



Original article

Tragedy or Redemption of the Mulatto: Contrasts in Cuban and Brazilian literature, c. 1830 and c. 1870

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ABSTRACT

This paper compares Brazilian and Cuban anti-slavery literature between 1830 and 1870, highlighting the use of almost-white mulatto protagonists to denounce slavery and the racial hierarchies of slaveholding societies. The analysis begins with the theoretical debate on Nation building (Smith, Brennan, and Sommer) and encompasses romantic and realist literature, demonstrating temporal and contextual differences: between 1838 and 1841, in Cuban novels, the rigid social hierarchy prevented the advancement of mulattoes; in Brazil, between 1857 and 1875, literature proposed the inclusion of these characters in the local aristocracy. Thus, Brazilian anti-slavery literature addressed the construction of national identity and partial acceptance of miscegenation in Brazil, themes later developed by Gilberto Freyre and Oracy Nogueira.

Keywords: Literature; Slavery; Mulattos; Cuba; Brazil

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RESUMO

O artigo compara a literatura antiescravista brasileira e cubana entre 1830 e 1870, destacando o uso de protagonistas mulatos quase brancos para denunciar a escravidão e as hierarquias raciais das sociedades escravocratas. A análise parte do debate teórico sobre Nação (Smith, Brennan e Sommer) e abrange a literatura romântica e realista, demonstrando diferenças temporais e contextuais: entre 1838 e 1841, nas novelas cubanas, a rígida hierarquia social impedia a ascensão dos mulatos; no Brasil, entre 1857 e 1875, a literatura propunha a inclusão desses personagens na aristocracia local. Assim, a literatura antiescravista brasileira

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abordou a construção da identidade nacional e a aceitação parcial da mestiçagem no Brasil, temas desenvolvidos, bem mais tarde, por Gilberto Freyre e Oracy Nogueira.

Palavras-chave: literatura; escravidão; mulatos; Cuba; Brasil

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RESUMEN

El artículo compara la literatura antiesclavista brasileña y cubana entre 1830 y 1870, destacando el uso de protagonistas mulatos casi blancos para denunciar la esclavitud y las jerarquías raciales de las sociedades esclavistas. El análisis parte del debate teórico sobre Nación (Smith, Brennan y Sommer), y abarca la literatura romántica y realista, demostrando diferencias temporales y contextuales: entre 1838 y 1841, en las novelas cubanas, donde la rígida jerarquía social impedía el ascenso de los mulatos; en Brasil, entre 1857 y 1875, la literatura proponía la inclusión de estos personajes en la aristocracia local. De esta forma, la literatura antiesclavista brasileña abordó la construcción de la identidad nacional y la aceptación parcial del mestizaje en Brasil, temas desarrollados, mucho más tarde, por Gilberto Freyre y Oracy Nogueira.

Palabras clave: literatura; esclavitud; mulatos; Cuba; Brasil

Many characters in anti-slavery novels and plays are mulattos, children of white fathers and black or mulatto mothers¹. Enslaved blacks did not receive the same emphasis and were rarely the leading characters in publications. This evidence is based on the analysis of the work of Cuban and Brazilian authors, two literary communities which did not keep in contact during the nineteenth century. Although they followed distinct literary traditions, these authors were immersed in very similar societies. Slaveholding societies were composed of a significant contingent of mulattos and free blacks. This social dynamic caused by slavery, traffic, and immigration gave the literati inspiration for plays and novels. Racial hierarchy differed little in these so distant slaveholding territories. Following the arrival of slaves at the end of the sixteenth century, the Brazilian population had become much more mestizo, while *pardos* formed the most noticeable group in Brazil. In Cuba, the enslaved population was proportionally much more significant, but this evidence was not translated into a greater role for slaves in the island's literature. However, demography does not explain the protagonism of mulattos in anti-slavery literature, although the numerical growth of

¹ In relation to the “mulatto” as a social category, see Freyre (1985); Frederickson (2005); Bantum (2010); and Stolcke (2017).

mestizos is something undeniable in any understanding of social conflicts involving the group (BERGAD, 2007, p. 64-131).

This article analyses novels and dramatic (theatrical) texts which were part of romanticism and realism in the first phase of anti-slavery literature, when mulattos became protagonists. According to João Roberto Faria (2022), romantic and realist aesthetics, in principle antagonistic, guided Brazilian dramatists and novelists between 1857 and 1875. In Cuba, according to Ivan Schulman (1977), romanticism, realism, and *costumbrismo* merged in anti-slavery literature, between 1838 and 1841². Thus, in addition to the temporal lag, these works used the same literary styles and chose mulattos as protagonists. These characters stand out through their beauty, experiencing abusive relations imposed by their masters, although they behave in a civilized and pacific manner. According to the authors, these characteristics are incompatible with the harshness of slavery. In this article, this antislavery literature is used to analyze how mulattos inserted themselves in the nation.

Literature and nation

Since the end of the eighteenth century, states have carried out three revolutions (administrative, economic, and cultural) responsible for incorporating various communities, both rural and urban ethnicities and the middle and lower classes who inhabited the territory. The active policies of socialization impelled the creation of secularized nations with the support of the public education system. This state policy led to the gradual propagation of an aristocratic ethnic culture which was transformed more authentically into a national one, forming a socially inclusive civic and ethnic culture (SMITH, 1990, p. 54-55). The construction of the national state has been profoundly linked to the literary imagination since the end of the eighteenth century. According to Benedict Anderson (2008, p. 71-83), national consciousness was consolidated through the integration of various forms of communication, print capitalism, the creation and diffusion of the official language through the press, and schools which allowed the continuous reproduction of knowledge. The political tasks of modern nationalism, according to Timothy Brennan (1990), directed the course of literature, by resorting both to romantic concepts of “popular nature” and “national language” in relation to the compartmentalization of “national literatures”. Literature thus participated in the formation of nations through the “national print media”. Historically the novel accompanied the emergence of the nation, in seeking to forge it through the fusion of languages and local customs. The press sought to standardize language, encourage literacy, and eliminate mutual incomprehension. Its

² In relation to literary styles, see Prado (1996, p. 143-198); Faria (2022, p. 77-78); Schulman (1977, p. 356-367); and Ferrer (2002, p. 325-326).

diffusion in books and newspapers allowed people to imagine the nation as a special community (BRENNAN, 1990, p. 48-49).

Following the same vein, but aimed at Latin American literature, Doris Sommer (1991, p. 7-12) has pointed to the extraordinary connection between novelists and the founding politicians of the young Latin American nations. In the middle of the nineteenth century, novels and patriotic history developed and together promoted fervent desires for happiness and the dreams of national prosperity, using private passions with public objectives. Politicians and intellectuals not only had the mission of filling the gaps in a history capable of legitimating the birth of the nation, but also had to push history towards this ideal future. In the independent Americas, many novelists actively participated in the construction of the Nation-state and at times sought to implement the plans established in fiction. They were literati and at the same time participated in legislature and even military campaigns. It is worth mentioning that the social models defended in novels were rooted in families, since they constituted a stabilizing force, ensuring national security. In Latin America, the family and the state sought to mitigate the instability caused by the clash between public and private alliances. The construction of nationality became an unavoidable theme in the fiction forged by the founding fathers. They created models of society which opposed the civilizational values of Europe (SOMMER, 1991, p. 30-33).

Starting from the principle that nationalism precedes and fosters the nation (SMITH, 1990, p. 64), Cuba was not a nation but Cuban identity, *Cubanidad*, propelled the construction of the sovereign nation. When Latin America intensely debated its nationality, the Cubans were still fighting against the oppression of the metropole and against plans for its annexation to the United States. According to the José Antonio Saco (AGUIRRE, 1990, p. 90-103), Cuban identity was based on a common origin, language, uses and customs. Therefore, before the struggles for independence, Cuba was not a nation, as had neither sovereignty nor an independent government, though the Cuban nation was emerging.

In this sense, in the 1830s the lawyer, writer, and literary critic Domingo del Monte organized literary soirees in Havana, aimed at thinking about the future of the island and producing anti-slavery narratives. They fought not only for the abolition of the slave trade and the improvement of slavery, but also for more favorable conditions for Cuban elites in the construction of the Spanish liberal state. Del Monte encouraged the realistic description of rural daily life and the terrible conditions experienced by slaves, influenced by French literary realism. Literature became not only an instrument for fighting slavery, but also for stimulating *Cubanidad*, knowledge about Cuba, its nature, language, and customs. These narratives were based on liberal discourse, opposed slave traders and planters, and protested indirectly against the authoritarian interventions of the Spanish government (MANZANO, 2009, p. 67-96; LUIS, 1990, p. 28-39; FERRER, 2002).

In any case, Del Monte's writings were always subject to controversy. In principle, they did not defend the end of slavery, but rather its reform: better material conditions and the control of violence inflicted on slaves. Since they were landowners, the novelists, above all Domingos del Monte, attenuated their criticisms of the slave system and highlighted the passivity of black and mulatto characters. They feared slave revolt and the punishments inflicted by the Spanish government. Above all they were defenders of Cuba and saw slavery as an obstacle to modernization. One exception was the writer Félix Tanco who had condemned slavery since his initial writings. He was effectively an abolitionist, although he reinforced the racist perception of blacks (FIVEL-DÉMORET, 1989). Cubans fought for greater sovereignty and faced harsh repression, resulting in the prohibition of the publication of his works and driving him into exile in France and the United States. The production of anti-slavery novels was soon extinguished due to the intense persecution of abolitionists, triggered by repression against the *Conspiración de la Escalera* at the beginning of the 1840s (REID-VAZQUEZ, 2011; FINCH, 2015). Moreover, due to repression and censorship, Cuban novelists wrote their books in the short period between 1838 and 1841. Only de Gómez de Avellaneda's book *Sab* (1841) was published in Spain, the others appeared to the public in New York (1880) and Havana (1925), while the Brazilians appeared in the 1860s onwards. This time lag hinders comparison but does not make it unfeasible³.

According to Richard Graham (2001), in Brazil political and economic elites promoted independence, created a State capable of stimulating the nation and maintaining social order threatened by popular and slave revolts. Like Eric Hobsbawm, he defends that nations did not create states, but the contrary. In following this principle, Ilmar Rohloff de Mattos (1987) understands the State not only as a coercive apparatus, but also as an agent which stimulates culture, values, and the nation. Political independence and romanticism had a decisive impact on the formation of Brazilian literature. They encouraged the emergence of new genres, new formal conceptions to express aspects of reality in the individual, social, and natural sphere. Literature is thus part of the broadest project for the construction of the nation. Romantic ideas sought to express a new order of feelings and patriotic pride, since national literature was the counterpart of European and Portuguese literatures. Intellectuals were thus responsible for participating in national construction (RICUPERO, 2004, p. 110).

In Brazil, the first romantic authors published in the 1840s intended to describe the exuberant nature and the customs of indigenous and Luso-Brazilian communities. They sought to demarcate the local characteristics of Brazilian literary production. From 1860 onwards anti-slavery novels appeared more frequently, above all after the Paraguay War (1864-1870) when they effectively began to debate the destinies of slavery (CANDIDO, 2002, p. 21-75). These works were not part of a determined political project, had very

³ The comparison between Cuban and Brazilian anti-slavery literature can be found in important books, see Sommers (1991) and Rosell (1997), amongst others.

different approaches to slavery, circulated initially in the newspapers, and unlike the Cubans their authors did not suffer governmental repression. Before the 1860s, mulattos and blacks did not appear as protagonists. Dating from 1859, the work of Maria Firmina dos Reis, a writer from Maranhão, opened the anti-slavery debate in Brazilian literature and provided valuable information on the memories and daily lives of slaves, but the leading characters of her novel were still white (SILVA; VASCONCELOS, 2020, p. 84-106).

The main novelists only explored the theme of slavery ten years after Maria Firmina's publication. By this time, José de Alencar had already discussed the problem in two plays: *O demônio familiar* and *Mãe* staged between 1857 and 1860⁴. In fact, the novel was not the main vehicle of the anti-slavery cause, Brazilian theater played a preponderant role. Dramatists dealt with the theme from various perspectives, even under the censorship of the Conservatório Dramático [Drama Conservatory], created in Rio de Janeiro in 1843 (SAYER, 1958, p. 257-312; FARIA, 2022, p. 51-57). In nineteenth century Cuba, the theatrical scenario was intense and heavily influenced by Spanish and European drama. The theme of slavery was persecuted, the reason to banish it from Cuban drama in the period. In comedy, the plays of the Spaniard Bartolomé Crespo y Borbón. Using the pseudonym Creto Gangá, he established the character of *negrito cubano*, responsible for presenting the public with the customs and actual languages of the free and enslaved blacks in Cuba (CRUZ, 1974, p. 59-68). This drama escaped censorship since it did not present an antislavery discourse.

The tragedy of the mulatto

The writer and poet Félix Tanco y Bosmeniel wrote the novel *Petrona y Rosalía* in 1838, but it was only possible to publish it in 1925. Until then the text remained in manuscript form. The novel tells the story of two enslaved women, mother and daughter. It all began when Doña Concepción suspected that her *mucama* (maid), the “black Petrona”, was pregnant and told her husband, Don Antonio, about her decision to punish her. Petrona was sent to the plantation, where she was punished, and while pregnant she had to work in the mills and plantations. Don Antonio tried to dissuade his wife from applying the harsh punishment, but she would not give in. Months later, Rosalía, a mulatto girl, was born. It was clear that the girl's father was white. A few years later, Doña Concepción decided to bring the beautiful young girl to Havana, as an adornment. Initially, Petrona considered the news wonderful, as it meant that she would return to the city with her daughter. However, this did not happen. She remained in an arduous routine on the plantation, while her daughter went to live with her masters in the city and to enjoy good clothes, shoes, and jewelry. She became a beautiful and elegant girl, with “dark eyes, local eyelashes, and full of

⁴ See *Diário do Rio de Janeiro*, 2 oct. 1857, p. 2; 14 apr. 1860, p. 1.

lively seduction” (TANCO Y BOSMENIEL, 1980, p. 10-17)⁵. She began to be tormented by the flirtations of Don Fernando, the spoiled only child of her owners. Rosalía gave in to the desires of the boy when she received a promise for the return of her mother to Havana. It did not take long for Rosalía to become pregnant and for Fernando to confess responsibility. In trying to abort with the help with the family doctor, Doña Concepción was certain that Rosalía was the daughter of her husband, but assured the reader when she stated that the reader that Don Antonio was not the father of her son, rather the Marquis of Casanueva was. Pregnant, Rosalía suffered from the same destiny as her mother - punishments and exhaustive work on the plantation. After three months, Petrona died, followed afterwards by Rosalía and her son. The mulattos of the novel all died.

The tragedy was repeated in the novel *Francisco* (1839) by Anselmo Suárez y Romero. A member of the Del Monte group, Suárez went to the famous faculty of Philosophy in Havana where Varela, Saco, and La Luz gave classes, and where he later graduated in Civil Law. Since his youth he had written in Cuban periodicals and gained fame in the small intellectual circuit with his novel *Francisco*. Unlike the other novelists, Suárez was not exiled from Cuba, nor did he leave the country (CALCAGNO, 1878, p. 601-605). His novel strictly follows the Delmontine directives, since he describes urban and, above all, rural daily life. It narrates the martyrdom of Francisco, the only black protagonist in Cuban anti-slavery novels.

The enslaved African was a coachman for the well-known and rich Mendizábal family. Loyal, hardworking, and lacking vices, Francisco fell in love with the slave Dorotea, “a beautiful and honest mulatto”. She asked Doña Dolores Mendizábal for permission to marry. The response she got was negative and she was also forbidden from meeting Francisco. Nevertheless, the relationship continued in secret. As in Tanco’s novel, the spoiled son tried to seduce the beautiful girl, but she rejected his advances. Ricardo perceived Francisco’s interest in the mulatto woman and invented stories to punish and send the African slave to the plantation, far from Dorotea and the control of his mother. In the following chapters, Anselmo Suárez y Romero describes in detail the punishments imposed on Francisco on a daily basis. Dorotea then decided to intercede on behalf of her beloved. Following her interference, Ricardo began to blackmail her and promised to suspend the tortures if she accepted him as a lover. Once again, she rejected his vows of love. In fact, Senhora Mendizábal covered up the libertine advances of her son, tacitly accepting his unregulated behavior.

After much insistence, Ricardo revealed his real feelings in relation to Dorotea: “You are a mulatto dog, my slave, and I am white, a gentleman, and I can make you do what I want” (SUÁREZ Y ROMERO, 1880, p. 119-125)⁶. Francisco’s martyrdom continued

⁵ Author’s translation: “ojos negros y largas pestañas llenos de una viveza seductora”.

⁶ Author’s translation: “Tú eres una cachorra mulata, mi esclava, y yo soy blanco, caballero, y puedo hacer de ti lo que me dé la gana”.

until Dorotea's decision to give into Ricardo's wishes. Francisco found the end of the daily punishments strange and discovered the plot hatched by Ricardo. This conclusion left him upset. He could not count on friends, since he was a black slave in strange lands. Finally, he was also disappointed with his beloved. He ended up hanging himself from a tree. Neither Senhora Mendizábal nor Dorotea knew of his tragic end. Nevertheless, the mulatto woman was consumed little by little and died a few years later.

Given the names of slaves, Cuban novels were particularly centered on the daily life of their owners, their excesses, and moral deviations. These anti-slavery novels do not narrate the events from the perspective of slaves (WILLIAMS, 2006, p. 132). Slaveholders acted as protagonists, above all women and their spoiled sons. In focusing on the Cuban aristocracy, the authors intended not only to denounce the abusive relations practiced by slaveowners, but also to expose their decadence. They thus pointed to the contrast between the honesty of the slaves and the perversity of the slaveowners: aristocrats were lewd, abusive, and perverted, while the slaves accepted their martyrdom without rebellion. Polarization was certainly a resource to convince readers of the injustice caused by slavery. The institution reinforced impunity and authoritarianism. It encouraged abortion, adultery, and corruption, practices frontally opposed to Christian morality. Ultimately it gave rise to a violent and decadent society (LUIS, 1990, p. 53-56). In this adverse environment, slaves lived in a hellish climate, deprived of both family support and solidarity among the slaves. In the novels, the slaves were solitary and passive beings, all they were left with was death. Suarez wrote about the isolation of Francisco a little before his suicide (SUÁREZ Y ROMERO, 1880, p. 154).

Certainly, Francisco's loneliness was also experienced by Petrona, Rosalía, and Dorotea. When enduring their punishments, they received no support from their companions, freed people, or slaves. In returning to the plantation and the terrible daily life of slavery, Rosalía embraced her dying mother and expressed her wish that God would let her die during childbirth. This was done and mother and child died. In the two Cuban novels, mulattos suffer from social death before leaving the world. In Gómez Avellaneda's novel *Sab* faced the same exile, suffered from the same lack of social ties: "I have no father or mother... I am alone in the world: no one will cry over my death. Nor do I have a homeland to defend, because slaves do not have a homeland: I do not have duties to fulfill, because the duties of the slaves are the duties of the beast of burden..." (GÓMEZ DE AVELLANEDA, 2017, p. 219)⁷. Tanco, Suárez y Romero and Gómez de Avellaneda narrate the tragedy of slaves in Cuba, using very similar words and finalizing their novels with the death of the protagonists, whether they were mulattos or blacks. Slaves suffered the same loneliness, imposed by the lack of social ties, making it impossible to become part of the homeland.

⁷ Author's translation: "Yo no tengo padre ni madre..., soy solo en el mundo: nadie llorará mi muerte. No tengo tampoco una patria que defender, porque los esclavos no tienen patria; no tengo deberes que cumplir, porque los deberes del esclavo son los deberes de la bestia de carga".

Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda's novel *Sab* (1841) is considered an iconic work of nineteenth century Cuban fiction, celebrated by his literary prestige and the radical combination between anti-slavery and feminist ideas⁸. Born in Cuba, Gómez de Avellaneda moved at an early age to Spain, where she attended aristocratic salons. She had a troubled life because she did not accept the social rules imposed on women. Her prose disseminated her reaction against the feminine model of the Spanish aristocracy. In her *Autobiografía y cartas* (1914), she recorded her rebellion and family scandals. Her fight in favor of women's self-determination merged with the anti-slavery cause, particularly in her novel *Sab*. However, unlike the other novelists, Gómez de Avellaneda was not part of the Delmontine Circuit, lived in Spain and was well acquainted with French anti-slavery debates and literature. Nevertheless, her novel has parallels with Cuban anti-slavery intellectuals was from the same ideological vein (SELIMOV, 1999; SCHULMAN, 1977).

A slave and mulatto, Sab was young, tall, and with regular proportions, with a particular physiognomy, since he did not appear to be a white *creole*, nor was he black, nor did he descend from the first inhabitants of the Antilles. "His face presented a singular composition in which could be discovered the crossing of two diverse races (...); the traces of the African caste with the European, without nevertheless being a perfect mulatto" (GÓMEZ DE AVELLANEDA, 2017, p. 104)⁹. The novel began with the meeting between the blond Enrique Otway and Sab. The former arrived at the plantation of his fiancée Carlota, when he met the slave. Sab's appearance and behavior did not betray his condition as a slave, as he seemed more like a peasant. In fact, he had been raised like a free man, treated as a brother of Carlota, the oldest daughter of the owner of the property. On realizing Enrique's mistake, Sab soon confessed his condition: "I belong – he continued with a bitter smile – to that misfortunate race without the rights of men... I am a mulatto and a slave"¹⁰. However, his mother was free (*sic*), an African princess, captured on the coasts of the Congo and brought to Cuba by the traffickers in human flesh. Initially, the novel narrates Sab's devotion to Carlota, his *irmã de leite*, or milk-sister, and daughter of Sab's owner. Platonic love was turned into suffering when the slave discovered Carlota's engagement to Enrique, a union based on monetary interests. At various moments, Sab contributed to the organization of wedding and at the moment of the ceremony he died, after suffering from tremors and internal bleeding. Sab's passive reaction was justified by his condition as a slave and mulatto, since he considered that nature had condemned him to an existence of nullity and opprobrium (GÓMEZ DE AVELLANEDA, 2017, p. 108-109, 118). For Gómez de Avellaneda, slaves and women faced the same fate, unchallenged submission to patriarchal power.

⁸ In relation to *Sab*, see Sommer (1991, p. 114-137); Luis (1998, p. 175-186); Kirkpatrick (1989, p. 131-164); and Gomariz (2009, p. 97-118).

⁹ Author's translation: "Su rostro presentaba un compuesto singular en que se descubría el cruzamiento de dos razas diversas (...); los rasgos de la casta africana con los de la europea, sin ser no obstante un mulato perfecto".

¹⁰ Author's translation: "Pertenezco – prosiguió con sonrisa amarga –, a aquella raza desventurada sin derechos de hombres... soy mulato y esclavo".

According to Doris Sommer (1991), the physical description of Sab, the imperfect mulatto, makes him the new incarnation of the Cuban aboriginal. His hybrid form ruptured with the racial categories that advocated slavery and violated the racial hierarchy maintained by slaves and masters. He is differentiated from slaves in his physical form and behavior. He was a slave and mulatto, but at the same time he had aristocratic manners and feelings. His hybridization breaks with the binary opposition between whites and blacks, a division necessary to justify and perpetuate the power of the patriarchal colonizers (SOMMER, 1991, p. 118). By conceiving Sab as a new autochthone, a new Cuban, Gómez de Avellaneda promoted *creole* nationalism, an important step to imagining an independent Cuba. According to Comfort's study (2003), Sab (a mulatto), his adoptive mother Martina (indigenous) and Carlota (white and the daughter of the tropics) were together the proto-national subject. However, the triad could not thrive as long as Cuba remained a colony, since there they were oppressed by patriarchal power. In the novel, mestizos, indigenous people, and women lived under the yoke of the slaveowners. Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda thus produced discourse against slavery, the oppression of women, and indigenous communities. The debate goes beyond this, since the condition necessary to neutralize patriarchal power was the independence of Cuba. In the novel elements favorable to the construction of the Cuban nation, composed of whites, Indians, and mulattos can be found (COMFORT, 2003; DAVIES, 2003, p. 423-444).

The redemption of the mulatto

In José de Alencar's *Mãe* (published in 1862), the mulatto Joana also committed suicide. To the contrary of the Cuban characters, she decided to take poison to allow her son preserve his identity as a free white man. Suicide was a strategy to delete the past, to hide Jorge's slave origin, a music teacher and medical student. He lived with his slave, the mulatto Joana, and treated her as if she was his mother, since he had never met his real one. However, the play gained another rhythm when the reader becomes aware that the slave was actually his mother. At no moment in the text does José de Alencar refer to Jorge's skin color. Theoretically, he was also a mulatto. Although he was fair skinned, he had characteristics of the black race. Nevertheless, the marks of slavery were either not on his body or were invisible. Skin color was not addressed in the play and the only character of color was Joana. In principle, all the other characters were white, including Elisa, Jorge's fiancée. For Alencar, the gradation of colors was not an important reference for social classification.

In revealing that Joana was his mother, Jorge received the stain of the slave. Marriage with Elisa was no longer possible. Jorge thus said to his future father-in-law that he deemed himself unworthy of belonging to the family. Dying, Joana tried to reverse the situation.

Alencar left it clear that the ties to slavery were not revealed through appearance, but through a slave origin. Joana was afraid that her son would become a slave due to motherhood. In fact, the death of the mulatto woman also represented the death of Jorge's ties with slavery. After the death of Joana, the father of his fiancée, who had previously reproved the marriage, stated: "May she bless such a holy union!" (ALENCAR, 1862, p. 140-143)¹¹. Or better, the death of the slave and the hiding of his slave origin permitted the whitening of Jorge. As a result, the union between Elisa and Jorge would no longer provoke a subversion of the slave order. Suicide preserved his identity as a free white man. The whitening of bodies made feasible the erasure of the memory of slavery. According to Alencar, slavery was a step towards reaching civilization: "In three and a half centuries, the amalgamation of races would operate to a large proportion, allowing the color white to predominate. Three or four generations are sometimes enough in Brazil for a complete transformation" (ALENCAR, 2009, p. 290-296)¹². Slavery would thus be forgotten along with Jorge's captive past.

In *O Guarani* (1857) and *Iracema* (1865), José de Alencar also defended the mestizo origin of the Brazilian people. The relationship between the national and the birth of the mestizo child is, however, more explicit in *Iracema*, in the birth of Moacir, son of the Portuguese Martim and the Indian Iracema. After the death of his beloved, Martim left with his son and recruited new colonists to settle the region where he had buried Iracema. Alencar wrote this novel to deal with the origin of Brazilian society. He asserted that wars and resistance did not generate this society. According to Alencar, the Brazilian people were not forged with historic resistance, but through romantic surrender. Its foundation occurred when whites and Indians fell into each other's arms to create mixed race offspring (SOMMER, 1991, p. 150). In nineteenth century Brazilian drama, the formation of the mestizo family was also a recurrent theme. This dramaturgy did not only denounce the horrors of slavery, but also shed light on the feasibility of the social inclusion of descendants of slaves, once they were fair-skinned mulattos, or almost white.

The same arguments can be found in Maria Ribeiro's play *Cancros sociais* (1865). She was born in Parati and wrote more than twenty theatrical texts, a noticeable achievement for a woman in the middle of the nineteenth century. Her plays had a good reception on the stages of Rio de Janeiro and in general dealt with the female condition. In *Cancros sociais*, she denounced not only oppression against women, but also the scourge of slavery. These themes bring her closer to Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, although the Cuban had published her book more than 20 years previously. Inspired by Alencar's play *Mãe*, Ribeiro told the story of Eugênio S. Salvador, a well-connected trader with the Rio de Janeiro aristocracy. On the day of the fifteenth birthday of his daughter, he decides to present her with the freedom of

¹¹ Author's translation: "Ela abençoe tão santa união!"

¹² Author's translation: "Em três e meio séculos, o amálgama das raças se havia de operar em larga proporção, fazendo preponderar a cor branca. Três ou quatro gerações bastam às vezes no Brasil para uma transformação completa".

Marta, her new servant. Eugênio was an abolitionist and did not allow slaves into his house. Before the festivities, he received Antônio Forbes, a slave trader, and Marta, a *parda* slave. At the moment of the purchase, Marta discovered that Eugênio, her new master, was her missing son. Before continuing the analysis, it is worth highlighting that on few occasions is the word *pardola* (mixed) used in Portuguese to describe characters in Brazilian and Cuban anti-slavery literature. In dealing with mestizos, it was more frequent to use the word mulatto. Perhaps Maria Ribeiro used it to reinforce the good qualities of Marta and highlight that Eugênio was “perfectly white” (RIBEIRO, 2021, p. 115)¹³, starting from the assumption that mixed people were closer to whites than mulattos.

Unlike the mulatto Joana, the *parda* woman did not decide to kill herself to free her son from slavery. As a servant, she lived in her son’s house, causing her daughter-in-law to become jealous, as she could not imagine the embarrassing situation. In a large part of the text, Eugênio feared revealing to his wife and friends that his mother had been a slave, since in this way he, a rich and well-connected trader, would be transformed into a slave. With the help of Baron Maragogipe and Matilde, they discovered that Marta had been emancipated before Eugênio’s birth. The *parda* woman had thus been unjustly kept in captivity, since she had already been freed. In this way, in accepting his mother, the trader did not run the risk of losing his liberty.

In principle, Eugênio’s color was not an unavoidable mark capable of linking him to slavery. However, in the play there exist two contradictory passages referring to Eugênio’s appearance. In describing Marta’s son, Forbes, a trader, mentioned that he had sold him in Rio and that “he was a devilish small mulatto”. Matilde, the family friend, had known Marta much before meeting him in Eugênio’s house. When asked, she said that Marta had a son, “a beautiful child, perfectly white!” Although there were contradictory opinions about the boy’s color, everything ended well when it was proven that Marta’s freedom had been registered before the birth of Eugênio. Without the shadow of slavery, Eugênio’s home was reformed, as if the letter of manumission had neutralized all the obstacles imposed on the lives of the freed slaves and their descendants. Before the curtain falls, Maria Ribeiro again praises Marta: “Alongside virtue, which is ennobled by martyrdom and faith, it is contemplated in the beneficial ties of the family, and in the holy love of the mother: the picture of true happiness! (The Independence Anthem starts playing)” (RIBEIRO, 2021, p. 85, 111, 143)¹⁴. A happy ending for the family and nation.

In José de Alencar and Maria Ribeiro’s plays, color does not differentiate Brazilians. In fact, in the 1824 Constitution, slavery was not based on natural or racial differences, since irrespective of color, all free men were citizens, albeit with different civil and political rights.

¹³ Author’s translation: “perfeitamente branco”.

¹⁴ Author’s translation: “era um mulatinho endiabrado”; “uma linda criança, perfeitamente branca!”; “Ao lado da virtude, que se enobrece pelo martírio e pela fé, contempla-se nos benéficos laços da família, e no santo amor de mãe: o quadro da verdadeira felicidade! (Rompe fora o Hino da Independência)”.

In this context, the classifications and racial hierarchies were irrelevant for the construction of citizenship (PARRON, 2022, p. 731-739). Dramatists followed the same assumption and dampened down racial hierarchy in fiction. In fact, in Bernardo Guimarães' anti-slavery novel *A escrava Isaura* (1875), a past in slavery also became irrelevant at the happy end of the novel. With the charter of manumission, Isaura becomes white, beautiful, educated, gifted, free, and engaged to a white liberal millionaire. Drawing on this novel, Sara Rosell (1997, p. 157-175) defended that in Brazil the "prejudice of the mark" was determinant, while in Cuba "prejudice of origin" predominated. In summary, among Brazilians appearance was determinant in the social hierarchy while an origin in slavery was relegated to the background. In addition to Isaura, this thesis also explains the outcome of the characters of Jorge and Eugênio. The authors understand that, freed of ties with slavery, mestizos became white men socially.

Bernardo Guimarães was a well-known poet and journalist on the Brazilian literary circuit. In *A escrava Isaura*, the debate on slavery is very limited and deals with the drama of a white slave. The other slaves in the novel did not receive due attention from the author, except the mulatto Rosa, antagonist of the heroine. The novel highlights the injustice generated by slavery, since: "Such a good and interesting creature was not born to be a slave"¹⁵. As if creatures were born for slavery. Guimarães' racism goes much beyond this phrase, since he uses various stereotypes to describe the black from the romance (GUIMARÃES, 1875, p. 25, 68-69). In general, those in Brazil opposed to slavery were not only opposed to slavery itself, but were also opposed to slaves (HABERLY, 1972), above all when they were black. Guimarães was no exception.

The novel tells the story of Isaura, a slave and daughter of a beautiful mulatto, the favorite household slave of the *comendador's* wife. The distinguished lady gave her a religious education and also taught her to read, write, and sew. Later, she learned drawing, music, dance, Italian, and French. The *comendador's* wife "finally committed herself to giving the girl the most careful and refined education, as she would do with a beloved daughter" (GUIMARÃES, 1875, p. 10-12)¹⁶. However, the *comendador* did not like this whim, considering it old fashioned to create "little mulatto princesses". As an adult, Isaura was beautiful and had "such a beautiful color, so that no one would say that there was even a drop of African blood in her veins" (GUIMARÃES, 1875, p. 22-23)¹⁷. Leôncio, the spoiled only child of the *comendador*, considered her a treasure, appearing more like an Andalusian or Neapolitan. His brother-in-law Henrique retorted that he considered Isaura much better, "she is a perfect Brazilian". The *comendador's* son agreed and stated that she was superior; "those charms and those seventeen springs in a free girl would have turned the minds of

¹⁵ Author's translation: "Uma tão boa e interessante criatura não nasceu para ser escrava".

¹⁶ Author's translation: "empenhou-se enfim em dar à menina a mais esmerada e fina educação, como o faria com uma filha querida".

¹⁷ Author's translation: "uma cor linda, que ninguém dirá que gira em tuas veias uma só gota de sangue africano".

many good people” (GUIMARÃES, 1875, p. 29)¹⁸. After marrying, Leôncio began to frequent the plantation and became enchanted with Isaura who rejected his advances. Since these were unsuccessful, the son of the *comendador* began using violence to get the consent of the “slave princess”. To the contrary of the Cuban mulattos, Isaura resisted the advances of her master and perhaps for this reason had a happy ending.

Isaura enchanted men, but constantly rejected their advances, and repelled with heroic energy all the seductions and threats of Leôncio. In fact, more than once the white slave considered her beauty a torment. Henrique, Leôncio’s brother-in-law, was also enchanted with Isaura. He wanted to take liberties and the love of the slave, since she was too feminine and beautiful to remain in slavery. So typical of the “mulatto myth”, seduction was not a resource used by Isaura to obtain advantages or the love of a man. She belittled almost all those who praised her, made proposals to her, or blackmailed her. She only accepted the vows of love of Álvaro, her liberator. In a conversation with a friend, Álvaro dignified the slave by asserting that all distinctions arising out of birth and wealth were in vain, since a slave could be worth more than a duchess. “There was nothing in it which denounced the abjection of the slave, or which did not reveal the candor and nobility of her soul” (GUIMARÃES, 1875, p. 33, 186-187)¹⁹.

To escape from violence, Isaura fled from the plantation with the help of her father. For a time, she lived in Recife, where she met Álvaro, a generous abolitionist, and rich as an English lord. In Pernambuco, Isaura came to call herself Elvira, but soon afterwards she and her father were discovered, alerted by the publication of an announcement of a reward for their capture in the newspapers. After finding the fugitive, Leôncio was bankrupt, he had lost his fortune, and Álvaro had obtained his property, including Isaura. In this novel, it was not the slave who committed suicide, but the master. Leôncio fired a bullet into his skull with a pistol. Before his tragic end, Álvaro spoke to his beloved to express his love, “because despite all the prejudice in the world, I believe myself to be the happiest of mortal because I am able to offer you the hand of a husband” (GUIMARÃES, 1875, p. 275)²⁰. Once again, in Brazilian literature, a happy ending united the white and the freed mulatto, who formed a typical Brazilian family, and marriage solemnly overcame racial and social prejudices. Inspired by romanticism, the novels and plays by Brazilian anti-slavery activists ended with the reestablishment of harmony with mestizo families or with marriage between individuals of different races, unions responsible for consolidating the new nation. On paper and on stage, racial democracy reigned, all those born, free or freed, were citizens, although political participation was much restricted, since the vote was based on property.

¹⁸ Author’s translation: “aqueles encantos e aquelas dezessete primaveras em uma moça livre, teriam feito virar o juízo a muita gente boa”.

¹⁹ Author’s translation: “Nada havia nela, que denunciasses a abjeção do escravo, ou que não revelasse a candura e nobreza de sua alma”.

²⁰ Author’s translation: “Pois a despeito de todos os preconceitos do mundo, eu me julgo o mais feliz dos mortais em poder oferecer-te a mão de esposo”.

In “Uma história de quilombolas” (1900 [1871]), Bernardo Guimarães conceived as protagonists a mulatto couple, the sole characteristic shared with anti-slavery novels. Conceived before *A Escrava Isaura*, the “mulatinha” Florinda possessed some traits of the most famous slave in Brazilian literature, since she had a fair complexion and was enslaved, beautiful, and “almost of Caucasian purity”. Although she was chaste and faithful, Florinda attracted men with “the soft and gracious curves typical of the mulatto”. Her beloved, the mulatto Anselmo, had been emancipated at baptism and was very close to the governor of Minas. He also had a fair skin, curly black hair, his shape revealed the “African blood in his veins”. His face was cheerful, expressive, conveying “happiness in all its fullness” (GUIMARÃES, 1900, p. 11, 22, 26)²¹. Anselmo fell in love with Florinda and promised her emancipation and marriage.

The *cabra* Matheus also nourished a great passion for Florinda. He was very young, “handsome and strong, but with a bad complexion”, something which reflected his bad character. In perceiving the girl’s enchantment for Anselmo, the *cabra* decided to flee from the plantation and to join other slaves in a *quilombo* located in Serra de Itatiaya. He had plans to drink the blood of whites, but particularly he planned to kidnap Florinda and bring her to live on the *quilombo* commanded by Zambi Cassange. According to the *cabra*, Anselmo was “a Capixaba, a devil of a lazy mulatto”. Promised to the enemy, Florinda was captured and brought to the *quilombo* in the middle of the night, deep in the woods and rocks (GUIMARÃES, 1900, p. 4-14)²².

The villain Matheus was not called a mulatto. Perhaps to differentiate him from Anselmo and Florinda, he was called a *cabra*, someone of darker skin than a mulatto, with an even more pejorative name (REIS, 1989, p. 85). Because of Matheus, Florinda could not be rescued and Anselmo had to make an agreement with Zambi which freed the *quilombo* from the threat of intervention by the governor’s guard. This agreement was denounced by Matheus, and Anselmo had to face a trial which condemned him to death. However, the head of the *quilombo* managed to get Anselmo declared innocent and freed him from execution. While the mulatto married in the church, the *cabra* faced death in Morro da Forca (GUIMARÃES, 1900, p. 142). And the ending was repeated, another mestizo family was formed.

Obstacles to the formation of the mestizo family are debated in a play by Paulo Eiró. The São Paulo dramatist defended racial miscegenation and warned about the imminent risks caused by a heterogenous population, and the lack of unity in the nation. In the preface, he commented: “It is not only the difference between the free man and the slave; three human races grow on the same soil simultaneously and almost without mixing with each other”

²¹ Author’s translation: “quase de pureza caucasiana”; “curvas moles e graciosas, que são próprias das mulatas”; “sangue africano nas veias”; “a felicidade em toda sua plenitude”.

²² Author’s translation: “bonito e reforçado, porém de má catadura”; “capixaba, um diabo de um mulato pachola”.

(EIRÓ, 2006, p. 308)²³. The play *Sangue limpo* (1861) features the romantic couple Aires and Luiza and deals with the impossible love between the young aristocrat and the beautiful mestizo woman. Eiró studied in the Largo de São Francisco Faculty of Law and wrote various plays, known only by their titles since they were destroyed by him. He lived alone, disappeared from the city and returned much later as if he was a beggar (PRADO, 1996, p. 165-170). *Sangue limpo* summarizes various themes dealt with in the literature dedicated to mulattos. He addresses social segments, nuances in skin color and slave origin, without neglecting the impediments and rules inherent to marriages. Paulo Eiró's plays are precious in the analysis of social and racial exclusion in the formation of Brazilian nationality.

In Pátio do Colégio, the historic center of the city of São Paulo, Luísa was looking at the variety of people who had come to listen to a band and the 1820 constitutional anthem. The events narrated preceded by a few days the Sete de Setembro of 1822 – the day of Brazilian independence. In the crowd, the clothes and people run into each other. The beautiful girl had never seen “a similar mix of poor and rich, of old people and children”. Luiza was dark-skinned, result of the “most delicious mixture of the white race with the Indian type” (EIRÓ, 2006, p. 317-321)²⁴. While Eiró describes Luísa's family as white, her brother was *pardo*, her grandmother a mulatto, and her father a slave. The brother and sister Luísa and Rafael Proença were not called mulattos, but represented the racial synthesis of the Brazilian population. In the initial dialogues, Eiró mentioned the quarrels between Brazilians and Portuguese. The latter offended the Brazilians when they called them mestizos, children of unknown parents. In the dispute with a Portuguese soldier, Sargeant Rafael Proença mentioned that the Portuguese had made the Americas a *pelourinho* or whipping post. Since they were unsuccessful in forcing Indians to cultivate the land, they had sought more obedient servants overseas (EIRÓ, 2006, p. 326).

The dark skinned Luiza fell in love with Aires Saldanha, son of the Portuguese noble D. José. For the young lady, love was impossible, since Aires was too noble “to be my husband... I was too honest to be his mistress”. For Rafael, the impediment of color prevented this union: “A *pardo*'s lot is so wretched! A poor man can get a fortune; the plebian can obtain honors and glories: but the man who carries within him the seal of two different and enemy races, what can he do?” This character thereby clearly indicated the limits for social ascension for mestizos in slaveocratic societies. For the noble D. José, the obstacle to marriage was not the poverty of the young woman's family, nor the color, but the slave origin of the brothers and sister: “What does a slight modification in blood matter?... but letting it weigh on my family is an indelible stain... Sargento Proença, was your father a slave?”. Rafael confessed that his paternal grandmother was a mulatto woman and slave and added: “I am the son of a

²³ Author's translation: “Não é somente a diferença de homem livre para escravo; são as três raças humanas que crescem no mesmo solo, simultaneamente e quase sem se confundirem”.

²⁴ Author's translation: “semelhante mistura de pobres e ricos, de velhos e crianças”; “mistura mais deliciosa da raça branca com o tipo indiano”.

slave, and what is wrong with that? ... where is the indelible stain... Brazil is a land of slavery” (EIRÓ, 2006, p. 393-395)²⁵. In these dialogues, Paulo Eiró tackles the theme of social and racial history of colonial Brazil. Written around 1860, Eiró believed that independence would weaken the racial hierarchy forged by Portuguese colonizers. Brazilian society, governed by the 1824 Constitution, did not mention the hierarchy between the races and did not differentiate between free Brazilians, freed people, whites, mulattos, Indians, and blacks (PARRON, 2022). Under the law, they were all citizens, but in practice the social exclusion denounced by Sergeant Rafael Proença in a conversation with the Portuguese *fidalgo* still survived.

After the conflict with the sergeant, D. José refused to accept the marriage of his son, kidnapped him, and separated the couple. To watch over Aires, he bought the slave Liberato, described by the author as having the worst qualities. His son escaped from his prison with his flight provoking his father’s wrath. At the moment of punishing the enslaved black, D. José was murdered by Liberato. Moved by destiny, the young *fidalgo* met Luísa and obtained from her brother consent to marry her. Before the death, Rafael saw Aires Saldanha as “a son of another country”. However, with the advances of the independence process and the death of his father, he lost his patria and family. The sergeant then stated: “When you had all that, you were an enemy to me. Now you have nothing, I put out my hand and say: do you want to accept my patria and my family” (EIRÓ, 2006, p. 423)²⁶. The slave Liberato thus made feasible the integration of Aires in the country and the Proença family. As the *grito do Ipiranga* caused the birth of the Brazilian nation, the death of the Portuguese *fidalgo* allowed the marriage of Aires and Luísa. Before the curtain falls, the characters all shout “independence or death” and praised the Emperor. In short, the play is favorable to miscegenation and the formation of the Brazilian state and nation.

Much after the production of the Cuban anti-slavery narratives, the Porto Rican lawyer and journalist Eduardo Ezponda published the pamphlet *La mulata* (1878) based on his experience in Cuba. According to Ezponda, the skin of the mulatto inherited the degradation of the “slave race”. Without counting on social refinements, “without religious, moral, and instructive education, guided by confused notions of right and wrong”, mulatto women only learned trades such as dressmaking or other manual trades. They neither cultivated their minds, nor did they have any encouragement to be honored. This mulatto woman rarely married, since their destiny did not change alongside the mulatto man. “Naive, libertine, or

²⁵ Author’s translation: “demais para ser meu esposo (...); e eu muito honesta para ser sua amante”; “A sorte de um homem pardo é tão miserável! O pobre pode chegar à fortuna; o plebeu pode alcançar honras e glórias: mas o homem que traz em si o selo de duas raças diversas e inimigas, o que pode fazer ele?”; “Que importa uma ligeira modificação do sangue?... mas deixar pesar sobre a minha família uma nódoa indelével... Sargento Proença, seu pai era escravo?”; “Sou filho de um escravo, e que tem isso?... onde está a mancha indelével... O Brasil é uma terra de cativo”.

²⁶ Author’s translation: “um filho de outra pátria”; “Quando tinhas tudo isso, eras para mim um inimigo. Hoje, que nada tens, estendo-te a mão e digo: queres aceitar a minha pátria e a minha família”.

serf, she easily succumbs to the first flattering insinuations addressed at her” (EZPONDA, 1878, p. 17-18)²⁷. Ezponda described women who had few characteristics of the mulatto woman as described by the romantic and realist literature. Here mulatto women did not yet show the lust and seductions of characters from the naturalist literature. These are seductive, impulsive, and independent while the romantic-realist ones are passive, victims of patriarchalism and slavery. In Cuba, the literati created mulatto women to denounce the perversity of the slaveocratic families. The beauty of Rosalía and Dorotea sharpened the desire of their masters. Under intense pressure, they surrendered their chastity to the owners to save Petrona and Francisco. They accept punishments and death without fighting back. Nor did Ezponda’s mulatto women possess the qualities of the heroines Isaura, Joana, Luísa, Marta, and Florinda. Although they were beautiful, the romantic-realist Brazilian mulatto women preserved their chastity or lived for their children. They were marriageable mulatto women, destined to form part of the Brazilian nation.

In fact, Brazilian society was not formed by families consisting of Portuguese and Indians, according to Alencar’s novel, but also fair skinned mulattos. The inclusion of mulatto women in the heart of the Brazilian family was a recurrent theme since the first manifestations against slavery in the literature. For this reason, mulattos became the protagonists of anti-slavery narratives. Cuban novelists also chose mulatto men as the protagonists of their anti-slavery novels, but their inclusion as part of the Cuban nation proved unfeasible.

Beginnings of the myth of racial democracy

In the Cuban novel between the 1830s and 1840s, social frontiers were clearly delimited for black, mulattos, and whites. Hence the ascension of mulattos to the world of whites was very unlikely. Forty years later, almost white mulattos were never confused with whites in the novels of Cirilo Villaverde and Ramón Meza (GUEVARA, 2005). The same hierarchical rigidity is rare in Brazilian literature. In novels and plays, the children of enslaved mulatto women were accepted, confused with whites, or even part of the local aristocracy, such as Eugênio Salvador in *Cancros Sociais*. Isaura’s physical and intellectual gifts were unsurpassed, she was the most perfect of women. White women never received the same praise. The almost white Florinda, an enslaved mulatto woman, enchanted men with her beauty and honesty. In the novels, miscegenation between whites and blacks/mulattos can give rise to whites. African origin was not always the reason for social exclusion. For this reason, classifications were unstable, color shades were subordinated to the context of the novel or the relationship

²⁷ Author’s translation: “raza esclava”; “sin educación religiosa, moral e instructiva; guiándose por confusas nociones acerca del bien y del mal”; “Ingenua, libertina, o sierva, sucumbe fácilmente a las primeras insinuaciones aduladoras que le dirigen”.

between characters. Color only became determinant when the author intended to link it to the character: the whiter they were, the more honest and physically perfect. The villain Mateus was a *cabra*, a darker mulatto, while Anselmo was a fair-skinned mulatto. Mestizos were called almost white, *pardos*, mulattos, or *cabras*.

Curiously, the approach to mulattos in anti-slavery literature brings us to the Brazilian sociological debates in the 1940s and 1950s. Almost one hundred years later, the same themes were analyzed by the São Paulo sociologist Oracy Nogueira, who confronted social exclusion based on origin and mark, in other words, race and appearance. In the former type of prejudice, common in the United States, the individual does not need to display any characteristics of the inferior race to be treated as such, since their social classification refers to the origin to their ancestors. “Prejudice of mark” did not have the same rigidity: “the conception of white and non-white varied in Brazil, due to the level of miscegenation, from individual to individual, from class to class, region to region” (NOGUEIRA, 2006, p. 294)²⁸. The darker the individual, the more social exclusion they suffered; the richer and more educated, the lower the impact of racial prejudice. The probability of social ascension is inversely proportional to the marks, in other words, poverty darkens while wealth clarifies, “with the prejudice of race being hidden under that of class” (NOGUEIRA, 2006, p. 303)²⁹. Thus, Eugênio Salvador in *Cancros sociais* and Jorge in *Mãe* passed as white not only due to the color of their skin, but also due to education, economic power, and the circuit of friendship.

Oracy Nogueira also provides other precious data to understand this literature. He argues that in Brazil, “there is an expectation that the black and Indian will disappear as racial types, due to the successive crossing with whites” (NOGUEIRA, 2006, p. 297)³⁰. In fact, since the nineteenth century, whitening was seen as the best solution to attenuate the racial hierarchy of the Brazilian people. The bastard son of an enslaved *parda* woman and the Viscount, Eugênio Salvador passed as white and like him many were able to benefit from whitening. The “prejudice of mark” acted as an ideology responsible for deleting the slaveholding past and the African identity, promoting at the same time the whitening of the Brazilian nation. In short, the 1824 Constitution allowed the social ascension of free people, freed people, blacks, and mestizos, as long as they accumulated income and assets (PARRON, 2022). With this status, they were able to move from passive to active citizens and participate in political life. Social classification, based on “prejudice of the mark”, also allowed the social ascension of mestizo individuals, once they were light-skinned and prosperous.

²⁸ Author’s translation: “preconceito de marca”; “a concepção de branco e não-branco varia, no Brasil, em função do grau de mestiçagem, de indivíduo para indivíduo, de classe para classe, de região para região”.

²⁹ Author’s translation: “ficando o preconceito de raça disfarçado sob o de classe”.

³⁰ Author’s translation: “há uma expectativa de que o negro e o índio desapareçam, como tipos raciais, pelo sucessivo cruzamento com o branco”.

In the Cuban novels, all mulattos would find death. Their fruits were forbidden and were not to be reproduced in colonial Cuba. Under the Spanish yoke they did not escape from tragedy. In the Brazilian novels analyzed, mulatto women distanced themselves from captivity, married and formed a family with white or mulatto Brazilians. They became citizens, they were included in the nation. Just as Alencar romanticized the union between Martim and Iracema, in dealing with slavery the other novelists sought the redemption of mulattos and wrote happy endings for those threatened by captivity. Certainly, the “history” of these mulattos served as a model for the History of Brazil and was part of the whitening process of the population. The almost white should not be slaves, but included in the nation, introduced into it by marriage. Novelists thus fulfilled the mission of filling in the gaps in a history constructed to forge the nation and push the history in direction of the ideal future. This was a possible message transmitted by newspapers and books to Brazilian citizens.

However, two short stories by Machado de Assis counter this trend. Virgínia and Mariana, both slaves, met their deaths, victims of a slaveholding and patriarchal society. The first was black and victim of her own father, with the intention of freeing her from the deflowering plotted by the son of the plantation owner. The second was a mulatto “raised in the household”, in love with the white Coutinho. The impossible love led her to suicide. Like the Brazilian and Cuban mulattos, the slaves in Machado’s short stories behaved like white ladies, modest, prudish, and victims of patriarchal power (VITAL, 2012, p. 65-96). Machado did not resort to the stereotype or myth of the mulatto woman, so common to naturalist literature.

The 1858 play *Calabar* by Agrário de Menezes also contradicts the optimism of Brazilian dramaturgy. In the play this historical character of the Pernambucano wars received other contours. In Menezes’ work, treason against the Portuguese was justified by the protagonist’s feeling of inferiority, due to the fact that he was a mulatto and because of the rejection of his beloved, in love with a Portuguese officer. As a result, the tragedy of the mulatto was repeated, Calabar was punished on the gallows and before dying shouted: “Motherland! Motherland! Win your freedom!” (MENEZES, 1858, p. 166)³¹. However, these examples do not invalidate the contrast between mulattos in Cuban and Brazilian literature. In Cuba, marriage with whites was not a feasible alternative for mulattos, as seen in the iconic novel *Cecilia Valdés* (1882). The intellectuals of the Delmontine Circuit still could not imagine the nation in their novels (CONFORT, 2003).

Mulattos in Brazilian antislavery literature brings us to an issue which was important for Gilberto Freyre, the myth of racial democracy in Brazil (COSTA, 1999, p. 365-366). In 1947, he published a series of talks given in the United States which summarized these arguments on inter-ethnic relations in Brazil. Two aspects of Freyre’s thought can be highlighted to understand anti-slavery drama. First, his vision on racial hierarchy:

³¹ Author’s translation: “Pátria! Pátria! Conquista a liberdade!”.

“the distinction between races is a distinction of position or of class rather than of color”. Second, the impact of miscegenation had led to the rapid disappearance of blacks, “merging with whites”. The fusion of three races and three cultures also allows “an imperfect type of social democracy” (FREYRE, 2001, p. 195-198)³². His thesis repeats the same arguments of antislavery literature, particularly the works of José de Alencar. In valorizing miscegenation, some nineteenth century literati mitigated exclusion based on color and race. Silence on the color of the characters and the recurrent mixed marriages between mulattos and whites, and their inclusion in the white family and the nation, predates by almost one hundred years Freyre’s vision of Brazilian society and his defense of “racial democracy”.

For Flora Süssekind (1982, p. 54-55), the relaxation of slavery, the docility of slaves and the pacific inclusion of blacks in seigneurial society are interpretations common to the works of Alencar and Freyre. In fact, it is worth mentioning that these Brazilian literati were white men and women (BROOKSHAW, 1983, p. 23-47). Perhaps their color and social position can be determinant in explaining the optimism in relation to the whitening of mulattos. They minimized racial hierarchy, while the black literati abundantly denounced exclusion based on color. According to Antônio Pereira Rebouças, Maria Firmina dos Reis, and Luiz Gama, slaves, freed people, and free people of color suffered all types of exclusion and even faced returning to slavery. Gama was not only an abolitionist, but also a political activist in defense of the liberty and dignified integration of men marked by slavery. Their struggle was not reduced to the legal extinction of slavery, they intended to redeem African identity, enforce the Constitution, and strengthen democratic relation in a slaveholding society (GRINBERG, 2002; AZEVEDO, 1999).

Ultimately, the protagonism of mulattos in Cuban and Brazilian antislavery literature was a form of helping readers understand the slave experience. Under the yoke of brutal and lewd masters, the almost white slave triggered the compassion of readers, above all in a racist slaveocratic society. The literature also intended to debate how absurd it was to enslave white people and submit mestizo children of slaveowners to harsh work and punishments. It also denounced the promiscuity caused by slaveowners, outside the restrictions of the law, in the use and abuse of blackmail, martyrdom, and rape. Brazilian literature also drew on *mulattos* to include the more fair-skinned in the nation, encouraging mixed marriages, and the erasure of slave origins. Not rarely, witnesses defended that the white race was determinant and blacks would disappear if miscegenation or whitening was encouraged. Novelists and playwrights planned the redemption of *mulattos*, particularly when they were almost white. Finally, it is worth mentioning that this antislavery propaganda did not plan to denounce the terrible conditions of black, Creole, or African slaves. Except for the novel *Francisco* (1839) by Anselmo Suárez y Romero, the other narratives did not focus on the real

³² Author’s translation: “a distinção entre raças é uma distinção de posição ou de classe mais do que de cores”; “fundindo-se com os brancos”; “um tipo imperfeito de democracia social”.

protagonists, the multitudes brought from Africa to the inferno of the American tropics. This choice of almost white mulatto protagonists brings us to the racial hierarchy and racism inherent in slavocratic societies.

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