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Black Identities in Brazil
Ideologies and Rhetoric

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Black Identities in Brazil

Ideologies and Rhetoric

Antonio Sérgio A. Guimarães¹

Abstract

Brazil has had a distinctive definition of national and racial identity, and it has changed considerably over time, and at each time held out different possibilities for social mobility and citizenship. This paper traces changing relationship between black identities and citizenship through four periods in Brazilian history: abolition, black protests in the 1930s, postwar re-democratization and the democratic movement against the military dictatorship in the 1970s. It emphasizes how the complex intersection of nation, social relations, class and race has had profound effects on not only the categories used to label people, but also on the nuanced definition of the goal of efforts to overcome inequality.

Keywords: Brazil | black identity | racial rhetoric

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1. Introduction

To talk about Brazilian blacks as an ethnic group is something very recent and often incorrect. If, as according to the Online Dictionary of Social Sciences,² ethnicity refers to the historical formation of a group of individuals having a distinct culture – a common subculture, then the ethnic formation of black people is restricted to groups that are located in specific spaces, as for example, a *povo de santo* community or particular black communities in some cities in Brazil. Undoubtedly, Brazilian blacks would be better described in terms of race, that is, a social group defined in relation to their physical characteristics and a range of beliefs about their attitudes and behaviors, or eventually, in some points of time, a minority of blacks organized as a social movement.³

Indeed, since members of various African ethnicities were enslaved and arrived in Brazil to work in plantations and mines, there has been a continuous, albeit slow, process of de-ethnization – a process of cultural transformation and mixing between ethnicities – together with a process of racialization, which is identification in relation to physical characteristics. This process was, of course, stronger amongst *crioulos* – those who were born in Brazil in direct contact with the colonial society – than amongst Africans, and accelerated once the slave trade ceased in 1852.

If we think about modern Brazil, there are some critical moments in which racialization – the designation of human groups as races – were the basis for social identities from which political ideals such as economic redistribution, national belonging and social equality were built. During these periods, the idea of race became a self-defined identity, rather than an identity imposed by others from outside. These periods were: the abolitionist movement, the black protest of the 1930s, the post-World War II process of re-democratization and the re-democratization movement of the 1970s.

Interestingly, these social groups defined themselves by using different names: *peessoas de cor* (people of color), *pretos* (black) and *negros* (black). If at first the collective term used to name them was “class”, it subsequently became “race”. It is therefore worth asking whether different terms denominated different identities, or whether different terms simply indicated different political projects.

2 “A group of individuals having a distinct culture – a subculture – in common. The idea of ‘ethnic group’ differs from that of ‘race’ because it implies that values, norms, behavior and language, not necessarily physical appearance, are the important distinguishing characteristic” (Drislane and Parkinson n.d.).

3 “A group of people organized, outside of institutions established for this purpose, so as to bring about political and social change which will satisfy their shared interest or goal” (Drislane and Parkinson n.d.).

Up to the 1930s, the political movement reaffirming citizenship and equal rights for the “class of men of color” or “black (*preto*) people” was both a movement that denied any possibility of cultural specificity and also constructed a sentiment of nationality. Noticeable are the appeals to racial fraternity as a means of building the Republic, that is, the construction of a public sphere within the law, founded upon equal rights. Their names clearly show that, although defined from the outside by others, it was necessary to use the label “racial” in order to be able to deny a distinction between races, or even the existence of different races and certainly between different cultures.

In fact, up to the 1970s, the political project which provided support for these democratic movements’ inclusion of Afro-descendants on an equal footing to European descendants employed two strategies or ideals: the mixed (*mestizo*) nation and fraternity or equality between the races. These ideals appear in their titles, but something that may seem obvious needs to be restated and fully analyzed: they interacted critically with the colonial fact that the country, and later the nation, was built under the political, cultural and economic aegis and domination of European descendants and colonizers, who often claimed exclusivity. Here, two ideas were fused together: (1) that mixed race (*mestizo*) colonized people were truly and genetically the nationals of the country, and (2) that despite coming from different races, the only possibility for establishing a single nation was the fraternity or democracy amongst them all and the formation of a homogeneous, mixed-race (*mestizo*) culture. Therefore, from the times of abolition until very recently, as I have already stressed, it has not been possible to talk about black ethnicities in Brazil unless we were referring to small communities which are spatially delimited.

Moreover, the objective that impelled “black” movements to attain racial equality was inexorably the struggle against “color prejudice”. It is worth noting that black movements were profoundly impregnated by anti-racism, either because they saw racial prejudice as a cause of inequality and the inferior social position that blacks held in Brazilian society (a view shared by all movements), thus emphatically denying that social inequalities between blacks and whites were due to race (as in the case of the *frentenegrinos* [members of the Frente Negra movement] of the 1930s), or denying the existence of human races altogether (as the Teatro Experimental do Negro advocated in the 1940s). Nevertheless, one way or another, even when this denial took place, and in the absence of ethnic identities, racial discourses became part of the political sphere in order to build commitment.

2. Racial Ideologies

In Brazil, as elsewhere in the Americas, the abolition process stimulated a wave of scholarly and pseudo-scientific reflection on the concept of race, the end result of which was the creation of justifications for the continuing social inequality among those defined as whites (Europeans and their descendants classified as such) and non-whites. The former claimed equal citizenship and political rights for themselves, while subaltern positions were reserved for the latter. As Louis Dumont astutely observed, modern societies in the Americas chose racism as a natural justification for maintaining social hierarchies in the liberal republics (Dumont 1960).

In contrast to what happened in the United States, though, race in Brazil did not create unsurpassable obstacles for individuals, especially mestizos. Various explanations have been given for this difference which cannot be reviewed here. The fact is that the older notion of “color” used to differentiate peoples and individuals in Europe since antiquity continued to be more important than pseudo-scientific explanations based on race. Although color classifications were exposed to a kind of racist academic re-reading and thereafter retained this substrate, no bipolar racial classification developed in Brazil and no precise classificatory rules emerged (Harris 1956). Social circumstances and situations allowed the manipulation of color classifications (Azevedo 1963).

This development was congruent with the demographic and political impossibility of creating a completely white nation, by which I mean a nation formed of non-mixed and recently-immigrated European descendants. The demographic impossibility arose from Brazil’s low appeal for European migrants at the end of the 19th century and the start of the 20th century. The political impossibility resided in the social and economic centrality acquired by the part of the Brazilian population of mixed origin which declared itself to be white.

Here it may be worth outlining quickly the differences between the racial classification systems operating in the United States, Europe and Brazil so as to avoid potential misunderstandings and semantic ambiguities. The US system uses the rule of hypodescent – where descent is traced via the spouse identified as socially inferior – to map the boundaries of racial groups, which are openly referred to as “races”. Meanwhile the contemporary European system, in place since the end of the Second World War, rejects the term “race” and classifies individuals either in cultural terms, as “ethnic groups” properly speaking, or in terms of “skin color” without reference to biological descent. The Brazilian system also rejected the term “race” until recently, favoring the notion of “color”, and also lacks any clear rule of classification by descent,

though it uses other physical traits such as hair type and the shape of the nose and lips to classify individuals in groups. Though the term “race” was taboo until recently, today the pair “race/color” is frequently used in censuses and opinion polls, while the terms have also become interchangeable in everyday use. It could be said, therefore, that in general, the US system is the most closed, given that it sets precise limits on descent groups, while the European system is a bit more open since the single criterion of skin color allows greater transit between groups, though the skin category “dark” can give rise to a kind of racial purgatory, and finally, the Brazilian system allows the formation of various racial groups positioned between white and black according to a number of different physical features.

The Brazilian system can treat racial mixture as a process, since it is the only one with the elements to demarcate the different stages of this transformation. Indeed, the young republican nation, at the height of the intellectual fashion of racism, adopted the discourse of the gradual whitening of the entire population, promoting immigration and accepting miscegenation as something both necessary and virtuous (Schwarcz 1993M; Skidmore 1974; Ventura 1991). But the belief in whitening was only one of the possibilities generated by the ideological framework shaping the birth of the young South American nation. This framework was first announced in academic form by Karl Friedrich von Martius during the Second Empire in an essay presented in 1845 to the Brazilian Historical and Geographic Institute, in which he argues that anyone writing about the history of Brazil must take into account the fact that its people were formed by a mixture of three races: “the copper or American color, white or Caucasian, and black or Ethiopian” (Martius and Rodrigues 1956: 442, own translation).

Three potential variants of this framework would have important impacts on the black racial formation in Brazil: whitening, mulatism and negritude.

2.1. Whitening

The whitening of the Brazilian population emerged as a corollary of the superiority of the white race and European civilization, but also as a denial of racist theories that took miscegenation to be a form of degeneracy. It therefore corresponded to the first version of the mixed-race national tale introduced by von Martius which proclaimed that the conquering people would not only impose their language and civilization on the colonized peoples, but also their racial attributes and qualities. Perhaps the most complete version of this optimistic vision of whitening is found in the thesis presented by João Baptista Lacerda (1911) to the Universal Races Congress in London in 1911. There, Lacerda argued that the black race would be slowly absorbed through

miscegenation, generating a stock of “eugenic” *mulatos*, while successive interbreeding would mean that the latter would also be incorporated eventually into the white group. We should note, however, two other variants of the same thesis: a more pessimistic version, which believed that the black race would have to be replaced by a sharp increase in European emigration, the expulsion of freed Africans and the higher natural mortality of the black race⁴; and a more optimistic version, which saw whitening as a more general process that would include not only miscegenation but also the acculturation and social assimilation of black and indigenous peoples into Luso-Brazilian culture (Freyre 1933, 1936). In its three variants, whitening emerged as an enduring ideology, impeding the development of universal citizenship in Brazil.

2.2. Mulatism

The second variant emerged as a more radical development more in keeping with von Martius’s original racist proposal, which argued that the miscegenation of indigenous, white and black populations in Brazil had led to the formation of a meta-race. The construction of the image of a mestizo nation, one which would include all free individuals, was intensified by the abolitionist movement and became deepened further during the republican era. This perhaps comprises the most refined vein of Brazilian social thought, exemplified in the work of Joaquim Nabuco (1949) and Gilberto Freyre (1933, 1936). According to this line of thinking, the freedom acquired with the abolition of slavery was immediately transformed into citizenship in the absence of racial prejudices. The remaining social inequalities became entrenched instead in the economic and cultural order of the social classes. It was the state’s responsibility to implement social policies to incorporate and regulate citizens’ access to the full enjoyment of their rights, promoting justice, education, healthcare and social security for all. The state was the only entity capable of civilizing and promoting social harmony (Vianna and Carvalho 2000). There is no place in this thought for Thomas Humphrey Marshall’s theory of the development of citizenship through the conquest of rights (Marshall 1977 [1963]).

This variant of von Martius’s framework would be called “mulatism” by some intellectuals, that is, a form of conceiving the Brazilian nation in which the typical Brazilian would be the *mulato*, rather than the whites originating from European emigration or the mixture of the latter with the descendants of the Portuguese. As may be surmised, the accusation of mulatism came from those who believed that European culture (rather than Afro-Indo-Luso-Brazilian culture) should exert the strongest influence on

4 These ideas circulated freely among educated Brazilians. For an analysis of their social and academic affiliation see Thomas Skidmore (1974), Roberto Ventura (1991), Lilia Katri M. Schwarcz (1993), among others.

the Brazilian nation. This disparaging characterization of mulatism was widespread among São Paulo intellectuals in the 1930s and 1940s (Duarte 1947, Bastide 1961).

2.3. Negritude

Finally, the third variant is Brazilian negritude (Bastide 1961). Despite being highly influential in black circles, this variant – perhaps because of this fact – appealed little to Brazil's intelligentsia, remaining almost entirely limited to the work of Guerreiro Ramos (1957). As Roger Bastide (1961) emphasized, negritude involves a radicalization of mulatism by seeing all Afro-descendants as black and proposing that the Brazilian people are generically black: in other words, it makes no sense to think of blacks as a separate ethnic group since they form the demographic mainstay of the country's nationality. Moreover the designation of Brazil's people as *negro* rather than *mulato* or *mestiço* deliberately involves an attempt to valorize the most stigmatized element in the nation's formation, reversing the European colonialist view, introjected by the national elites, of Brazil as a white country and its culture as a prolongation of Portuguese culture.

These three approaches – whitening, mulatism and negritude – delimited the ideological-racial space nourishing some of the black discursive strategies employed in the fight to extend citizenship in Brazil to all regardless of color.

3. Black Discourses and Recurring Themes

Four discursive themes of inclusion can be identified during this long period of black mobilization.

3.1. Puritanism

The first of these was characterized by Bastide as puritanism, prevalent in the 1920s and 1930s. This comprises a discourse on the morality – behavior, attitudes and values – suited to living in a bourgeois society. Bastide explains that he prefers to use this designation “because morality is essentially subjective, while puritanism draws attention above all to what one sees, to the external manifestations and what can classify a person within a group” (Bastide 1983: 150). More precisely, however, this involves a discourse on the morality suited to the social integration of black people into the urban middle classes. In a society where discrimination based on race or color was not legally permitted, the social inferiority or subalternity of the black population could not be regulated through it alone: much the opposite, when this discrimination occurred, it

had to be discrete and preferably attributable to the operation of mechanisms of social classification. Hence it was through mechanisms of class formation and reproduction – formal schooling, good manners, morals, religion, educated speech, and so on – that social discriminations could be more effectively exercised and, more than this, that black people could spontaneously form into a class. This explains the reasoning behind the label often used by the black press of the period for the black population – the “class of men of color” rather than the “black race”.

Puritanism was thus the first attempt after abolitionism – that is, after the acquisition of formal citizenship – to extend the effective rights of the black population through a community (racial) form of solidarity, which, as we have seen, slowly shifted from color to race as racist political ideologies, like fascism, made headway in Brazil. It would be a mistake, therefore, to see puritanism as a simple introjection of the ideology of whitening among the black middle class. The rejection of pan-Africanism and the Afro-Brazilian cultural practices that flourished among the general black population should be read instead as an incorporation of the logic of identifying and reproducing classes, such as the denial and attempt to deconstruct the class *habitus* of the wider population. It is clear, though, that one of the premises of this puritanism is the supposed inferiority of African cultural practices and their Brazilian forms. However, it should be noted that the codes of high European culture – including ways of dressing, speaking or behaving – remain as marks of distinction of the upper classes even when “black culture” becomes fully accepted.

Puritanism is a strategy designed to raise the social status of a group by forming a racial community – that is, a common racial origin – through solidarity and leadership. Some of the discursive themes (what US sociologists call frames) appearing in the rhetoric of puritanism were taken from the abolitionist movement and would reappear thereafter in each of the black mobilizations of the 20th century: the colonizing role of blacks in Brazil; black people as the creator of the nation’s wealth; the talent of the *mulato*; the mestizo as the most Brazilian type (we are all mestizos, even the Portuguese); abolition as abandonment and vulnerability, and the absence of racial prejudice in Brazil, but the continuation of color prejudice.

3.2. Modernism

Yet by the time that the puritanism of the Brazilian Black Front reached its peak in 1937, it was already an outmoded discourse. Ever since the 1920s, Brazilian modernists had looked for inspiration for their avant-garde productions in black and mestizo popular culture where Brazil’s soul was presumed to be found. Popular festivals, dances,

folklore – all these manifestations served as reference points for constructing a new aesthetic of authenticity, inspired by the European artistic movements which, from dadaism to surrealism, had discovered primitive, African and Oriental art. In Brazil this discovery went hand-in-hand with the study of Africanisms in cultural anthropology (Ramos 1937; Herskovits 1943), especially the *jêje-nagô candomblé* Afro-Brazilian religious practices, which transformed Bahia first into a laboratory and later into a kind of black Rome (Lima 2010), the spiritual home for the reconstruction of African traditions in Brazil.

The sheer strength of the modernist artistic and spiritual rebirth would have enormous consequences for discourses linked to black rights, adding fresh nuances to their class project, grounded on *petit bourgeois* and European status markers, which by then (the 1920s and 30s) was already being criticized as inauthentic by the artistic and intellectual avant-garde. Two other themes would be added to black discourses in the 1940s, therefore: the people of Brazil are black and color is a mere appearance. These would be primarily employed in the discourse on racial democracy, which would come to dominate the cultural and ideological politics of the Estado Novo⁵ (New State).

3.3. Black Dimensions of Racial Democracy

Although I have written about racial democracy elsewhere (Guimarães 2002; Guimarães and Macedo 2008), here it is necessary to provide a summary of its origins and identify its black dimension. The ideas converging around the theme have a variety of origins, some academic, others popular, brought together by the underlying political motivation that animated them. The scholarly source can be traced to the Hispanist movement (Diaz 2006) that captivated Latin American intellectuals at the start of the 20th century and its search to identify the specificity of Iberian civilization, whether in terms of its contacts with other peoples, its form of governance, or its culture. The popular source comes from the abolitionist campaign, which gave rise to a social movement with a fair degree of impact on the streets (Alonso 2010) but which was primarily legitimized at an intellectual level through the writings of Castro Alves, Rui Barbosa and Joaquim Nabuco. The political source can be found in various intellectuals, some of them more racist, like Cassiano Ricardo (Campos 2005), others more culturalist, like Arthur Ramos or Gilberto Freyre (Gomes 1999).

5 Estado Novo refers to period 1937-1945, in which Getulio Vargas exerted dictatorial powers, after taking power in 1930 spearheading a revolt of governors supported by the military.

In Manuel Oliveira Lima (1911) we already encounter the argument, later reworked by Freyre⁶ (1933, 1936), that the Portuguese aristocracy in colonial Brazil was much more open to contact with the popular classes, frequently incorporating not only bastards but also talented *pardos* (dark-skinned people), with “black blood not comprising an insurmountable obstacle even to royal favors and largesse” (Lima 1922: 32, own translation). This democracy described by Oliveira Lima – that is, the absence of any rigid class and race classifications – would be interpreted by Freyre as the uniqueness of Portuguese colonization, the embryo of a social and ethnic democracy deeper and more humane than even the supposedly liberal Anglo-Saxon or French democracies, since it would allow the incorporation and social mobility of diverse races in the new nations emerging from European expansion. The singular nature of democracy in Portuguese America would also be called racial democracy by others, like Cassiano Ricardo, yet for him as for other authors, as proposed in 1845 by von Martius, democracy maintained an authoritarian nature, based on a clear hierarchy under European or white command.

The sympathy aroused by Casa Grande and Senzala (Freyre 1933) resides precisely in the fact that racial hierarchy gives way in this work to what Ricardo Benzaquen de Araújo (1995) called the balance of opposites. In other words, the power relations between masters and slaves, men and women, adults and children are responsible for determining the social hierarchy, not the races. Freyre finds space to incorporate the popular variant of racial democracy in its entirety, i.e., a version in which the black and *mulato* populations become the mold for making the future nation. In this popular reading, to which Freyre lends the charm of his prose, miscegenation subsumes hierarchy, allowing it to appear only in certain aesthetic and cultural preferences.

In this view, racial democracy would acquire an authentically Brazilian version, dependent on a strong state capable of regulating social relations to ensure that private powers do not succumb to the temptation to transform racial and cultural differences into rigid hierarchies. Only class differences were to be recognized and mediated by the state and regulated through wide-ranging legislation. The state was to act in a sovereign form, above its citizens, preventing the ossification of race and class diversity. This ideal form of democracy – founded not on individual rights but on the absence of color barriers to the social mobility of individuals, whose legitimacy is drawn not from an utopia of some free individual but from the absence of collectives whose exclusive characteristics afford them privileges – also coincided with popular and wishes of black people, especially those who still flew the flag of the second abolition.

6 Oliveira Lima’s influence on Freyre has been analyzed by Ângela Gomes (2001).

Hence, paradoxically, the racial hierarchy defended by the Brazilian elites, whether openly as racism, or in a milder form as a mestizo nation led by the white or European cultural heritage, does not disappear but instead becomes submerged in a regulated order of social classes. Inevitably, in this new hierarchy, the physical, racial and cultural traits of the dominant classes emerge as preferential forms. The “eugenic” black person is transformed into a *moreno*, and its beauty into a divine grace. Racial conflict transmutes into social conflict. To exemplify this we can cite a highly popular song by Adelino Moreira, *Amar a deusa do asfalto*, from 1959. In the song, the author tells the sad love story between a resident of a Rio de Janeiro’s hillside (favela) and a girl of good family living in one neighboring district of the lower-lying coastal areas of the city. Nobody can know for sure the true color of lover and loved, but we know that the sad union ends in “black solitude”. As we can see, the conflict is transposed to another hierarchy. Similarly, in the songbooks of the period, the *cabrocha*, *morena* and *mulata* become the most exalted female figures. Similarly, Bahia, which was depicted by von Martius as the most Portuguese of Brazilian cities⁷ and described as the “old mulata” during the First Republic (Guimarães 1999: footnote 66), became associated from the New State onwards with the Afro-Brazilian mystique, a land of magic and sorcery, evoked in the *sambas de exaltação*, along with Rio de Janeiro and its hillside favelas.

It is important to stress, though, that the black intellectuals who embraced the ideal of racial democracy did so, as we have seen, by giving new meaning to the negritude movement and replacing pan-Africanism with anti-colonialist nationalism. The polysemy of terms like racial democracy, negritude and Afro-Brazilian culture has to be emphasized. For black people, the first expression meant their integration into a social order without racial barriers, the second was a form of patriotism that accentuated the black color of the Brazilian people, while the third highlighted Brazil’s syncretized and hybrid culture (Bastide 1976).

To arrive at the present – when Salvador, the old city of Bahia, is openly described as a black city, the term race has been reintroduced into demographic censuses, and multiculturalism and racial egalitarianism are the dominant doctrines in black political and cultural organizations – we need to understand how certain signs of ethnic identity have been appropriated by the black elites and how the rights of the citizen have become central to defining democracy.

7 Commenting on Martius’s Voyage to Brazil, José Honório Rodrigues observes that Bahia was the Brazilian province in which one could note “a greater attachment to Portugal and the conservation of Portuguese laws and customs”. Von Martius also noted “the efficient commercial activity of the Bahian, practical, down to earth” (Martius and Rodrigues 1956: 437).

3.4. Black Egalitarianism

Roger Bastide, who has already provided us with the key to understanding black puritanism and Brazilian negritude, also helps us to understand the emergence of ethnic identities in the 1970s. Bastide argues that the advance of Afro-Brazilian religions in the south and southeast of the country, the decolonization of Africa and the consequent emergence of an African black elite, circulating internationally, as well as the expansion and increasing independence of a *mulata* middle class not incorporated into the elites as socially white, meant that Brazilian negritude ceased to refer merely to the physical-racial aspects of black people in order to emphasize instead their cultural singularity and authenticity as Afro-Brazilians.⁸

For Bastide, the social bases for accepting and adapting theories that would become more widespread internationally over the following decades, such as multiculturalism and multiracialism, had been provided by Brazil's so-called economic miracle, referring to the country's burst of economic and social development in the 1970s.

Dating from the same period, I would add, is the sea change in Brazil's intelligentsia – on both the political left and the right – which, rejecting the earlier aspiration for an authentically local democracy, turned to the critique of the historical failure to guarantee human rights and citizenship. This cleared the way, then, for racial inequalities in the country to be denounced as the genocide of the black people, echoing the famous petition presented by Paul Robeson and William L. Patterson to the UN General Assembly in 1951 (Robeson and Patterson 1970). The first man to speak out in Brazil was the same Abdias do Nascimento (1968, 1978) who had led the movement for racial democracy and negritude in the 1940s.

It is completely understandable that attempts to limit democracy to any one of its aspects were rejected. The military dictatorship had governed the country since 1964, camouflaged under the appearance of a representative democracy, maintaining the legislature and judiciary as autonomous powers, remaking the party political system and the constitution, intervening and limiting these powers on an ad hoc basis. The dictatorship thus continued a long authoritarian tradition, which had already borne fruit in the First (1889-1930) and Second (1945-1964) Republics, and had served as an inspiration for Getúlio Vargas, instituting the presidency as a kind of imperial moderating power. In the fight to restore democracy to the country, therefore, the

8 “It cannot therefore accept a ‘negritude’ of a purely physical kind, its negritude henceforth can only be cultural – and I would add: that which defines it and makes the two movements of national incorporation and authenticity coherent among themselves is not an ‘African’ cultural identity but a resolutely ‘Afro-Brazilian’ identity” (Bastide 1976: 27, own translation).

opponents were compelled to radicalize their conception of democracy (Weffort 1992), producing a historical critique of Brazilian society and politics, repudiating any kind of exceptionalism or singularity in this area, and advocating a radical defense of civil liberties and the rights of the individual human being.

Black egalitarianism, therefore, would be merely a question of time for congruent demands to come to maturity, abandoning the call “for an authentic racial democracy” (Movimento Negro Unificado 1982: 1) in order to adopt demands for recognition of their cultural particularity and for affirmative action capable of establishing greater equality of opportunities between white and black people.

4. Conclusion: Black Citizenship

To conclude this paper, I shall briefly summarize my arguments, highlighting a number of guiding threads and a periodization that have remained implicit. In a seminal article, L. Werneck Vianna and Maria Alice R. de Carvalho (2000) turn to a thesis propounded by Oliveira Vianna (1973) which emphasized the central role played by the state in Brazil’s civilizing process, advancing and guaranteeing rights and freedoms in the face of opposition from the dominant classes and with the diffuse or amorphous support of the dominated classes and masses. This had been the case during the period of Abolition and during the New State (1937-45). José Murilo de Carvalho, in his history of citizenship in Brazil (2002), demonstrates how the state’s proactivism meant that social rights were guaranteed to the urban sectors of the population even before political and civil freedoms had been fully developed, a process which Wanderley Guilherme dos Santos (1979) had called “regulated citizenship”.

As discussed (albeit rapidly) in section 2 above, there were three moments of rupture with the established racial order – sometimes with increased involvement from the state, but with greater social mobilization over the last few decades – in which the black population’s rights to citizenship were recognized.

Undoubtedly the initial moment was the conquest of individual freedom, since the end of slavery meant that the connection between a black identity and the restriction of individual liberty was severed for good. But as we have seen, the freedom thereby acquired was not translated into an active political citizenship: it merely set off the process of nation building in which these individuals were more subjected objects than subjects. The First Republic provided a clear representation of this period in which two logics of citizenship competed with each other: on one hand, the civilizing wave of republicanism, limited to the upper and wealthy classes, which from the cultural viewpoint signified the Europeanization of Brazil (Freyre 1936) and the consequent

denial of its African heritage. In the downward direction came pseudo-scientific racism and the attempt to whiten the nation, as well as the response of the black petite bourgeoisie, which, in search of social inclusion and respectability, resulted in black puritanism. On the other hand, in the upward direction, among intellectual and artistic circles there was a celebration of popular festivities, primitive arts, folklore and the African cultural heritage. This wave broke in multiple directions: modernism, the ideal of the mestizo nation and Afro-Brazilian rhetoric. What was once seen as African and foreign was now labeled Afro-Brazilian or simply Brazilian. Rather than accepting differences and proposing the equality of the diverse inheritances, the option preferred in this discourse was hybridization and for tolerating and living with inequalities.

The next period began with the 1930 Revolution and subsequently the New State. Recognition of the cultural legacy of the black race was acquired along with the social rights of urban workers. During this period, political and cultural commitments were forged that were later expressed in the ideal of racial democracy: regulated citizenship, the nationalization of ethnic and racial cultures, the rejection of racism. But the Second Republic, despite restoring political freedoms, failed to universalize or deepen them. From the viewpoint of the black population, any progress in terms of political or social rights was achieved through class struggles only. The rejection of ethnic or cultural singularity was explicit, though their affirmation was less and less disqualifying. Class formation occurred but not racial formation. At any rate, the idea became widespread among the left at least that all Brazilian people are black or mestizo.

Our contemporary period is the first in which the authoritarian premises of racial democracy are rejected and there is a search for harmony and equalizing the social distribution of wealth and opportunities without consolidating the hierarchical order. The main protagonists are now the social movements, although the state retains a central role as a distributor and donor. This order of guaranteeing individual and collective rights has enabled the recognition of ethnic singularity and respect for racial equality to flourish. In what superficially appears to be a paradox, affirmation of the racial collective serves to deepen the equality between citizens. The reason seems to reside in the fact that inequalities now need to acquire a name (color, gender, race, sexual orientation) in order to be combatted.

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