

**"WHAT IF?" IMPLODING THE PILLARS OF MODERNITY: A REVIEW ON THE BOOK *A DÍVIDA IMPAGÁVEL***

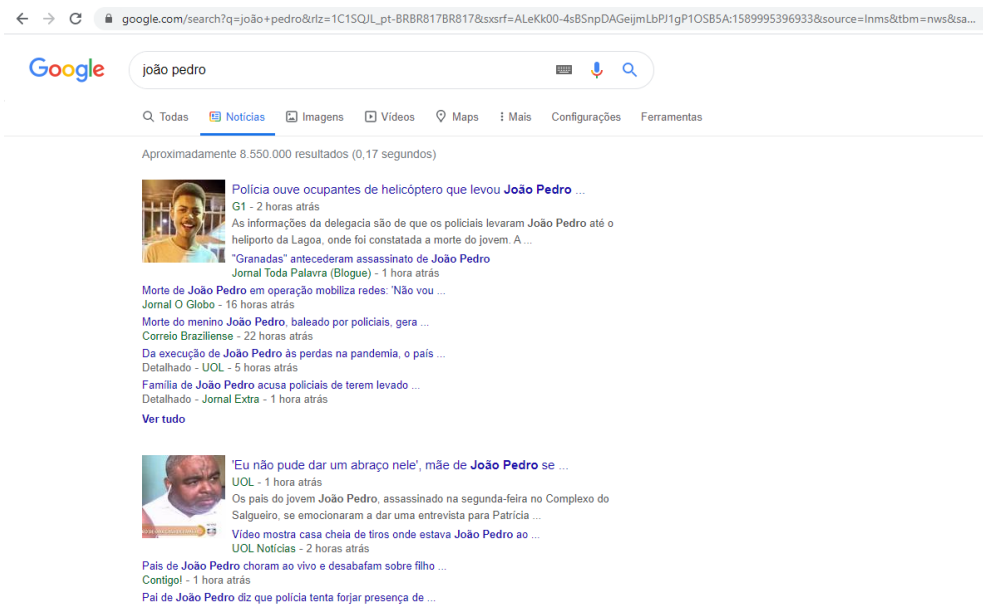
**“E SE?” IMPLODINDO OS PILARES DA MODERNIDADE: UMA RESENHA SOBRE O LIVRO *A DÍVIDA IMPAGÁVEL***

**“¿Y SI?” EN BUSCA DE LOS PILARES DE LA MODERNIDAD: UNA REVISIÓN DEL LIBRO *A DÍVIDA IMPAGÁVEL***

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[...] as an anti-dialectical image, *A Dívida Impagável* does nothing more than register, in trying to interrupt, the unfolding of the perverse logic that occludes the way in which, since the end of the 19th century, raciality has operated as a ethical arsenal together – inside, alongside, and always-now – in front of the legal-economic architectures that constitute the State-Capital pair (FERREIRA DA SILVA, 2019, p. 33, author's emphasis, our translation).

**Figure 1** – News about the murder of João Pedro, a 14-year-old black man, in São Gonçalo-RJ, during the operation of the federal and civil police in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, on 18 May 2020.



Source: Google search print with the name João Pedro

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Why is not there a global and not just a local ethical crisis with the deaths of young black people by the State? What is the role of raciality in modern thought? And if we abandon the critical procedures that are based on the ontological and epistemological foundations of modernity, what would happen? These are the main questions posed by Ferreira da Silva<sup>2</sup> in *A Dívida Impagável* (2019). In the book, the author takes raciality as a focus and deals with the importance of a complete transformation of thought from a *black feminist poetic* perspective that would be able to bring down the pillars of modernity<sup>3</sup>, in order to constitute a distinct world in ethical terms, political, legal and aesthetic. Ferreira da Silva makes a scathing critique of modern thought; the one located (historically and politically) where colonial, capitalist and patriarchal tentacles landed and instituted a societal mode.

Denise Ferreira da Silva (2019) proposes, in fact, “the end of the world as we know it”<sup>4</sup>. Since for the author, this world as we know it is supported by pillars that never included and would not include enslaved and indigenous people, those subjugated/expropriated individuals centuries ago. After all, the way we think within the norms of this world would only allow us to talk about exclusion and discrimination, not allowing us to articulate a discourse capable of going to the center of racial violence, which is, fundamentally, colonial violence (which is physical, because even kills and also expropriates not only materially). Ferreira da Silva then carries out a mapping of modern Western thought, especially via philosophy, seeking its ontological and epistemological bases.

In her mapping of modern thought, Denise Ferreira da Silva, in addition to dialoguing with classical physics, biological anthropology, as well as with anthropology and sociology up to the present time, takes up authors such as René Descartes (1596-1650), Kant (1724-1804) and Hegel (1770-1831). The reconstruction that he presents from Descartes and his maxim “I think, therefore I am” is fundamental, responsible for the separation between body and mind and, thus, for the construction of the modern subject as a self-determined subject that can know the World, but that to it do not mix. With Kant, the author traces back the subject that would be a scientific subject, in a system guided by the power of reason and separated from the sphere of the divine. And, with Hegel, the author deals with her critique of Kantian thought and the proposition of the dialectical method.

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<sup>3</sup> Explained below.

<sup>4</sup> Researcher speech in: O Evento Racial, Uma Proposição de Denise Ferreira da Silva. (ALI DO ESPIRITO SANTO, 2017)

From the notions briefly mentioned, Ferreira da Silva, in order to answer the questions (ethical, legal and sociological) that open this text, goes back to what would be the three pillars of modern thought, named as: *separability*, *determinability* and *sequentiality*, which would support modern thinking operating “in the ethical syntax in which indifference, as a moral position (common and public), makes sense” (FERREIRA DA SILVA, 2019, p. 127, our translation). In other words, an ethics guided by the logic of exclusion and obliteration, internally articulated by racial subjugation. It is, in this sense, that the onto-epistemological pillars identified by the author support a world in which young black people are murdered by state forces and this does not create an ethical-legal crisis in global terms.

Ferreira da Silva reveals the modes of operation of modern thinking in relation to raciality through the aforementioned categories constructed from its mapping, highlighting what is in dispute when her proposal is to subvert the forms of thought bequeathed by modernity in favor of thinking about the world *otherwise*<sup>5</sup>. Thus, these ontoepistemological pillars are analyzed throughout the four essays that make up the book, thus divided: *Introduction: (Di)Ante(s) do Texto*; chapter I. *A Ser Anunciado ou Conhecendo (n)os Limites da Justiça*; chapter II. *Para uma Poética Negra Feminista: A Busca /Questão da Negridade Para o (Fim do) Mundo*; chapter III. *1 (vida) ÷ 0 (negridade) = ∞ – ∞ ou ∞/∞: sobre a matéria além da equação de valor*; and, chapter IV. *Dívida Impagável: Lendo Cenas de Valor Contra a Flecha do Tempo*. In addition to having a preface by Jota Mombasa and Musa Michelle Mattiuzzi, entitled *Carta à leitora preta do fim dos tempos*, and yet, an afterword by Pedro Daher called *O abrir-mão para o futuro*.

The ontoepistemological pillars brought by Ferreira da Silva are the target of his analysis insofar as such thought models/tools structure the world as we know it. Therefore, they indicate ethical mechanisms/principles that organize modern thought. In this way, *separability* is mapped since Descartes, it is present in the Kantian program and does not disappear with Hegel, as well as when, in chapter I, the author proposes an analysis of the limits of justice based on her question about the murder of young black people by the State. Being *separability* a principle that includes the difference, even if it is with separation between the items of the equation. In other words, it would be a mechanism/principle responsible not only for a separation between body and mind, but which also influences the separation between distinct racial categories of individuals.

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<sup>5</sup> Briefly, Ferreira da Silva (2019) speaks of otherness to refer to epistemologies, ontologies and experiences that do not fit into the model proposed/instituted/imposed by modernity, in which *separability*, *determinability* and *sequentiality* prevail.

At the other end of the triangle, *determinability*, which would be crucial to Kantian thought for dealing with what Descartes called the “nexus” of consequences, would be an action of the rational mind to establish something with certainty. *Determinability*, analyzed in Chapter II, presupposes a universal that would function as a formal determinant. This is how the author understands, for example, how *determinability* is operated through the notion of humanity (closed within European borders), as only it would share the determining powers of the so-called universal reason, for having free will and self-determination.

Finally, *sequentiality*, analyzed in Chapter III, would be temporal linearity mediated by *determinability*. In other words, it concerns the linearity of modern thought that would occlude coloniality and slavery, despite their supposed inclusion. Denise Ferreira da Silva then presents the ways in which these categories, briefly explained, operate in the constitution of the rules that structure social relations (between humans) and with the (non-human) World itself, as proposed by modernity.

As abstract as the mentioned pillars may seem, their drying by the author takes place in parallel with the presentation of other ways of thinking, with the centrality given to the issue of raciality, also demonstrating how it is constituted by this modern legacy. Therefore, raciality creates, according to Denise Ferreira da Silva, a human difference based on Kantian reason, in which not everyone would follow the so-called trajectory of the spirit, with European abstract thought taken as the highest expression of the spirit in human evolution.

Based on *separability*, *determinability* and *sequentiality*, there would be a continuous process of accumulation of expropriation of value from racialized and historically subjugated individuals. Ferreira da Silva (2019, p. 180-181, our translation) will say:

Over the past one hundred and fifty years, since the presentation of the classic version of historical materialism, capitalist production (as outlined by Marx and his followers) has not stopped colonial expropriation. In fact, the opposite occurred. The last two hundred have witnessed repeated episodes of colonial expropriation of land, labor and resources, guaranteed by juridical-economic architectures that operate inside and outside the nation-state, that is, the more recent figuration of the liberal political body. Undoubtedly, we find today the colonial legal form enabling global capital. Consider, for example, the many places in the world that are in a state of ongoing violence – various parts of the Middle East, the African continent, economically dispossessed neighborhoods and rural areas in Latin America and the Caribbean, or black and Latino neighborhoods in the United States. Violence that, in addition to facilitating the expropriation of land, resources and labor, also transforms these spaces into markets for the sale of weapons and countless services and goods provided by the insurance industry.

It is in this way that the author analyzes the global financial market crisis of 2007 and 2008: as a fundamental racial event to explain how raciality operates in the process of global capital accumulation. Since the *subprime* loans were intended for people with economic lag, who could not obtain normal loans. Black and Latino people, from the working and lower middle classes, understood by financial institutions as “financial instruments and not moral entities, that is, people” (FERREIRA DA SILVA, 2019, p. 157, our translation). *Subprime* loans therefore extract profit from the financial deficit of people taken as instruments for the enrichment of financial institutions. Such loans would operate as tools of colonial and racial subjugation, which compose what the author calls *racial dialectic*, which would take place with the transubstantiation of colonial expropriation into a deficit that would be *natural*.

Thus, Denise Ferreira da Silva deals, especially in chapter IV, with the lack of tools of historical materialism capable of approaching the role of slavery in the accumulation of capital, since, as she argues, enslavement is constitutive of the juridical-economic architectures of the (and not temporally (separate from) or prior to) the capital. The rules of the social structure bequeathed by modernity and its three pillars are still in force, which occlude racial violence in its various shades. In this way, the concept of unpayable debt, which gives the book its title, concerns the continued process of expropriation of the black element in Western society, being, therefore, “an obligation that is carried, but that must not be paid” (FERREIRA DA SILVA, 2019, p. 154, our translation). Or yet, they are debts in economic terms, but not in the ethical sense, therefore, they should not be settled. A fact made explicit by the author in her analysis of *Kindred* (1979) by Octavia E. Butler and the aforementioned *subprime* loans.

The world bequeathed by modernity with its ontological and epistemological pillars is called by the author of *Ordered World*, where people would be marked by raciality, separated from each other and from the rest of what makes up the World. In this way, the turn of thought proposed by the author is based on the notion of *Plenum*<sup>6</sup>, which would characterize an *Implicated World* in opposition to the *Ordered World*, designed and carried out in the colonial, capitalist and patriarchal process. Being, then, the *unpayable debt* referring to the process of continuous expropriation to which some bodies have been subjected throughout history, the *Implicated World*, guided by the *Plenum* model, would bring the possibility of thinking about the world *otherwise*. The *Plenum*, therefore, would be the possibility of life, of another life, in other ontoepistemological perspectives, which would understand the implication of people and things in the world in each other. That is, it deals with a universe in which each of the

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<sup>6</sup> A noção de Universo como *Plenum* é resgatada por Denise Ferreira da Silva do pensamento de Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646-1716).

bodies that exist in the world would express the universe in a unique way, but, at the same time, they would express all the other things that exist in the universe. Collectivity rather than individuality is important here, since it marks the differentiation between a perspective, such as that presented by Ferreira da Silva, and that of the *Ordered World of modernity*, which classifies, hierarchizes and separates. In this way, the *Plenum* is an *Implicated World*, in which

sociality is no longer either cause or effect of relations involving separate existents, but the uncertain condition under which everything that exists is a singular expression of each and every other virtual-actual existents of the universe, or that is, as *Corpus Infinitum* (FERREIRA DA SILVA, 2019, p. 46, author's emphasis, our translation).

The project proposed by Denise Ferreira da Silva, places raciality at the center of modern thought, understanding how *blackness*<sup>7</sup> would be a key to the collapse of this *Ordered World* and the rise of the *Implicated World*. If in the first case, it is not possible to think about difference without separation, in the second, existence would take place without the principle of *separability*, thus enabling the end of the world as we know it, for the flowering of an epistemological and ontological perspective that would bring a complete turn of thought.

*A Dívida Impagável* (2019) can be understood as an enterprise of breath, creativity and rigor in research. A book that is certainly not easy to read, but undoubtedly fundamental, in which the perspective of a multifaceted author is presented, capable of moving between different sciences in order to explain the issues and build the categories with which she works. Bringing raciality to the center of the investigation, not targeting a denunciation, but an end-of-the-world project and the birth of another in epistemological and ontological terms.

Intertwining past, present and future, the book takes a new look at modernity and its processes of domination, as well as *blackness* as a category that is also capable of imploding and subverting the logics prevailing in the *Ordered World* in search of a new societal mode that against the modern proposal (based on a *racial dialectic* that occludes racial violence). Seeking the decolonization of the world, with the implementation of legal-economic architectures different from those that, investigated by the author, were constituted with modernity and are still in force. Therefore, Denise Ferreira da Silva proposes an analysis that goes to the past, at the same time that it is centered on the present (in which racial violence is part of the ordering

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<sup>7</sup> According to the author, the category of *blackness* has two faces: on the one hand, seen as an index of a social situation, it never ceases to signify slavery, recalling the expropriation of the productive capacity of the enslaved. On the other hand, *blackness* signals a creative capacity, when one contemplates the World as *Plenum*. In this second case, *blackness* is understood by the author as the holder of the necessary tools for the dismantling of the *Ordered World*. (FERREIRA DA SILVA, 2019, p. 95-97).

of the world), pursuing/proposing possibilities for the future in which it is possible to exist fully, that is, without the attribution of *otherness*. It then pursues the constitution of a world in which implication (the ability to understand the elements of the world as singular but not separate parts) is the norm and from which new ethical, moral, legal and aesthetic paths are possible.

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