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THE MYTH OF RACIAL DEMOCRACY IN THE LABOUR MARKET: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE PARTICIPATION OF AFRO-DESCENDANTS IN BRAZILIAN COMPANIES

O mito da democracia racial no mercado de trabalho: análise crítica
da participação dos afrodescendentes nas empresas brasileiras

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ABSTRACT

This research sought to identify the participation of different races in organizations and to investigate the opportunities for black people, in terms of employability and professional growth, in Brazil. To meet this objective, documentary research was undertaken with 117 companies, which are among the 500 largest in Brazil. The results indicated that racial democracy is a myth in our society, hence the need to move forward with social policies that minimize inequalities between white and black people in the most significant company positions. The process of producing and reproducing racism continues to restrict the of black people to the highest hierarchical levels. In order to achieve equality for black people in the labour market, we must evolve from social policies of 'good intentions' to the concept of praxis and be positioned among the benchmarks of militant sociology, establishing a set of affirmative government policies, accompanied by practices that encourage diversity in companies and denounce ideologies which reinforce the myth of racial democracy.

Keywords: Diversity. Race. Affirmative policies. Racial democracy. Labour market.

RESUMO

Esta pesquisa buscou identificar a participação das diferentes raças nas organizações e em decorrência investigar as oportunidades dos negros em termos de empregabilidade e ascensão profissional em nosso país. Para o atendimento do objetivo estabelecido se desenvolveu uma pesquisa documental com 117 empresas que fazem parte do conjunto das 500 maiores empresas do Brasil. Os resultados apontaram que a democracia racial constitui um mito em nossa sociedade, daí a necessidade de se avançar com as políticas sociais que minimizem as desigualdades entre brancos e negros nos cargos mais relevantes das empresas, pois o processo de produção e reprodução do racismo continua a tolher a ascensão de pessoas negras aos níveis hierárquicos mais elevados. Para a inserção do negro no mercado de trabalho de forma equânime se efetivar, é necessário evoluir de políticas sociais de "boas intenções" para o conceito de práxis e se situar nos marcos de uma sociologia militante ao se estabelecer a conjunção de políticas governamentais afirmativas acompanhadas de práticas que estimulem a diversidade nas empresas e, ao mesmo tempo, denunciem as ideologias que apregoam o mito da democracia racial.

Palavras-chave: Diversidade. Raça. Políticas afirmativas. Democracia Racial. Mercado de Trabalho.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Studies on prejudice and social discrimination in Brazil are characterized by two predominant and basic perspectives. The first, supported by sociological tradition, conceives the term “racial democracy”, as a myth, a false illusion, by ideologically omitting the socio-economic asymmetries between white and non-white people. The second, related to Social and Cultural Anthropology, considers that Brazilian society was formed on hybrid bases and that, in racial terms, the colour of a person’s skin does not prevent a meaningful own identity and integration between the dominators and the dominated. The myth of racial democracy in Brazil is founded on the presumed absence of legal segregation mechanisms and in the affirmation that there are no barriers to upward mobility for black people, given the “absence of prejudice and discrimination”.

The sociologist, Gilberto Freyre (1933), although recognizing the existence of racial prejudice in the country, inspired the idea of racial democracy, being the main articulator of this myth, arguing that the social distance between black and white people in Brazilian society is the result of class differences, and not the outcome of colour or racial prejudice. Along these lines, studies by Bourdieu and Wacquant (2002) which analyse race relations, highlight that unlike the cultural imperialism of the United States and its historical particularisms, translated into binary categories of black and white, although there is racism in Brazil, colour prejudice is not expressed as a social division, in which white people deliberately oppress the black population.

Historically, the myth of racial democracy is a constant reminder that Freyre (1933) bequeathed to contemporary Brazil, according to which Brazilian society was constructed from the desire to deny racial categorizations, since it is a country of mixed races, which believes in coexistence and the acceptance of different ‘races’, cultures and religions. In the past, this miscegenation generated a democratizing force between the masters and the slaves and, today, has produced an equivalent memory.

From this perspective, the myth of racial democracy is confirmed, and this position recognizes the existence of racism in Brazil but does not formulate it as our structuring force. Therefore, social exclusion does not stem from racism but is the product of poverty and the socio-economic model, which has concentrated income for decades, leading the poor to remain in poverty and contributing to the rich remaining wealthy. Consequently, the myth of racial democracy assumes that there is a peaceful coexistence between ethnic groups in Brazil, unlike other countries, such as South Africa and the United States, and everyone has equal chances of success (COELHO JÚNIOR, 2013).

Contrary to this vision, which disregards relevant aspects of the history of slavery in this country and its ramifications in forming a society, it is understood that in the origins of colonial society, Brazil was marked by racism and, specifically, by the exclusion of the black population. More than a simple inheritance from our past, this racial problem continues in contemporary times, in very different ways.

In addition, debating race relations implies discussing the different forms of power relations which permeate society, since the fundamental problem of race relations issues lies in the process of hierarchization, dehumanization and the justification that

discrimination exists among the various populations, becoming clear when it is part of the historical analysis of the position that the black population occupies in the country (MUNANGA, 2006). As Figueiredo (2012) clarifies, this position includes the absence of market segmentation specifically oriented toward the black population.

Along these same lines, Rosa (2014) suggests that the so-called logic of group assimilation has prevailed in Brazil, which means the integration of cultural differences, in which minority groups undergo an acculturation process, incorporating ideas which the majority group proposes. These ideas have the capacity to transmit all-encompassing ideologies in which the existence of a society free of racial conflicts emerges and, consequently, allows for utopian interpretations of discrimination and racial prejudice.

At the same time, affirmative actions emerged in various countries, as a way of reducing social inequality and can be considered a set of policies and practices which seek “[...] to promote the social recognition of citizens excluded from the benefits of their citizenship and inclusion in the world of work” (FREITAS, 2015, p. 90). According to the author, in Brazil these actions were strengthened in 1989 with Law n. 8213/89, which regulates the allocation of jobs to people with disabilities. This was expanded in 2002 through Decree n. 4228, which suggests the creation of targets to include female professionals, black people and people with disabilities in public institutions and service providers, and includes the provision of guidelines to monitor these actions (BRASIL, 2002). Although there are legal arrangements which encourage diversity in public management, these initiatives have proven to have little effect in the labour market as a whole.

Based on this brief contextualization, the problem which this article sought to address was: in the present day, in the corporate universe, as a result of the development of integration policies aimed at those who were excluded in the past, can racial democracy be considered a myth?

Drawing on the documentary analysis method, this research sought to identify the participation of different races in organizations and to investigate opportunities aimed at black people, in terms of employability and career mobility in this country. The broader objective is to present data which enables an understanding of the influence of racial prejudice in companies as an element of integration or social exclusion.

This article is divided into six sections, including this introduction. The next section presents the theoretical framework, in order to analyse the varying aspects of the controversial racial democracy, with an emphasis on the labour market. The methodology section presents the techniques used in this research. This is followed by a presentation of the results discussed in the light of the conceptual framework defined in the theoretical framework and, as a result, the reflections which originated from the investigation. Final considerations about this study are presented in the final section, clarifying the existing limitations and suggesting directions for future research.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

One of the first difficulties which a social science researcher encounters is related to integrating theoretical aspects and language practices. Specifically in relation to studies

on racial democracy, the complex aspects of the theoretical-methodological nature of the research stem from the initial difficulties which the researcher encounters in order to establish the “race” category, connected to others such as “colour”, “ethnicity” and “class”, etc., which can be used as an analytical or native concept. Guimarães (2003) highlights that a distinction of concepts is established in social sciences, in two categories: analytical and native. For the author, while the analytical concept analyses a phenomenon in which the meaning is restricted to the body of a theory, the native concept is, in opposition, establishing meaning in the practical and effective world.

Therefore, in this approach, when asking “what is race?” the answer is: it depends. It depends on whether we are referring to race in scientific terms or to a category in the real world, and whether “it has a historic and specific meaning for a certain human group” (GUIMARÃES, 2003, p. 95). However, this apparently logical distinction became complex and even controversial, when the concept of Afro-descendants emerged, since this concept cannot be classified as either analytical or native, as “[...] it was not analytical because neither sociology nor biology upheld it, nor was it native, except for a small proportion of the Brazilian population” (GUIMARÃES, 2003, p. 103).

Faced with this dilemma, the solution found by Guimarães (2003) was to establish colour as a racial category: “[...] colour is not an objective category; colour is a racial category, as when people are classified as black, mulatto and of mixed-race, it is the idea of race which orientates this form of classification” (GUIMARÃES, 2003, p. 103-104).

For the purposes of this research, colour is adopted as a concept of race, in line with the classification proposed by Guimarães (2003, p. 103), according to which “[...] the classification of people by colour is orientated by a discussion on qualities, attitudes and essences transmitted by blood, which trace back to a common ancestral origin [...]”.

Based on this guiding argument, which is essentially concerned with an analysis of colour prejudice, it is observed that studies and discussions on racial democracy in Brazil incorporate labour relations, market characteristics and company management. It involves the analysis of multiple aspects which are not only conditioned by economic imperatives but whose inequalities are legitimized by education, culture, religion, literature, art, science and the means of communication. Therefore, various aspects of this problem need to be analysed, in order to consider their complexity in current times.

With regards to educational aspects and social origin, Osorio (2004) analysed racial and income inequality in Brazil, in order to investigate the validity of the theory that their persistence is predominantly due to the exacerbated weight of social origin in stratification processes. Among other causes, it was noted that the main source of racial inequality lies in the difference in income levels for black and white people and that this difference in remuneration is predominantly due to educational inequalities between black and white people. It is highlighted that educational inequalities between racial groups are largely determined by social origin.

In cultural terms, Brazilian society is quite diverse, as a result of various migratory movements registered in the country. Due to the vast territorial range of Brazil, some regions have a greater influence from a specific colonization process.

Despite this social diversity, the labour market does not reproduce the same diversity, whether of gender or race. In her studies, Rosa (2014) argues that organizational diversity results from a historic need, while the research performed by Uhr et al. (2014) demonstrates the existence of salary differences in Brazil, which discriminate against gender and race in the administrative sector of the labour market. From this perspective, professionals with the same level of productivity, potentially earn lower salaries, as a result of gender or race, while executing the same type of activities.

Also, in relation to salary differences between black and white people and their consequences on social upward mobility, Costa Ribeiro (2006) presents an overwhelming distinction by confirming that racial inequalities prevail in disputes for hierarchically higher social positions, however, this does not take place in the search for positions and duties related to the low classes, which are entirely determined by their class position. Thus, racial inequality prevails at the top of the class hierarchy of companies, but not at the base.

The treatment of race-related issues usually occurs within the context of diversity, which also includes issues pertaining to gender, age, those leaving the prison system, indigenous people and the integration of transvestites and transsexuals. The term “diversity” has not yet been presented as a robust construct, as Fleury (2000) indicates, establishing difficulties for the development of research on the topic. The present research interprets diversity in line with the perspective of authors such as Fleury (2000) and Queiroz, Álvares and Moreira (2005) who present diversity in the cultural context.

Gender inequality can be observed in the research conducted by Barroso (2015), with regards to female participation at the highest levels of public administration in Brazil. The study indicates that female participation in the Federal Executive Branch is small in managerial positions. Female participation in managerial positions is 28% and 19% as high-level advisors. Marques and Ferreira’s (2015) research analysed the differences between men and women who occupy leading positions in Portuguese companies. According to the authors, a lower percentage of women was observed in leading company positions, but the data found indicate that leadership capacity among men and women is similar, with no differences identified between genders in the leadership process. The research also revealed that there was no significant difference between men and women’s salaries.

Diversity within a company’s staff, which in the context of this study is interpreted as differences in gender, race, place of origin, academic studies and ideology, can be beneficial for the company. Focusing attention on a specific group of professionals - board members - studies are identified which indicate neutral aspects when establishing boards with different members. In this context, the study of Gallego-Álvarez, García-Sánchez and Rodríguez-Dominguez (2010) is highlighted, which analyses board diversity and its influence on the performance of companies listed on the Spanish stock exchange. The results obtained by the authors indicate that companies which present greater diversity among board members do not demonstrate a different performance in relation to companies with less diversity. Upadhyay and Zeng’s (2014) research indicates that it is not possible to infer that greater diversity of board members results in greater independence of board members in relation to organizational management. The analysis of these studies can be approached from the perspective that having more homogeneous boards does not necessarily translate into better

results. In this regard, companies can adopt greater diversity when forming their boards, as this action does not imply lower performance.

The advantage of establishing a diverse board is presented in the context of agency theory, which suggests that the potential to better monitor managers is established under this condition. This occurs as diversity provides members with greater independence to act (CARTER et al., 2007). In this regard, Campbell and Mínguez-Vera (2007) indicate that board members of different cultural or ethnic origins can pose different questions. For the authors, members with very similar backgrounds tend to take similar approaches and, as a consequence, ask similar questions, thereby reducing company managers' breadth of analysis. This approach proposes that the inclusion of a more heterogeneous group in the structure, taking the question of race into account, establishes positive points for the board and, consequently, throughout the company.

Inequality is not restricted to specific sectors of an organization and needs a broader approach. In this sense, Freitas (2015) affirms that the Declaration of Human Rights was the first document to recognize the relevance of differences between individuals, and of the respect for these differences through legal and social mechanisms, so that a reduction in inequality became a goal defined by the United Nations (1948) for the new millennium. Inequality culminates in socially addressing difference, in other words, in the way a society has historically produced and dealt with difference.

In this aspect of socially addressing difference, it is observed that, in social relations, the position of status and class, although they correspond to distinct dimensions, are commonly related; in other words, they enable the conversion of economic capital into symbolic capital (BOURDIEU; WACQUANT, 2002). However, this relation does not take place with the black population. Figueiredo (2004) exposes countless evidence that racial discrimination affects the allocation of status to black people, even those with a high purchasing power. This evidence is also confirmed in research about black identity and class undertaken by Tosta and Alves (2013), in which it is noted that for the reduced number of the black population placed in the higher economic segments of society, problems related to social interaction and integration are similar to those experienced by the lower economic layers.

Biderman and Guimarães Araújo (2004) highlight that the determinants of inequality vary in importance, with factors linked to gender and colour discrimination being more decisive, particularly between women and black people who climb to positions at the top of the social hierarchy. This class condition is worse for women. The condition of a black woman with high purchasing power is not enough to convert the affluence of her economic condition, into a position of status (ROCHA, 2017).

Corroborating this evidence, Silva and Reis (2011) describe the "elitist profile" of racial discrimination in Brazil through 80 in-depth interviews with black professionals in Rio de Janeiro. The authors also noted that middle class black people who occupy leadership positions are the victims of stereotyped and prejudiced behaviour; in other words, colour prejudice overlaps with economic inequality. They conclude that: "They recognized racism, prejudice, racial inequality, and negative stereotypes about blacks in Brazil. Negative stereotypes about blacks are widespread in Brazil". (SILVA; REIS, 2011, p. 75).

In sociological terms, the acculturation process emerges, which refers to the idea of physical and social whitening, since even on achieving high levels in the social hierarchy, black people still face, from some of the white people in their very social class, the expectation that they incorporate the values and behaviour of the dominant sectors as an acceptable procedure to attain greater opportunities for personal and professional growth (MAIO, 2017).

Nóbrega, Santos and Jesus (2014) comment that the term “diversity” is assigned different meanings by authors, and it can refer to cultural, demographic and social characteristics. In their qualitative study, seeking to relate diversity to creativity and organizational competitiveness, the authors were not able to identify a causality between the variables, as the organizations do not perform quantitative surveys to determine these relations. However, the managers interviewed in the research believe that diversity has an influence on the capacity to innovate and on company competitiveness. In conclusion, the companies researched, two of which were large and one medium, located in the state of Bahia, show knowledge about diversity but do not have effective management practices for this resource. Therefore, diversity takes place purely by chance, and unintentionally, at these companies.

Bibliometric research performed by Ferreira et al. (2015) reinforces Fleury’s (2000) position, indicating that recent studies which address diversity, compared to organizational practices, take a tangential and sentimentalist position on the topic. For the authors, organizations can best meet their objectives when there is more diversity among their co-workers, as this composition adjusts better to any disagreements which companies are subject to. In this approach, greater diversity among employees contributes to management, since it enables the establishment of different propositions, visions and understanding, thereby optimizing the possibility of identifying better alternatives to solve problems. It is highlighted that the research performed by the authors presents a list of 46 articles submitted to the National Association of Post-Graduate Studies and Research in Administration (ANPAD) Organizational Study Meetings, which address the issue of diversity in different forms.

Hasenbalg (1979), in his study which dates back to the late 1970s, indicated that the problem of inequality between black and white people is not restricted to aspects related to social class but progresses to the occurrence of racial discrimination. For the author, the existence of factors related to racial discrimination in professional exchanges precludes black people from establishing full social integration and, therefore, full exercise of their citizenship, hindering economic mobility.

Santos (2006) uses the term “image discrimination”, exposing the lack of participation of black workers in managerial or leadership positions, and in jobs which include customer service. This is in clear opposition to the myth of racial democracy, which establishes the existence of a peaceful co-existence between the different ethnic groups in Brazil, in which everyone has equal opportunities for personal and professional success (JAIME, 2011). Jaime (2011) highlights the importance of the social context, when seeking to identify the changes which result from constructing the trajectories of black executives in companies, classifying them in two generations: the first one, from the Brazilian dictatorial context of the 1970s and, the second one, whose reference is the consolidation of the social rights achieved by Afro-descendants in the 21st century.

Gonçalves et al. (2016) who draw on data from the Inter-union Department of Statistics and Socio-Economic Studies (DIEESE), demonstrated the incidence of lower salaries for black people when compared with non-black people. The authors also put forward that black people have a higher rate occupation without a formal work contract, the majority have precarious jobs and a smaller percentage is in leadership positions. Additionally, in its research on income inequality, the Inter-union Department of Statistics and Socio-Economic Studies (DIEESE, 2013) identified that black people earn lower salaries than non-black people in the cities of São Paulo and Salvador.

Oliveira and Barreto (2003) analyse the research performed by the Centro de Articulação de População Marginalizada (Advocacy Centre for the Marginalized Population - CEAP) and the Núcleo de Pesquisas, Informações e Políticas Públicas (Research Centre for Information and Public Policies) from the Fluminense Federal University (DATAUFF) in Rio de Janeiro in 2000, and identify a contradiction, according to which although people state that they are not racially prejudiced, they accept that racial prejudice and discrimination are clearly impregnated in Brazilian society.

The adoption of diversity policies does not show any sign of improvement in companies' financial performance. However, as suggested by McKay et al. (2007), there are indications of improved organizational performance: when the organizational environment incorporates cultural diversity, operational benefits can be observed. According to the authors, positive feelings are observed between employees and employers in this situation, which involves variables such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment and task identification. Thus, the authors state that companies with greater diversity tend to have better product and service quality indicators, better productivity and efficiency and a much lower staff turnover. In this regard, Puente-Palacios, Seidl and Silva (2007), also indicate that cultural diversity contributes towards better performance by the working teams.

Despite the potential benefits of adopting cultural diversity, Coutinho, Costa and Carvalho (2010) show the difficulties of distinguishing the companies which encourage a multicultural environment because they believe in the benefits of this practice, from those which implement this practice for marketing reasons or in response to pressure from society and the government. For Serrano and Brunstein (2007), the insertion of diversity in companies occurs as a response to crises and conflicts with external groups. Thus, the adoption of cultural diversity is associated with following policies such as racial quotas, or as a response to consumers who want companies to have greater social responsibility. The position of the authors mentioned here, indicates that there still are differences in companies' motivations for adopting more cultural diversity in their organizational structures.

As an element to favour the expansion of cultural diversity in organizations, affirmative actions and public policies are identified. Galeão-Silva and Alves (2002) understand affirmative actions as a group of compensatory policies allocated to compensate those who have been excluded from various opportunities. Iizuka (2006) explains that compensatory policies are intended for social groups who were excluded from equal possibilities in the past and who need actions which enable them to compete on equal terms in the labour market. For Valentin (2005), on the other hand, affirmative actions are supported on the understanding that social phenomena are not natural, and, consequently the occurrence of imperfections should be the object of policies which enable the establishment of equalities, by reversing

inequality and exclusion. It is observed that in Brazil, black people (average salary BRL 1,534.00) have lower salaries than white people (average salary of BRL 2,697.00), and this factor acts to encourage policies specifically destined to reverse inequalities (GOMES, 2018).

Data from the 2017 National Household Sample Survey (PNAD) released by the IBGE (GOMES, 2018) indicate that black people receive an average monthly salary lower than white people (BRL 1,534.00 compared to BRL 2,697.00). Additionally, this research indicates that the proportion of black workers without a work contract is higher, with 21.8% of black people and 14.7% of white people; the unemployment rate is higher (14.5% of black people, 13.6% of mixed-race and 9.5% of white people), and, similarly, access to education for this population is lower, with only 8.8% of black people aged over 25 attending higher education courses, compared with 22.2% of the white population. Data from the 2016 Annual Social Information Report (RAIS) disseminated by the Ministry of Work and Employment (GOMES, 2018) confirms that professions such as engineer, higher education lecturer, pilot and flight attendant are predominantly occupied by white workers, while work in rural farming, telemarketing operators and other occupations, which do not require specific training, are predominantly occupied by black workers. This data indicate more positive results for whites, as opposed to black people.

Therefore, in general, it can be suggested that racial discrimination in the field of work is broad, spanning from the admission processes, promotion routines and payment parameters.

The following section presents the methodology used in this study.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study is classified as a documentary and bibliographical research. The documentary analysis relies on the process of identifying, verifying and examining documents, in order to obtain the information contained in them, and which, in turn, is contextualized according to the facts under study. Documentary analysis is characterized as developing an investigation in texts which are not classified as bibliographical (BASTOS, 2009). This investigation is characterized as a documentary research, supported by reports and yearbooks provided by official institutions.

The documentary research is supported by data provided by the Ethos Institute (2016). The document "Social, racial and gender profiles of the 500 largest companies in Brazil and their affirmative actions", produced and published by the Ethos Institute, in cooperation with the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), presents quantitative research developed by applying a self-administered questionnaire sent via the internet. Additionally, the research complemented the data through interviews with managers from the responding companies. This stage of the research was undertaken using a sample.

The questionnaire was forwarded to the 500 largest Brazilian companies, listed in the 2014 Largest and Best yearbook (REVISTA EXAME, 2014). This yearbook is a publication from the publishing company Editora Abril, which presents the results in Exame magazine. The questionnaire was intended for employees and managers.

Of the 500 companies invited to take part in the research, a return from 117 companies as respondents was recorded, and which are positioned within the universe of this research. The response period for participants was between 9th December, 2014 and 28th May, 2015. In the 2015 data, of the companies which form the sample, there is a predominance of the industrial sector (52.1%), followed by the service (17.1%), commerce (17.1%) and agricultural product sectors (13.7%). Most of the head offices of these organizations were located in the southeast (57.3%) and south regions (21.4%), and among those located in the southeast region, 62.7% were based in the municipality of São Paulo. The majority of the respondent companies (57.3%) had a turnover of up to BRL 500 million in the year that the data was collected and 64.6% had more than 1,000 employees.

It is highlighted that the classification used: WHITE, NEGRO, BLACK, BROWN, YELLOW AND INDIGENOUS is the same used by the IDB and Ethos in their published report. No judgement analysis of the appropriateness of these terms is made in this research.

The methodological option of using data provided by institutions and/or official authorities is similar to that used by other research, such as Yang, Xu and Shi's (2017) who used the yearbook made available by the Chinese central government; Webb, Hawkey and Tingey's (2016), with data provided by the British government, and Mrkajić and Anguelovski's (2016) who drew on data provided by the city of Novi Sad in Serbia. The research undertaken by Gonçalves et al. (2016), which evaluated the participation of black people and women in leadership positions in Brazilian companies is also highlighted. In order to develop their research, the authors used data from performance appraisals and annual reports of the 30 largest organizations, according to the publication *The Largest and the Best of 2013* by the magazine *Revista Exame*. The appropriateness of using documents disseminated by public institutions or class associations is therefore demonstrated. The following section presents and analyses the research data.

Critical discussion was employed as the theoretical axis for the bibliographical research, with authors related to the three main pillars of racial prejudice as reference:

- a) The European and North American (principally Chicago's) sociological tradition which, historically, has always denied the existence of racial prejudice and racial groups in Brazil, arguing that these groups would be classes and not castes; in other words, groups open to mobility and, therefore, not "races" per se (PIERSON, 1971).
- b) Cultural anthropology inspired by the ideas of Freyre (1933) and his followers, according to which, by means of the concept of "racial democracy" to some extent sought to update the precarious political balance between social inequality, political authoritarianism and formal freedom present in modern Brazil in the language of the emerging social sciences;
- c) Political activism, accomplished in two components: governmental and non-governmental organizations which range from the struggle for quotas to the proposition of black praxis; in other words, an alternative discourse against the Eurocentric modernity disseminated in Brazilian culture (MOURA, 1983).

Thus, in the first perspective there is the concept of racial denial and the reinterpretation of the differences among peoples in terms of “culture”; in the second one, racism is defined not in terms of asserting physical or cultural differences between races but its hierarchization and possible oppression; in the third one, the concept of affirmative actions, whose political expression of demands and the black movement’s agenda should be expressed in ethnic language, as racial democracy is nothing but a myth, illusion or farce.

4. PRESENTATION AND DATA ANALYSIS

This section presents and analyses the research data based on the selected theoretical framework. First, the profile of the employees at the responding companies is presented, divided into racial categories, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 - Racial distribution by hierarchical levels at the companies

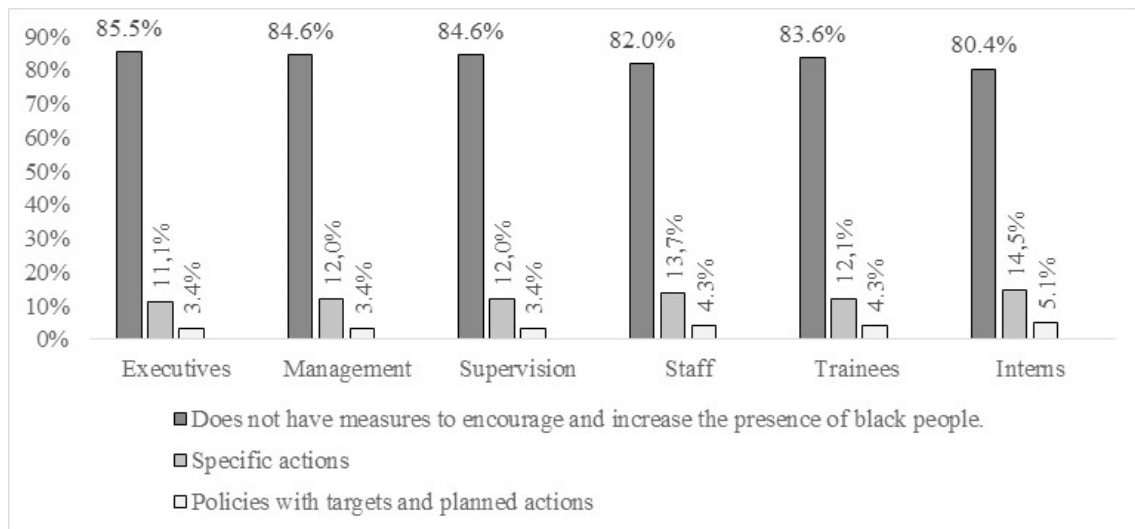
Hierarchical Level	Indigenous	Yellow	White	Black Total	Black Category	
					Black	Brown
Board	0.0	0.0	95.1	4.9	0.0	4.9
Executive	0.0	1.1	94.2	4.7	0.5	4.2
Management	0.1	3.5	90.1	6.3	0.6	5.7
Supervision	0.1	1.8	72.2	25.9	3.6	22.3
Staff	0.2	1.3	62.8	35.7	7.0	28.7
Trainee	0.0	0.5	41.3	58.2	2.5	55.7
Interns	0.2	2.0	69.0	28.8	4.4	24.4
Apprentice	0.4	0.5	41.6	57.5	12.2	45.3

Source: Social, racial and gender profiles of the 500 largest companies in Brazil and their affirmative actions Report - Ethos Institute (2016).

Note: The last two columns of Table 1 which present the classification of black and brown, are a breakdown of the previous column - Black Total.

The data shown in Table 1 indicate the hierarchical levels: board members, executives, management, supervision and staff, positioned at the highest levels of the company, which are predominantly filled by white people. This performance indicates a lack of diversity in organizations’ main managerial positions, not allowing these companies to reap the benefits indicated by Fleury (2000), McKay et al. (2007), and Puente-Palacios, Seidl and Silva (2007). The trainee and apprentice levels are the only ones which are predominantly filled by black people, and although they are positioned at the initial levels of the hierarchy, this indicates greater diversity in the future. However, if this really is a possibility, it is not related to the existence of in-company measures implemented to increase the presence of black people in companies. This lack of measures to increase the presence of black people at organizations can be observed in Figure 1, which also demonstrates the absence of promotional actions for black people, observable at all hierarchical levels.

Figure 1 - The existence of measures to encourage the presence of black people in companies



Source: Social, racial and gender profiles of the 500 largest companies in Brazil and their affirmative actions Report - Ethos Institute (2016).

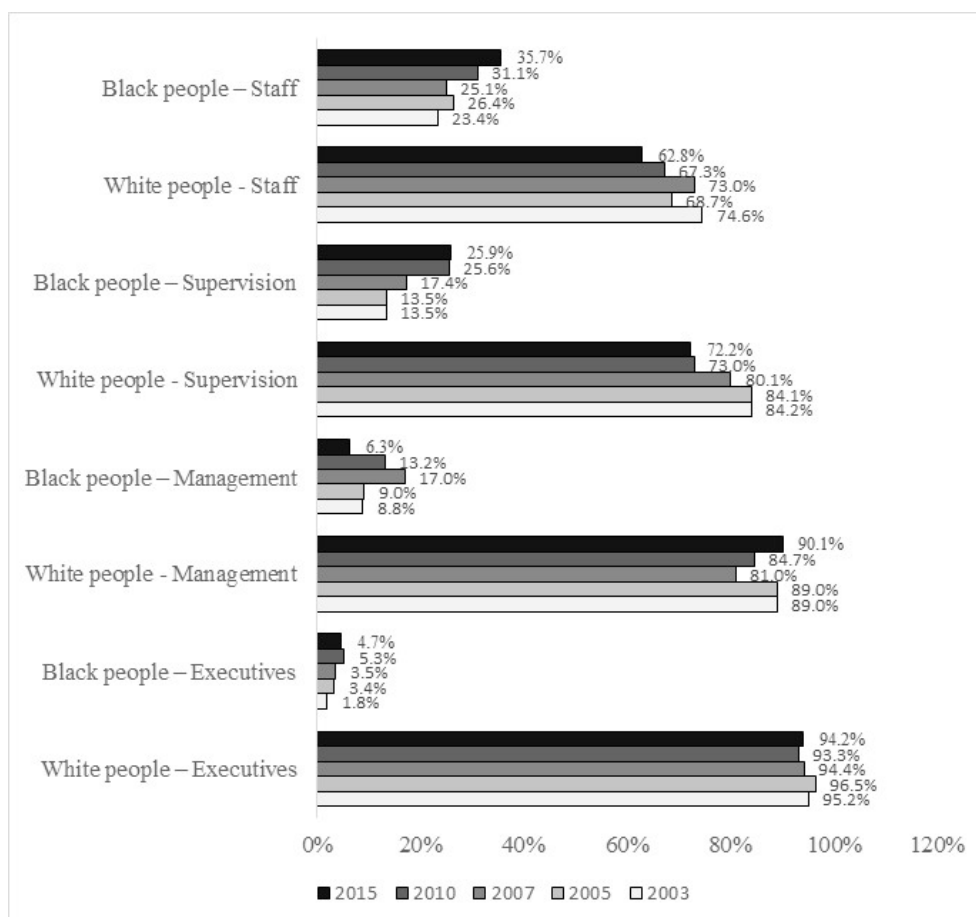
Tapering is observed when moving through the organizational hierarchy; in other words, although there is a predominance of black people at the base levels of the pyramid (apprentices and trainees), their progression to higher levels does not occur, particularly at management, executive and board levels. Additionally, the researchers observed that many of the companies participating in the research do not have policies to permanently employ these young apprentices (only 58.1% answered this question and only 64.7% of these confirmed that they have effective policies for these young people), which helps to understand the under-representation of black people at higher hierarchical levels.

In the general data, 88% of the companies confirmed that they do not have policies to promote equal opportunities among ethnic groups. Only 9 of the 117 companies confirmed that they had at least one affirmative action focused on racial equality, independent of the hierarchical level, and predominantly the establishment of professional training programmes to qualify black people to occupy positions at higher hierarchical levels.

This data suggests that diversity occurs in organizations in a more non-intentional way than as a result of management and planning this resource, which corroborates the argument of Nóbrega, Santos and Jesus (2014). In addition, from interviews held during their research, Diniz, Carrieri, Gandra and Bicalho (2013) observed the belief that diversity policies implemented in organizations are strongly related to the image of social responsibility which they wish to transmit to the market and not the desire to encourage difference as a resource and competitive advantage. Figure 2 presents the relation between black and white people in the following positions: executives, management, supervision and staff in the period between 2003 and 2005. The data indicate that during the period under analysis there is an increase in the presence of black people in relation to white people at all hierarchical levels researched; however, the tendency is very slight in more strategic executive and management positions. It is highlighted that Figure 2 does not present data related to

indigenous and yellow people. For this reason, the sum of the values does not come to one hundred per cent.

Figure 2 - Colour composition in the main positions at organizations

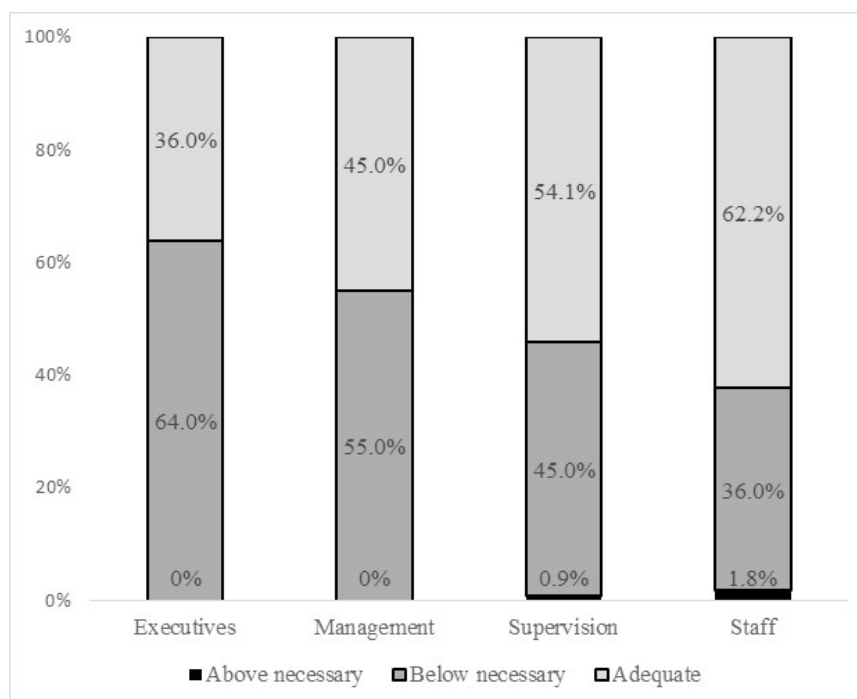


Source: Social, racial and gender profiles of the 500 largest companies in Brazil and their affirmative actions Report - Ethos Institute (2016).

On the other hand, in general terms, it was observed that the organizations researched showed concern for the question of diversity, since 68.4% of them have a code of conduct which establishes the principles of diversity and equality; 85.5% offer scholarships to qualify their employees; 69.2% train their leaders in the principles of equality and the consequences in the corporate environment; 76.1% have a channel to report cases of discrimination and harassment and 53.8% disseminate good management practices, which culminate in respect for human rights and inclusion. Consequently, it is noted that mainly there are global actions to promote diversity; however, very few of them are specifically for Afro-descendant professionals, so the effectiveness of these actions could be enhanced if there were a focus on specific vulnerable groups and not only black people but also women, people with disabilities and the LGBTIQ public, etc.

Part of the research consisted of inquiring the managers of the organizations researched about their perception of black representation among their staff members and 36% consider the proportion of professionals from this ethnic group as adequate for executive staff; 45% consider it adequate for managerial positions; 54.1% for supervisory positions and 62.2% for members of staff. Therefore, a perception of greater adequacy is observed when the hierarchical level is lower. However, it is noted that the number of managers who consider the presence of black people to be adequate in higher positions is expressive, even when this is only 4.7% in executive staff and 6.3% at managerial level. This data suggests the need for effective actions in the search for organizational ethnic equality, which go beyond best practice manuals and channels to report abuse. Besides organizational actions and policies, a cultural change is required, which incorporates diversity in its broadest and most multifaceted way in the organization's daily activities, whether in recruitment and selection routines or career mobility. This scenario can be observed in Figure 3.

Figure 3 - Adequate presence of black people in organizations in the managers' view



Source: Social, racial and gender profiles of the 500 largest companies in Brazil and their affirmative actions Report - Ethos Institute (2016).

When questioned about the reasons why the proportion of black professionals was less than adequate, 48.3% of the managers researched attribute this fact to these professionals' lack of qualifications and 41.4% attribute it to the difficulty that companies have in addressing the subject of equality. This result is in line with the findings of a study by Diniz, Carrieri, Gandra and Bicalho (2013) who analysed diversity policies in organizations from the perspective of homosexual workers. In their study, the authors noted a discrepancy

between discourse and the reality of management practices, not only with regards to the representation of different sexual orientations but to diversity as a whole.

The correlation between the perception of an adequate proportion of black people and the representativeness of this ethnic group in the different hierarchical levels is $r=0.96$, indicating that the more the proportion of Afro-descendants is conceived as adequate, the higher the real proportion of these professionals in the company. To conclude, managerial support for the implementation of diversity is fundamental, so that ethnic plurality is established in the organizational environment.

Therefore, it is confirmed that despite the social policies implemented, racial democracy is a myth, since social discrimination in terms of opportunities in the labour market are clearly evident in corporate relations. The situation of black people's employability and social upward mobility faces numerous barriers in order for them to be consolidated as democratic.

In the face of this observation of disseminated stereotypes and prejudice in relation to the black population, we sought to find a set of factors to minimize this discrimination and, as a result, decrease inequalities and increase opportunities for the placement of Afro-descendants in the labour market.

Based on an analysis of the bibliographical data collected (FLEURY, 2000; BARRETO, 2003; BIDERMAN; GUIMARÃES ARAÚJO, 2004; FIGUEIREDO, 2004; OSORIO, 2004; GUIMARÃES, 2004; 2006; QUEIROZ; ÁLVARES; MOREIRA, 2005; COSTA RIBEIRO, 2006; SANTOS, 2006; SILVA; REIS, 2011; JAIME, 2011; TOSTA; ALVES, 2013; UHR et al., 2014; FERREIRA et al., 2015; MARQUES; FERREIRA, 2015; OLIVEIRA, 2016; GONÇALVES et al., 2016; MAIO, 2017; ROCHA, 2017) possible alternatives were identified, listed as responses associated to a set of factors, and the following are highlighted:

1. The formulation of specific public policies for the sector;
2. The effective application of racial quotas in public entrance exams;
3. Respect for the Statute of Racial Equality;
4. Severity in the punishment of crimes of racism, with an efficient reporting system which receives, records and forwards complaints to the relevant authorities;
5. Support for ethnic diversity programmes in public and private companies;
6. Incentives to hire and promote Afro-descendant employees;
7. Programme to eradicate child and teenager labour (PETI), with an emphasis on Afro-Brazilian families;
8. Creation of a system for the reservation of vacant posts in public entrance exams through Law No 12.990 of June 2014.

Typically, the experiences of social movements indicate that only with long periods of economic growth, together with affirmative action policies, particularly aimed at education, is it possible to decrease inequalities in the labour market and improve placement opportunities for the black population. However, the unfavourable performance of the economy and its

reflections in the labour market as of 2014 has led to an increase in the unemployment rate, which was more intense among the black than the non-black population, besides significant cuts on racial equality programmes and policies. The following section presents reflections stemming from the data collected.

5. REFLECTION ON THE RESULTS

The belief that there are no racial conflicts in Brazil is the result of promoting the concept of racial democracy, mainly from the second half of the 20th century. This belief was implicitly disseminated in Freyre's work (1933), "*Casa Grande e Senzala*" (The Masters and the Slaves), which disseminated the idea that there were peaceful and harmonious racial relations in Brazil between black and white people; although as Guimarães (2004) cautions, the author himself had never explicitly adopted this so-called "racial democracy" in his writings, but rather the synonymous expression "ethnic democracy" in his communications as of 1944.

More than seventy years have now elapsed since the publication of Gilberto Freyre's classic work, "*Casa Grande e Senzala*" (FREYRE, 1933), which inspired the creation of the myth of racial democracy in our times. In the corporate universe, as a result of the development of integration policies for those who were excluded in the past, racial democracy can be considered a myth. Discrimination and racial prejudice are barriers to the integration and mobility of Afro-descendants in the labour market and are demonstrated ideologically.

Although he described, in *Casa Grande e Senzala*, situations in which relations between white and black people were marked not only by asymmetry, but also sadism, he preferred to celebrate Brazil as a racial paradise. That is because, from his point of view, when compared to the English colonial model, Portuguese colonization was more moderate to what is referred to as race relations, allowing and even encouraging miscegenation. This resulted in the idea that Brazil conveyed to the world the message of racial democracy, namely, of a mixed nation in which white, black and indigenous people live harmoniously (JAIME, 2011, p. 162).

Despite advances in recent decades, discrimination and prejudice still predominate in the corporate universe. Besides the lack of opportunities for the black population, the ineffectiveness of an ethnically segmented market is highlighted.

In terms of the consumer market, historically, in Brazil, the creation of an ethnically segmented market has not been considered. Although the Brazilian market is racially distinctive, namely, in the configuration of the labour market, black people's participation is concentrated in activities with a lower income and status, in contrast to white people who are over-represented in occupational categories with higher pay, status and prestige (FIGUEIREDO, 2012, p. 181).

In political terms, Oliveira (2016) reflects on the influence which the colour and/or racial identity of candidates exercises in the definition of the discursive strategies of black politicians in relation to their adversaries in electoral campaigns.

[...] in Brazil, we live in a multi-racial and classist society, where racial representations not only orientate expectations of social roles, but also provide material and symbolic advantages to actors in various areas of society, especially in the political and electoral field, and it is inevitable that issues of identity and group interests are inserted into political speeches. Consequently, it is inevitable that an “allusion” to the colour of candidates influences discursive strategies when a black candidate takes part in bi-racial races in Brazil (OLIVEIRA, 2016, p.28).

In terms of placement in the labour market and career mobility, Jaime (2016), through ethnographic research in the state of São Paulo, sought to identify the changes which took place in constructing the trajectories of black executives in companies, dividing them into two generations: the first one, from the 1970s on, and the second one, at the start of the 21st century.

For the first generation, still in the period of the military dictatorship (1964-1985), the context was largely unfavourable to their affirmation as black people, as well as the construction of their trajectories as executives. Racism was construed as a minor misdemeanour, which contributed to increase the possibilities of its manifestation in people’s everyday lives. Typically, these Afro-descendant professionals were around 50 years old and tended to deny the existence and effects of racism. In order to protect themselves from prejudice and discrimination in the work environment, they used defensive strategies and avoided conflicts, tending to circumvent explicit incidences of racism.

The context of the second generation presented unique characteristics in relation to the first one. The State started to take new approaches in relation to the racial issue, by creating government policies to help combat racism, as pressure to meet the old demands of the black movement grew. Companies were forced to adapt to the new context, starting to promote the management of diversity, in order to value the insertion of black people as members of staff.

Thus, the social context promoted significant differences in the actions of black executives. The first generation of executives had to construct their career paths in isolation; those from the second generation, in a new context, tend to act through collective action for the chance to develop a positive perception of their black identity. Although situations of racial constraint still persist, the very attitude adopted is the result of a more positive affirmation of identity.

Generally speaking, Theodoro (2014) demonstrates that the levels of inequality for the black population are expressed through the empirical observation of the precarious living conditions of Brazilian Afro-descendants, including from the point of view of the naturalization of this phenomenon. Therefore, the lack of opportunities for the black population is the most serious consequence of racism.

Consequently, affirmative actions are an essential strategic element to minimize racial discrimination, including quotas, not just aiming to promote fairer social relations for internal aspects at companies, since they mainly seek to assist in tackling institutional racism and their cultural bases.

Peaceful coexistence between black and white people has not yet been achieved in large companies, especially in higher positions. Seeking to raise awareness of discrimination and prejudice without the participation of black people is not presented as a viable or effective proposal.

Consequently, as a matter of principle, tackling racism involves unveiling historically constructed power relations. This involves a critical review of consolidated practices in this country.

Strictly speaking, there is no formal decision about the veto on black people in the labour market. It is a tacit agreement in which nobody needs to say anything; it is all implied. The policy which discriminates against black people at work is rarely discussed formally - it is cultural fact internalized by everyone. This is one of the characteristics of Brazilian "cordial racism". It operates - well - without anyone arranging anything. Everything flows, driven by a culture of black exclusion (SANTOS, 2006, p. 21).

The report "Inequalities in Brazil. The divide that unites us", published and disseminated by the non-governmental organization, Oxfam (MAIA; GEORGES, 2017), shows that, in Brazil, 67% of those who receive up to 1.5 minimum salaries are black; approximately 80% of black people earn up to two minimum salaries, and for every black person with an income of over 10 minimum salaries, there are four white people. The research concluded that the income of black and white people would only be equivalent in Brazil in 2089 (MAIA; GEORGES, 2017, p. 27-28). Ethnic prejudice was demonstrated, conceived as antipathy, based on an erroneous and inflexible generalization that seeks to prevent members of a specific group to benefit from salaries which match those received by other ethnic groups.

The report data portray racial prejudice in the different layers of the black population. Racial inequalities in the labour market also affect black people in the middle and upper classes; in other words, even for the reduced number of the black population inserted in the economically higher strata of society who have climbed to positions at the top of the social hierarchy, obstacles to convert the affluence of their economic condition into a position of status are observed (FIGUEIREDO, 2004; BIDERMAN; GUIMARÃES ARAUJO, 2004; SILVA; REIS, 2011; TOSTA; ALVES, 2013; ROCHA, 2017). This discriminatory condition is further exacerbated in an acculturation process, which refers to the idea of physical and social whitening, in order to access opportunities for personal and professional growth (MAIO, 2017) and whose discrimination and prejudice become more intensive for black women with a low purchasing power. As Bairros (1991, p.192) suggests, "[...] 'more than sex', race carries forceful determinations in defining a lower participation of female black workers in occupations which are more valued socially and, clearly, with higher salaries".

In this culture of discrimination and exclusion of black people, recovery of black praxis as a key category in the process of their symbolic reconstruction is required: namely, the recovery of black identity and the condition of a political subject who can operate on

a symbolic and subjective level, which is based on new perceptions about integration and overcomes the marginalization of black people as a subaltern social group in Western society.

[...] black identity as a method of participant observation represents unity between theory and practice in the sense of dealienating not only the black populations but all those segments of the population who, in one way or another feel oppressed and/or marginalized by the dominant system to any extent (MOURA, 1983, p. 43).

Accordingly, the term “negritude” (black identity) means historical and collective consciousness, and a way of initiating political action, in order to overcome a situation of objective marginalization and, as a result, combat the myth of racial democracy, not in the sense of a fable but in the sense of examining its practical consequences. As Guimarães (2003, p. 104) highlights, a “myth is not only a false ideology, a myth [...] is a discourse about the origins of things; a discourse about daily activities, which does not need to be real; on the contrary, it is only effective in as far as it orientates people’s actions, giving meaning to everyday social relations”. Overcoming this myth requires strategic attitudes for its combat. In ideological terms, among other conflicts, it also involves tackling the pressure which the media and intellectuals in the system exercise over scholars and mili-tants who confirm the existence of a racial problem in Brazil (AZEVEDO, 1996).

Therefore, actions proposed to combat racism in this country, require the adoption of social policies which incorporate the concept of praxis, such as affirmative actions. Firstly, they do not simply require good intentions but operationalization of a reflection which problematizes and questions the organizational bases of Brazilian society. For this reason, there is an overriding need for the concept of praxis; in other words, an alternative discourse against Eurocentric modernity (GILROY, 2001), which enables advancement beyond silence and denial, which accompanies the complexity of the topic, historically associated to controversies and disputes. The following section presents the final considerations

6. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Racial democracy is a myth which is still present in Brazilian culture and cannot be explained simply in terms of social classes, but instead, indicates racial prejudice as an element that is present in our culture.

The research data suggest that the problem of racial inequality needs to be tackled head on and not merely covered up as an issue which results solely from socio-economic inequality. The reason is that, if the problem of inequality in Brazil were merely the divide between the rich and the poor, logically there would be an equal representation of black people, both in the working classes and ruling classes.

Social policies need to be created, which minimize the inequalities in question, since the classic model of social policies has not reversed the setting of inequality between black and white people. There is an urgent need to focus on this segment of the population, since the process of producing and reproducing racism continues to deprive this population from the access to the most basic. Therefore, it is in the midst of this issue that incorporation

of the discussion of affirmative action policies in the professional context is required. The research enabled to identify that management support is fundamental for the implementation of diversity so that ethnic plurality is consolidated in the organizational environment. Thus, in order for black people to be placed equally in the labour market, a combination of affirmative public policies is required and, at the organizational level, practices which encourage diversity in companies which, at times, involve changes in organizational culture.

At the end of the research, from the perspective of the definition of race proposed by Guimarães (2003), it was confirmed that racial democracy, in Brazil, is a myth. Specifically, in the labour market, a reduced participation of Afro-descendants is observed in Brazilian companies, and even for the very small number of those who have attained a prominent position, prejudice and stereotypes are present. Clearly this research has limitations; if on the one hand it provides important answers on the topic which the authors proposed to discuss, on the other, it leaves unanswered questions, which other researchers would be interested in. One of these questions is related to the risks of dissolving and mischaracterizing public policies related to affirmative actions, which are an important element to eradicate racial discrimination in companies and, in a broader way, in society. As the result of changes in the overall picture, it is suggested that future research analyse the influences and characteristics of public policies to combat the myth of racial democracy, which continues to be an obstacle in the recognition of the problem of racism in Brazil.

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