

“I am a slave of the Navy Officers”: the great revolt of black sailors for rights in the post-abolition period (Rio de Janeiro, 1880-1910)

“Sou escravo de oficiais da Marinha”: a grande revolta da marujada negra por direitos no período pós-abolição (Rio de Janeiro, 1880-1910)

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RESUMO

Este artigo insere a Revolta da Chibata na história das primeiras gerações de descendentes de ex-escravos no pós-abolição. Entende-se que aqueles homens viveram um processo de disputas acirradas com imigrantes, brancos pobres e com os próprios negros livres, nos variados ofícios e contratos de trabalho existentes à época. As Forças Armadas permitiam uma possibilidade de ascensão aos negros, mas também o disciplinamento com castigos corporais. Com base em diferentes fontes, o artigo descreve os problemas enfrentados e as conquistas alcançadas pelos negros – sobretudo os marinheiros, nas primeiras décadas do pós-abolição – e a própria Revolta da Chibata, partindo dos discursos deixados pelos líderes do movimento, oficiais e cronistas acerca do racismo, da escravidão e dos castigos corporais.

Palavras-chave: Revolta da Chibata; pós-abolição; Marinha de Guerra.

ABSTRACT

This article inserts the Revolt of the Whip into the history of the first generations of descendants of former slaves in the post-abolition period. It is understood that these men experienced a process of bitter disputes with immigrants, poor whites, and with free black themselves, in the various trades and labor contracts existing at the time. The Armed Forces permitted a possibility of social ascension to blacks, but also discipline based on corporal punishment. Through different sources, the article describes the problems faced and the victories won by blacks – especially sailors in the first decades of the post-abolition period – and the actual Revolt of the Whip, starting with the discourses left by the leaders of the movement, officers, and journalists about racism, slavery, and corporal punishment.

Keywords: Revolt of the Whip; post-abolition; Navy.

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One of the greatest challenges to societies which experienced the end of slavery of Africans and their descendants in the Americas was to transform one of the proposals of the French Revolution into reality, in other words to construct equality between beings whose economic, social, racial, political and cultural differences had been historically forged and experienced. The possibility of black people voting, having the right to move as they pleased, accepting or not a work proposal, amongst other liberties, created discomfort for most whites, who felt injured by the division of their privileges. Freedom thus brought various problems to post-abolition societies (Holt, 1992, p. 6).

However, the processes which led to the total emancipation of slaves, for these and other reasons, were not pacific. No matter how much the Brazilian press had commemorated each success in the abolitionist campaign, later reporting in block capitals abolition itself and lauding the birth of a new era, of fraternity, and without vindictiveness (Silva, 2003, pp. 65-72; Venâncio, 2007), the transformation of a society which acted, thought, and understood itself as slaveholding, into another where production would theoretically come from payment for labor, was extremely tense (Albuquerque, 2009; Andrews, 1998; Mendonça, 1999; Machado, 2010).

Conflicts continued – many of them bloody. In recent decades the historiography has demonstrated these experiences, highlighting the agency of blacks regarding social and productive relations or in important events which occurred in cities and the rural universe. In revolts (Bartelt, 2009, p. 69), stevedore (Cruz, 2000) and transport strikes (Souza, 2011, pp. 154-155), in the newspapers of the black press (Santos, 2011; Pereira, 2013), and various associations (Chalhoub, 2007; Mac Cord, 2012), blacks fought for rights, sometimes explicitly denouncing the ‘prejudice of color’ in the country. Our principal objective here is to describe this process through another social movement little remembered in this historiography.

We are referring here to the revolt led by the black sailors João Cândido Felisberto, André Avelino, Francisco Dias Martins, and Manoel Gregório do Nascimento. Between November 22 and 26, 1910, they and hundreds more black colleagues, bombarded, and threatened with devastation the then Federal Capital of the Republic, drawing attention to racism, having their demands and actions printed on the front page of newspapers, such as *O Paiz*, *O Estado de S. Paulo*, *Le Figaro*, and the *New York Times*, as well as criticizing the young Republic (Nascimento, 2008; Morgan, 2014; Love, 2012; Almeida, 2009; Morel, 2009; Silva, 1982; Arias Neto, 2001; Maestri, 2000; Martins, 1988).

Before taking the extreme decision, they saw their attempts to improve working conditions frustrated, whether in the request made to the then president, Nilo Peçanha, when they handed him a picture drawn in charcoal with his profile in May 1910, or in complaints to the press (Maestri Filho, 2000, p. 62; Morel, 2009, p. 90). A little later, one of the leaders of the future revolt signaled – in an anonymous letter address to the commander of the Scout Cruiser Bahia – in September of that year that the situation would explode if nothing was done. Feeling repentant months later, the same commander recognized the error in calculation, since “we did not give the threat the least importance. Today it would be a case of believing it to be a just appeal, made to the authorities against the *chibata* [the whip]!...” (Coelho, 1911, p. 20). Prevented from voting by law, they could not elect a representative to defend them (Carvalho, 2003, pp. 29-32). All that was left to them was the way of arms, of threats, and of following the example of their Russian colleagues on board the Battleship Potenkim (Maestri Filho, 2000, pp. 42-60).

After two years conspiring, in both specific places in Rio de Janeiro city and the holds of vessels, the sailors chose those responsible for each act in the future stage of the revolt, which exploded a week after the new president of the republic, Marshal Hermes da Fonseca, took office (MIS, 1969).

Seen as a whole, the demands were more than a list of urgent or reactive necessities. They formed the foundations of a political project for changing the Navy, proposed by those who looked at daily problems from the perspective of the bottom rungs of the military hierarchy. Proposals which came from criticisms of how they were seen and commanded by their immediate superiors, and – even more significantly – from self-criticism about the behavior and education of many sailors (Nascimento, 2008, pp. 233-235).

With approximately 75% of black sailors, as will be seen, the revolt also expressed some of the adversities faced by the first generations of sons and grandsons of slaves, *ventre-livres* (born after the 1871 ‘free womb’ law which meant that children of slaves were born free), and free blacks, who were on board navy ships twenty-two years after Abolition. Generations born observing their parents in slavery, who saw themselves forced into migration with their families, who heard the stories of the hardships of slavery told by freed slaves, and who saw the barriers to economic and social ascension imposed by racism (Mattos; Rios, 2005; Weimer, 2013). Even under the new regime, the young black sailors said that the Navy kept them as ‘slaves’ of the officers. The cry of ‘Viva Liberty,’ during the revolt represented the dissatisfaction with 13 May

(the day of Abolition) and the Republic, which could be felt with the tremors of the artillery shots which fell on the city of Rio de Janeiro.

THE REVOLT OF THE WHIP

The revolt exploded on 22 November 1910. The commander of the iron-clad battleship *Minas Gerais*, Batista das Neves, returned to his vessel, after participating in a commemorative dinner on board the *Duguay-Trouin*, a French navy ship, also anchored in Guanabara Bay. Taking his first step on the deck of the ship, he heard from hundreds of sailors the shouts of ‘Viva Liberty’ and ‘Down with the Lash.’

The *Chibata* and liberty summarized a range of frustrations faced on a daily basis by the rebels. What they experienced on the decks of vessels resembled the old slave plantations, which were also the stages of revolts and other slave movements in the previous centuries (Schwartz, 2001). Twenty-two years after abolition and under a new regime, columnists and editors of newspapers asked about the reason for that reminder of slavery and its physical punishment. These words annoyed the officers and they were very much exploited by the press (Martins, 1988, p. 126).

Since the nineteenth century, the Brazilian Armed forces had resolved disciplinary problems by castigating the bodies of transgressors. In the case of the Navy, the type of punishment (*golilha* [being chained with an iron ring around the neck], *chibata* [lashes], *palmatória* [caned], being locked in irons, or solitary confinement) and the amount applied (days in solitary confinement, being hit on the back and on hands) were defined after a decision of a Disciplinary Council formed by the commander and two more officers on board.² Although similar punishments were used in European navies – until the beginning of the twentieth century in the Russian navy – in the Brazilian case, it was very difficult to disassociate these physical punishments of black sailors from those legally practiced on captive workers in the last country in the Americas to judicially abolish this type of punishment.

Batista das Neves, other officers and six sailors were killed that night. In one stroke the rebels had committed three military crimes: insubordination, mutiny, and murder. The sentences for these crimes were very long (Soares, 1920, pp. 149, 152, 228). It could clearly be seen that the rebel sailors were willing to face any risk. Something very unjust had occurred on the decks of the Navy and the population was scared by that clamor. What had led them to

commit these crimes and to risk their lives in a possible battle in Guanabara Bay, with a later trial in military courts?

The reasons were recorded in a two page message written by a young sailor from Ceará called Francisco Dias Martins and sent on the morning of 23 November to the recently sworn in president of Brazil, Marshal Hermes da Fonseca.³ The first demand of the sailors was the removal of ‘incompetent officers;’ individuals whose demands from their subordinates about daily services did not take into account the difference between the accumulation of tasks and the number of sailors available to carry them out. Few men were available to carry out many tasks. Since they did not see or want to see this difference, these ‘incompetents’ preferred to understand the non-fulfillment of orders as “resulting from the customary negligence and the impossibility of understanding the duties of punctuality, good will, and a good predisposition to work” – as stated by the officer Alberto Durão Coelho (1911, p. 39).

The second demanded the extinction of the legal basis used by officers who committed correctional excesses: “reforming the immoral and shameful code so that the lash, the *bolo* (a type of caning of the hands), and other similar punishments will disappear.” Since the Empire, it had been a practice among many officers to inflict punishments with a higher number of lashes than permitted by the disciplinary code of the Navy (known as the *Articles of War*), but with a much lower number of these being registered (Nascimento, 2008, p. 217). If the sailors wanted the end of physical punishments, these would have to be eliminated as the letter of the law (Decreto-Lei n. 328, Apr. 12, 1890).⁴ During the revolt, disciplining through physical punishment was discussed and condemned in the Chamber of Deputies and in the Senate, and its use suspended until new legislation was passed.

Until now we have reported the motivations most explored by the historiography to explain the revolt. In my research, I noticed that another one was lacking, one that is only cited by authors, but which was registered by Dias Martins as a collective demand of the sailors. They knew that it was no use getting rid of the lash and expelling officers who punished more than allowed by law. After all, how could they guarantee their own security on board the ships or units on land, if there were dangerous sailors who, after drinking *cachaça*, tripping over someone, or being rejected in love, would lose their reason, pull out their knives and threaten everyone’s lives? How could this serious problem be resolved? It was at this moment that the third demand came in: the government would have to “educate the sailors who did not” have the “competence to wear the proud uniform.” Various criminal processes showed

that rivalries between sailors on ships ended in fights, corporate lesions, and even murders (Nascimento, 2001, Chapter 1). Physical punishment and tough officers kept some sort of brake on the brawlers. The Navy urgently needed to be capable of educating and preparing their sailors for work and life in groups, reducing tensions.

Finally, there was the exhaustion due to the excess of work. Between 1909 and 1910 the Navy received various warships ordered years before from the English shipyard Armstrong, but their crews were incomplete and overloaded. Planned by a commanding office, each ship had a 'Table of Services' distributing the daily tasks to each sailor. Cleaning, maintenance, inspecting machinery, painting, victualling, etc., occupied the crew. To avoid being overburdened, the rebels drafted a new 'table of services' and demanded that this be fulfilled. Without a doubt, this was something unthinkable until that moment: sailors writing and proposing a new work routine for the ships, irrespective of their hierarchical 'superiors.' It represented a further insubordination, a form of surpassing the authority of officers.

The set of demands contained in the message sent to the president expressed the group conscience that the majority of those black sailors had achieved. Officers were white, hierarchically superior, educated in the best teaching institutions, belonging to wealthy families and defenders of the *esprit de corps*. Their privileges and images were undermined at that moment by poor, badly educated, black sailors – 70% of whom were illiterate (Coelho, 1911, p. 39).

This conscience increased with the arrival of the new navy ships mentioned above. Amongst these were the colossal dreadnoughts *Minas Gerais* and *São Paulo*, the most powerful warships in the world at that time. As we have said, they were not equipped with proper sized crews. Although hundreds of sailors had done courses in England, the 26 ships arriving in Brazil required the recruitment of hundreds more (Morgan, 2014, pp. 169-179). The increase in the demand for labor in the daily tasks combined with the small number of sailors led to discouraging results for officers, who exerted pressure with frantic corporal punishment. *Capitão de corveta* (Lieutenant Commander) Alberto Durão Coelho counted 911 punishments on board the new scout cruiser Bahia, committed by a team of 288 sailors on a trip to Chile. An “overwhelming and significant” number (Coelho, 1911, pp. 26, 39).

Complaints about these excesses were sent in an anonymous letter on 1 September 1910, written by one of the future leaders of the revolt, the sailor Francisco Dias Martins, who used the codename *Mão Negra* (Black Hand). He

said that he had “left his family to be a spectator of dishonored advertisements which deplored his character, your respect, and the brilliance of this deceived patria” (Coelho, 1911, p. 21). For this reason, he was “the slave of navy officers, and felt the lash, ‘the Lash,’ while twenty years after the establishment of the Brazilian Republic the *decrees enacted* are still not enough” (emphasis added).

This was a significant message and revealed the frustrations with the new regime. Long-serving navy officers knew to which ‘decrees’ Dias Martins was referring. The third decree of the Republic, dated 16 November 1889, extinguished corporal punishment in the Navy. However, on 12 April 1890, it was reinstated through the Correctional Company (a platoon of undisciplined sailors who were isolated from the others, losing rank and pay, as well as suffering lashes and humiliations). The first decree got the sailors drunk in a party on board their vessels, the second resulted in the ‘hangover’ of the day after (Nascimento, 2001). These decisions in the Republic had already become law when a large part of the generation of rebel sailors were born (Almeida, 2012, p. 28), but the memory of these decrees and the dissatisfaction with the Correction Company were alive in the daily life of sailors, even the youngest ones, such as Francisco Dias Martins, *Mão Negra*. Moreover, the sailors were not believers in the ideals of equality or the rights of man present in republican discourses.

For four days they held the city of Rio de Janeiro under siege. Firing the ships’ guns on the first night of the revolt, some houses were hit, with one family suffering casualties – some children died. During the following nights, they sailed around Guanabara Bay, anchoring the ships at night outside the bar. Following negotiations, the government decided to grant them an amnesty and discuss their demands in the Senate afterwards. It was much less than demanded, but possibly the effects of the revolt had been enough: they had gained for their cause the attention of all classes and all parts of the country; they had won the support of journalists and columnists dumbfounded with physical punishments which seemed to be from the times of slavery and the Monarchy; their demands had reached the presidency of the Republic, the Chamber of Deputies, and the Senate; and finally they were pardoned from the harsh penalties for the crimes committed. Having achieved these results, they preferred to end the revolt.

On the day that the officers regained control of the ships, photographers and reporters from the principal newspapers ‘invaded’ the ships and took photographs which made history.⁵Some were prearranged, such as when João

Cândido read the issue of *Diário Oficial* in which the amnesty decree was published. Certainly a reporter had put this into the hands of the leader of the revolt, with a photographer positioned for the ‘instantaneous’ moment.

They also captured the shock to the *esprit de corps* and the military hierarchy, by photographing the exact moment when the officer replacing Batista das Neves received command of *Minas Gerais* directly from four sailors, three blacks and a barefoot white. The military hierarchy is revealed and reinforced, for example, in the differences and subtleties of the uniforms used by officers, sergeants, and sailors. But it is also reaffirmed in the ceremonials for handing over command. Subordinates perceive the serious and grave look exchanged between the new and old commandant, the positioning of their bodies straight as the trunks of palm trees, the lateral meeting of their feet, which touched brusquely, and the salute with the right hand, first by the lower ranking person followed by the same gesture of the one with the higher rank, sometimes under the musical command of bugles, or even musical bands on the most festive days (Decreto n. 13753, Sept. 10, 1919). But the passing of command from a sailor to a lieutenant commander, for example, was not expected. Commonly this was done between a sergeant and a lieutenant, who then transferred it to the commanding officer.⁶ It could be undignified and even humiliating for a commanding officer to have this eye-to-eye contact with someone much further below them in the hierarchy than someone nearer in rank. This embarrassment of the new commander can be perceived in one of the most revealing photos of this day: the moment when a sailor handed over command of the largest ship in the world, the *Minas Gerais*. It can be clearly seen in this photo that the new commander did not wait for the end of the hand-over and began to walk away while the former commander, a black sailor, was saluting.

Obviously, the days following these photos were much more difficult, with the return of officers to the ships. Dealing with the former rebels, who had exposed their inhuman punitive methods which were similar to slavery and had murdered their hierarchical colleagues, was tense. This was further strained by the flagrant disregard for the amnesty, when the Ministry of the Navy dismissed sailors who had been pardoned. Nor did it stop there: the disarming of the guns of *Minas Gerais* and *São Paulo* was ordered, increasing the circulation of rumors and exchanges of threats. On 9 December another revolt exploded, this time on Cobras Island. Once again the city was shaken by bombardments. There is no precise dimension of how many died or were wounded (Samet, 2011).

Having defeated the second revolt, the Navy, the Police, and the Army began to act, arresting, torturing, exiling, or killing those involved. 16 died asphyxiated by inhaling lime using to clean the detritus of prisoners in a cell on Cobras Island, which turned into powder after the evaporation of the water. The keys for their cell were in the pockets of the officer commanding the island, who was absent at the moment of the fatality (Nascimento, 2008, pp. 67-70). Another eleven were shot onboard the ship *Satélite*, which was bringing 97 former sailors extradited to the north of the country, in order to work on the construction of the Madeira-Mamoré railway and the extraction of rubber. The eleven were accused of having organized a mutiny (Samet, 2011, pp. 275-276). The ‘load’ consisted of 200 men (former sailors and prisoners) and 44 prisoners from the *Casa de Correção*. Women reached their destinations in rags and starving like their colleagues from the crossing. They submitted or were sold to local entrepreneurs. The ship *Satélite*, a commercial packet steamer, appeared more like the last slave ship in the middle of the twentieth century. Those responsible for these crimes were never punished.

A GENERATION OF BLACK SAILORS IN THE POST-ABOLITION WORLD

To understand the possibilities of work for these black sailors and the path which led to the Navy, it is important to analyze which channels for finding employment were open to them in the final decades of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth. And, speaking of this, I start from the old dilemma about the destinations of the freed slaves at the end of the process of emancipation which abolished slave labor (Costa, 2013, pp. 161-162; Gomes; Cunha, 2007; Mattos; Rios, 2005). Certainly, there was a movement of former slaves to the cities, but this view hides a much more complex process, eclipsed by our stubbornness in seeing the attitudes of the past in an immediate and theological manner. As aptly noted by Walter Fraga, in discussing the post-abolition period in the Recôncavo Baiano area, the community and family ties woven and established during slavery “were fundamental for the survival of the freed black population and an important factor for settling in the locations where they resided” (Fraga Filho, 2006, p. 250). In addition, local conditions (negotiated labor contracts, forms of remunerations, housing, and possibilities of access to land) were on the horizon of expectations of former slaves by becoming judicially free.

Various forms of bonds were found (*meeiro, parceiro, peão, arrendatário, lavrador, agregado* etc.) between former slave owners and freed slaves, but

these are categories of polysemic analysis in the experience of so many forms of production in the country. These 'positions' were present in the daily life of the peasants (whether black or not) on plantations, in livestock raising, in mineral extraction, and in other activities, generally distant from the cities, which offered possibilities for the individual to reproduce their material conditions of existence (Weimer, 2013; Aguilar, 2012). Thus, the reality of a continental country such as ours, with strong regional differences, principally if we take into account the economic activities exercised, and whether or not European immigration had an impact (Silva, 2001, p. 86; Andrews, 1998; Butler, 2000), requires greater research to state how many and when former slaves and their descendants migrated and to where they migrated (Mattos; Rios, 2005; Fraga Filho, 2006; Costa, 2008; Marques, 2009).

However, there were those who migrated immediately to cities and even to other plantations. Mistreatment by plantation owners and the need to re-compose their family scattered by the sale of relatives during slavery led many freed slaves to migrate to other locations. Ana Lugão Rios and Hebe Mattos (2005, Parte II) have recorded the histories of families threatened by slave owners and for this reason they began to move away. Like the flights embarked on by slaves (Gomes, 2003, pp. 45-86), the path followed by those who preferred to leave their places of origin was not a simple one. The travelers so often put their few items of value on their backs and kept moving until they encountered a new place. Other works have illustrated this path to a new plantation or farm, in which individuals constructed their wattle and daub houses, and formed ties with landholders or tenants through a contract, whose payment was converted into foodstuffs or currency (Aguilar, 2012).

The families which remained, were tied to work through custom based contracts (*meação*, sharecropping, for example). In these system, they herded cattle, clear scrub, planted seeds, collected fruit, and looked after the various buildings on the plantation, even if all they got for this, in the cases of extreme exploitation, just a liter of lard for each task carried out (Aguilar, 2012, p. 107). Those who had the right to small plots planted to complement the what their families could eat, and in certain conditions, they could even improve their quality of live and socially improve (Weimer, 2013, p. 312).

As we can see, the complexity of the destinies of the freed slaves shows an enriching side of history when compared to the, already very criticized, one (Hasenbalg, 1979; Chalhoub, 2001; Nascimento, 2005) which argued that blacks migrated *en masse* to the cities, lived in the *favelas*, women prostituting themselves and men becoming outsiders. Some collections, for example, have

illustrated other forms of investigating freed slaves and their descendants in the post-abolition period, revealing the experiences of urban work of these men, women, and children in the most diverse areas, such as industry, domestic work, sports, music, theater, the press, school, the armed forces, the construction of railways, and the professions (Gomes; Cunha, 2007; Abreu; Pereira, 2011). Obviously, these perspectives are already well known by those who have focused on the area for some time.

In a rudimentary form, the Navy offered opportunities for housing, food, wages, travel to see the world, some professional specialization, and stability in their economic activity for between 6 and 15 years (this time was obligatory; evasion was seen as a crime of desertion). It was not by chance that during the nineteenth century, fugitive slaves voluntarily chose to be sailors, as if they were free, and dozens of them were found by their owners on board Navy ships, already recruited (Nascimento, 2000; Kraay, 1998). The armed forces, even with their vast source of problems, could therefore emerge as a solution for those who did not have many opportunities.

The blacks involved in the revolt found in the Navy an option for their lives. In addition, to the absence of universal free formal education, families also faced a series of difficulties keeping their children in schools where they were registered (Veiga, 2008). As the children of poor families, they had to help their parents or themselves, even at an early age. Although the Navy offered the guarantees outlined above, it also had a cruel side, with corporal punishments and a rigid military regime. Very few people enlisted voluntarily. The most common form was the registration of children and young men in the Naval Apprenticeship Schools scattered throughout the country. Brought there by parents, judges with responsibility for orphans, and guardians, these minors received a rudimentary practical and theoretical education and suffered punishments, with many being the victim of sexual violence (Nascimento, 2001; Beattie, 2009). The officers preferred to register these boys since they had the possibility of disciplining them in the military life before they became adults. It was in this way that during the second half of the nineteenth century the Navy gradually ended forced recruitment, which hunted beggars, prisoners, vagrants, and poor workers. The intention was to better select those entering the Navy, and many measures were defined on this basis, seeking to attract more youths, although their implementation left a lot to be desired.

The labor market was very competitive in the most populous and rich cities (immigrants and migrants frequently sought them) such as Rio de Janeiro, at the turn of the twentieth century. Regions in economic crisis, such as the North

and Northeast, had limited income and employment opportunities, forcing people to migrate. Moving in search of work and contracts signed with employers resulted in the former slaves and their descendants facing difficult moments and situations. With the racism existing at the time and depending on the region, possibilities of employment became even more rare for blacks than for whites. The armed forces could be a solution to overcome these barriers.

Silvia Capanema Almeida (2009, pp. 160-161) had access to the first records of the Navy Identification Office, established in 1908, and analyzed personal data that previously were impossible to obtain, such as the age group of sailors. According to her, 'the majority' of matriculated sailors had been born after 1888, with ages that varied between 17 and 22. Part of these youths could be grandchildren or children of slaves. Color was a great indication of this. According to the observations of First Lieutenant José Eduardo de Macedo Soares (1911, p. 85), in the "garrisons 50% were black, 30% mulatto, 10% *caboclo* (with Indian and black ancestry), 10% white or almost white."

To verify this quantity, I analyzed the books of the Thirteen Company of National Sailors. 72 men were registered there, of whom 21 were listed as 'colored,' 15 'black,' 13 'white,' two as '*caboclo*,' one as 'mulatto,' while the color of 20 was not listed. If we count only those individuals whose color was mentioned to calculate the percentage of each color in the Thirteen Company, we can see that of these – in other words, 52 individuals –, 40.38% were mixed, 28.85% black, 25% white, 3.85% *caboclos* and 1.92% mulattos. In other words, 75% were considered black or mixed, confirming the observation of Macedo Soares.

Finally, Silvia Capanema Almeida corroborated this data through the analysis of Book 1 of the Navy Identification Office. Her data shows the following:

56.4% mixed, 20% white, 11.6% black, 10.4% *morenos* (dark), 1.2% 'tanned whites,' and 0.4% 'light mixed.' 68% of the total of those identified were black or mixed, in other words, almost 70% of them were considered non-white. (Almeida, 2012, p. 17).

The oldest of the sailors involved and prosecuted was the leader of the revolt, the black *gaucho* João Cândido. He is an example of what is usually called '*ventre livre*' (free womb, i.e., born after the law making the children of slaves free).⁷ His father was a *tropeiro* or muleteer in the current municipality of Encruzilhada do Sul and he was freed years before marrying Ignácia, mother of João Cândido (Nascimento, 2011). The case of the leader of the revolt was

the closest to slavery that I arrived after doing research in documents archived in Porto Alegre; certainly an investigation of the others involved will also show such a relationship. Nonetheless, all of them had a very real and close memory of slavery. They had lived with freed slaves among relatives, acquaintances, or neighbors (Mattos; Rios, 2005).

As accurately stated by Silvia Capanema Almeida (2012, p. 17), slavery was present “as a personal experience or collective memory” of those sailors, who recalled this in other part of the message of the sailors to the president, dated 22 November 1910, in which they presented themselves as: “Brazilian citizens and republicans [who] can no ... longer put up with slavery in the Brazilian Navy...”

RACISM IN THE BRAZILIAN NAVY

Racism could be found in the pens of a large part of the writers of the time. Believing in science which explained the difference between human beings based on racial theories, many authors used these ideas when they formed opinions based on a new text (Schwarcz, 1993). Rivalries in the workplace between workers and between the latter and their employers also had racial motivations (Ribeiro, 1987). Job advertisements expressed an unconcealed racial option of the contractors (Damasceno, 2011; Peçanha, 2013). In the Navy, this scenario was no different.

Among the military forces, the Navy was the most elitist. Its ships were received abroad by diplomats, governors, heads of state, military officers, industrialists, etc. Its officers had to be able to speak French and English, follow the rules for commemorative dinners, participate in soirees, dance in ballrooms, have vast erudition. It was a real problem for them to have a crew of black sailors when visiting other countries. As stated in the editorial of *Estado de S. Paulo* newspaper, on 5 June 1911:

One of these groups, the least numerous, is constituted by the officers. The other group, much more numerous, constitutes the proletariat in shirts or uniforms, the people do not have the right to dream with the braids and the advantages of the officers. The officer was never a sailor. The sailor can never be an officer ... to become an officer it is necessary to belong to the rich bourgeoisie, to have money to spend on winning the braid in the Naval School and *to be the least mixed or the most white possible.*

José Eduardo de Macedo Soares (1911) was one of these officers and condemned the system of military recruitment since it incorporated a large number of black men, who he judged guilty for the evils which annihilated the Navy in 1910. According to him, 'laziness,' the 'incapacity to progress,' the addictions of gambling, alcoholism, fighting, sexual violence, the *sambas* (conflicts), wasting without saving, and so many other customs reproved by the young white office, were evils innate to blacks. For him,

The first impression produced by a Brazilian garrison is decadence and physical incapacity. Blacks are stunted, look bad with all the depressing signs of the most backward African nations. The other races are submitted to the influence of the environment created by those always in the majority. Profoundly alien to any notion of comfort, our sailors dress badly, do not know how to eat, do not know how to sleep. Improvident and lazy they bring from their race the incapacity to progress. (Soares, 1911, pp. 85-86)

Without demonstrating any concern with the press – after all he was writing under a cloak of anonymity, though he signed as a 'navy officer,' representing the entire class of 'superiors' –, he defended that corporal punishment was above all a 'necessity,' a form of fighting both 'vicious' sailors on the decks and holds of vessels. For this reason, José Eduardo Macedo Soares was indignant with politicians who during the revolt criticized officers for the practice of 'inhuman' punishment, which recalled slavery, and finally for having amnestied the murderers of Batista das Neves and other officers who had fallen carrying out their duty in the name of order and discipline. He therefore exposed all his racial prejudice and explanatory immediatism in a few lines, like a harsh decree:

The officers of the navy were always part of the choicest part of Brazilian high society; why does it deserve less credit when it states that there is an indispensable need for punishment than the unworthy politicians who advocate their own unconscious interests exploiting a false piety for the *black lout who kills and robs?* Change the situation of the garrisons: it is the duty of politics to legislate and of the government, and afterwards it is open for humanitarianism. *While the garrison is the sewage of society, discipline, order, and security have their rights, and the lash its place.*

He, therefore, proclaimed a total change in the ranks of the navy, starting with the removal of this mass of sailors. After all, the appearance of machinery, telegraphs, the ironclads, electricity, and so many other technological

innovations meant that there was a need for better qualifications for both officers and sailors. Given the ‘evils’ resulting from the ‘race’ of the latter, there was no way to demand from them literacy and training to face the new challenges imposed by modern navies. Worse: while blacks were in the majority, only corporal punishments – including the lash – could dominate that mass, guaranteeing the foundations of order and good military discipline.

Five years after this book began to circulate in the bookshops of Rio de Janeiro, Álvaro Bomilcar (1916) published *O preconceito de raça no Brasil*, which directly dialogued with José Eduardo de Macedo Soares’ work. The former had a degree in Law, but had veered towards journalism, literature, and sociology, as well as exercising various positions in the judiciary. He was one of the most important collaborators of the *Gil Blas* journal alongside Afonso Celso, later allying with Jackson de Figueiredo in the foundation of the *Braziléa* journal. He was one of the fervent anti-Portuguese intellectuals who lived at the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. His discourse questioned the racial prejudice in Brazil and criticized the absorption of the racial theories of Gobineau and Cuvier by part of the Brazilian elite, but his anti-Portuguese convictions marked the content and the integrity of the book which of interest to our discussion. He was accused of *Lusophobia* by many intellectuals of his time (Jesus, 2012, pp. 54-57).

It is hard to leaf through the book and not perceive the weight given to what he identifies as a national problem: the Portuguese and their descendants, the white Brazilians. This was who Bomilcar accused of implementing inhumane measures against the black population and, principally, the indigenous people since the colonization of the country. Nor is it difficult to observe, during the reading of this work, that on the one hand were the white officers, and on the other were the black sailors. After introducing the reader in the book to the history of the Revolt of the whip, it is revealed that the officers are guilty, since they distanced themselves from the black crew by understanding themselves to be racially superior: white descendants of Portuguese. Bomilcar, thus, did not believe in the superiority of one race over another. The difference was more historical and evolved more. According to Bomilcar,

While today, more than in the past, it would be too coarse and biased to confer on the white the monopoly of intelligence, it would be no less daring to deny moral qualities to the native American, abundancies of cordial impulses to the children of arid Africa, treasures of patience and foresight to the pertinacious Mongol. (Bomilcar, 1916, pp. 46-47)

In the vision of Bomilcar (1916, p. 58), the Portuguese was white and represented the ‘pernicious influence’ which hindered the ‘progress’ of Brazil. He verified his positions with the growth of regions of the South colonized by Nordic Europeans. According to Mônica Pimenta Veloso (2001), Bomilcar represented “a current of thought which associated the idea of modern to anti-Lusitanism, identifying Portugal with our colonial backwardness.”

However, Álvaro Bomilcar goes further and raises other thorny questions. He complained that the theorists always said that the problem of Brazil was ‘race,’ but he asked, “who has the reins of executive power? Was it the ‘almost-Indians,’ the ‘almost-blacks’? ... No ... it has always been an almost-Portuguese.” His questioning is expanded not just to politicians, but also to the press, justice will reach the officers of the armed forces, principally the Navy. All the individuals cited by Bomilcar were white, whites descended from Portuguese, the least intelligent and developed among the Europeans. For this reason, he thought it a mistake for ‘our’ whites to complain about the intelligence of blacks and Indians.

Finally, he also showed that in the defense of privilege these white individuals were capable of everything. In a democratic regime, ‘privileges,’ had to be extinguished, but the division was maintained between the Naval School, which trained officers and was reserved to whites, and the Naval Apprentices which was for the ‘dark-skinned’: “Even when a dark *mestiço* has enough means to pay the costs of his education, the examiner, at the service of prejudice, knows how to construct ‘a barrier’ against him in the admission exams to the [Naval] School” (Bomilcar, 1916, pp. 98-99).

CONCLUSION

The evils of racial discrimination are common to the history of the majority of the black population in the post-abolition period. Economic and social descent made feasible the legacy of the capitals (economic, cultural, intellectual) crucial to the future of the descendent. The problem was and is how to access this place overcoming racial discrimination.

Scientific racism created an explanation for the differences between human beings. Various interests (conquest of rich territories, production of primary materials for consumption by industries and peoples in the richest countries, submission of populations to the poorest countries, the reduction of political rights of blacks, native and Asiatic populations, etc.) were also at play at the moment of creating barriers for social ascension.

The texts of José Eduardo de Macedo Soares and Álvaro Bomilcar showed these barriers more than one hundred years ago. The former wanted to remove all blacks from their positions in the Navy, not seeing any way they could do their work in a proper manner. He believed in the differences of races, saw officers as superiors, as they were whites, and saw blacks as the garbage of society. Bomilcar, although he was a questionable *Lusophobe*, fought against racism and attacked the ‘barriers’ imposed by instructors, contractors, etc., who these blacks had to get past.

Black sailors thought very differently and included education for the least educated sailors as the third demand on the message to the president. Furthermore, they rejected the position of officers who transferred the slave relations existing in the old plantations to the decks of ships and the barrack yards. For this reason, Francisco Dias Martins felt frustrated for having “left the heart of his family to be a spectator in dishonorable advertisements which deplored his character ... and the brightness of this deceived patria.” He felt that he was a “slave of the navy officers” (Coelho, 1911, p. 21).

That generation of sailors was conscious of the place reserved to them, to the daily problems of the Navy, the conceit of most officers, the racialization established by barriers of color. They were so capable of commanding a ship that Gilberto Amado, in his column in *O Paiz*, on 27 November 1910, stated that João Cândido was a ‘professional’ who “did not need courses in schools, in trips to Europeans capitals, and in the elegant salons around the world to maneuver with a miraculous ability.” After all, the rebel ships were under the command of sailors, with João Cândido being the head of the four vessels. Obviously, we know that the education and professional training is fundamental to exercise the daily activities of a ship, but those rebels could not be officers as they were blacks and for not having the necessary sociability, they lacked the simplest education and carried on their skin the color prohibited in the Hall of Arms.

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NOTES

¹ Doutorado em História (Unicamp, 2002), Professor Associado de História do Brasil, UFRRJ.

² NASCIMENTO (2001, Chapter 2). In this paper, it can be perceived that the deprivation of liberty (confinement in prison) was used when the sailor had been condemned after being tried for a crime. The court was military, entitled the Council of War.

³ CARVALHO (1912, p. 355). The federal deputy José Carlos de Carvalho visited the rebels on the morning of 23 November, received the message and brought it to the president. He was a retired officer and had proposed a law to increase the pay of sailors. This must have facilitated his boarding of the ship. It was also him who described to his colleagues and to the senators, the scenario of death and physical punishments which he witnessed during the visit.

⁴ This decree, known as *Companhia Correccional* (Correctional Campaign), substituted the *Articles of War* in force in the Empire (Nascimento, 2008).

⁵ See the editions of 27 November 1910 of *O País*, *Correio da Manhã* and *Gazeta de Notícias* newspapers. Also see the edition of the subsequent week of *O Malho*.

⁶ Cabin Boy, 1st and 2nd Class Sailor, Sergeant, Lieutenant, Second Lieutenant, Lieutenant Commander, Commander, Admiral.

⁷ Arquivo Histórico da Cúria Metropolitana de Porto Alegre – Livro de registro de batismo, Rio Pardo, Livro nº 24, 1881 a 1882, folha 61. “On the twentieth of January of 1882, in this District of Rio Pardo, in a private oratory in the district of Capivary, I solemnly baptized and put the scared oils on João, born on the fifteenth of January 1882, the legitimate son of João Felisberto Pires and Ignacia Candida Pires, slave of Firmino José Moreira. The godparents were José Antonio da Silveira Franco and Eugenia Amalia de Souza Franco. For this I ordered this certificate to be drafted.”