

TAUNAY AND MACHADO DE ASSIS: ON NATURALIZATION AND IMMIGRATION

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Abstract: The subject of immigration, explored by Taunay and Machado, clearly developed in the shadow of abolition, and paid tribute to the widespread fear among rural landowners about a shortage of labour for agriculture, but it is equally of interest as it helps shed light on the type of national identity under construction. This brief dialogue between Machado and Taunay exemplifies clearly how much the boundaries between the included and the excluded can depend on the delineation of who is imagined to belong to the national ‘sector’ and, as a symmetrical pair, who is imagined to not belong to it.

Keywords: Machado de Assis, Alfredo d’Escagnolle Taunay, Naturalization, Immigration

One of the problems faced by post-colonial nation-states has been how to determine who belongs to the national population. In the late 18th century, the solution chosen by the USA, for example, was to introduce two naturalization laws (in 1790 and 1795) which established that to be a North American citizen it was necessary to be “white” and “free”, above all else. This meant that the following groups were, by definition, excluded: indigenous people, the first inhabitants of the land (today referred to as Native Americans); blacks, whether enslaved or not; Asians; and all mixed-race people.

In Brazil, the author of *Inocência*, Alfredo d’Escagnolle Taunay, in his capacity as politician in the Conservative Party, also sought to put forward an answer to the question: “Who should be considered *Brazilian*?” He wrote a book and presented a proposal to the Senate about how the issue of incorporating Brazil’s foreign population should be dealt with. The following article outlines Taunay’s proposal and Machado de Assis’s critique of it, expounded in a newspaper column on 28 October 1888.

TAUNAY AND NATURALIZATION

Alfredo D'Escragno Taunay left his mark on the history of Brazilian literature as the author of *Inocência* (1872), though he published many other works. This article is chiefly concerned with one of his less cited publications: *A nacionalização ou grande naturalização e naturalização tácita* (Nationalization or great naturalization and tacit naturalization, 1886), published in the form of a promotional book by the Central Immigration Society on 17 November 1883, when he was vice-president of that association.

I will begin by explaining the component elements of the very title of this book. *Great naturalization* referred to the full incorporation of foreigners into the Brazilian nation, giving them equal rights alongside all national citizens. This differed from *simple or small naturalization*, which would exclude the eligibility of the naturalized to hold public office. *Nationalization* (or *tacit naturalization*), on the other hand, would involve making all foreigners Brazilian if they were resident in Brazil for a given period of time, if the foreigners in question did not explicitly oppose their naturalization – and with very specific exceptions for the likes of murderers, fraudsters and so on, who were not “naturalizable”, so to speak.

Taunay's arguments suggest a citizenship model of nationalism, whereby the incorporation of foreigners within the recently constituted nation-state would be an option, so that they – as Brazilian citizens – could contribute to its development¹. The idea was that these groups of foreigners, being *naturalized*, would go on to feel they had a more active role in the construction of Brazil and could, based on this strengthening of ties with the local community, be mobilized with greater motivation to commit to more long-term, embedded undertakings. However, it is important to underline what kind of *foreigner* was envisaged in this line of thinking, and in what terms.

Let us begin by stating that, in fact, what Taunay was advocating was the integration of *European* foreigners. He argues that for this group to begin working more intensely for the new “homeland”, it would be necessary to grant them *naturalization*. Failure to do so could lead to them not feeling motivated to work as hard as possible for the glorious future of Brazil, and to simply think of the country as a place they were passing through and could later abandon “(...) without longing or links, once their wishes were fulfilled and their sole aim achieved.” (Taunay, 1886, 25)

In his opinion, the European immigrant would have the advantage of setting an “example” (or being a role model, to use a current phrase) for Brazilian workers. This was because, at the

¹ For more on the concept of nationalism as citizenship, see JOBIM, José Luís. Nacionalismo e globalização. In: ---. *Formas da teoria; sentidos, conceitos, políticas e campos de força nos estudos literários*. 2nd. ed. Rio de Janeiro: Caetés, 2003. pp. 19-66.

same time as Taunay created a highly positive, idealized image of Europeans, he also reiterated a clichéd notion of an innate characteristic of Brazilians, namely laziness. Let us consider the following quotation:

“I have shown how serious and pressing the issue of preparing people for labour is, given that the interior of the country is populated by *people accustomed to the most absolute and enervating habits of indolence*, from which they can only be dragged away by example and education.

Indeed, *the primordial type of Brazilian – the Indian – is the perfect antithesis of activity*. Only when driven by hunger does he leave the hammock in which he is rocked to gather some of the food that nature provides him with an excessively generous hand.

Those who travel through the interior of the provinces see almost identical facts under a slight veneer of civilization.

In the hottest hours, the men lie in the shade of the trees, or in their houses wrapped in hammocks, taking such a harmful nap that they stretch out almost the entire day at their leisure, doing nothing, and at most playing the guitar.

Without European immigration, we will not be able to accustom these people to work, showing them through fruitful examples how much they would gain from leaving their deleterious inertia.” (Taunay, 1886, 78-79. My emphasis.)

Indeed, the attribution of this characteristic to the indigenous people was a constant in 19th-century Brazilian society, reiterated even by those – like Gonçalves Dias – who chose the indigenous figure as a national hero in their literary production³. What seems to be new here is the extension of this attribute to all Brazilians².

Taunay was, in fact, both favourable to immigration from Europe and against Asian immigrants. Let us consider, for example, what he says in the *Gazeta de Notícias* newspaper about the introduction of Chinese workers to Brazil: “The word immigration cannot be applied to the dregs of the streets of Canton and Shanghai, where you only find bad people who, driven by poverty, can only bring vicious individuals and nothing more (...)”³.

Even when it came to Europeans, Taunay had his preferences, namely the Germans, because he thought they would help support the monarchy, since they were “obedient”, whereas the Italians in his view were “restless”. He even went as far as saying that liberal policies favoured

² “The Indian was indolent and lazy because nature, like an improvident mother who, through extremes and caresses, poorly educates her children, had been excessively generous towards them.” (DIAS, Antonio Gonçalves. *Brasil e Oceania; memória apresentada ao Instituto Histórico e Geográfico Brasileiro e lida na augusta presença de Sua Majestade Imperial. Revista trimestral do IHGB*, Rio de Janeiro, 4th quarter. 1867: 257-396.) For a more detailed analysis of the issue see JOBIM, José Luís. *Indianismo, nacionalismo e raça na cultura do Romantismo*. In: -----, *Formas da teoria; sentidos, conceitos, políticas e campos de força nos estudos literários*. 2nd. ed. Rio de Janeiro: Caetés, 2003b. pp. 87-116.

³ *Gazeta de Notícias*, 6 October 1888, p. 2.

Italians, whereas conservative ones supported German immigrants – which perhaps explains his preference for the latter, since he belonged to the Conservative Party⁴.

Since this was a burning issue in parliamentary debates and in the press in this era, Silveira Martins, the famous parliamentarian from the southern state of Rio Grande do Sul, also made his predilections clear. In his view, preference should be given to immigrants of the “Latin race” (whatever that means) but “not being a question of purifying races” he believed that “what we should want is an abundance of workers⁵.”

Responding directly to Silveira Martins, Taunay wrote:

It is a pity that such an elevated mind, who has at times contributed to the progress of the country through his words and ideas, has expressed this true aberration. His idea of helping the development of the North of the country with Chinese immigrants, while attracting European immigration to the South, would soon lead to the division of the country into two zones: one full of vigour and progress, the other weak and riddled with vices—an undoubtedly unfortunate idea.” (Taunay, 1886, 94)

Taunay was very familiar with the international context of policies and laws about immigration in his era, and he knew that in 1870 the North American congress denied Chinese immigrants the right to naturalization, attributing to them – during parliamentary debates – a series of supposed innate characteristics presented as incompatible with naturalization⁶. These “characteristics” were also emphasized in Brazil at that point in time, for example in the following comic poem by Pedro Malazartes:

FANFRELUCHES

Some point us to China,
Regarding the issue
That troubles us so much:
That of large-scale immigration.

To replace, God forbid!
With ugly yellow the black,
Is a case like the edit
That is worse than the sonnet.

Just a few days ago, in the Senate,
A mandarin senator

⁴ *Gazeta de Notícias*, 4 October 1888, p. 2.

⁵ *Gazeta de Notícias*, 6 October 1888, p. 2.

⁶ “The Act of 14 July 1870 extended the reach of naturalization laws *to foreigners of African origin and descendants of Africans* – a text that was modified in 1875 as follows:

“The resolutions regarding naturalization apply to free, white foreigners, to foreigners of African origin or descendants.” There were, however, still special restrictions, and in April 1878 the Circuit Court, District of California, denied naturalization to a Chinese individual, for belonging to the Mongolian race and not the white or black races, covered by the legal texts.” (Taunay, 1886, 18)

Revealed himself to be passionate
About the *coolie*, the Chinese.

To transfuse into our race
The blood of those veins
Is to cause fatal misfortune
(*illegible*)

The sons of Chinese
(*illegible*)
Bear the colour and ugliness
Of their horrendous fathers.

Let us not desire such a scourge
That ruins our aesthetics;
Down with the *coolie*, the yellow one!
Down, therefore, with China!⁷

Still on this subject, in a letter to the *Gazeta de Notícias*, published on 26 October 1888, on behalf of the Central Immigration Society, Taunay and a further nine signatories (among them the famous black engineer André Rebouças) made a “formal and energetic protest against the nefarious attempt to defile Brazilian soil with representatives of an atrophied and corrupt race, incapable of effectively collaborating with this neo-Latin people, eager for progress and a glorious future, in their great altruistic evolution.” In the view of the signatories, it was important that the world knew that they did not intend “to replace black slavery with yellow slavery and substitute the wretched captive, subjected to the whip and the stocks, with the unfortunate Asian, who, driven from his homeland by the deepest poverty, resigns himself to the bamboo and the villainies of his overseers, until despair and hatred lead them to suicide or the most atrocious crimes, to mass poisoning and the burning of sugar mills, farms and crops.” To prefer “a decrepit and worn-out race” instead of the “intelligent, progressive peoples of Europe” would be an error that would entail “re-enslavement and the debasement of Brazilian nationality in the very year in which it so gloriously and resolutely redeemed itself from the three-century stain.”⁸ It is not surprising, therefore, that Taunay presented to the Senate a proposal prohibiting the introduction of Chinese workers into the country.⁹

As can be seen, this is a racial framework of references, which can be studied through the social use made of the “identifying characteristics” of belonging to the “Chinese” group, characteristics that have more to do with the political interests and viewpoints at play at the time than with the actual nature of the group's members to whom these same characteristics were attributed. In addition, the political backdrop of the time was precisely the question of the

⁷ *Gazeta de Notícias*, 1 October 1888, p. 1.

⁸ *Gazeta de Notícias*, 26 October 1888, p. 1.

⁹ *Gazeta de Notícias*, 5 October 1888, p. 1.

consequences of the abolition of slavery. In this sense, there were a series of arguments circulating that focused on the loss of agricultural labour – a supposed consequence of the liberation of slaves on 13 May 1888 – and on the need to replace these workers, mainly through immigration (although there were also proposals to force the formerly enslaved to work in the fields again). It should be noted, in passing, that this was not a purely Brazilian issue: Luisa Campuzano states that, between 1847 and 1874, more than one hundred and fifty thousand Chinese workers arrived in Cuba, traveling directly from China or Macau, hired to supply the real or potential shortage of African slaves.¹⁰

The minister of Agriculture, Antônio Prado, in a speech delivered to the Senate on 29 September 1888, succinctly explains the issue:

A labour force? But I know of no other means to meet this need than that which the government has been striving to employ on a large scale, namely, the introduction of immigrants and the manner in which it intends to manage it, providing suitable agricultural workers without the farmers [*read: rural landowners*] needing to spend capital for this purpose. Does the honourable opposition perhaps intend that the government should propose to the legislative power coercive means that have the virtue of forcing freed slaves to work?

.....

The immigrant cannot currently find easier or more readily available employment in Brazil than in private agricultural work. (...) It is a matter of fact, and no one will dispute it, that this destination for immigration is all-the-more useful given that the law of May 13th determined, and could not fail to determine, temporary uncertainty regarding the labour of freed slaves from agricultural establishments.¹¹”

It should be noted that the minister considers it dangerous and unenforceable “to apply the immigration service to some provinces”, such as Amazonas, Goiás and Mato Grosso.

In any case, it is important to stress that while the debate was unfolding, immigrants were continuing to arrive. In the same edition of the *Gazeta de Notícias* (3 October, page 6), there is the following advertisement: “SETTLERS – recently arrived foreign families needed for coffee farming; enquiries to no. 96 Riachuelo Street.”

MACHADO DE ASSIS AND NATURALIZATION

Machado’s newspaper column, published in the *Gazeta de Notícias* on 28 October 1888, begins by stating that the author does not wholly agree with the *nationalization* proposal presented to the

¹⁰ In: JOBIM, José Luís *et alii*. *Lugares dos discursos literários e culturais*; o local, o regional, o nacional, o inter-nacional, o planetário. Rio de Janeiro/Niterói: Editora da Universidade Federal Fluminense/ Associação Brasileira de Literatura Comparada, 2006. The Portuguese consul at the time, according to this Cuban researcher, was Eça de Queiroz, a supporter of the Chinese.

¹¹ *Gazeta de Notícias*, 3 October 1888, p. 2.

Senate. The then Senator pejoratively called “nativists” those who opposed his concept of naturalization, insinuating that they were xenophobic or had a narrow-minded view that Brazil should be reserved exclusively for native-born Brazilians. Machado responds to a virtual interlocutor who has supposedly accused him of this: “I don’t really know what I am. If a nativist is some ugly animal, then fair enough; but if it means exclusivist, that’s not me.” (Assis [1888] 1990, 127)

Developing his reasoning, Machado agrees with Taunay’s fundamental thesis, that there is no sense in having “second-class citizens”, foreigners who are naturalized as Brazilians, but without all the rights that native-born Brazilians have. Since the question of the possibility of *naturalized* foreigners being elected and occupying political positions is crucial for Taunay, Machado makes it clear that he is in favour of making them fully able to fulfil such public service roles:

Indeed, if the man [a *naturalized* foreigner] is Brazilian and capable, why shouldn't he be as capable as other Brazilians? Who wouldn't agree with me (speaking only of the dead) that it's far better to have a Guizot or a Palmerston as regent, as a minister of the Empire, than a former minister (may God rest his soul!) who lacked this vision? (Assis [1888] 1990, 128)

However, Machado does not agree with the idea of tacit naturalization and presents a series of objections to this. He begins by drawing attention to the fact that Taunay, if he succeeds in having his law approved as he has proposed it, will have to accept the automatic integration of the Chinese after a period of two years, since there is no legal means for preventing their entry into Brazil.

He then reminds us that obligatory naturalization might be, contrary to what the Senator wished, a burden for immigrants: “But, if the immigrant knew that, after two years, and in some cases after just one, he would be obliged to be Brazilian, he would think twice and might not come.” (Assis [1888] 1990, 128-129)

The “main defect” that Machado sees in the proposal is that it asserts “in a tremendous way the omnipotence of the State”:

To throw open the doors, smiling, so that the foreigner may enter, is good and necessary; but to have him taken by two men, to be forcibly led inside the house for lunch, with him unable to refuse the courtesy except by swearing that another lunch awaits him, is not something that resembles individual liberty.” (Assis [1888] 1990, 129)

Even giving the foreigner the option of keeping his original nationality (“running, as the deadline approaches, to his consulate or the townhall, to declare that he does not wish to be Brazilian and receiving a certificate to this effect”) seems problematic to him, since, among other

reasons, it would create “a certain number of Brazilians by accident, who had forgotten to go and fulfil their legal duty in time”. (Assis [1888] 1990, 129) He adds: “Such individuals will not have a great love for the land that did not witness their birth.” (Assis [1888] 1990, 129)

Always with humour, Machado reminds us: “The State was not born in Brazil; neither is it here that it acquired the taste for regulating all of life.” (Assis [1888] 1990, 129) Evoking the “old republic of Sparta”, that supposedly “legislated even about women’s hairstyles”, he criticizes both the omnipotence and the casuistry of the bill, and says that, if he were to make a speech in the Senate, he would propose moderating naturalization¹², facilitating and honouring it, and, above all, making the country attractive via good legislation, widescale reforms and effective freedoms. (Assis [1888] 1990, 129)

As well as criticizing excessive State interference, Machado valorizes individual initiative, and a degree of egalitarianism in his proposal to incorporate “new” Brazilians with the same rights as other national citizens.

It seems that Machado is adopting the strand of Enlightenment thought that enshrined the idea of equal rights among men, which, incidentally, stems from an ethical premise that is supposedly prior to all norms created at the national level – a premise that should, as a universal principle, underlie every norm to be created – that equality should be guaranteed prior to and independent of any national condition. However, Liah Greenfeld (1983) has shown that, in fact, the degree of egalitarianism that exists is what nation-states enshrine (or not) within their respective spheres.

Consequently, although egalitarianism is a fundamentally universalist proposal that should embrace all human beings, what has actually prevailed – where this perspective has been adopted as the legislative premise – is a type of egalitarianism restricted only to those defined as members of their respective nation-states and, therefore, who have the “right” to demand the protection and guarantee of their nation-state for the equality they invoke.

In Brazil, until 1888, it was extremely problematic to invoke egalitarianism, chiefly because of slavery. With the emancipation of the enslaved, on 13 May of that year, other issues arose that were no less problematic. The subject of immigration, explored by Taunay and Machado, clearly developed in the shadow of abolition, and paid tribute to the widespread fear among rural landowners about a shortage of labour for agriculture, but it is equally of interest as it helps shed light on the type of national identity under construction.

¹² In 19th-century Brazil, among other things, the foreign candidate for naturalization had to pay a tax, in the form of cash, to achieve his aim. Only 5,381 individuals paid it between 1822 and 1883. In the first six months following the decision to abolish this tax, the number of naturalization letters signed by presidents of the province amounted to 1,797. See TAUNAY, 1886, 39-43.

CONCLUSION

This article is particularly of interest for analysing the arguments evoked by the fundamental question: “Who should be Brazilian?” The answers this elicits – when it comes to establishing what kind of immigrant should be incorporated into the Brazilian nation-state and under what terms this process of incorporation should (or not) occur – might be an important contribution to a better understanding of how, beginning in the 19th century, a notion of nationality is formed in which sectors of the population are classified according to characteristics that are attributed to them, and on the basis of which the possible social roles of each sector are conceived.

If the construction of nationality means, among other things, erecting collective identities, creating a notion of belonging to the nation-state, on the other hand it also implies a notion of exclusion. This brief dialogue between Machado and Taunay exemplifies clearly how much the boundaries between the included and the excluded can depend on the delineation of who is imagined to belong to the national ‘sector’ and, as a symmetrical pair, who is imagined not to belong to it.

Translated by Lisa Shaw.

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