstanding the fact that Holanda recognizes the emergence of a new social environment caused by both the decline of the rural society due to the end of slavery and increasing urbanization, he does not mention the impact of a huge migration of former slaves and Indigenous descendants in the emerging Brazilian urban scene. Despite developing a social and historical approach to the formation of Brazilian society, he loses sight of the cultural and ethnic value of all the people involved in the colonial environment.

In a part of *Raízes do Brasil* not significantly changed by revisions, Holanda insists that, although Brazil was already a republic and urbanization had undermined the rural social order, a genuinely American form of government and identity had not yet emerged. As Holanda (2016, 303) claims, “That our cultural formation is still broadly Iberian and Portuguese should be attributed especially to an insufficiency of ‘Americanism,’ which can be largely summed up as a kind of exacerbation of foreign features, of decisions imposed from the outside, foreign to the land. Internally, we are still not American.”

From Holanda's words, it seems that being heir to the colonizer resulted in Brazilians not being genuinely who they are, as always forged by the other. That is, they undergo any change not from their own core but according to the influence of others. It is hard to avoid the conclusion that the contradiction is at the heart of Brazilian identity because it can continue to be itself as it changes. The only stable element in this identity seems to be a dependence on “the other” as the factor of change. As Feldman (2013, 82) believes, after the 1948 revision, the part cited above could be interpreted as if Holanda believed that, although the Portuguese colonization passed an unending experience of alienation and exile to Brazilians, it did not make the Portuguese the only social models for Brazilians over time. In effect, the experience of being colonized by the Portuguese instilled in Brazilians an existential condition of always being influenced by foreigners. In fact, that could be the true resilient Portuguese heritage.

Incredibly, although Holanda emphasizes that Brazilians have historically been genuinely vulnerable to external influences and unable to turn their eyes to themselves, that does not deter his disregard for the real and diverse ethnic composition of Brazilian society throughout the essay's revisions. In the end, in *Raízes do Brasil*, Holanda does not abandon a racial approach to the formation and development of Brazilian society predominant since the end of the nineteenth century nor consider social and cultural factors as defining peoples' characteristics. That is revealed in his attitude regarding African and Indigenous peoples as naturally unfit to have a significant impact on Brazilian identity and the Portuguese as naturally gifted to shape said identity.

During the period Holanda worked in Germany, between 1929 and 1931, his reflections on Brazil's history resulted in a work of four hundred pages, on which, later, *Raízes do Brasil* was drawn. According to Eugênio (2010, 123–147) and Waizport (2011, 43), the influence of German thinkers such as Friedrich Nietzsche and Ludwig Klages, among others, was

significant on Holanda's organicist view in the essay.⁸ Mostly after World War II, Holanda attempts to critically detach himself from controversial "sociohistorical" interpretations he shared with these thinkers, some of whom were associated with the Nazi State. Indeed, the revisions of *Raízes do Brasil* demonstrate his intention to distance himself from his own previous essentialist mindset. Actually, changes undergone by history as a discipline had an important influence on Holanda's later approach to Brazil's history, as he attested in a text published by *Diário Carioca*, in 1950 (Feldman 2013, 119). In 1967, he confesses, "In 1936 I wrote as an essayist: later I would better define myself as a historian" (Holanda 1967, 3). This perspective might suggest that he would later base his conclusions exclusively on factual and documented research. However, his determinist views seem to have continued to guide his sociohistorical account of colonial Brazil for at least two decades.

Interestingly, two of Holanda's later books contemporaneous with *Raízes'* second and third revised editions also bear a determinist tone despite his more evident commitment to a systematic historical analysis in these works.⁹ As Eugênio (2010, 18) explains: "Sérgio Buarque does not speak of organicism, but it is an organic conception that is shown in the excerpts and is maintained for more than thirty years: enunciated for the first time in 1920, even before the author's modernist activism. It persists until *Caminhos e Fronteiras* despite significant changes in the historian's research and historical circumstances."

Undeniably, Holanda's later works, such as *Visão do Paraíso* from 1959, are committed to a documented historical analysis, leaving aside any interpretation not well grounded. Later on, in the eighties, his biography attests to his engagement with an equalitarian society and a democratic political agenda (Carvalho 2017, 157). However, despite any real change undergone by Holanda throughout his life and career, *Raízes do Brasil* continues to reflect its own time and influences.

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⁸ "The contact with lands, peoples, customs, all different from what I then knew, seem to favor a revision of old ideas and a search for new knowledge, which could help to abandon or perfect them. I restarted reading, and restarted badly, now immersing myself in mystical and irrational philosophies (Klages, etc.), which pullulated in the last years of the Weimar Republic, just before Hitler's ascension" (Holanda 1979a, 29–30).

⁹ In *Monções*, from 1945, the Portuguese are still seen as "bearing the same consistency of leather or bronze, bending, adjusting, molding itself to all the roughness of the environment" (Holanda 2014, 43). In *Caminhos e fronteiras*, from 1957, his words are quite self-explanatory: "For the historical analysis of the influences that can transform the ways of life of a society, it's necessary to never lose sight of presence, within the social body, of factors that help to admit or reject the intrusion of habits and conduct, techniques, and institutions foreign to their cultural heritage. Far from representing inanimate and alluvial clusters, with no defense against suggestions or external impositions, societies, including and especially among natural peoples, normally have selective forces that act for the benefit of their organic unity, preserving them as much as possible from anything that could transform this unity" (Holanda 1975, 62).

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