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REVIEW ARTICLE

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MANIFESTATIONS OF COLOR PREJUDICE IN ANGOLA: AN ANALYSIS OF ITS EVOLUTION

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ABSTRACT

Reflection on the origins of color prejudice in Angola -if placed at a radical level- requires prior, accurate examination of its antecedents. As a product of theoretical research, this study presents the origins and forms of manifestation of this prejudice and analyzes its dynamics in two periods: under Portuguese colonization and after independence. It assumes that before the arrival of the Portuguese there was no color prejudice. Colonialism introduced and consolidated the foundations of color prejudice not only through social oppression supported by discrimination and segregation but also by means of the assimilation "code". During this period, prejudice and discrimination were directed at the dominated group, consisting of Black and Mixed-race individuals; however, after independence, with the massive departure of the white population to Portugal, color prejudice, although reduced to nearly imperceptible levels, did not disappear. The results indicate that it persisted among Black and Mixed-race individuals, showing signs of renewed strength in recent years.

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INTRODUCTION

This text is a reflective exercise on color prejudice in Angola. Its objective is to analyze its dynamics during the period under Portuguese rule and in the period following independence. However, writing about color prejudice in Angola is a highly complex task. Its complexity does not arise only from the need for self-evaluation of our latent and actual awareness - underlying our daily behaviors, attitudes, and actions - but also, and above all, from the absence of a theoretical reference framework on racial prejudice in both periods.

The absence of such studies during colonization is explained by the fact that, at the time, it did not constitute a social or political concern, since discrimination, segregation, and inequality among races in all aspects of life were social norms. However, the theoretical void in the field of studies on racial prejudice continued after independence. On the one hand, this is attributed to scarce training in the Social Sciences; on the other hand, to the low level of expression of color prejudice in Angolan society, which fostered a biased perception of a social scenario in which it was not considered a relevant issue. Furthermore, addressing color prejudice is difficult because there is no dominant group. Reflection on color prejudice in Angola raises a central question: if before Portuguese colonization racial prejudice did not exist, but only cultural or tribal distinctions, why did manifestations of color prejudice continue to exist after independence among groups of the same African matrix - namely Blacks and Mixed-race individuals? The complexity of this issue stems from the fact that Portuguese colonialism introduced and consolidated logic of differentiation and social hierarchy based on skin color, through

oppression, segregation, and the assimilation system. Although independence and the massive departure of the white population reduced levels of such prejudice, it did not disappear. On the contrary, it continued to manifest itself within Angolan society, revealing symbolic tensions and social practices that privilege lighter skin over darker skin. This study assumes that color prejudice in Angola persists because, even after independence, the logic of social differentiation instituted by Portuguese colonialism was not fully overcome. This logic, sustained by the assimilation system and the unequal attribution of privileges according to skin color, left deep marks on social and cultural relations. It is assumed that, in the absence of a white dominant group, discriminatory practices began to manifest among Black and Mixed-race individuals, reproducing inherited hierarchies and being reinforced by current socioeconomic inequalities and symbolic representations that privilege lighter skin. Thus, based on the above, this study argues that color prejudice in Angola is not a phenomenon originating in pre-colonial African society but a social and political construction inherited from Portuguese colonialism. This prejudice was solidified through differentiation between whites, Blacks, and Mixed-race individuals, the imposition of the assimilation system, and the unequal assignment of social and cultural privileges. After independence, although color prejudice weakened in intensity, it continued to reproduce among Blacks and Mixed-race individuals, now associated mainly with socioeconomic inequalities and inherited cultural representations that associate lighter skin with prestige, competence, and beauty. Thus, color prejudice in Angola must be understood as a colonial legacy that is reconfigured in the present, manifesting itself in social practices and discourses that reinforce inequality.

Development: During Portuguese colonization, color prejudice was institutionalized and took various forms of social, economic, and cultural segregation. The assimilation system, based on unilinear evolutionism, proposed the integration of Africans into Western culture but, in practice, functioned as an exclusion mechanism. As Kamabaya (2003, p. 92) notes, “the assimilation certificate was the most difficult document to obtain, requiring the indigenous person to abandon African customs, traditions, and practices and adopt Portuguese culture in its entirety.” The 1926 Indigenato Statute is a clear example of legalized exclusion, as it defined non-assimilated Africans as “indigenous,” subjected to forced labor, special taxes, and restrictions on civil and political rights. Mixed-race individuals, meanwhile, were often automatically granted assimilated status due to European ancestry, reinforcing perceptions of social superiority. Crochik (2005, p. 11) emphasizes that “what leads an individual to be or not be prejudiced can be found in their process of socialization,” and colonialism fostered differentiated socialization, hierarchizing individuals according to skin color.

This process was reinforced by daily segregation practices. Official schools were reserved for whites and assimilated individuals, while non-assimilated Blacks were confined to missionary schools and rudimentary education (Carmo, 2001). The same pattern occurred in access to employment, housing, and public services. As Allport (1954) explains, prejudice and discrimination form a vicious circle in which the belief in inferiority justifies inequality, and inequality reinforces prejudiced beliefs. After independence, with the massive departure of the white population, the intensity of prejudice decreased but did not disappear. Mixed-race individuals symbolically inherited part of the social space left by colonizers, and skin color continued to function as an informal criterion of distinction. During the socialist period (1975–1991), the State promoted greater social equality, mitigating tensions related to color. However, with the transition to capitalism and the worsening of socioeconomic inequalities, manifestations of color prejudice regained strength (Macionis & Plummer, 1999). Today, color prejudice manifests itself in various spheres. In advertising and popular music, the image of the Mixed-race woman is privileged as a beauty standard, while the Black man is often portrayed as a symbol of virility but also of brutality. This association reveals, as Lima and Vala (2004, p. 402) note, “that prejudice is an expression culturally conditioned by social norms, even when it appears subtly.”

Employment opportunities and social mobility still, in some contexts, privilege lighter-skinned individuals, especially in sectors such as hospitality, media, and politics, where public visibility is valued. In everyday social interactions, stigmas persist: in conflicts, the first insult directed at a Mixed-race person often refers to their mixed origin, using pejorative expressions such as “colonizer leftovers.” Nogueira (1954) noted that color prejudice is deeply tied to social ethos, reproduced through implicit norms of treatment. Another relevant aspect is “color boasting”- expressions such as “I am Mixed-race and wealthy”- which illustrate how the colonial imaginary continues to influence contemporary social representations. As Thomas (1966, cited in Macionis & Plummer, 1999, p. 327) warns, “when a situation is defined as real, it becomes real in its consequences.”

The valorization of lighter skin thus continues to produce concrete effects, despite lacking scientific basis. Finally, it is important to emphasize that the Angolan reality is not unique. Similar processes of color hierarchy occurred in other former Portuguese colonies, such as Cape Verde and Mozambique, and in countries colonized by Britain and France. This comparison shows that color prejudice cannot be understood solely as a local legacy but as part of a global process generated by European colonialism, which established racial and symbolic inequality patterns still visible in many African societies today.

CONCLUSION

Despite the massive departure of the white population to Portugal between 1974 and 1975, which reduced color prejudice to nearly imperceptible levels, it did not disappear completely. Contrary to expectations, it continued among Blacks and Mixed-race individuals, as a consequence of racial relations established during the colonial period, based on distinctions between dominant and dominated groups and, within the latter, between assimilated and non-assimilated. This differentiation, grounded in privileges assigned according to skin color, contributed to the emergence of prejudice among Mixed-race individuals, who perceived their category as socially more valued. These perceptions remain strong today, largely due to social inequalities and the immigration of new European and Asian groups. Thus, understanding color prejudice in Angola requires recognizing it as a colonial legacy that adapts and updates itself to contemporary Angolan society.

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