

CENTRE FOR BRAZILIAN STUDIES

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

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national identity in Brazil**

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Working Paper Number
CBS-47-03

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April – June 2003

Working Paper
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Abstract

The search to define Brazil and Brazilians by colour, more specifically by a miscegenation so extreme that it appears exceptional, is longstanding. Mid-nineteenth century naturalists that visited the country from Europe were astounded by the lush vegetation, the wide variety of fauna, and another phenomena – a type of unprecedented laboratory of humans and their various races. Local intellectuals also focused on the racial theme, but more as explanation for their perceptions of national degeneration than racial mixture. It is from these origins that debate reappears as an official model in the 1930s and persists until today in notions about what makes Brazil unique. After an introduction of this historical context, and rejecting the myth of racial democracy, this paper reflects on the impasses of race anew and from a different perspective attuned to contemporary problems. The central question that remains is whether race is a social and economic variable or whether Brazilian identities are dispersed across a wide rainbow of color. The goal of this paper is to use recent census and 1996 PNAD data that reveal 136 categories for Brazilians to identify several specific characteristics of this debate. This analysis implies a more political discussion of the limits of citizenship in a country where the color line is always viewed subjectively and contextually. The maxim of the sixteenth century Jesuit, Antonil, that “Brazil is hell for negros, purgatory for whites, and paradise for mulattos” still appears to resonate.

Resumo

Não é de hoje que se procura definir o Brasil e os brasileiros por uma especificidade que é dada pela cor, ou melhor por uma miscigenação que, de tão estremada, parece até particular. Já em meados do século XIX naturalistas que estiveram no país, além de se emocionarem com nossa flora e com a variedade da fauna, se depararam com um outro espetáculo: uma espécie de laboratório dos homens e das suas raças. Além desses viajantes estrangeiros, a própria intelectualidade local recortou na temática racial um foco especial de atenção, que explicava antes a degeneração do que o futuro dessa nação de raças mistas. É por isso mesmo que a questão, retomada nos anos trinta e transformada em modelo de oficialidade, persiste no centro do debate sobre identidade nacional ou na definição do que faz do *brazil*, *Brasil*. Tendo, portanto, esse pano de fundo histórico pretende-se refletir sobre os impasses que o problema racial tem gerado no país, em uma perspectiva mais contemporânea. Isto é, desmontado o famoso mito da democracia racial, a questão permanece presente, acionada a partir de chaves diferentes. Raça se transforma numa variável social e econômica ou então se transmuta em cores e passa a implicar na definição do país tal qual um arco-iris. O objetivo dessa apresentação é, dessa maneira, tendo como base pesquisas recentes, os últimos dados do Censo e da PNAD (Pesquisa Nacional por Amostra de Domicílio), que revelou a existência de 136 denominações para o brasileiro, apontar para algumas das especificidades desse debate que, de alguma maneira, implica em uma discussão mais política sobre os limites da cidadania em um país aonde a “linha de cor” é objeto de percepções sempre subjetivas e contextuais. Afinal, ainda ressoa a máxima do jesuíta Antonil que ainda no século XVI dizia que “o Brasil é o inferno dos negros, o purgatório dos brancos, o paraíso dos mulatos”.

Introduction: racism “à la brésilienne”¹

The book *The black princess and other fairy tales from Brazil* published in Brazil in 1906 and in England in 1937,² introduces a lot of stories with the same subject: how a black person can become white. This is also the main idea of the story that gives its name to the book. In this story – a mixture of Sleeping Beauty with The Beauty and the Beast and some biblical motifs from the tropics – a very kind, royal couple is very sad because of their bad luck: after so many years of marriage they have not succeeded in having an heir. Nevertheless, as a reward for their good actions – because in fairy tales kings are always very good – the couple have the opportunity to make a last wish to the fairy godmother. And the queen exclaims: “- Oh! How I wish I could have a daughter. I desire it so much that she could be as dark as the night outside”. The wish contained a metaphor but the fairy translated it literally – I suppose fairies are not so good with metaphors – and a child was born, and she was “as black as coal”. The tale says that the figure of this black baby caused such a “commotion” that the fairy had no other choice but to change her work, but not totally, deciding that if the little girl were to stay in the castle until she was sixteen, she would “suddenly” have the colour that her parents so greatly desired. However, if she disobeyed, her future would really be dark. So, Rosa Negra (Black Rose; that is the name of the princess) grew up “terribly dark”, but, “despite her colour, very beautiful”. However, one day the princess was tempted by a serpent that invited her to see the world outside the castle. Innocent and without knowing the deal her parents had struck, Rosa Negra left the palace and immediately knew the horror. Trying to save herself, Rosa Negra agreed to marry “the ugliest creature in the universe” -- “the ugly Urubucaru”. After the wedding, the first moment she stayed alone with her husband, Rosa Negra could not stop crying. And when Urubucaru asked her why – if it was because of his face – the good princes answered: - “No. My problem is not you, but me. I am terribly black. Now I have lost all hope of becoming white”. In this moment something completely special happened: “Rosa Negra opened her eyes and saw the most handsome and charming prince; Urubucaru was now the Diamond Prince. But it was not just this that happened; Diamond could not take his eyes of that beautiful white princess”. End of story: nice and white, the couple lived together forever”.³

¹ This article, given its wide-ranging nature, does not intend to exhaust the several themes and periods covered in it. Above all what it does intend to do is present a broad chronological overview of the question. For this reason we attempt to fill lacunae in the text through these footnotes, as well as present bibliographical references as and when necessary, to enable the reader to pursue his or her own future research. Although this article is original, it is also based on two other articles, which are cited in the bibliography.

² The book was originally published by the publishing house Laemmert and its authorship is attributed to the controversial Madame Chrysanthème – Cecília Bandeira de Mello Rebelo de Vasconcelos. It is a strange negligence that led to the English publication from The Sheldon Press crediting the work to a Publisher of the name Crisântemo. *The Black Princess* was written by Christie T. Young and illustrated by Florence Mary Anderson. I would like to thank Donald Ramos for sending the material and for suggesting that I read the thesis of Maria de Lourdes Eleutério (1997) for a profile of the author.

³ Young, *The black princess*, pp. 149-160

We Brazilians often say: “Quem conta um conto aumenta um ponto” -- who tells a good story gets ahead of the rest. I really don’t know if this proverb is true or not. What I really can say is that the insistence on the idea of “branqueamento” (getting whiter), and the importance of the colour white tells of a situation that ranges far beyond this tale. It reminds us of some values dispersed in Brazilian society and present in spaces apparently more inappropriate. The white colour, even if it is not mentioned, is like an allusion or even a kind of miracle.

What I want to show is how the question of race, one way or another, has always been fundamentally important in identifying Brazilian national identity. First there were the old depictions of the New World: men without faith, law and king, in the view of travellers like Gandavo. Then, in the eighteenth century, came the exotic view of the foreigners, and in the early nineteenth century the romantic view. Even in the late nineteenth century the theme of race was central to the more realistic and negative theories. Then there was the idealized vision of the 1930s, when a kind *mestizo* culture was seen as national. Of course, if we have no space to talk about all these periods, what we can assume is the fact that “race” has always been a talking point.

We often use expressions such as “*esse é um sujeito de raça*” (he’s got guts), or “*vai com raça*” (go for it), which prove that the term *raça* is by no means neutral. The most common jokes are racial, showing that those who laugh at them do not do so for no reason, but reveal a universe of allusions.

Besides this, whenever we are called upon to talk of a personal identity, we return to our racial specificity, and above all to a process of miscegenation which is shown as more apparent in Brazil than elsewhere: a biological and cultural process.⁴

This would seem to suggest a high profile racial question, and frequent treatment of the issues involved. However, what one observes is totally different. In our discourse outside the country, we often exalt the unique nature of Brazilian miscegenation; but back in Brazil amongst ourselves, the theme is virtually taboo. Little is actually said on the issue, and the subject has hardly been addressed.

Of course we have the very new reality of the Black Movement and also the discussions about the quota system. Nevertheless, beyond the general public, books on the issue arouse little interest; nor do debates and exhibitions, concentrated on this specific question. The response seems to reveal naturalized behavior patterns that one might expect in a stable natural situation. People commonly stress the harmonious relations between the different groups, and always relegate the problem to the personal sphere.

⁴ In my article “The Zé Carioca’s Complex” (1995) I set forth in more depth the question of the construction of an identity which is mulatto, mestizo and ‘malandro’. (A malandro is a street character who may or may not actually be a criminal, but who behaves with a petty criminal’s cunning).

But just as the fact that people don't complain about something does not mean there is nothing to complain about, since this often simply hides an unease which is hard to express, so we know that this Brazilian-style racism, for all its particularities, nonetheless exists and is no less harmful than other styles of racism. Just as there is no such thing as 'good' or 'bad' racism (all forms are equally bad), in the same way an effort must be made to define terms and perceive specific features.

The "myth of racial democracy", like the good myth it is, contains distortions in its much-vaunted absolute equality, but does contain partial truths in indicating a singularity in the relationship between the races, mainly between races and culture. Indeed, several studies prove there to have been one distinguishing feature in Portuguese colonization: the incentive towards miscegenation, which was considered a strategic point of the settlement policy. This feature stands out even more when contrasted with other approaches to colonization - such as the American model - in which restrictive policies with regard to legalizing mixed marriages were adopted, or when one perceives similarities with former Portuguese colonies in Africa. But, one cannot forget, that was not just a question of character but a contextual question, connected with the lack of women involved in the Portuguese colonization. In my point of view that is not a question of defining the differences – cultural differences – or transforming it in fossilized parameters. It is not even a question of judging the models positively or negatively, but rather of reflecting on individual modes of discrimination, a Brazilian way of discriminating.

What can one say, for example, about data from a questionnaire in 1988, in which 97% of the respondents claimed that they were not prejudiced, while 98% of the same respondents declared that they knew other people who were? When asked about their relationship to the people who they claimed were racist, the interviewees unashamedly said that these were relatives, close friends, girlfriends and boyfriends. The conclusion of the study was: "Every Brazilian feels like an island of racial democracy, surrounded on all sides by a sea of racists"⁵.

Another questionnaire: João Batista de Jesus Félix, in a study of dance parties for black people in São Paulo, shows how most interviewees denied being the victims of discrimination, but stated that they knew of friends or family members who had been⁶. While apparently distinct, these two results show parallels: prejudice and discrimination exist, but are always ascribed to "others". Whether one is prejudiced or the victim of prejudice, the act or the blame for it is always laid at someone else's door, as if what is "ugly" is to admit, rather than practice, the act of discrimination.

On January 10, 1996, *Veja* magazine published the results of a wide-ranging study into "who Brazilians think they are", some conclusions of which reinforce the present argument. While

⁵ Study conducted under my coordination in the first term of 1988.

⁶ João Batista de Jesus Félix is presently carrying out his research in conclusion of his Masters Degree in Social Anthropology at the University of São Paulo.

Brazilians consider themselves more joyful (88%) and more caring (78%) than other nationalities, 51% stressed the fact that we are extremely prejudiced as a national characteristic.

We are, therefore, faced with a particular form of racism. This was defined by Florestan Fernandes (1972) as “retroactive prejudice; prejudice against being prejudiced”. The characteristic stance seems to be to acknowledge that prejudice exists, but not to make an issue of it. It has also been “cordial racism” in the *Folha de São Paulo*'s apt phrase: outwardly, one is friendly, but in reality reinforces crystallized and untouchable hierarchical structures⁷. This expression comes, in fact, from Sérgio Buarque de Holanda's allusion, in *Raízes do Brasil* (Roots of Brazil) (1936) to the cordial nature of the Brazilian. Writing that the term derives from *cor*, the Latin for ‘heart’, and indicates a complicated mixture between private and public spheres of action, the renowned historian draws attention to deadlocks in our process of citizenship. According to Holanda, everything in Brazil is encompassed within the circle of intimacy; representative institutions are ignored, as is the State itself.

The problems are similar when the issue of race arises. Discrimination occurs in the private sphere on an everyday basis, in separate elevators, in completely different modes of access to leisure, to education and employment. However in formal spaces it is hidden and even outlawed. This is, after all, what Law Number 7,716, enacted on January 5, 1989, lays down. Racism, so the law goes, is a non-bailable crime. There is a logical error at the outset in the wording of this law: “Article the first - Under the terms of this Law crimes of prejudice against race or colour shall be punished”. There is only one race - the human race - and so such a peremptory assertion is at least problematic. Besides, as with most Brazilian legislation, the laws are enlightened, but mostly honored in the breach. They are hardly ever resorted to, and enforcing them is largely a hypothetical issue⁸.

The intention, anyway, is not to deny the racism that exists in Brazil: quite the opposite in fact. However it is not enough to transform it into a copy of other models. Just as there are no easy solutions, so in the case of the discrimination which one finds in Brazil, the specific features of this racism make it a complex subject, difficult to analyze. It stems from the past, in a clear-cut policy of miscegenation that was employed from the very outset of colonization, in a deep-rooted slave-owning system, which it was Brazil's sad fate to be the last country in the Americas to abolish.

In the aversion to manual labour, and the inhumane relations with the work force, we see re-readings and throwbacks to a History that is written in us and among us.

⁷ The *Folha de S. Paulo* poll appeared for the first time in the “Mais!” supplement on Sunday June 25, 1995, and was co-published with Editora Ática the same year under the title *Cordial Racism*.

⁸ We shall take up the analysis of this Law again, at the end of this article.

As it is impossible to resume Brazilian history in a few pages, what I intend to do is to divide that particular history into some “scenes”. If they do not recall the entire history, they can shed light on some specific moments of our history.

Scene 1. Abolition as gift and charity

Brazil was one of the countries upon which slavery left its deepest marks. Despite imprecise data, it has been asserted that the first slaves disembarked as early as 1549, and the flow was steady until 1850 when the slave trade was abolished, although the keeping of slaves was not. Over this long period upwards of 3.5 million Africans were forcibly brought to the country, influencing the local colours, the employment structure and the patterns of society.

The institution of slavery was so deep-rooted that work eventually came to be seen as exclusively for slaves, and the inhumanity and violence of those relations became commonplace and everyday among us. For example, in the wills slaves appear at the same time (and mixed) with animals. Furthermore, they used to be referred to as “bens semoventes”, which means “mobile proprieties” in opposition to “bens imóveis”, which is to say: “fixed proprieties”

In a country where possessions and income are extremely concentrated, and in which one man can buy another, the distance from the Metropolis and, as from 1822 on, from the National State, increasingly undermined the status of public power. Power was decentralized and the great landowner on his proprieties was lord of life and death. As Holanda says: “in a land with many barons, law is impossible” (Holanda, 1936:85).

We carry the marks of this society that was absolutely dichotomous until the mid-eighteenth century, setting against each other two groups which occupied opposite ends of the social pyramid - slave-owners and slaves. The imposition of laws was customarily relaxed and public institutions were not so important.⁹

A perfect example of this lack of institutional agenda was the official abolition of slavery in Brazil, and even the conservative nature of the abolitionist movement. Liberation of the slaves was never actually seen by the legal abolitionist movement as a revolutionary issue¹⁰. For these politicians, in fact, what was at stake was to put an end to captivity, and this task boiled down to nothing more than an act¹¹. Although these gentlemen believed that slavery was the cancer afflicting Brazil and that abolishing it would help heal the open sore, no allowance was made for projects to absorb the labour force or compensate them. As if by magic the situation would solve

⁹ Roberto da Matta (1981), in a well-known article entitled “Do you know who you are talking to?” (translation) analyzes how the law applies to ‘individuals’ rather than to ‘people’ who are always above it.

¹⁰ The abolitionist movement in Brazil was not entirely legal. Groups such as the ‘*caifases*’ existed: led by Antonio Bento the groups fostered and aided escape by slaves. This group became famous for having organized a quilombo (runaway slave settlement) - Jabaquara - near the port of Santos. For further examination of this theme, see Schwarcz, 1987, among others.

itself through negotiations between (former) slave-owners and (former) slaves, who would reach an agreement as to how the latter would be absorbed into society¹².

The first set of abolitionist legislation - Lei do Ventre Livre (*The Law of the Free Womb*) (1871), and the Saraiva-Cotegipe Law, or Law of the Sexagenarians (1885) - showed just how moderate the process was. The first law freed the children of slaves, but not in fact their mothers, and furthermore determined that they should remain, as freed slaves, under the tutelage of the slave-owner until they reached 21. Captivity was thus prolonged, while the process of abolition was made more palatable.

The second law was so shameful that it was fought even at the time of its enactment. The law of the sexagenarians freed slaves over sixty years old, but allowed for the slave-owner to extend the limit to sixty-five. Average life expectancy for slaves living in the fields ranged from seven to fifteen years, and thirty-year-old slaves were described as senile, toothless and white-haired. A slave reaching thirty was more often than not a liability rather than an asset. The law was, therefore, an instrument favoring slave-owners and not captives. The law also helped to accommodate the public image and the internal and external pressure. But for the slaves the situation was even harder: newspapers of the time talk of former slaves, legally freed, dying by the walls of the properties where they once worked, since there was no solution or shelter for them in the cities¹³.

The immediate result of this organized and over-cautious liberation was to throw a large uneducated and unprepared population into competition with the immigrant labour flowing into Brazil from the 1870s on, and in which the odds were stacked against them.

Finally, the “Lei Áurea” formalized a situation that had persisted for some time. When Princess Isabel abolished slavery on May 13, 1888, many captives had already procured their own freedom. From the start of the 1880s the numbers of slaves escaping increased, and it became common to read in the newspapers of São Paulo state that large slave-owners had ‘gone to sleep’ in possession of all their slaves and ‘awoken’ to find they had all fled.

The army also began to refuse to pursue runaway slaves, and the chances of recapture became increasingly slim. The slave-owners themselves, faced with the total loss of their labour force, took the initiative of freeing their slaves, but retaining them on their estates.

The laconic text of Law No. 3,353 enacted on May 13, 1888 - “Declares slavery extinct in Brazil. The Imperial Princess Regent, on behalf of His Majesty the Emperor Dom Pedro II hereby informs all subjects of the Empire that the General Assembly has decreed, and she has sanctioned the following law: First Article: From the date of enactment of this law slavery is

¹¹ I am referring to the activities of abolitionists like André Rebouças, Luiz Gama and Joaquim Nabuco in the sphere of political bodies. Just as it is true that these politicians were fundamentally important on an individual basis, their joint efforts were clearly legalistic and excessively moderate in character.

¹² See Queiroz, 1981; Skidmore, 1976; Schwarcz, 1987, among others, on the question of legal abolitionism.

¹³ See Viotti da Costa, 1982, for the abolitionist legislation.

henceforth declared extinct. 2nd: All conflicting legislation is hereby overturned". It was a short law with big consequences. It thus dealt with many aspects which were already reality. On the one hand it showed how the law had lagged behind developments, and how the monarchy was trying to win a few last tricks, which would eventually result in its own downfall in 1889¹⁴. On the other hand, however, in its total failure to take into account the fate of this great slave population, the text of the law showed how no one had thought of how to absorb the former slaves into society.

Abolition was understood as a gift, and as such, also as unsought-for charity. The problem is that it disguised a process of struggle and confrontation, becoming entirely an image of slow, orderly, gradual and state-controlled change. In this way any sort of rights or demands of any kind were lost. Unlike what occurred in other countries, where abolition meant the culmination of a process of struggle, the news of liberation in Brazil caused a certain passivity and resignation.

No process, however, is meaningful in itself. It is important to consider how, in this context, the nationality and potential for citizenship and, above all, the potential of such a numerous Negro and *mestizo* population, were thought of in Brazil. Indeed, at the time a series of deterministic scientific theories seeking to establish ontological differences between the races had a significant influence upon Brazilian intellectuals. These theories considered miscegenation a factor that might potentially bring about the 'failure and degeneration of a nation'. At the same time, during the nineteenth century, the country became a naturalist's paradise. The scientists, who came in search of flora and fauna, ended up discovering the novelty of miscegenation.

Scene 2. Racial theories of the nineteenth century: "*mestizage* and degeneration"

While the right to citizenship was guaranteed in the body of legislation of the young Republic of 1889, a deterministic and evolutionary science was denying equality between men and systematically transforming this goal into a utopia.

Unlike the romantic stance of the early and mid-nineteenth century, when the Empire selected the indigenous Brazilian as its key symbol, and made miscegenation between races a desirable aim¹⁵, racial intermingling had become a problem in itself by the end of the century.

In the first place, according to countless travellers who had visited Brazil, the country was fast becoming a kind of 'racial laboratory'. So that if at first most of these naturalists sought in

¹⁴ Several writers have drawn parallels between the abolition of slavery and the fall of the monarchy. Indeed, the last segment of society still supporting the Empire - the large estate-owners of the Paraíba valley - joined the ranks of the newly-created Republican party.

¹⁵ The Brazilian Historical and Geographical Institute held a competition in 1844, called "How to Write the History of Brazil", which was won by a Bavarian naturalist: K. F. P. von Martius. He defended the thesis that Brazilian history could only be studied from the standpoint of its specific characteristics and the confluence of three races. On the other hand, while the Academia Imperial de Belas Artes sought its ideal of representation in the native Indian and in the forest, romantic literature idealized the natives and made them a symbol of national identity. See my book (1998)

Brazil the sanctuary of boundless flora and fauna, they afterwards diverted their gaze towards another spectacle: that of the races.

However, unlike one might suppose, while most interpretations in the field of nature tended to depict Brazil as a Garden of Eden, in the field of humanity these interpretations were unforgiving. If cannibalism, polytheism and polygamy had concerned European curiosity from the moment the country was discovered, from the nineteenth century onwards, justified by evolutionary and deterministic science, these new travellers now condemned what they saw; above all miscegenation.

Naturalists like Aimard (1888), Agassiz (1868), Gobineau (1853), Spix and Martius (1881) among others, marvelled at the beauty of the flora and the variety of species of fauna, but reproved native habits - considering them throwbacks to the very dawn of civilization - and particularly disapproved of biological and cultural crossbreeding, mixed customs and adulterated religions.

But if it is easy to understand the penetration of racial theories into foreign discourse about Brazil, it is hard to interpret its scientific vogue among Brazilian intellectuals; and it was indeed in vogue.

In the various research institutions of the time - in the Historical and Geographical Institutes (in Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo and Recife), the Museums of Ethnography (in Rio de Janeiro and Belém), the Law (São Paulo and Recife) and Medical Schools (Rio de Janeiro and Bahia) - racist theories were imported and became fashionable.

These scientists, who for the most part were followers of the Darwinist social ideas championed by writers such as Gobineau (1853), Le Bon (1894) and Haeckel (1884), believed that the same distances observed among species also existed among races, and that, therefore, crossbreeding was always a factor of imbalance and degeneration.

In Rio de Janeiro and Bahia Schools of Medicine, for example, the racial question was so recurrent that one might think Brazil was but one step away from social apartheid. Nina Rodrigues of the Bahia Medical School called for the introduction of phrenology in Brazil, and was a disciple of Lombroso's criminal anthropology (1876). Rodrigues even introduced this academic discipline into the Medical and Law Schools, and later fought to introduce these theories into the Penal Code.

In his book *The Human Races and Penal Responsibility in Brazil* (1894), Rodrigues argues in favour of creating two penal codes - one for whites and another for Blacks - and justifies his arguments using the scientific jargon of the times. Indeed, in compliance with social Darwinism, if the races really did carry fundamental ontological differences, then it was necessary to separate them legally and physically. Nina Rodrigues, who was a controversial character – our first ethnographer, with the book “*Africanos no Brasil*” and our first theoretical racist – used to say

that if a country was not rich not old it must be different. So Brazil was different because of miscegenation, which was, at the same time, both our biggest problem and our specificity.

The efforts of Rio de Janeiro physicians stand out against this background in their support for direct intervention in the state of affairs in Brazil. In the Rio de Janeiro Medical School specialists like Renato Khel defended the use of techniques such as eugenics and even the sterilization of mestizos, in their continual struggle, to use the terms of the era, to 'improve the race'¹⁶. Using the arguments and practices of "hygienization", the Rio physicians, sweeping all before them after their public sanitation campaigns such as the eradication of Yellow Fever, now began to make the formation of a 'good race' their priority, encouraging certain marriages, preventing others, imposing practices and customs, fostering certain habits and censuring others. The model was South Africa and the racial practices used in the country in that context.

The lawyers, or 'men of Justice' as they called themselves, involved in their own struggle for intellectual hegemony, also saw the question of race as a key issue. At the Recife Law School, Silvio Romero (1888), while acknowledging miscegenation as Brazil's defining characteristic, held "getting whiter"- to translate the word *branqueamento* literally - to be the key solution. He wrote: "we are mestizos in our souls, that is undeniable, and it is enough" (1888:63) - resigning himself to the marked intermingling that already existed in Brazil. For him the question of race was so crucial that he even had time for jokes. He used to say that the first Emperor lost the crown because he was not Brazilian and that the second one would follow the same line because he was not *mulatto*. Let us say it in Portuguese: "O primeiro Imperador caiu porque não era nato, o segundo há de cair porque não é mulato".

Meanwhile, in São Paulo, although jurists claimed to be against the racial theories developing in Recife, they were the first to adopt restrictive measures against immigration. Some lawyers who were parliamentarians for the province went so far as to try to impede the entry of Africans and Chinese, despite a shortage of manual labour, feeling that they could afford to select workers only from Central Europe.

But the debate was not centered exclusively on physicians and jurists. While phrenological studies were fundamental in ethnographic museums and enabled scientists to measure the capacities of different peoples, with Euclides da Cunha's entry to the IHGB - the Brazilian Historical and Geographical Institute - this type of deterministic racial thinking pervaded even these circles¹⁷.

¹⁶ See Schwarcz, 1993, for a fuller examination of the role of the Medical Schools in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

¹⁷ In my book *O Espectáculo das Raças* [The Spectacle of the Races] (1993) I have analyzed the impact of racial theories on the several scientific establishments at the end of the nineteenth century. Besides this, I reflect upon the importance of the entry of Euclides da Cunha, the author of *Os Sertões* [Rebellion in the Backlands]

There is much more to be said on the subject of these theories, but what is essential is to see how they undermined the idea of equality and ascribed 'the ills of the nation' to the Blacks and mestizos. Actually, not only did Lombroso's stigma theory draw attention to the traits of the coloured population - which supposedly suffered from atavism and tendencies to delinquency - but all the various writers themselves also found a common cause for concern in mixed-breeding - *mestiçagem*. If 'race' was a negotiated concept, all agreed in censuring breeding across races.

This type of theory, backed up by science, effectively enabled them to pass off as 'natural' what were in effect political and social differences.

Against this background in which abolition appeared to be an end in itself – or even an external gift – and in which racial models viewed Blacks as 'foreigners' and second-class citizens, there was little space for Blacks to exercise their citizenship. The former slaves, now classed as a subgroup, were inserted into another strange forbidding world. But in the official representation the situation began to change: although the real situation had not changed, in the official depiction, things were different. The mestizo started to be seen, not as our poison, but as our sublime difference.

Scene 3. The 1930s: “we are indeed all mulattos”

Only in the 1930s does miscegenation transform itself from being Brazil's supreme disgrace into being its sublime defining characteristic. This magic spell was formalized by Gilberto Freyre, despite the fact that other authors were talking about the same subject at the same period: Arthur Ramos, Thales de Azevedo, Donald Pierson and even Mario de Andrade in the famous book *Macunaíma*.¹⁸ But it was Gilberto Freyre in *Casa-Grande e Senzala* (1930) [The Masters and the Slaves] who painted the most famous and fairly idealized portrait of Brazilian slavery. Taking the specific and unique environment of domestic slavery - and making it a generalized model of local captivity - Freyre ended up making official the idea that a 'good model of slavery' had existed in Brazil, with strict but paternalistic masters and faithful friendly slaves. In spite of the fact that Freyre found violent relationships between “master and slaves” the main conclusion was that in Brazil we had a special kind of civilization, a mixed civilization.

Arguing that in the Tropics everything tended to 'soften', to use his own term, Freyre viewed Brazilian cross-breeding not as the fruit of asymmetrical social relations, or of a given unjust historical state of affairs¹⁹, but as a model of civilization to be acknowledged and possibly

¹⁸ In this book Andrade shows the myth of the three races, showing that the origin of Macunaíma was a mixed one.

¹⁹ Several writers have drawn attention to the disproportionate ratio of the sexes in the Colonial period and throughout much of the Empire. Not only did white men arrive in greater numbers in Brazil to try their fortune, and 'make America' in the contemporary phrase, but the overwhelming majority of imported slaves were masculine. Mário de Andrade wrote an interesting essay on this theme entitled “O seqüestro da Dona Ausente” [The Rape of the Absent Mistress] (unpublished), grouping together songs which treat of the lack of women in colonial Brazil.

even exported. In his view, the Portuguese had two distinguishing features: their hybrid origin, and their geographical proximity to two other continents, America and Africa. These historical and geographical coincidences supposedly created a people averse to prejudice and tolerant of differences, and, what is more, accustomed to 'syncretizing'²⁰ diverse cultural elements.

Starting out in this way from an exclusively culturalist standpoint, which hardly took economic determiners into account, Freyre found in Brazil Portuguese personality traits thriving alongside the native and the Black cultures. If *Casa-Grande & Senzala* actually did represent a critique of racial and evolutionist analytical models, in that the author introduced cultural arguments, it is necessary to state that Freyre changes the terms and reveals new theoretical connections²¹, but still orders the races hierarchically. The white man is always the civilizing example, closely followed by the native Indian with his habits of hygiene and feeding, and the Black with his 'lubricious religious fervor'. The whole cultural interchange is presented in a harmonious environment, as if inter-cultural contact was some kind of organized swoop, and above all not emphasizing the inter-racial differences which took root. Culture was above the infrastructural elements, as it was a completely independent factor.

However, the book caused a furor at the time, since it started out from original sources - letters, diaries and wills - and concluded that the history of Brazil was the history of the sexual intercourse of the three formative cultures.

And thus, at that moment, not only did the "Estado Novo" adopt miscegenation as the symbol of the young nation's identity, but Freyre himself, crossing the Atlantic, enjoyed great success in Portugal with his theory of "luso-tropicalism". According to which, Portugal and Brazil possessed a model to offer to this world full of tensions: it possessed a paradigm of racial harmony.

With obvious political intentions, miscegenation ceases to be a blemish and becomes a virtue. The slave dish Feijoada - black bean stew - becomes the national dish, uniting, so the folklorists say, the white of the rice, the yellow of oranges and the brown of the beans. The martial art capoeira is decriminalized and recognized by the Penal Code in 1890 and officially made a

²⁰ Terms such as syncretism and acculturation, which Freyre used freely, are currently undergoing a thorough re-examination. These concepts stem from a symmetrical notion of culture, as if Brazil had not had the European model imposed on it politically and economically. On the other hand these terms lead one to suppose that cultures are impermeable entities, that contact between them is restricted to the introduction of given elements, and that mixture or alteration never occurs. In the final analysis, such terms reveal problematic principles, since they posit pure unadulterated cultures. If one concludes that there is no such thing as a totally untouched culture, the concept of purity itself becomes a false problem (Schwarcz, 1987). The most commonly used term nowadays is 'cultural dynamics' (Sahlins, 1987; Ginsburg, 1983), which emphasizes not individual contributions but the way in which new cultures, which are always re-readings of prior models, arise from contact.

²¹ At several points in his book Freyre states his allegiances to Franz Boas' American culturalist school. Nonetheless, he dedicates *Casa-Grande* to the physician Nina Rodrigues, who defended racial and deterministic analytical models.

national sport in 1937.²² The “samba” changed from a repressed dance to a sound for exportation and received official subvention from 1935. The new government of Getulio Vargas introduced new civic dates: Labour Day, Vargas’ birthday and Race Day, invented to show the tolerance of this society. In the same way in 1938 candomblé was freed.²³ Even football, originally an English sport, became more and more associated with the Blacks, mainly from 1933 on, with the professionalization of the players. At the same time Nossa Senhora da Conceição Aparecida was chosen as the patron saint of Brazil. Half white, half black, the new saint was as mestizo as the Brazilians. In panorama, the main idea was that a free exchange of cultural traces between groups existed in Brazil. Culture was harmonious and the society – despite the deep differences – was considered one of equality too.

The formerly degenerate mestizo makes a comeback in the person of the ‘malandro’ from Rio de Janeiro - typically an upbeat street-wise character always on the lookout for a big chance - , and is even set in stone by Disney’s cartoon character Zé Carioca, in 1942. The friendly parrot, representing the Brazilian mestizo malandro, never doing anything very bad, but then again, never doing anything very good either, appeared for the first time in the cartoon ‘Alô Amigos’. In this film the happy parrot –symbolizing Brazil – introduced Donald Duck to the Brazilian lands with a lot of “cachaça, mulattas and Carmem Miranda” – another symbol for exportation. With the song “Aquarela do Brasil”, new symbols of the same country were shown: “Brasil, meu Brasil brasileiro, meu mulato inzoneiro, vou cantar-te nos meus versos...” (Brazil, my Brazilian Brazil, my lazy mulatto, I am going to sing you in my verse ...”

The success was immediate and Zé Carioca returned with the cartoon *Você já foi a Bahia?* (“Have you been to Bahia?”), showing to the Americans how harmonic and exotic the country could be. It was the foreign view that recognized the “malandro” as a compact of Brazilian culture: the hatred of regular labour and the value given to intimate relations. As Wilson Batista, one of the great samba composers of the period, used to sing: “meu pai trabalhou tanto/ que eu já nasci cansado/ ai patrão/sou um homem liquidado”.²⁴ (My father worked so much that I was already born tired; boss I am a dead man”).

In this context, in the songs, such as *Mulato de qualidade* (Quality mulatto) -- from André Filho (1932) – or in *O que será de mim*, (What is going to happen to me) composed by Francisco Alves, Ismael Silva and Nilton Santos, in 1931, emerged a new national figure: “Minha malandragem é fina. Não desfazendo de ninguém. Deus é que dá a sina. E o valor dá-se a quem tem.” (My malandragem [double-dealing/laziness/cunning] is nice. And I do not mistreat anyone. It’s God who gives fate. And honour to the honourable alone). God is therefore Brazilian and the country began to be a synonym of this character. And thus arises the “jeitinho brasileiro”: a kind

²² See Leticia Vidor Reis (1997)

²³ Leticia V. Reis, 1993:12.

²⁴ Apud Leticia V. Reis, 1993:16.

of behaviour that means always doing things on the side, far from the official measures, and always using intimacy as a way to success.

The penetration of this character was immense and so the Estado Novo, against the divulgation of this image, from 1938 on, used the Departamento Nacional de Propaganda (DNP. National Department of Propaganda) to try to change the representation of labour and the worker. As a result, in 1939, an official law was passed forbidding the exaltation of the malandro. At the beginning of the forties the DIP even suggested that composers should exalt work and condemn bohemia.

Anyway, repressed or not, the malandro represented the prejudice against a world that was inherited from the slave period. Associated with “a coisa de preto” (a black thing), the aversion to labour was connected with “mestiçagem”, and linked with the new image of laziness. But one important thing is worth mentioning; colour is still present, but in such a scenario as hides differences: the criteria is still a phenotype, but the stress is on a new distinction that is not just biological but also cultural. And one cannot forget the “mulatta”, the black lady exported for her exotic beauty and sensuality; a new icon of the Brazilians. The thing is, there is a certain nationalization of symbols and mestizo elements come to be national. Again, nothing happens in reality, it is just a question of public representation.

In this context, *Casa-Grande & Senzala* is hailed as a kind of Brazilian model, discovering an excess rather than lack of meaning in Brazilian society. As we have seen, the book disseminated a myth: the myth of ‘racial democracy’. Even if the author does not introduce this expression, the idea is there - Brazil has a special model, an example to be shown elsewhere. However, like other myths, which often fly in the face of reality but nonetheless cast light upon it, *Casa-Grande* may have contained some distortions, but it also hit the target in many ways.

Just as there were several Brazilian patterns of racial coexistence, it was also impossible to ignore the unjust violent relations between whites and blacks stretching over four centuries. The mixture cannot be ignored, but it was above all cultural rather than biological - always bearing in mind the asymmetry of relations.

This is what a number of writers confirmed in the 1950s. Brazil’s much-vaunted racial democracy disguised and distorted obvious racial discrimination, a segregation that was neither racial nor cultural but above all economical.

Scene 4. The UNESCO survey and the Brazilian example

The message of the 1950s was given at the same time in which the ruins of de-colonization were becoming increasingly obvious. The violence of the liberation process of former African colonies was comparable to European imperialism itself, which had carved up the world like a pudding at the end of the nineteenth century. The loss of Africa was a stab wound to Europe’s heart: it would have to cease to pretend to be carrying ‘the white man’s burden’ and

acknowledge the predatory interests which had driven nineteenth-century imperialist domination. De-colonization also meant the failure of the model of 'good colonialism' - which is surely a fiction - and revealed to the world the extremism and incomprehension that lay behind the meeting of different cultures.

Against this backdrop UNESCO held a large conference on the question. Claude Lévi-Strauss produced one of his best-known texts especially for the occasion: his essay 'Race and History' (1952). The ethnologist argues in this essay that it is essential to "acknowledge differences, without, however, ordering them in a hierarchy", a clear allusion to two deadlocks of the time. The culturalist analysis, opposing evolutionist models²⁵, saw mankind as an evolutionary pyramid, at the top of which was white western civilization, and thus clouded the issue of diversity. The reaction to this was to stress the differences between cultures, which follow distinct processes. However, the problem at that time was not just recognizing the differences - of course mankind is plural - but simply to avoid qualifying them.

UNESCO organized three different meetings -- in 1947, 1951 and 1964 --, and tried to change the biological importance of the term "race"; it would be a mere taxonomical word and a statistical one. The idea was to criticize the term by showing how it hides other cultural prejudices. The phenotype was just one physical and empirical umbrella to introduce other prejudices. The concept was not considered natural; it was just a social classification based on a negative attitude in front of different groups.²⁶

But the impact and penetration of this kind of interpretation was big and Brazil appeared as an example for the world. Gilberto Freyre's interpretation played an active part in these seminars and it was his idea to conduct a large-scale survey of Brazil. It was in this way that Brazil ceased to be a model of degeneration, as the travellers and the Brazilian intelligentsia had asserted in the nineteenth century, and became a model of racial coexistence, a ray of hope for a world at war.

In 1951, a big research project was commissioned by UNESCO and mediated, in Brazil, by Alfred Métraux. Trusting in Freyre's and Pierson's interpretations the institution wanted to show the "Brazilian case" as a kind of propaganda, and with this specific goal opened the *Programa de pesquisas sobre relações raciais no Brasil (Program of research on race relationship in Brazil)*. The main idea was that the country represented a neutral example in the manifestation of racial prejudice and that it could serve as inspiration to other "less democratic" nations. They contracted other specialists, such as C. Wagley, Thales de Azevedo, René Ribeiro,

²⁵ We are referring to authors such as Morgan, Frazer and Tylor who argued for the unity of the human race, but believed that there was only one direction in which to evolve: towards western civilization.

²⁶ Antonio Sérgio Guimarães, 1997

Costa Pinto, Roger Bastide, Oracy Nogueira, Florestan Fernandes, among others, to deal with the “Brazilian racial reality”.²⁷

UNESCO wanted, therefore, to show through this research how positive “mestiçagem” in Brazil was and how it was a kind of model to modern societies divided among different groups. Nevertheless, if some books -- such as *As elites de cor* (1955) from Thales de Azevedo -- followed that goal, others changed the terms. This is the case of Costa Pinto (who studied Rio de Janeiro), and Roger Bastide and Florestan Fernandes (with their studies about São Paulo). They showed the limits of the myth: instead of democracy we had deep discrimination, instead of harmony, we could find prejudice.

The most interesting thing is that while Pierson’s research findings bore out Freyre’s model of “racial democracy”, the southern group, who used more rigorous investigation methods, inverted the terms of the equation upon revealing that, unlike what other analyses presumed, there was no equality. Quite the opposite in fact: what they unearthed were differences in access to leisure, education and employment²⁸.

The result was that UNESCO published Pierson’s study and the work of the group of sociologists from São Paulo was shelved. Their efforts, after all, contributed very little to the initial purposes of the sponsoring agency. However, within Brazil, their research caused a hurricane and, to a certain extent, scratched and dented the hitherto unassailable ‘myth of racial democracy’.

Fernandes’ analyses, which connected the racial question with the theme of inequality²⁹, were very important. He tried to understand the bases of the inequality and argued against the idea that showed that we had no problems because we had no open conflicts. “Does the absence of open tensions and permanent conflicts, in itself, really indicate good organization of racial relations?”³⁰ - asked the sociologist, questioning the fragile following-on of one affirmation from the other. Confronting the impasses engendered within this society recently released from slavery, the São Paulo sociologist raised as problematic the notion of “racial tolerance” in force in the country, comparing it to a certain code of decorum that, in practice, functioned as an impassable ditch separating the different social groups. The innovation stemmed from the theoretical bases of this school, with sociologically stamped analyses, centered on the theme of

²⁷ This project was later enlarged through new research conducted by the chair of Sociology I of the Faculty of Philosophy, Science and Letters at Universidade de São Paulo (better known as the São Paulo School of Sociology from this time on). Fernando Henrique Cardoso, Otavio Ianni and Renato Jardim conducted related projects, in areas with the smallest proportion of Negroes in Brazil, in search of particular forms of the introduction of slavery.

²⁸ See Fernandes (1972) on this question.

²⁹ In 1953 Florestan Fernandes and Roger Bastide published *Whites and Negroes in São Paulo*, but it was in *The Introduction of the Negro to Class Society* (1965) and in *The Negro in a White World* (1972) that the author returns in a more evident form to the impasses of the racial situation in Brazil. The book was first published in 1965, but was originally the thesis he presented for his chair in sociology, defended in 1964. For more information on the work of Florestan Fernandes, see Maria Arminda Arruda (1996a and 1996b).

³⁰ Florestan Fernandes, 1972:21

the modernization of the country, taking the place of culturalist analyses. It also arose from the investigation of the process that had paved the way for the transition from the traditional to the modern world, opening up an ample discussion on the situation of the social classes in Brazil.³¹

The author even noted the existence of a particular kind of racism: “a prejudice towards not being prejudiced”. Otherwise put, the Brazilian tendency would be to continue to discriminate, despite considering such an attitude outrageous for the sufferer and degrading for the practitioner³². The result of the disaggregating of the traditional order, tied to slavery and lordly dominance, this polarization of attitudes, was, for Fernandes, a consequence of the permanence of a catholic ethos. It was the Christian mores that were responsible for this split world-view that ensured that one followed a practical orientation that was totally at variance with one’s theoretical obligations. Consequently, even if prejudice based on colour was to be flatly condemned by Brazilian society, as if it represented an evil in itself, the discrimination present in society would - so long as a certain decorum was preserved and its manifestations at least remained hidden - continue untouched.

Racism appeared in this manner, and once more, as a manifestation in the private forum more appropriate to the recesses of the home, it was almost a lifestyle. It is as if the Brazilians repeated the past in the present, but translated it into the private sphere. The abolition of slavery, with rights under law and the right to work becoming universal, was not to affect the traditional pattern of racial accommodation; on the contrary, it would serve only to camouflage it.

Once again, and through diverse analyses, the specificity of prejudice in Brazil was made clear in its private and largely unformulated character. The result is to confuse miscegenation with the absence of stratification and the construction of an idealization focused on ‘whitening’. We arrive, in this manner, not only at the notion of “the whiter the better”, but to the already traditional figure of the “black with a white soul”; white on the inside, a figure which represented, above all, until the 1970s, the prototype of the loyal black, who is devoted to his lord and family, as well as to the very social order itself³³. From this image we can see the paradox of the racial situation lived in Brazil: a valiant social mobility might have eliminated some of the barriers that existed during the slave period, only to create others of economic and even moral order - at least for those who did not fit the abovementioned figure, or who opposed certain moral codes being lived in an increasingly internalized fashion.

A hidden and a-systematic racism was thus diagnosed by Florestan Fernandes, who introduced statistical data to support his interpretations in an innovative way. In the 1950 census

³¹It was thus informed by the new sociological slants and by historical materialism that Florestan Fernandes understood his theme, without failing to establish relations between the process of the formation of a class society and the maintenance of the mechanisms of discrimination still in force in the country. For more on this, see Antonio Sérgio Alfredo Guimarães, 1997:140.

³² Florestan Fernandes, 1972:23

³³ Florestan Fernandes, 1972:27

results, the sociologist found not only regional differences (with the majority of blacks and mulattos situated in the north-east), but also economically, socially and culturally privileged racial concentrations.

The research taken as a whole pointed to new facets of “Brazilian miscegenation”. A deep-rooted system of social hierarchy would survive, bequeathed by history, that introduced grades of prestige based on criteria such as social class, formal education, line of descent and an entire *carrefour* of colours and tones. Almost as a native reference, “colour prejudice” did the rounds of the races, making the criteria and mechanisms of understanding discrimination even more slippery. Dubbed “the metamorphosis of the slave”³⁴ by Fernandes, the Brazilian process of social exclusion developed in such a way as to employ the terms “black” and “Negro” – which formally refer to skin colour – in the place of the notion of a subordinate class, in a movement that constantly extinguishes the conflict and the difference.

However, the arrival of the seventies brought a whole new movement contesting the dominant values, submitting them to questioning through official politics and, more alternatively, through literature and music. Also dating to this time was the emergence of the Unified Negro Movement (MNU), which joined with the other social movements to create parallel organizations that came to question traditional forms of power³⁵. Largely supported by Florestan Fernandes’ conclusions and those of the São Paulo School of Sociology, the MNU strengthened the chorus of those who had already demonstrated the mythical side of racial democracy – exalted as a model, but hard to find in reality.

In the differences in access to education and leisure and in the unequal distribution of wealth one could see the marks of a discrimination that, while evident in daily life, avoided being officially grasped. The first studies of the fifties were certainly important for the future debunking of the myth, and yet, in its deconstruction, they to a certain degree encapsulated the theme of race within a class question while abandoning the issue of culture. Within a context marked by political radicalism the racial theme seemed to be subsumed within a larger question – that of the struggle among the social classes. It would be through the modernization and democratization of the State that the racial question, among others, would be resolved in Brazil and not by confronting its specifics.

If this is undoubtedly a privileged way of understanding the question, it was more recent studies that, according to the vogue of numbers and data, took up the theme anew and showed

³⁴ Florestan Fernandes, 1965.

³⁵ The date of the formation of the MNU is generally associated with the public act of July 7th, 1978, in São Paulo. It is also important to highlight that this was neither the only nor the first Brazilian Negro movement, with the Brazilian Negro Front and its newsletter, *The Voice of Race*, having been created as far back as 1931. Besides this newsletter, there were also other Negro periodicals in circulation, such as *The Bugle of Dawn* and *The Progress*. Years later, new vehicles would come to be created, like *The Negro Culture Section*, as well as other new managed initiatives, a good example of which would be the *Negro Experimental Theatre*, organized by Abdias Nascimento.

how prejudice based on colour was not exclusively entwined with an economic and social question, but, quite to the contrary, persisted as a dividing given in our society. Insisting on the thesis of inequality developed by Fernandes and opposing the argument that continued to underline a certain softness in Brazilian racism, a new series of quantitative studies, from the eighties onwards, invested in the analysis of the deep inequalities that separated Negroes from the other groups, and whites from non-whites.

What explained Brazilian society was not race (as the nineteenth-century theorists would have it), nor was it a special culture (as was held by the culturalist interpretation), but a completely asymmetrical class struggle. At that time Marxist analyses were gaining influence in Brazil, placing more weight on class problems than cultural issues.

The new studies shed light on aspects which had not previously been formalized and revealed the discriminatory character of Brazilian society. However, they devalue some of Freyre's genuinely important arguments. The racial question could not simply be relegated to a class issue, and to treat it as such was to ignore a fundamental theme of Brazilian society.

Years later the question would be revived from the standpoint of the social movements. These were the first fruits of the May 1968 agitation, in which the students at the barricades began to question the existing forms of power, and adhered to libertarian interpretational models.

Scene 5. Social Movements: "we're all gays, lesbians and Blacks"

In the late 1970s, with the end of repression and the beginning of the *abertura* - the process of increasing political freedoms - so-called social movements come to the fore.

These social movements arose as alternative forms of use of the political word and as an alternative form of voicing protest. Against this background there sprang up new feminist organizations - in this country where the paternalist nature of relations has always been crystal clear - as well as groups representing the homosexual movement, ecological groups and associations for the defence of Black issues in Brazil.

At the end of the 1970s the MNU - Unified Black Movement - was created, representing for the first time a black political protest group in the country. This is not to say that Black newspapers and associations had never previously existed in Brazil. But what distinguishes the MNU, which proposed that the Black population should receive damages and group together, is its politically outspoken nature.

The black movement, clearly influenced by the American model, and the Marxist analyses, represented a clear-cut breakthrough in terms of the awareness it proposed and its demands for Black culture and values to be respected. In a country so marked by the political and economic depreciation of underprivileged segments, the Black population was even undervalued by its own members. How could one grant value to religions and shades of brown in a country which had always taken its cultural inspiration from white sources?

In this way, along with other groups, the MNU played an important role in bringing to the fore the voice and values of minorities, as well as the language of difference³⁶. It was a question of recuperation of “honour and self image”, and it really matters to talk about a positive action in this sense. How do you compensate the lacks accumulated over the centuries?

However, its American inspiration meant that there was, in my point of view, a huge gap between the values of this group and those of the population it actually represented. If not so, how else can we understand how little representative the Movement was? The movement was oriented towards a bipolar racial distinction and the analysis of a prejudice of origin - since in the United States whoever comes from a Black family is Black, regardless of actual colour - and failed to recognize the particular character of Brazilian racism. It is not origin which defines belonging, but colour itself, as well as economic status. As Oracy Nogueira used to say, there is in Brazil a kind of particular prejudice: a prejudice based in external colour and not in the origin of the group.³⁷ That means that a person can become whiter if he becomes rich, and even the opposite. That also means that a person can change his answers depending on who asks the question: if the person is black the person would be whiter in his/her self-definition, and the contrary is also true.

With its use of phenotypic signs and stress upon ‘pure immaculate’ origins, the MNU ran the risk of returning to late-nineteenth century deterministic explanations, or seeking an “African essence” in a people who had been submitted for four centuries to a process of not only biological, but also cultural miscegenation.

This is why even today Brazilians find it difficult to specify skin colour and invent a vast array of words to make up for their uncertainty in this field. This also explains why the term race is so often mis-read, since one supposes it implies becoming whiter or blacker, determined by the subject’s economic condition. The MNU in fact worked with a population that had difficulty in defining itself as Black, which in itself is a trait working against the delimitation of the group.

To resort to a biological definition is risky since it entails agreeing with evolutionist criteria that saw in race a stable defining element for physical, cultural and moral potentials. The problem, in my point of view, is that in retransforming the concept into a biological one, one calls forth the ghost of a new racism.

As the philosopher Kwame Appiah says: “the truth is that races do not exist; there is nothing in this world capable of doing that which we ask of race ... even the biological notion has only limited uses (..) To insist on the notion of race is even more desolating for those who take culture and history seriously³⁸”. Race is, therefore, a historical and social construction, raw

³⁶ I shall not go deeply into the significance of the MNU, or of capoeira and candomblé. This subject is new and very controversial and we would have no time to develop it in this article. For a good balance I suggest, among others, the articles of Antonio Sergio Guimarães.

³⁷ The creator of this distinction between prejudice of origin and of colour is Oracy Nogueira (1954).

³⁸ Kwame Anthony Appiah, 1997:75.

material for the discourse of nationalities. It is, as Thomas Sowell put it, “over and above being a biological concept, a social reality, one of the forms we have of identifying people in our own heads”³⁹. This is also Toni Morrison’s sense, the 1993 Nobel Prize for Literature winner, when she says: “I would like to dissuade those who read literature in this way... Race is the least trustworthy piece of information one could obtain about a person. It is real information, but it says almost nothing”⁴⁰.

Just as we know that race does not really exist, but is in fact merely a piece of statistical data, we also know that it is impossible to bet on a return to exclusively phenotype-related criteria.

If the group continues, it is the question of identity, which is primordial and confers culture on it, rather than the opposite. As Bath (1995) states, we have mistaken the consequence - race and culture - for the cause; and there is a danger of clouding the issue. It is the group that recreates the concept as an instrument, but the concept itself is hard to sustain.

However, while the MNU adopted the Sociology School model (viewing the class struggle as the key issue) and linked its activities to the liberation movements in Africa; the local Black population seemed increasingly interested in reinventing local mestizo culture in Brazil. We are talking of *candomblé*, funk and reggae, *capoeira*, *axé* music, *pagode* and *timbalada*, which despite being borrowed from different sources in Black culture, when taken together indicate the recovery of a certain “Negritude” and display a recent process of self-esteem, a new vision of what it means to be black, mestizo and brown in Brazil.

Once again, there is no agreement on this question, and there are also some original things to be observed in this field. Culture is once again re-signified and Black cultural manifestations gain nationwide importance. One need only think of the resurgence of pride in being from Bahia - *baianidade* - and the new affirmation of an African past in the southeast of Brazil. There are some differences in the scenery and there is not such a passivity as we used to observe.

Therefore, one should not take our Afro heritage for granted⁴¹: tradition is not immutable, but promptly summoned up in particular sets of political circumstances. Cultures recreate traditions and not the opposite. The new importance of the Brazilian African heritage is a fact (that is for sure) but it is also a sign of new times and new faces.

Colours and confusion

If we think about today we could say that the question of race is once again the order of the day. Whether in its milder, more exotic form - celebration of the *morena*, of Carnival and

³⁹ Thomas Sowell, 1994:96.

⁴⁰ Interview in *Time* magazine, January 19, 1998. Our translation.

samba - or in its novelty Afro-Bahian mode - music, spicy food and religious cults - or in its more negative aspect: racism.

These recent new manifestations have been something of a nuisance to a population that has obviously always known that racism existed, even if on a personal level it has denied the fact.

With regard to Brazil, the numbers are alarming. We have mentioned the University of São Paulo study in which 98% of the subjects claimed not to be racially prejudiced, although 97% stated that they knew people who were. This data was borne out to a certain extent by a more broad-based study of the same issue conducted by *Datafolha* in 1995.

The results showed that 89% of Brazilians claimed that there was no discrimination against Negroes in Brazil. Only 10% admitted to a slight or significant degree of prejudice, but 87% indirectly admitted to being racially prejudiced by agreeing to a series of discriminatory sentences, or by admitting to racist behaviour towards Blacks⁴².

To a certain extent this nationwide study confirmed F. Fernandes' conclusions (1972) that there is, in Brazil, discrimination of a particular character: "the Brazilian does not try to avoid being racially prejudiced, but is ashamed to be so". *Folha* added the phrase "cordial racism" to this conclusion, a concept coined by S. B. de Holanda in *Roots of Brazil* (1936), when he asserted that the excessive number of intimate personal relationships in Brazil led to a primacy of the private domain, and to a certain cordiality, which, besides the appearance, created a continual, repeated affirmation of deep-rooted hierarchies.

The cordial Brazilian, on being asked whether he is a racist, will deny it, but will keep his conceptions and sensibility intact. Thus while there are no extremist racist movements in Brazil, there are countless demonstrations of racism which find a delicate but no less effective way of discriminating. R. da Matta (1981), for example, analyses the phrase "Do you know who you are talking to?", in order to prove that Brazilian racism does not need to affirm itself on a daily basis, since the hierarchies are in place and accepted. However, when provoked in moments of stress, Brazilians, by means of such phrases, reveal this stratified world where everyone's place is strictly defined. It is like another version of the humorist Millôr Fernandes' well-known provocative joke: "there's no racism in Brazil: the Blacks know their place".

Further away from the body of the law, racism thrives in the vague spaces of daily life. It is interesting, against this background, to analyze Law Number 7,716 of January 5, 1989, which made racism a non-bailable crime in Brazil.

The first article of the law already indicates the confused definition of the question in the country: "Crimes of prejudice towards race or colour shall be punished under this law". In the

⁴¹ The historian Eric Hobsbawm in *The Invention of Tradition* (1987) shows how traditions are not fixed but reinvented as a result of new political circumstances.

⁴² The research data was presented in the book *Racismo Cordial*, 1995. Fernando Rodrigues' Introduction contains an excellent analysis of the study's findings.

wording of the law, “race” is used as a synonym of colour⁴³, proving that the terms are considered homologous and interchangeable here in Brazil. The articles that follow are extremely telling:

Article 3 – To directly or indirectly impede or hinder the access of any individual with the necessary skills to whichever Administrative position, or to any concession of the public services, on the basis of prejudice towards race or colour shall be punishable as follows: penalty – 2 (two) to 5 (five) years incarceration⁴⁴.

Article 4 – To refuse or hinder employment in private companies on the basis of prejudice towards race or colour (...)

Article 5 – To refuse or impede access to any commercial establishment, to refuse to serve, attend or receive a client or customer (...)

Article 6 – To refuse, deny or impede the registration of a pupil to any public or private school, of whatever level (...)

Article 7 – To impede access to, or refuse hospitality in, a hotel, boarding house, hostel or whichever similar establishment (...)

Article 8 – To impede access to, or refuse service in, restaurants, bars, delicatessens or similar establishments open to the general public (...)

Article 9 – To impede access to, or refuse attendance in, sports establishments, entertainment houses or social clubs open to the general public (...)

Article 10 – To impede access to, or refuse attendance in, hairdresser’s salons, barber’s shops, massage parlors or establishments with similar ends (...)

Article 11 – To impede access to official entrances to public buildings or residences, or to elevators or stairways therein (...)

Article 12 – Impede access to, or the use of, modes of public transport such as planes, ships, boats, buses, trains, subway trains, or any other such mode of transport, (...)

Article 13 – Impede or hinder access to service in any division of the Armed Forces (...)

Article 14 – Impede or hinder, in whatever way, either marriage or familial or social cohabitation (...)

Article 20 – To practice, induce or incite discrimination based on race, colour, ethnicity, etc., through whatever means of social communication or publications of whatever nature (...)

This didactic law comprises twenty articles going into detail over forms of discrimination, such as the right to arrest someone refusing access to “the use of public transport: airplanes, ships, ferries, boats, buses, trains, subway trains”.

⁴³ In the end, rather than *and*, the text presents an *or*, revealing how this interpretation of the terms are homologous. We must remember that only one race exists in Brazil, or in any other part of the world, the human race itself. However, this does not deny the criteria, but gives it a nuance.

⁴⁴ Article no: 2 was blocked.

Such detail is strange for a law more honoured in the breach than in the observance. Besides, as Fernando Rodrigues shows in *Racismo Cordial* (1995:23), the wording of all the articles of this law begins with three verbs “impede”, “refuse” and “deny”, showing that in Brazil “racism means preventing someone from doing something because of the colour of their skin”.

Given this shaky concept, small wonder that the law is hardly ever enforced. For someone to be arrested the police and witnesses must be present when the crime is committed. For official purposes, racism can only be recorded in this way. Like the “gift of abolition”, we see once again how the struggle against prejudice does not spring from a citizen’s project but is imposed by law. Despite its good intentions, the body of the law cannot cope, and indeed how could it, with the disingenuous side of discrimination. How can you arrest someone who in all sincerity discriminates by claiming not to?

The fact remains that most of those accused get away with it, either because it is hard to catch someone in the act, or because the different allegations shift the complaint onto the quicksand of hypothesis.

A good example of the ineffectiveness of this law is the performance of the São Paulo Racial Crimes Police Station. According to Rodrigues’ data (*Folha de S. Paulo*, 1995) the station recorded 53 incidents in the first months of 1995; fewer than one per day. What this reveals is not the non-existence of discrimination, but the lack of credibility of official bodies and the idea that the law is only for the few. As Da Matta puts it (1981): “for one’s enemies, the law, for one’s friends, nothing”.

Another example of the gulf between definitions supplied by public agencies and the Brazilian population is the use of the census. Otherwise put, it is part of a certain Brazilian model to deny and camouflage the conflict before it presents itself in an evident manner. In 1900, for example, in the face of the observation that this was really a mestizo and Negro country, the preferred course of action was to simply remove the question of colour from the demographic census. In fact, although the census was conducted in Brazil in 1872, 1890, 1900, 1940, 1950, 1970 and 1980, the colour item was not included on at least three occasions: 1900, 1920 and 1970⁴⁵.

In the first two counts, those of 1872 and 1890, the greater emphasis was placed on obtaining information on blacks, whites and mestizos, given that the population was still differentiated into slaves and freemen in the first census⁴⁶. The census of 1950 broke the population down into four groups according to colour: whites, blacks, and yellows (Orientals), with all those registering as Amerindians, mestizo, mulatto, brown, or without any declared colour at all, grouped together as *Pardos*. In 1960, however, the research whittled this down into five groups: whites, blacks, Orientals, Amerindians and pardos, while publishing the results for

⁴⁵Racial data can also be drawn from the National Survey by Household Samples of 1976, 84 and 87.

⁴⁶For more on this, see Turra and Venturi, 1995, and Posada (s.d.), among others.

Amerindians within the results for pardos. Finally, in 1980, the IX General Census re-introduced the colour concept of the 1950 census, with the “mulattos, mestizos, Amerindians, caboclos (integrated Amerindians), mamelucos (mixed indian and white), cafuzos (mixed indian and black) etc”⁴⁷, all denominated as pardos.

This brief history brings us in several directions. Firstly, the term ‘pardo’ can only be described as a right bag of cats, a sort of miscellaneous column in the census. The name functions much like the wild card in the pack – whatever does not fit anywhere else ends up here. Let us see the use of the term in the local dictionaries: *brown, dark, dark gray* in Webster’s Portuguese-English Dictionary (James L. Taylor), or to translate from the prestigious Aurélio Dictionary ‘1: a colour between black and white, almost dark; 3: the color of brown paper; 5: mulatto. A colour between something, or almost something that is the definition for the lack of a definition.

But the censuses tell us more – they speak of a certain confusion in the terms depending on the manner or situations in which they were used. Even during the slave years the etymological usage of these apparently synonymous terms already revealed differences in sense: *Negro* referred to the disobedient, rebellious slave, while *Black* denoted the loyal captive. A news-story that appeared in the *Correio Paulistano (The São Paulo Mail)* in 1886 demonstrates this clearly in employing the terms as if they referred to two wholly distinct realities: “One particular day, *the black* João Congo was quietly working on his master’s farm when he noted that two fugitive *negroes* were approaching, who soon said – ‘Leave this life behind, *old black*, it’s not for you’ To which the *loyal black* replied – ‘I’m not going to go wandering about here and there like some *runaway negro*’. Irritated, the *negroes* retorted – ‘Die, then, you *black coward*’”.

The result of our indeterminacy in racial distinctions is that the phenotype, or rather, certain physical characteristics such as stature, hair-type and skin colour become the main variables in discrimination. As Oracy Nogueira would tell us in 1954, risking a definition on this terrain: we would have prejudice based on *brand* – an almost immediate classification – in opposition to prejudice based on *origin*, closer to the North-American context, in which whoever comes from a negro family (at least third-generation), regardless of appearance, is still negro⁴⁸.

And therein, in my opinion, lies the central problem. In Brazil, contrary to the North-American model, a mixture of definitions based on colour in itself on the one hand, and economic and social situation on the other, have generated this indeterminacy, which was consolidated in 1976 when IBGE conducted its *National survey by household sample* (PNAD). Unlike the census, in which colour is determined by the researcher, in this case it was the Brazilian population that

⁴⁷ J. E. M. Posada, s.d:224.

⁴⁸ Until quite recently, in certain North American courts, any person with so much as ‘one drop of African blood’, or of recognized African ancestry, was considered Negro. This reasoning also applies when we note the presence of classificatory terms that always refer to origin: Afro-American, Italian- American, and so on.

revealed the true “Brazilian Watercolour” by attributing to themselves no less than 136 different colours.

In this National Survey by Household Sample (PNAD) the institute chose this virtually meaningless definition. Brazilians themselves, however, when asked in the same survey to define their own colour, came up with 136 different definitions, which rendered the census useless according to the interviewer’s criteria. The poll’s findings, far more complex than the simple stereotype ‘pardo’, revealed the richness of colour among Brazilians, and highlighted just how problematical the question is.

1. Acastanhada	somewhat chestnut-coloured	F
2. Agalegada	somewhat like a Galician	F
3. Alva	snowy white	F
4. Alva escura	dark snowy white	F
5. Alvarenta * (not in dictionary; poss. dialect)	snowy white	F
6. Alvarinta *	snowy white	F
7. Alva rosada	pinkish white	F
8. Alvinha	snowy white	F <i>dimin</i>
9. Amarela	Yellow	F
10. Amarelada	Yellowish	F
11. Amarela-queimada	Burnt yellow	F
12. Amarelosa	Yellowy	F
13. Amorenada	somewhat dark-skinned	F
14. Avermelhada	Reddish	F
15. Azul	Blue	
16. Azul-marinho	Sea blue	
17. Baiano	From Bahia	M
18. Bem branca	Very white	F
19. Bem clara	Very pale	F
20. Bem morena	Very dark-skinned	F
21. Branca	White	F
22. Branca-avermelhada	White going on for red	F
23. Branca-melada	Honey-coloured white	F
24. Branca-morena	White but dark-skinned	F
25. Branca-pálida	Pale white	F
26. Branca-queimada	Burnt white	F
27. Branca-sardenta	Freckled white	F
28. Branca-suja	Off-white	F

29. Branquiça *	Whitish	F
30. Branquinha	Very white	F <i>dimin</i>
31. Bronze	Bronze-coloured	
32. Bronzeada	Sun-tanned	F
33. Bugrezinha-escura	Dark-skinned Indian	F <i>dimin</i> + <i>derogatory</i>
34. Burro-quando-foge	Disappearing donkey (i.e. nondescript)	<i>humorous</i>
35. Cabocla	Copper-coloured (refers to civilized Indians)	F
36. Cabo-verde	from Cabo Verde	
37. Café	Coffee-coloured	
38. Café-com-leite	Café au lait	
39. Canela	Cinnamon	
40. Canelada	somewhat like cinnamon	F
41. Cardão	colour of the cardoon, or thistle (blue-violet)	
42. Castanha	Chestnut	F
43. Castanha-clara	Light chestnut	F
44. Castanha-escura	Dark chestnut	F
45. Chocolate	Chocolate-coloured	
46. Clara	Light-coloured, pale	F
47. Clarinha	Light-coloured, pale	F <i>dimin</i>
48. Cobre	Copper-coloured	
49. Corada	With a high colour	F
50. Cor-de-café	Coffee-coloured	
51. Cor-de-canela	Cinnamon-coloured	
52. Cor-de-cuia	Gourd-coloured	
53. Cor-de-leite	Milk-coloured (i.e. milk-white)	
54. Cor-de-ouro	Gold-coloured (i.e. golden)	
55. Cor-de-rosa	Pink	
56. Cor-firme	Steady-coloured	
57. Crioula	Creole	F
58. Encerada	Polished	F
59. Enxofrada	Pallid	F
60. Esbranquecimento	Whitening	
61. Escura	Dark	F
62. Escurinha	Very dark	F <i>dimin</i>
63. Fogoió	Having fiery-colored hair	
64. Galega	Galician or Portuguese	F
65. Galegada	Somewhat like a Galician or Portuguese	F

66. Jambo	Light-skinned (the colour of a type of apple)	
67. Laranja	Orange	
68. Lilás	Lilac	
69. Loira	Blonde	F
70. Loira-clara	Light blonde	F
71. Loura	Blonde	F
72. Lourinha	Petite blonde	F <i>dimin</i>
73. Malaia *	Malaysian woman	F
74. Marinheira	Sailor-woman	F
75. Marrom	Brown	
76. Meio-amarela	Half-yellow	F
77. Meio-branca	Half-white	F
78. Meio-morena	Half dark-skinned	F
79. Meio-preta	Half-black	F
80. Melada	Honey-coloured	F
81. Mestiça	Half-caste/mestiza	F
82. Miscigenação	Miscegenation	
83. Mista	Mixed	F
84. Morena	Dark-skinned, brunette	F
85. Morena-bem-chegada	Very nearly <i>morena</i>	F
86. Morena-bronzeada	Sunburnt <i>morena</i>	F
87. Morena-canelada	Somewhat cinnamon-coloured <i>morena</i>	F
88. Morena-castanha	Chestnut-coloured <i>morena</i>	F
89. Morena-clara	Light-skinned <i>morena</i>	F
90. Morena-cor-de-canela	Cinnamon-coloured <i>morena</i>	F
91. Morena-jambo	Light-skinned <i>morena</i>	F
92. Morenada	Somewhat <i>morena</i>	F
93. Morena-escura	Dark <i>morena</i>	F
94. Morena-fechada	Dark <i>morena</i>	F
95. Morenã	Dark-complexioned man	M <i>aug</i>
96. Morena-parda	Dark <i>morena</i>	F
97. Morena-roxa	Purplish <i>morena</i>	F
98. Morena-ruiva	Red-headed <i>morena</i>	F
99. Morena-trigueira	Swarthy, dusky <i>morena</i>	F
100. Moreninha	Petite <i>morena</i>	F <i>dimin</i>
101. Mulata	Mulatto girl	F
102. Mulatinha	Little mulatto girl	F <i>dimin</i>

103. Negra	Negress	F
104. Negrota	Young negress	F
105. Pálida	Pale	F
106. Paraíba	From Paraíba	
107. Parda	Brown	F
108. Parda-clara	Light brown	F
109. Parda-morena	Brown <i>morena</i>	F
110. Parda-preta	Black-brown	F
111. Polaca	Polish woman	F
112. Pouco-clara	Not very light	F
113. Pouco-morena	Not very dark-complexioned	F
114. Pretinha	Black - either young, or small	F
115. Puxa-para-branco	Somewhat towards white	F
116. Quase-negra	Almost negro	F
117. Queimada	Sunburnt	F
118. Queimada-de-praia	Beach sunburnt	F
119. Queimada-de-sol	Sunburnt	F
120. Regular	Regular, normal	
121. Retinta	Deep-dyed, very dark	F
122. Rosa	Rose-coloured (or the rose itself)	F
123. Rosada	Rosy	F
124. Rosa-queimada	Sunburnt-rosy	F
125. Roxa	Purple	F
126. Ruiva	Redhead	F
127. Russo	Russian	M
128. Sapecada	Singed	F
129. Sarará	Yellow-haired negro	
130. Saraúba * (poss. dialect)	Untranslatable	
131. Tostada	Toasted	F
132. Trigo	Wheat	
133. Trigueira	Brunette	F
134. Turva	Murky	F
135. Verde	Green	
136. Vermelha	Red	F

Source: PNAD

This vast array of names displays confusion with regard to Brazilian official terminology, as well as an assortment of criteria.

First of all, most terms describe the colour: 77 *half-white*; 88 *chestnut brown*, 124 *burnt pink*, 16 *sea blue*, 38 *café au lait*, 25 *pale white*, 28 *off-white*, 52 *gourd-coloured*, 115 *getting on towards white*, 58 *polished*, 18 *really white*. These are definitions which attempt to explain the interviewee's colour, obviously underlining the fact that race in Brazil is a question of colour and not origin; that is why you have to describe it in minimum detail.

In this context it is interesting to note how recent the vogue for a 'return to African origins' is. None of the informants referred to their origins, except in the case of 111 *Polish* and 17 *from Bahia*. Again, origin it is not a popular criteria but a political one.

A second possible division is the use of colour qualifiers in conjunction with feminine diminutives or masculine augmentatives. 60 *becoming whiter*, 30 *quite white*, 100 *little dark-skinned girl*, 62 *little dark girl*, 102 *little mulatto girl*, 95 *large dark-skinned man* - names which are not only descriptive but also reveal a particular vision of race. The diminutive terms in the case of the women, and the augmentative, in the case of the men, not only suggest a sly use of prejudice but also a reinforcement of Black sexual stereotypes, both masculine and feminine.

We can also find terms such as 82 *miscegenation*, 83 *mixed* and 60 *getting whiter*. Here one can see the popular use of concepts, or the common sense theories, much prized in answering official surveys.

Other terms show how race is usually understood as a concept of circumstance. 118 *beach tanned*, 119 *sunburnt*, and 131 *toasted* are names which show how if one uses the distinction between *ser* (to be as main verb) and *estar* (to be as auxiliary verb) which is possible in Portuguese, one may temporarily be one's colour, not permanently. It means that a person thinks that he can be black at that moment, but not always.

One must not forget some possibly ironic terms which reveal a series of allusions underlying their tone of mockery: 34 *runaway donkey color*, [a common jocular reference to a nondescript color] 63 *fogoió* (having fiery-coloured hair) and 80, which is a pun on the meanings *honey-colored* and *sticky*. These terms show how difficult it is for a person to define their colour accurately. It's best to make a joke of it.

Pure colours make an appearance, some of them expectedly, others less so. 15 *blue*, 9 *yellow*, 21 *white*, 37 *coffee*, 48 *copper*, 61 *dark*, 67 *orange*, 68 *lilac*, 122 *pink*, 125 *purple*, 135 *green* and 136 *red* - a real Wal-Mart full of colours, a rainbow, or possibly even that famous 'aquarela do Brasil'. Finally we have an immense amount of colours around white -- "branca, branca-avermelhada, branca-melada, branca-morena, branca-pálida, branca-queimada, branca-sardenta, branca-suja, branquiça, branquinha". White is not just a colour, it is a kind of social aspiration.

We cannot deal with all the combinations and colours of the research but one conclusion is clear, however, if the definitions themselves are multifarious, what they do have in common is a certain consistency of detailed reference to colour – as one external and physical aspect but also as a clear social definition -- in itself rather than in terms of origin; only 2 out of the 136 refer to origin.

One could think that this answer was just popular, but it is interesting to compare with the answers we had in the last census at USP.

The first question was a close one:

“Using the categories of the IBGE census, which is your colour?” (closed question) - USP –2001

Colour	Numbers	Percentage
White	1205	76,9
Parda (mixed colour)	109	7,0
Black	19	1,2
Oriental	200	12,8
Indigenous	7	0,4
No response	26	1,7
Total	1566	100,0

Source: Survey sample of the 1st Ethno-racial Census at USP, 2001.

The other question was “open” and we can see different results.

**Responses to the question in percentages: “What colour are you?” (open question) - USP
- 2001**

Colour mentioned	Numbers	Percentage
White	1098	70,1
Variations of white	23	1,5
White	1121	71,6
Oriental	150	9,6
Oriental variants	3	0,2
Oriental	153	9,8
Morena and variations	122	7,8
Mulatta and variations	10	0,6
Mestiza and variations	11	0,7
Morena, mestiza ou mulatta	143	9,1
Parda	33	2,1
Black	3	0,2
Negro	32	2,0
Negro variants	1	0,1
Pardo variants	1	0,1
Negro	70	4,5
Others	43	2,7
No Response	36	2,3
Total	1566	100

Source: Survey sample of the 1st Ethno-racial Census at USP, 2001.

Table 5: Colour designations not featuring on the scale. Ethno-racial Census USP 2001

Variations of White	Variations of Negro
"I would say I am white "	"negress, mulatta"
"German"	Oriental variants
"very white"	"Oriental/white"
"a kind of Brazilian white"	"Japanese mestiza"
"white-morena"	"Oriental"
"Aryan white"	Variations of pardo
"Iberian white"	"pardo/moreno"
"regular white"	Others
"white or yellow"	"Argentine, a little Jewish and a little stateless"
"white-yellow"	"blue"
"white-morena"	"beige"
"white-redhead"	"each to his own"
"white/yellow"	"cafuso"
"white/mestizo"	"chesnut"
"white/morena"	"light"
"white; pale morena"	"coloured"
"big white"	"orange"
"reflective white"	"brown"
"delicate white"	"There is no definition"
"little white"	"There is no difference"
"bright white"	"There is no difficulty"
"between white and yellow"	"normal"
"very white"	"yes"
"regular white"	"all"
Variations of mestiza, morena, mulatta	"green"
"mestiza redhead"	No Answer
"yellow/white mestizo"	"no"
"mestizo of white and indian"	"I don't know"
"light morena"	"I don't know how to answer that"
"medium morena (mestiza: white, negro and indian)"	
"Big moreno"	
"light mulatta"	
"medium mulatto"	
"dark-skinned"	
"Brazilian mixture, a mixture of colours"	

In this case, provided with a sample of the university population, we can once more see that pre-delineated characteristics are made clear. Little is said of origin, there are a great number of responses containing the word 'white', as well as references to in-betweens in terms like mestizo, moreno, mulatto. Once more, it is the colour that is described, as is indicated in the response "normal", in the list above, which transforms what is clearly from the "cultural domain", and thus concerning difference, into something that comes under the jurisdiction of nature. There is nothing normal in the description of race or colour.

In contrast with this universe of colours, IBGE itself classifies Brazilians into five colours: 1. White, 2. 'pardo', 3. Negro, 4. native Indian, 5 yellow. Pardos are the leftovers, non-whites who are also not blacks, as are the Asiatic and native Indian⁴⁹.

With this system of classification, the findings of the National Survey by Household Sample (PNAD) in 1990 are problematic, to say the least: 55.3% whites, 39.9% pardos, 4.9% Negroes and 0.5% yellow/oriental. So actually in Brazil people hardly know what they are and usually answer according to stimuli supplied by the interviewer applying the questionnaire. Even in the PNAD of 1990 the results were similar: 73.5% whites, 4.4% blacks, 20.9% pardos and 1.1% yellows.

So the question is, who is black in Brazil, and who cares for this definition. In the *Folha de S.Paulo* survey, which took both the interviewer's notes and the self-definition of the respondent into account, and also asked about the five IBGE terms, the findings are quite different. The term 'pardo' was widely rejected, only 6% applying that term to themselves spontaneously. On the other hand only 8% chose the terms Negro or black. What was new was the use of the term 'moreno' (dark-skinned, dusky) which 43% chose - more indeed than the 39% who described themselves as white⁵⁰.

Thus, unlike what the IBGE asserts, Brazil is not a country with a white majority and a large number of 'pardos'. The total of Blacks and 'morenos' comes to over 51%, without including those who classified themselves as 'pardo', mulatto and 'dark' – with whose inclusion the total would rise to 59%.

Let us take the term 'moreno'. Unlike the anodyne character of 'pardo' and the coldness of the pure colors, 'moreno' seems to refer to a condition and is a kind of affirmation.

In keeping with the movement to find new value for Negro culture in Brazil, the term mulatto, which according to the Aurélio dictionary, means 'the sunburnt skin color of the Moors', seems to gather new ways of representing and perceiving color.

In parallel with this movement, there has been a noticeable attempt to introduce the term 'Afro-American', which is widely used in the United States. If, however, the term is coherent in the

⁴⁹ The native Indians only received their own denomination in the latest demographic census of 1991.

⁵⁰ See *Racismo Cordial* (1995) for the findings of the survey and a more in-depth analysis.

US, insofar as it follows the traditional system of classification, stressing the person's origins, it sounds artificial in Brazil, since it subverts the common method of division according to colour.

It is, however, necessary to distinguish between the mere delimitation of colour and the political affirmation of colour. Indeed, identity as a political phenomenon of self-affirmation is always one more weapon in the hands of the group that creates cultures and values. However, just as symbols are not simply created out of thin air, one may suppose that terms are selected which already exist in a given "collectivity of meanings". In this way the term *mulatto*, following a given existing context and being a definition according to signs rather than origin, is more obviously in dialogue with existing deep-rooted systems of self-identification.

This complex classification creates a special type of reflection, but does not paper over a real situation of difference and inequality. According to *Folha de S. Paulo* data (1995:43), 50% of Blacks earn a monthly salary equivalent to two minimum wages at most. Among 'pardos' this figure falls to 45% and to 40% among whites. In contrast, while 16% of whites interviewed earn the monthly equivalent of ten minimum wages or above, only 6% of Blacks belong in this category.

Things are no better when it comes to education. Only 4% of Blacks interviewed had passed any kind of University entrance examination. Among whites the proportion is 13%. At the University of São Paulo, for example, which has a student population of 50,000, the number of blacks just reaches 2%, a situation which is very similar to other Brazilian universities⁵¹.

The colour of USP candidates

Colour	Numbers	Percentage
White	113160	81,1
Black	2975	2,1
Pardo	10717	7,7
Oriental	11779	8,4
Indigenous	836	0,6
Total	139467	100,0

Ethnic Census - USP/ 2001

⁵¹ The affirmative action movement, which began in the United States in the 1980s, is growing stronger in Brazil today. This movement is noteworthy for its demand for the 'losses of the Negro population' to be made good. The discussion about quotas, only now getting under way in Brazil, is enlightening. The demand is for a defined number of university places to be set aside for Negroes as a way of making up for damages incurred under slavery.

**Distribution of students according to colour.
UFRJ, UFPR, UFMA, UnB, UFBA and USP – 2001**

	UFRJ	UFPR	UFMA	UFBA	UnB	USP
White	76,8	86,5	47	50,8	63,7	78,2
Black	20,3	8,6	42,8	42,6	32,3	8,3
Oriental	1,6	4,1	5,9	3	2,9	13,0
Indigenous	1,3	0,8	4,3	3,6	1,1	0,5
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100,0
% of Negroes in the state	44,3	23	78,7	79,1	52,4	34,3
Deficit	24,0	14,4	35,9	36,5	20,1	26,0

Source: Direct Survey. The Colour of Bahia Program /UFBA and 1st USP Ethno-racial Survey

In other fields the situation is also complex, showing a big gap between the different groups represented by IBGE.

Unequal geographical distribution is one of the most marked characteristics found in the analysis of Brazilian conformation. Practically half of the population classified under the term *pardo* is to be found in the northeast of the country (48%), in comparison with a paltry 15.1% of whites. The contrary holds true in the southeast (Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo) and south, where 64.9% of the population is white and only 22.4% are *pardos*⁵². This unequal division is, in itself, one of the factors that explains the difficulty in upward mobility for non-whites, obstructed as they are by the concentration of this population in less dynamic geographic areas; in rural areas as opposed to the cities, or if in the cities, confined to the outskirts⁵³.

Data regarding the jobs market demonstrates the notorious evidence of racial inequality. Studying such data one can see that, in the 11 branches of activity selected by the IBGE, the majority of the working population (84.25%) is concentrated in the following lines of work: agriculture (24.6%), service provision (17.6%), industry (15.7%), commerce (11.6%), social (8.1%) and civil construction (6.6%)⁵⁴. In relation to colour, however, with the exception of the agricultural sector, there is a notable white and, occasionally, oriental predominance within these work activities. In the distribution of work, the black and *pardo* populations feature in a clearly disproportionate manner.

This situation reflects directly and immediately on the wealth profiles of the groups. Using the 1960 demographic census, the sociologist Valle e Silva proved that the minimum wage for whites was twice that of the rest of the population and that a third of this difference could be attributed to discrimination in the jobs market.⁵⁵

⁵²Do not underestimate the difficulty in assessing colour in Brazil. The less than objective criteria and the elastic use of the colour concept will be cause for analysis further on in this chapter.

⁵³Nelson do Valle e Silva, 1992:7.

⁵⁴Marta Aimée R. Batista and Olívia Maria Galvão, 1992:83.

⁵⁵Nelson do Valle e Silva, 1992.

But it is not only from this angle that one can perceive the inequality existent in Brazil. Sergio Adorno has investigated the existence of racism in Brazilian penal practices, starting from the principle that equality before the law constitutes one of the fundamentals of modern society: presupposing that an individual – regardless of his/her class, gender, generation, ethnicity, or any other socioeconomic or cultural tag – is free to enjoy civic, social and political rights.⁵⁶ But in his investigations the sociologist found that there was preferential treatment depending on colour: “that is, if the person is Negro, he is more dangerous; if he is white, he’s probably less so”⁵⁷. Besides this, he also noticed that, when the accused had the right to define his colour when filling-in the necessary forms, his tendency was always towards making himself as white as possible – “I’m pale moreno, almost white”. The researcher also observed that, with the unfolding of the penal process, some individuals tended to “blacken”, as others would “whiten”. Subtly, some of those accused would “become pardos”. Otherwise put, depending on how the investigation proceeded, for example, should it be discovered that the suspect is a worker and the head of a family, he would become shades and shades lighter, more “pale moreno”, while more adverse discoveries would reverse the process entirely. The data is more conclusive when we see the general profile of the condemnations: “a) Negro defendants tend to bear the brunt of police vigilance; b) Negro defendants experience greater obstacles in access to criminal justice and more difficulty in exercising their right to a proper defence, rights assured by constitutional norms; c) as a result, Negro defendants tend to receive more rigorous penal treatment, a fact that is represented in their higher probability of being punished when compared with white defendants”⁵⁸.

INCIDENCE OF NEGRO DEFENDANTS CAUGHT IN THE ACT: 58,1% INCIDENCE OF WHITE DEFENDANTS CAUGHT IN THE ACT: 46% NEGRO DEFENDANTS RESPONDING IN LIBERTY: 15,5% WHITE DEFENDANTS RESPONDING IN LIBERTY: 27,0%
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The results are also revealing in relation to access to education. Interpreting the data provided by the PNAD of 1982 – and working with the indices for São Paulo – the researcher Fulvia Rosenberg verified blatant inequality in access to basic schooling. Besides this, she also attests to the greater concentration of blacks in public schools – 97.1% compared to 89% of whites – and on night courses: 11% for whites and 13% for blacks. The author leaves no doubt as to the existence of discrimination: “the poor population frequents poor schools, the poor Negroes frequent even poorer schools ... whenever there is a marked difference in the quality of schooling, there is always a greater proportion of Negro students on the receiving end”⁵⁹.

⁵⁶ Sergio Adorno, 1996:257

⁵⁷ Sergio Adorno, 1996:260

⁵⁸ Sergio Adorno, 1996:273

⁵⁹ Fulvia Rosenberg, 1990:100-3

In terms of the literacy rate, there are notable differences: in the group defined as black, there is an illiteracy rate of 30%, a high figure when compared with the 29% for *pardos*, 12% for whites and 8% for Orientals; and this is without considering regional variations⁶⁰. On the other hand, while the average Brazilian white has had less than four years of schooling, the expectation for the rest of the population is only two⁶¹. In truth, the majority of Brazilians, regardless of race, hardly reach high school, with most people interrupting their studies at fourth grade or earlier, though with the white population obtaining on average twice the level of schooling as non-whites. Regarding basic sanitation among the lower classes, Rosenberg showed that Negro populations are left aside in terms of attendance to urban infrastructure. The consequences of this unequal distribution are evident, above all, in endemic and epidemic infant mortality rates.

It is important to arrive at the data that leads closer to the private sphere. According to the National Survey of the Household Sample (PNAD), an annual survey conducted by IBGE, Brazil had a population of approximately 141 million people in 1988. Of this number, 55.5% declared themselves white, 5.4% black, 38.6% *pardos* and only 0.5% Orientals⁶². Even considering the less than objective criteria employed for identifying colour, this data is very revealing of a certain “whitening” of the population, when we recall that in the last century, in the 1890 census, whites accounted for 44% of the total population. This fact could perhaps be explained by the large-scale immigration from Europe at the beginning of the century, which would have contributed to a certain ‘whitening’⁶³. But the same argument does not hold true for today, when the movements of foreigners no longer has any relevant effect on the development of the local population demographic. The data, in fact, points to endogenous growth, where the dynamic basically comes to be managed by birth and death rates and by marriage patterns. It is the combination of these private factors that currently determine changes in the colour structure of the Brazilian population.

In effect, the recent component demographics indicate a consistent reduction of the Negro population towards a corresponding increase in the *pardo* group and a slow reduction – or rather a stabilization in the medium-term – of the population identifying itself as white⁶⁴. As such, the data, does not reinforce the existence of whitening, but first and foremost a certain “*pardoization*”. In terms of infant mortality, an undeniable disparity can be seen between the 77 white children dying to every thousand born, compared with the 105 in every thousand for *pardos* and 102 for blacks⁶⁵.

⁶⁰ Luiz Claudio Barcelos, 1992:45-6.

⁶¹ G. R. Andrews, (1992:62).

⁶² The IBGE affirms that in 1995 Brazil had a population of 154 million inhabitants.

⁶³ The census of 1940 showed that whites had already reached the 63.5% mark while the *pardo* population had reduced (Valle e Silva, 1992:7). On the other hand, in 1990 the results of the census kept the proportion of 55% whites, 34.3% *pardos*, 4.9% black, 0.8% oriental.

⁶⁴ Nelson do Valle e Silva, 1992:7

⁶⁵ Nelson do Valle Silva, 1992:8

Similarly, blacks and pardos present adult mortality rates that are higher than those for whites. “Among men, life-expectancy at birth, which was to the order of 41.6 years for blacks and pardos and 49.7 for whites during the period 1950-55, reached an estimated 64.1 for whites and 57.7 for blacks and pardos in 1975-80”⁶⁶. The picture is practically the same for women: in the period 1950-55, life expectancy for women was 43.8 for blacks and pardos and 52.6 for whites, while in the period 1975-80 it was 61 and 68 years respectively⁶⁷. One can clearly see whites outliving blacks and pardos by approximately 6.4 years for men and 7 years for women.

Significant new arguments could be developed based on reproduction. Estimates indicate that between 1980 and 1984 the most intense reduction in the birth rate took place among pardo women (a drop to the order of 22%). With this decrease, the estimates for pardos and blacks came closer to each other – 4.3 and 4.4 children respectively – and also reduced the difference in relation to whites, falling from two children to 1.4⁶⁸. Once more, the difference in living conditions determined the decrease (in function of the most accentuated mortality) in the number of children among blacks and pardos.

Regarding marriage patterns – and this includes not only formal marriages, but also co-habitation without matrimony – important variations once more come to the fore. The members of the group defined as black in the census were found to marry later in life, on average at around 23.4 years of age for women and 26.3 for men, while members of the pardo group got married at the average age of 22.5 for women and 25.4 for men. Another indicator of variations in marriage patterns is the definitive bachelor/spinster, with there being a higher level of black bachelors – 7.8% -- than white or pardo bachelors (5.2% and 5.5%). These numbers reveal how marriage – one of the great innovations of the Republic – is still a privilege, above all, enjoyed by whites.

In conclusion, although to a lesser degree than that observed in other miscegenous societies, the majority of marriages in Brazil are endogamous: that is, the spouses are from the same colour group. In a country so boastfully racially mixed, endogamy still reaches 79%, although the proportion varies a lot from group to group. Endogamy is more frequent among whites than among blacks and increases the further south one goes. Nevertheless, interbreeding has indeed been on the increase, as the rise in the number of individuals declaring themselves pardo would indicate, but is more frequently seen in the form of “white women marrying black men than the other way round. Or rather, the cross-breeding tends to be an attempt at whitening on the part of black men”⁶⁹. Only 58.6% of black men are married to black women, while 67% of black women are married to members of their own group. According to the demographer Elza

⁶⁶ Nelson do Valle e Silva, 1992:8

⁶⁷ Charles H. Wood, 1991

⁶⁸ Alícia Bercovich, 1987.

⁶⁹ Elza Berquó, 1987:44. We must recall that two factors must be taken into consideration here: the effective *mestiçagem* and the ‘whitening’ tendency in self-denomination.

Berquó white women still have the advantage over their black and pardo counterparts in the matrimonial market.

As such we can see how complex the question is in Brazil. The official image the country likes to present sought to highlight its racially mixed cultural aspects and the syncretism among the races while minimizing the inequality in daily life, which reveals itself as much in the public as in the private sphere. The black and pardo populations not only present a lower standard of wealth, but also a lower standard of education, a more elevated mortality rate, as well as a tendency to marry later and, preferably, among themselves.

As one can see, Fernando's conclusions are still valid thirty years on. Side by side with a kind of retroactive prejudice - 'prejudice against being prejudiced' - there is a very particular system of classification which in itself speaks volumes about how the standard of miscegenation evolved historically in Brazil. One cannot, however, forget the cultural mixture. The mixing process occurred and is still going on in an extremely imbalanced situation, with a background of discrimination against a vast segment of the population.

If examining the issue in cultural terms means emphasizing what is dynamic and complex in it, it is also not enough to reduce it to a class problem. The challenge is to seek answers between the structure and the history, between synchrony and diachrony, without rejecting either.

In conclusion: seeking the local model

Louis Dumont has shown how racism is the hierarchy of egalitarian societies: "It can be seen that in certain circumstances [...] a hierarchical difference remains in place, but related to somatic features, physiognomy, skin colour, blood" (Dumont, 1966:314).

This statement is correct, and allows us to think of the emergence of racism in societies with a background of democracy. However it is also problematic in that it does not point the way towards particular solutions. Perhaps the challenge is to show not only what is common in Brazilian racism - and thus accuse it of copying - but also how it is different, and examine how local racial policy "remains *sui generis* in the context of the modern world as a whole" (Fry, 1996:125).

The first step is to stress the pseudoscientific tone of the term **race**, above all because its meaning varies from place to place, and its biological implications are merely relative and statistical in their effect. One cannot ascribe to nature what is a feature of culture: mankind is one, cultures are plural. That is why I am for positive action but not for a quota system. Put Africa in the schools, work with the improvement of the black population's self esteem, but do not start with external models.

One must also reflect upon the fragility of certain terms and concepts which have been transposed simply because they help understand American racism. If this type of thinking is taken

to its limits, “racial democracy” shows as a mistake, or at best, as a stage, in a process of evolution which leads to American modernity (Fry, 1996:126).

The Brazilian experience must therefore be taken seriously, not in order to preserve it against the effects of time, but to avoid making the mistake of thinking that easy solutions are at hand. In a country like Brazil, where origin is not an important consideration and where a multiple rather than bipolar form of classification exists (Fry, 1996:131), it is complicated, to say the least, to advocate using the term Afro-Brazilian. It would imply the existence of a common essence, or at least a shared lifestyle, which one is unlikely to find if one assumes that culture is dynamic and its meaning is in a permanent process of construction.

Brazil, against the background of the world as a whole, presents some particularities which are neither a reason for pride nor for shame: they reveal a past and a particular context. Just as we live in an ideal but not real racial democracy, a brutal type of racism thrives in Brazil, albeit usually ascribed to ‘the other’.

The problem is to think what the place of this always elusive reflection ought to be. Equally slippery are the 136 colour reference terms. This trend became more complex when the concept of *becoming whiter*, undeniably a Brazilian invention, was created in the nineteenth century. At the time scientists like João Batista Lacerda of the National Museum, backed the idea that we would all be white within one century, Darwinistically speaking. The thesis entitled *Sur les metis* was presented at the 1st International Congress on Race, held in July 1911, and it attempted to show how becoming whiter was the solution for Brazil⁷⁰.

From that time on the use of these terms has become increasingly complicated. After the notion of race was banished from scientific spaces, albeit present in common sense, we tend to think of the problem in intimate terms, based on our own experiences. This is why people in Brazil can ‘darken’ or ‘lighten’ in relation to the social and economic position they occupy. As a result of this rapid process of mixed breeding there have been many cases where children are born and registered ‘white’, but darken over the years, keeping only their birth certificates. “Marrying well” in Brazil has always meant marrying someone whiter, just as “bad hair” is synonymous with the Negro’s tightly curled hair.

This “versatile” use of colour has meant that prejudice has been, above all, invisible in Brazil, like the social hierarchy which does not need formal affirmation. Racism is experienced rather than declared openly, which makes it difficult to define the term prejudice in a Brazilian context. How can one talk of prejudice [in Portuguese *pre-conceito*, a conception and a theory which exist prior to the fact in itself] if no-one in Brazil admits to discriminating? How can one reflect upon racism if no-one individually considers himself or herself to be a racist, despite often acting like one? Racism as a theory is surely social in origin rather than individual, and we can

⁷⁰ For a fuller development of the topic, see Schwarcz, 1993 and Skidmore, 1976.

also see in this case, as Durkheim asserts (1978), that “the sum total of individuals does not equal the logic of society”.

It is not enough, however, to say the problem is only economical. Nonetheless it would also be simplistic to reduce everything to a cultural issue. The same country that produces this mix of cultures also discriminates and reveals a violent form of racism which manifests itself in the invisible actions taken for granted in everyday life. In such a place the Black population is usually excluded and humiliated in a position which is nearly always subordinate.

As if by strange coincidence, two opposing images coexist in Brazil: on one side the model of racial democracy, on the other the memory of a country with a widespread and deep-rooted slave-owning tradition. While one model is a differentiated form of racial coexistence, the other is a silent, invisible, but no less effective discrimination. The result is a specific form involving racial interrelationships on the one side, and racism and on the other, which, despite being unmentionable, systematically leads to debased manual labouring and incomplete citizenship for a large part of the population.

If, as Caetano Veloso, a famous Brazilian singer-songwriter, puts it, it is only in the United States that “white is white, black is black, and the *morena* isn’t special”, it is also true that “Haiti is in Brazil”, in his own words in another song.

The problem is that the current format of the intellectual and social debate has bet on dichotomies: “yes or no”, “for or against”. In the face of these polarities the only way out is the accurate selection of one of the options, as if the big issues do not admit any doubt. I am going to give myself the right, however, to take refuge in a “maybe”, or rather, to try to make explicit different sides of this debate that have won for themselves the rubric of quotas. In fact, this is the oldest game, in the end, the discovery that cultures were distinct is part of human history and has led to the creation of a whole cartography of political reactions.

But this theme does not limit itself to the past. The question is a contemporary one, given that racism represents the reinvention of hierarchy in supposedly egalitarian societies. In this manner discrimination passes onto the running order of the agenda of the globalization age, marked as it is by historical hatreds sourced in ethnicity, origin or condition. However, this ample definition fails when one intends to look for local answers. In a country of widespread and violent cohabitation with slavery, in the discourse of Brazilian elites, the debate tended to oppose terms that strayed from the same old equation: romantic or degenerate, miscegenous or divinely mixed, social apartheid or cultural democracy.

This course has had no other objective than to nuance the problem and relocate it under focused lenses. It is not a case of essentializing the question and finding solutions that will be immune to time and space. Rather it would be better to insist on an interpretation that is more attentive to this particular experience. At the same time in which we cohabit, not with the reality of a racial democracy, but with the valiant ideal of one, a brutal racism rages amongst us. In virtue

of this, perhaps demonstrating the fallacies of the myth of racial mixture and the difficulties we have to deal with in relation to the theme is just as important as reflecting on its efficiency as a representation. Towards this end it is indeed high time we discussed quotas and, above all, name this discrimination, which in Brazil is always someone else's issue. Each and every Brazilian seems to feel like "an island of racial democracy surrounded by racists on all sides", as if the problem exhausted itself in denouncing others. It would be far better to open up an ample debate on racism in Brazil, without reducing it to a question of quotas, to setting aside a certain number of vacancies for minorities, which would not constitute the conjunct of possibilities one could really call "affirmative action".

Nevertheless, the artificiality of the policy, which cannot simply be implemented as if by magic wand, stands in favour of the *against*. Perhaps in the North-American context this way out responds to the old model of one drop of blood that implied racializing the issue, in which context inequality was understood in the same bracket as civil rights. In Brazil, however, the political context is very different, the criteria mix into each other and, just as there are no good or bad racisms, each being just as bad as the next, there is also no point in making a speech from a pauper's grave. First and foremost, it would be necessary to tackle the problematic question of nomenclature. In the face of the slippery application of the terms – which vary depending on social situation – and the pragmatic use of colours, which has brought us from the five stipulated by the IBGE to the 136 classifications that arose from the last PNAD; from the reality of colour designations, like *pardo*, which say absolutely nothing, how does one determine the boundary of colour and who, after all, is or is not actually Negro in Brazil? Of course, in the view of the little authorities of daily life – the doormen, police officers and security guards – it would seem that there is no cause whatsoever for hesitation. We know, therefore, that identity, when used politically, is always contrastive and situational, varying in function of the benefits of the moment. But even if we judge "colour" to be an irrelevant problem, it is worth considering, for example, that while quotas like these can guarantee entrance onto a university course, they cannot guarantee that one stays there. In effect, the damage accumulated through history cannot be compensated for by the best of formal intentions.

However, a categorical *no* announces only resignation. If on the one hand there is no denying prejudice, it will not do, on the other, to bet everything on a perfected formula of racial democracy, one that, considered outside culture, looks more like an old excuse that nobody listens to anymore. The best part of this story is that perhaps the theme has no way back and that its rendering explicit helps us go beyond the game in play. "Quotas" serve as a political strategy for the opening of a long-term negotiation process and as a reaction to internal and external pressure on the ways in which Brazilian society responds to inequality. This also involves the opening of a dialogue on criteria for recognition and self-recognition and the rereading of

historical memory, made up of so many selections and forgettings. In the midst of so many yes and no answers, it is impossible to put a final full stop.

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