

THE INEQUALITY EXPERIENCED IN THE MIGRATION OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS OF THE AFRICAN CONTINENT

A DESIGUALDADE SENTIDA NA MIGRAÇÃO DE ESTUDANTES UNIVERSITÁRIOS PROVENIENTES DO CONTINENTE AFRICANO

LA DESIGUALDAD QUE SE SIENTE EN LA MIGRACIÓN DE ESTUDIANTES UNIVERSITARIOS DEL CONTINENTE AFRICANO

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ABSTRACT: Migration flows have been present for many decades and are related to social, cultural, and territorial processes. This article analyzed, based on the discourse of students from the African continent enrolled in Higher Education institutions, the inequalities felt during the displacement process, expanding the look at the phenomenon of temporary international migration, and elaborating the meanings attributed to the experiences of these individuals. The speeches were divided into three themes: experience in Brazil, prejudice experienced and marks of migration. Throughout the study, it became clear that these factors crossed the lives of these young people and permeated their permanence within Brazilian universities, which are indicators of how diversity has been treated by our society today. It became evident the need for universities to have better preparation for the reception and setting of these students in order to minimize inequalities in opportunities, increasing the possibilities for an intercultural dialogue.

KEYWORDS: Migration. African students. Psychology. Inequality. University.

RESUMO: Os fluxos migratórios estão presentes há muitas décadas e possuem relação com processos sociais, culturais e territoriais. O presente artigo analisou, a partir do discurso de estudantes provenientes do continente africano matriculados em instituições de Ensino Superior, as desigualdades sentidas durante o processo deslocamento, ampliando o olhar frente ao fenômeno da migração internacional temporária e elaborando os significados atribuídos as experiências desses indivíduos. O conteúdo dos discursos foi dividido em três temas: a experiência no Brasil, o preconceito vivido e as marcas da migração. Ao longo do estudo ficou explícito que esses fatores atravessaram a vida desses jovens e permearam suas permanências dentro das universidades brasileiras, sendo eles indicadores de como a

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diversidade vem sendo tratada por nossa sociedade atualmente. Ficou evidente a necessidade de as Universidades possuírem melhor preparo na recepção e ambientação desses alunos, a fim de minimizar as desigualdades de oportunidades, aumentando as possibilidades de um diálogo intercultural.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Migração. Estudantes africanos. Psicologia. Desigualdade. Universidade.

RESUMEN: Los flujos migratorios están presentes desde hace muchas décadas y están relacionados con procesos sociales, culturales y territoriales. Este artículo analizó, a partir del discurso de estudiantes del continente africano matriculados en instituciones de Educación Superior, las desigualdades sentidas durante el proceso de desplazamiento, ampliando la mirada al fenómeno de la migración internacional temporal y elaborando los significados atribuidos a las vivencias de estos individuos. Los discursos se dividió en tres temas: experiencia en Brasil, prejuicio vivido y huellas de la migración. Estos factores atravesaron la vida de estos jóvenes y permearon su permanencia en las universidades brasileñas, que indican cómo la diversidad ha sido tratada por nuestra sociedad hoy. Se hizo evidente la necesidad de que las Universidades tengan una mejor preparación para la acogida y ambientación de estos estudiantes con el fin de minimizar las desigualdades en las oportunidades, aumentando las posibilidades de un diálogo intercultural.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Migración. Estudiantes africanos. Psicología. Desigualdad. Universidad.

Introduction

Migratory flows have been part of our society for many decades. They are related to social processes of domination, invasion, market, and territorial conquests. The increasing rate of migration flows, currently, has a direct relationship with the history of colonization and development of countries, with global economic inequalities and political/ethnic conflicts (BADI, 2015). Factors such as: displacement for economic motivations; unemployment rates in different urban areas; the scarcity of natural resources; the coming of intellectuals and well qualified professionals in various areas, who seek better living conditions in other countries, regions or continents; and insufficient access to professional qualifications contribute to migratory movements today, especially for African emigration, leading young people to move in search of university education (BARRETO; COUTINHO; RIBEIRO, 2009).

This study aimed to analyze, from the main speeches obtained in the doctoral thesis defended in the Postgraduate Studies Program in Clinical Psychology at the Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo entitled “Intercultural Dialogues within a Brazilian University” (FIGUEIREDO, 2013), the inequalities felt during the unique experiences of

displacement of university students enrolled in institutions of Higher Education from different regions of the African continent, expanding the look at the phenomenon of temporary international migration and elaborating the meanings attributed to this experience of these individuals. To this end, this article used a qualitative theoretical and bibliographical approach to analyze, based on the discourse of students, the experiences of several young people from African countries in a Brazilian university and point out the difficulties they face in adapting, from the planning for their arrival in the country to their relationships with professors and colleagues. In addition, the theme of open or veiled prejudice, present both in relations with Brazilians and among African groups, was addressed. To collect information, semi-structured interviews were carried out with six students who experienced temporary international migration, who were undergraduate students at the Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo. Thus, the issues raised were divided into categories that will be related and discussed below.

Brazil as reported and Brazil as experienced

In 1965 the first Protocol for Undergraduate Student Agreement Program (PEC-G) was launched, according to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the idea of creating a Government Program to support students from other countries came from the increase in the number of foreigners in Brazil in the 1960s, and the consequences that this brought to the internal regulation of the status of these students in Brazil. Africa is the continent of origin of most of the students; over the last decade, more than 6,000 students were selected by the Program. Among the African participating nations are Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau and Angola. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Brazil currently has approximately 17,000 foreign students enrolled in undergraduate courses, comprising 176 different nationalities.

According to INEP - Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais Anísio Teixeira Legislation and Documents (2018), 45.6% of foreign students attending undergraduate courses in Brazil, come from the African continent, with Angola, the country with the largest number of foreign students. According to Amaral (2013), young Africans come to Brazil in increasing numbers to pursue university studies. The opportunities offered cover both public and private higher education. Free vacancies are offered in undergraduate courses at Higher Education Institutions, UNILAB (University of Integration of Afro-Brazilian Lusophony) and the Undergraduate Student Agreement (PEC-G) and Graduate Student Agreement (PEC-PG) programs, aimed at the training and qualification of foreign

students. The process of immigration of young people from African communities in search of higher studies in Brazilian institutions has been happening for almost six decades, a factor that motivates the creation of African communities in large cities in the country, such as João Pessoa, Fortaleza, São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Curitiba, and Porto Alegre (MENDONÇA, 2017).

In this category we analyzed the reasons why young migrants chose Brazil as a destination, their expectations due to a previously constructed image in their country of origin and actual experiences they had in Brazil when making the migration process. These students believe that Brazil has a lower cost of living if compared to others, such as USA, Portugal, and Australia, for example. In addition, the social, historical, educational, economic, and cultural specificities generate bonds of friendship that unite Brazil with the countries of the African continent (SUBUHANA, 2009). Mendes (2012) and Subuhana (2009) also explore the attractive aspects associated with the image conveyed by Brazilian tourism agencies and Brazilian media in African countries. The African and Portuguese heritages provide the approximation between the most diverse cultural environments belonging to the Portuguese speaking African Countries (PALOP) and Brazil.

The young Africans report feeling the contrast with the whole image that motivated them to be here when they disembark in São Paulo, the largest city in Brazil. We cannot forget that Brazilian society itself insists on the discourse of a multicultural country, in which there is harmony among people of different origins, which does not match the social hierarchy that crosses classes, especially historically vulnerable groups (LIMA, 2017). The presence of these young people in a Brazilian University brings the possibility of experiencing the diverse in the daily life of this University, constituting the relationships that will be established throughout the years of graduation, where encounters take place in an intercultural, diverse, and different way. According to Nhaga (2013), these displacements also include the exchange of values, in which ideas about certain facts and events are created and recreated.

These factors can be observed in the desire to get to know a country that is usually happy, fun, with nice people, as the young Africans reveal in their speeches. Involved by preconceived images about their future in the coming years (graduation period), the information transmitted by the Brazilian media, which constantly links the idea that in Brazil there is racial pacification (SILVA; ROSEMBERG, 2008), reflects certain places of stereotyping and objectification of black people, mainly related to soccer and carnival. Another example of this objectification is the image of the black Brazilian woman metaphorized in the figure of the mulatto that occurs peacefully in the country (KALY, 2001).

Different emotions compose this scenario in which the imaginary Brazil is faced with the real Brazil, causing great impact on young people and their future. And it is with this contrast that they begin their great journey towards the fulfillment of their dreams, the discoveries of a new culture, a new people, with habits and customs different from their own.

Prejudice and its different shades

From the group analyzed, it was possible to observe the complexity of the issue of prejudice in the narratives of the young people. Some said they did not feel the prejudice, others said they did, but that they did not suffer the impact on their migration, and still others related the prejudice to the lack of information about the African Continent. Regarding those who said they did not feel it, the speeches showed that it was as if these young people had not experienced exclusion or prejudice during their experiences. In this way, it is possible to think that the matrix of prejudice, in these cases, would not have been built within them and, therefore, they do not denominate or mean what we often call prejudice as such.

As for those who said they felt, it was possible to observe that many of these temporary migrant students perceive, even today, in the 21st century, the issues of racial prejudice as themes experienced by Brazilians all the time, explicitly or not. This phenomenon makes up the temporary international migration of these young people from the African Continent, who are often judged for their blackness (FIGUEIREDO, 2013). The racial issue in Brazil is intrinsically related to social and economic issues, these two structuring factors being primordial for the generation of the country's great inequalities and poverty. According to Teixeira (2010), "Brazilian racism" is about discriminating in a subtle way without appearing to discriminate. It is characteristic of Brazilian society the "brand" prejudice where the more evident the phenotype, the more the appearance is black, the greater the prejudice (MÜLLER *et al.*, 2009).

Individuals who belong to minority groups (TAJFEL, 1982) inserted in societies that have their structure based on power inequalities are consequently at the mercy of multiple forms of exclusion. Such conflicts reflect in the social identity, in the relationships and formation of the subjects. In this way, relationships end up being established because of belonging to one or other groups, through processes of social exclusion/inclusion (SAWAIA, 2008). The power and domination relations between different groups that share the same social place, crossed by practices of discrimination and exclusion, have repercussions in suffering, in different ways.

The individualizing dimension of the prejudice problem has been overcome by the sociological approach, which directs it to an equally broader understanding that has as references the relations between the dialectical processes of exclusion and inclusion and social groups (SAWAIA, 2008). Lima and Vala (2004), in turn, identify racism as a process of hierarchization, estrangement, and discrimination against an individual or an entire social category that is defined as different based on some external physical mark, be it real or imaginary, which is re-signified as a cultural mark that defines behavioral patterns. Muller *et al.* (2009) state that prejudice against the black population in the country originates in a historical process that intended to keep black Brazilians as second-class citizens. Such process took place through the dissemination of hundreds of negative images against people. The external physical mark, in the case of Brazilian racism, are the African descendant features, such as the shape of the face, skin color, and hair style. The cultural mark, besides the different stereotypes established as part of the sociocultural environment, can be identified by the different popular manifestations associated with the idea of race and class.

According to Kaly (2001) and Subuhana (2005), racial prejudice is the main cause of unease in Brazilian lands; and being a university student and a foreigner mitigates the negative experience of racial discrimination. Langa (2014) showed that African students, in their daily lives, perceive Brazilians' difficulty in calling them by their first names, replacing them with other categories of nicknames. The treatment received by African students in Brazilian society are the same treatments directed to the local black population, stereotypes related to dangerousness, marginality, poverty, ignorance, among others (KALY, 2001). The association between skin color and poverty nurtures prejudice against foreign students living in Brazil and generates different embarrassing situations of racism (SUBUHANA, 2005). For Lima and Vala (2004, p. 407), Brazilian-style racism "has nothing cordial about it, since it implies a sinister scenario of discrimination and exclusion." Tcham (2012, p. 50) states that "in general, the black African student in Brazil, regardless of social status in his country of origin, is almost always placed in the most inferior and humiliated social strata of society. Thus, it is possible to observe that racial differences are still treated in our country and in our universities not only as differences, but as inequalities, implying a scenario of exclusion in which people have little cultural competence to deal with the different.

Marks imprinted by migration

Migration for the purpose of academic qualification has been gaining notoriety within academic research because it is increasingly frequent, multifaceted, and complex (BROOKS; WATERS, 2011; OLWIG; VALENTIN, 2015). For Kaly (2001), since the nineteenth century Brazil has the tradition of receiving young people from African countries in Brazilian educational institutions. According to the author, the sons and daughters of some Angolan and Mozambican dignitaries were sent to be educated in schools in Rio de Janeiro. The flows between Africa and Brazil can be analyzed from their historical aspects that are directly related to the colonial and post-colonial processes experienced by both peoples. From the narratives of young people in relation to the experience of temporary international migration, it is possible to see that this fact can be a transformer in their lives, not only of themselves, but also of families, communities, a people, and even a nation. It is understood that the subject that migrates is not only driven by economic issues, typical of traditional migration, but also by objective and subjective factors related to the migratory experience and the reality they encounter in the host countries (GUSMÃO, 2012). The students' speech demonstrates difficulties that make up a scenario of struggle, challenges, and achievements, not only in a personal and unique way, but also because they represent a people in search of better possibilities for study and opportunities. This fact involves "being here (Brazil) and being from there (Africa). It involves being African, foreigner, and black "out of place" and they occur as a reflection of the relations in process, established in the social context of welcome and that has a contradictory and conflicting dimension that, as Silva (2005) points out, requires to be understood since it is associated with losses and separations, but also with reunions, returns, and cultural reconstructions. These are people who believe it is possible to turn dreams into reality and transform history, migration being an experience that highlights memory.

According to Danticat (1998) individual experiences and memories are also social and collective, since through the act of remembering an individual shares some moments of his past experience. It is believed that a great part of memory is built from family experiences, and that these experiences almost always include narratives about their country of origin. Sarlo (2007) points out that memory leaves no doubt that its sources and its narratives are memories of its experiences, "memory that may have been borrowed from family members and that the most substantial part comes from stories told over the years by the mother and father or relatives as a whole. These memories are recreated in contexts of migration and

usually force one to look forward and backward at the same time, thus keeping the complex decision of whether to stay or return always burning.

Final considerations

We realize that students coming from different countries in Africa are not guided by a single identity, culture, and tradition. It is understood that "what they are" and "what they express" are made up not only of concrete historical relations, of the past and the present in their various and different nations, but also of the relations that they build in their daily lives, in the here and now of their existence and, in a particular way, within the University and the educational process. It was possible to observe, from what was raised in this study, that immigration brings a series of impacts on the lives of young African students and influences the way they mean their migration experiences, permeating issues such as the difficulty of adaptation, academic performance, and isolation (GUSMÃO, 2011).

Based on the students' speeches, it was clear that issues related to prejudice, migratory experiences and experiences in Brazil are factors that crossed the lives of these young people and permeated their permanence inside Brazilian universities. The categories that were raised are indicators of how issues related to diversity are currently being dealt with by our society. Thus, it is evident the need for universities to be better prepared to receive and welcome these students, in order to minimize inequalities of opportunities and increase the possibilities of an intercultural dialogue.

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