

## ***Colour and Race in Brazil: from whitening to the search for Afro-descent<sup>1</sup>***

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Two paradigmatic cases of the building process of post-slavery societies in the Americas were, without a doubt, Brazil and the United States. While the United States had an exceptional and singular development, the Brazilian case can be generalised, with certain caveats, to other countries of Central and South America and the Caribbean in terms of the incorporation of Afro-descendent and Amerindian populations into the free work regime, the formation of a class society, as well as the development of racial and national ideologies. Whereas in Brazil racial democracy was cultivated, segregation still presents a problem in the United States; whilst the former perpetuates pre-capitalist forms of exploitation and precarious employment, the latter provided for the formation of a modern black society, albeit separate from the rest of the nation; if in Brazil we have turned colour into the basic unit of a complicated symbolic system of status attribution, in the U.S. race was built into a descent status group.

In this article I aim to clarify the way in which Brazil has, since abolition, been developing a system of colour classification with regard to Afro-descendants. Not only do I intend to show how this system has developed through time, but how it is also shaped by the mobilization of the black population around the notion of race - as a group of solidarity and common experiences of subordination and discrimination. My strategy is to trace the terms "colour" and "race" and their meanings through time, as used or systemised into classifications by the state, social movements and social scientists. Certainly, this is a preliminary and incomplete study, but I hope that it can serve as a guide to future and more systematic investigations about specific periods, places and social agents.

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## From the "class of men of colour" to the "black race"

In colonial Brazil the Portuguese used the term "*negro*" not only to refer to people of darker skin, as was the case in Europe, but to refer to slaves - Amerindians, for example, were called "*negros da terra*" (blacks of the land), to differentiate them from the blacks from Africa (Monteiro 1994). However the social meaning of this colour terminology changes with time.

Manuela Carneiro da Cunha (1985:22) tells us that in the first half of the 19th Century,

Three dimensions were used to internally classify this population [of free men]: "colour", "nationality" and "legal condition". The colour *negro* or *pardo*<sup>2</sup>, and intermediary graduations sometimes used to describe an individual, did not seem to be used for classification into subclasses. With regard to nationality there were Africans (with ethnic subdivisions not necessarily used, such as *mina*, *angola*, etc.) or *crioulos*, that is, those born in Brazil. With regard to their legal condition, one could either be *forro*, freed, or *ingênuo*, born free.

João Reis (2000: 233) observes, in the first half of the 19th century in Bahia, two main racial terms: "*preto*"<sup>3</sup>, designating Africans, and "*crioulo*", designating black people born in Brazil. In the second half of the 19th century, however, in the same province, there was a tendency to use the term "*preto*" to encompass both Africans and Afro-descendants. "*Negro*" therefore stops designating "colour" and gradually comes to have a more pejorative meaning.

Analysing the São Paulo state press during the abolitionist period, Lilia Schwarcz (1987: 195-196) concludes that in São Paulo in the years before Abolition, a time of many slave escapes and revolts as well as of ideological struggle between abolitionists and those pro-slavery, the term "*negro*" acquires an insulting connotation, as opposed to "*preto*" which takes on a more neutral meaning. The same author reproduces a text from the last century in which the word "class" is used to refer to masters and slaves.

Hebe M. M. Castro (1995: 110) seems to agree with Schwarcz, as she transcribes a satirical poem, published in the newspaper *O Monitor Campista* in 1888,

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<sup>2</sup> *Pardo(s)* - dark or brown individuals

<sup>3</sup> the meaning of the word is black

which suggests that during the post-Abolition period, "negro" still carried an offensive meaning, as a reference to "slaves", whereas "preto" was understood as a reference to colour and not social position:

[...] <i>Fui ver pretos na cidade.</i>	I went to look for <i>pretos</i> in the city
<i>Que quisessem se alugar.</i>	Who may want to be hired.
<i>Falei com esta humildade:</i>	I said to them humbly
– <i>Negros, querem trabalhar?</i>	- <i>Negros</i> , do you want to work?
<i>Olharam-me de soslaio.</i>	They looked at me slyly.
<i>E um deles, feio, cambaio,</i>	And one of them, ugly and bowlegged,
<i>Respondeu-me, arfando o peito</i>	Answered me, puffing out his chest:
– <i>Negro, não há mais, não:</i>	-There ain't no <i>Negros</i> no more:
<i>Nós tudo hoje é cidadão</i>	We're all citizens now
<i>O branco que vá pro eito.</i>	The white man can go to the fields.

During the 1920s those considered to be the pioneers of the present day black movements referred to themselves and constructed a certain social identity from words, concepts and ideals inherited from the past. They called themselves "men of colour" and "*homens [men] pretos*", and referred to their collectivity as a "class". At that time the words "race" and "negro" were used in a very different way from how they are used today by black activists.

*O Menelick*, a black newspaper from 1916, called itself "a monthly publication with news, literature and criticism dedicated to men of colour". It publicizes a beauty contest in this way: "the contest is, of course, for the 'class'" (1st January 1916, p.4), putting the word "class" in speech marks. *O Bandeirante* (1918) is "a monthly publication for the defence of the class of men of colour" (in an editorial of the same year, *Vencendo a encosta [Conquering the mountain]*, it says "it fights for the interests of the class of black (*preto*) men") and, from 1919, it becomes a "publication to fight for the general promotion of the class of men of colour". *O Alfinete* (1918) is "dedicated to men of colour". *A Liberdade* (1919) is, at first, a "publication dedicated to the class of colour [offering] criticism, literature and news", and later in 1920, a "publication with criticism, literature and news dedicated to the class of colour"

This does not mean that the expression "*raça negra*" [black race] is not used by those who write in these publications, but the expression only carries the 19th Century meaning of biological inferiority<sup>4</sup>. "Race" is used in a biological sense, whereas

<sup>4</sup> See, as examples, *Alfinete*, São Paulo, 3 de Setembro de 1918,

"class" and "men of colour" have a social meaning. However, here and there, "race" is already being used almost as a synonym of "class".

The ideology that underpins the use of race can be itemized as follows. First, as I have already said, the term "*negro*" is considered pejorative and offensive, and it is avoided in interpersonal relations, not claimed by "men of colour". Second, colour is claimed as an objective marker, real, but considered of little importance in assessing someone's value. Third, "race" is only referred to in order to group all African descendents together, in particular the lighter skinned ones, who are considered to be those who show the most prejudice. Fourth, the expression "*preconceitos de raças iguais*" [prejudice of those equal in race] and the words "utopia" and "hypocrisy" are used to refer to the Brazilian situation - their meaning is revealing: the black race lived in a utopia, pretending that races are equal, without paying attention to the inequality of their material, cultural and social situation. Fifth, "those that were led astray", that is, those *negros* of dubious morality, are responsible for the stigma that the word "*negro*" carries, even if this generalisation is considered incorrect, and that "those led astray" should be the reason for the mobilization of "those equivalent in race". Sixth, the idea that "race", therefore, is mobilised to establish equality between, on the one hand, those that could occasionally be mistreated as "*negros*" and are commonly referred to as "*pretos*" and "*morenos*" (this seen as attenuating racial difference) and, on the other, those who hypocritically consider themselves as whites: the idea of race, therefore, is not used to mobilise a social identity, but to break it up, to make socially "whites" and "those of colour" equal, both either close or distant descendents of this "race". Seven, and finally, the word "colour" in "colour prejudice" means that there is prejudice within the same race (i.e. amongst those that have African blood): that is, it was precisely those of lighter skin (who considered themselves white) who discriminated and despised those who were darker.

We should not forget, nevertheless, that the constant accusation of prejudice on the part of those lighter-skinned members of the "race" was also a discursive strategy, whose objective was to create solidarity and identity among both close and distant descendents of Africans, and that, therefore, implicitly, the idea of biological race is being used for this purpose. However at the same time, this strategy strengthens the argument of whites that prejudice does not exist in Brazil and that the problems that black people face are their own fault, including prejudice.

A new meaning of "race", however, starts to become commonplace from the 1920s onwards, together with the self-denomination "*negros*". What was negative, inferior and insulting in these words is supplanted by a claim with a positive and regimenting meaning. *A Liberdade*, a newspaper well aware of the political movement of black Americans, was perhaps the first to register the change that was taking place. It is probable, therefore, that the idea of "historical race", as termed by DuBois (1986), was already having some influence on Brazilians<sup>5</sup>

I am not sure what takes place between 1921 and 1923, since there are no journals in the collections I have consulted (Mirian Ferrara and Michael Mitchel)<sup>6</sup> published in these years, but when *Elite*, *Clarim* and *Auriverde* appear in 1924, the terms "*negro*" and "*raça*" start to designate the collective which had earlier been preferentially designated as "men of colour" and "class"<sup>7</sup>

Terms such as "class" and "men of colour" were to gradually fall out of use in the press and in the movements who now call themselves "*negros*", but "class" was to survive to present times, with another meaning, to designate the absence of the idea of "race" in the treatment of blacks in Brazil. But, even amongst those who, in the 1920s, start to call themselves "*negros*" the change is gradual.

### **Self-defined race**

Both "race" and "*negro*" were words whose meanings were completely reversed through time. First used by Europeans to designate persons and peoples of darker colour, "*negro*" then became the designation of persons and peoples of inferior social status or biological constitution, slaves or submissive peoples; at a third stage, it was used to self-designate by these same peoples in their colonial liberation movements and the recovery of their self-esteem.

The evolution of terms which occurred in Brazil with regard to black people's self-designation can, in part, be viewed under the aegis of the identity revolution by black people at a world level, which occurs from the end of the 19th Century to the middle of the 20th Century. The ideological bases of this revolution were founded on the re-appropriation and re-approximation of two scientific terms: "race", a biological

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<sup>5</sup> See *A Liberdade*, São Paulo, 7th March 1920, p.1 and 9th May 1920, p. 2

<sup>6</sup> Both collections are available at the Instituto de Estudos Brasileiros [Brazilian Studies Institute] library at USP.

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, *Elite*, São Paulo, 20th January, 1924, p. 1; *O Clarim*, São Paulo, 2nd March, 1924, p. 3 or *Auriverde*, São Paulo, 29th April 1928, p. 1.

concept of the 19th century, reworked to designate a transnational historical and spiritual community; and "culture", re-appropriated as a near synonym of the first term, to designate a set of artistic and material manifestations of this transnational people. "Negroes", "nègres", "negros": these were the words chosen - in English, French and Portuguese respectively - for self-designation by the community claiming to be part of this race. However, although worldwide this "people" trace their roots back to Africa, they have not always, in their various adopted nationalities, claimed their own culture, black or African. In fact, the most extreme example of this occurs in Brazil, where only much later did black Brazilians claim themselves to be the producers of "black culture", of African origin. We shall go back to this issue further on. For now, we need to say a few words about the way in which "race" and "culture" are appropriated by intellectuals who define themselves as *negros*.

W.E.B. DuBois was one of the first to theorise about the "black race" - giving it a meaning that was not altogether biological, but close to that which would be defined as "culture" by Franz Boas, (though) still impregnated by German romantic thinking - in a talk he gave to the America Negro Academy in 1897, where he insisted on the predominance of spiritual and cultural traces over physical traces in the definition of human "races". DuBois' objective was to advocate, in a clear and precise way, an autonomous and independent cultural evolution for black Americans.

The existence of a "black culture", an expression of the "black soul", is a belief shared by Americans and Europeans at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century; a belief that fuels a profound sentiment of the differences between whites and blacks, a sentiment that is popularised during the same period by the discovery of "black art" and "African art" by cubist and modernist artists and the value attached to them. In the United States, the Caribbean and Europe the existence of a "black culture" was never seriously questioned. On the contrary, it served to justify the struggle for the political emancipation of blacks and feed the pan-Africanist nationalist ideal of many social movements. In literature and in politics this ideal was expressed in France and the Caribbean under the name of *négritude* (Césaire 1956; Senghor 1967; Depestre 1980; Munanga 1986). In Brazil, in the 1950s, the ideal of cultural decolonisation and economic nationalism and social development would also be given the same name of *negritude* (Ramos 1954; Nascimento 1982).

We see, therefore, that overcoming the pseudoscientific classification of humanity into colours and races as a way of subordinating human diversity to

egalitarian and individualist ideals of modern democracy could, and indeed did, concretely lead to different types of political-ideological attitudes.

Let us look at three of these. The first attitude is that of the denial of races and the re-reading of the differences between human peoples in terms of "culture"; any mention of races, therefore, is seen as racist. The best example of this posture is the ideology of the French republic, which does not allow adult and healthy human beings to act in the public sphere from the vantage point of any particular racial or ethnic characteristic, be it individual or collective. The second attitude is the transformation of the old biological race into "historical race", whose specificity is the experience of pan-Africanist or diasporic movements. In this case, racism is defined not in terms of the affirmation of physical or cultural differences between races, but in its hierarchization and possible oppression. The political ideal is of multi-racial and multi-cultural representation and recognition. Finally a third attitude preaches cultural hybridisation and biological miscegenation between peoples of original "races", so as to constitute, in the future, one nation and a single mixed humanity, but of a variety of colours. This proposal takes on various forms, of which the main ones in Brazil were "whitening" - based on the belief that the predominant colour would be white - and the Freyrean ideal of "*mestiçagem*" [mixing races], which like José Vasconcelos' (1925) "cosmic race" in Mexico, advocated that a mixture of races would over time produce a single and general colour of humanity or of a nation.

For Gilberto Freyre, in the 1960s, Brazil was already going through this phenomenon of loss of colour, the main symptom of which was the popularisation of the term "*moreno*"<sup>8</sup>. According to him, the increased use of this word was not only a semantic transformation, but "a growing trend in which not only the white *moreno* was considered *moreno*, as before, but also the *pardo* and even the *preto*, in various degrees of *morenidade*<sup>9</sup>, from light to dark, due to the effects of *mestiçagem*". Freyre could only come to one conclusion:

" With this "*amorenamento*"<sup>10</sup> (anthropological and sociological), to whom can also be added, in the last few years, those whites who try to make themselves *moreno* in the tropical sun of Copacabana and other beaches, *morenidade* is asserting itself, in the case of the Brazilian Man, as a denial of race and an affirmation of a meta-race (Freyre 1971: 120.)

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<sup>8</sup> *moreno* is an imprecise term that could mean dark white or light brown or even black

<sup>9</sup> *morenidade* - the condition of being "moreno"

<sup>10</sup> *amorenamento* - the turning of a people into "morenos"

## ***The colours (or races?) of Brazilians***

How are Brazilians classified and how do they classify themselves in terms of colour nowadays? We have two sources of data: sample surveys which cover the whole of the Brazilian territory and ethnographic research which are restricted to relatively small areas: a village, a neighbourhood, a city.

The main studies about colour, racism and discrimination which used representative samples were: DataFolha 1995 and 2008; PESB [Brazilian Social Survey] 2002; Perseu Abramo 2003; MQ-UFMG 2005 [Quantitative Methodology - Federal University of Minas Gerais]<sup>11</sup>. There is also data relative to colour<sup>12</sup> from *Pesquisa de Emprego e Desemprego* (PED) [Survey on Employment and Unemployment] which is conducted monthly by DIEESE<sup>13</sup>/INSPIR (1999) in the main metropolitan regions of the country<sup>14</sup>. However, the most important colour statistics in Brazil are gathered by IBGE<sup>15</sup>, through PNAD<sup>16</sup> and particularly, the Demographic Census which officially registers, every ten years, the composition of the Brazilian population by colour. In the censuses, the question, up to 1980, was: "what is your colour?" In the 1872 census, the alternatives presented to the respondent were "*branco*" [white], "*preto*", "*pardo*" and "*caboclo*"<sup>17</sup>; in 1890, the "*pardo*" category was substituted by "*mestiço*"<sup>18</sup>; in 1940 the categories were "*branco*", "*preto*", "*amarelo*"<sup>19</sup> and "others", although the category "others" was grouped under the denomination "*pardo*". In 1950 and 1980, the respondent had a choice of four categories: *branco*, *preto*, *pardo* and *amarelo*. In 1960, a new term was added to those of 1950: "*indio*"<sup>20</sup>. In 1991, there is a return to the 1960 categories but the term "*indio*" is substituted by "*indígena*" [indigenous], and the question is also changed to "what is your colour/race?" Finally in 2000, the same question and categories used in

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<sup>11</sup> These databanks are accessible from the *Consórcio de Informações Sociais* [Social Information Consortium], USP <http://www.nadd.prp.usp.br/cis/index.aspx>

<sup>12</sup> Differently from other surveys, PED's colour classification is made by the interviewer and not by the interviewees themselves.

<sup>13</sup> DIEESE - *Departamento intersindical de Estatísticas e Estudos SocioEconômicos* [Inter Trade Union Department of Statistics and Socio-Economic Studies]

<sup>14</sup> INSPIR - *Instituto Sindical Interamericano pela Igualdade Racial* [Interamerican Trade Union Institute for Racial Equality]

<sup>15</sup> IBGE - *Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatísticas* [Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics]

<sup>16</sup> PNAD - *Pesquisa Nacional por Amostra de Domicílios* [Brazilian National Household Sample Survey]

<sup>17</sup> *caboclo* - mixed race individuals of amerindians and whites

<sup>18</sup> person of mixed race

<sup>19</sup> *amarelo* - yellow or an individual of East Asian descent

<sup>20</sup> *indio* - indian (Amerindian)

1991 were maintained (Nobles 2000: 104). We should add that until 1960 the census interviewer attributed colour, and from 1980 onward it is a matter of self-classification.

Ethnographic studies in Brazil in the 1950s preferred to use "social races" instead of "historical races". This terminology is based on an uncontested fact: if the concept of human races does not form an empirical reality, that is, if there are no races in nature, but they continue to inhabit the imaginary of many human societies, it is because, far from being simple superstitions that can be exorcised by enlightenment, they are social constructions and have a social function and reality. If this is the case, the criteria by which races are perceived changes from one society to another, and even from era to era.

Charles Wagley (1968), studying the formation of social races in the Americas, identified three different patterns or three types of classification systems based on the criteria of: (1) ancestry or origin, (2) socio-cultural status, or (3) physical appearance. In fact, Wagley systemised these discoveries from a series of anthropological and sociological studies about race relations in Latin America, from the 1950s and 1960s.

In Brazil, the majority of these studies were conducted under UNESCO (Wagley 1952; Azevedo 1953; Pinto 1953; Bastide and Fernandes 1955, Ribeiro 1956); the agreement between the State of Bahia-Columbia University (Harris 1952, 1956; Hutchinson 1952 ; 1957; Zimmermann 1952), or as academic theses in the Department of Sociology at USP [University of Sao Paulo] (Fernandes 1965; Cardoso e Ianni 1960; Ianni 1962; Cardoso 1962). In some of them, Brazilian racial classification, that is, how people in this country classified themselves into groups of colour or race was an important part of the investigation.

Perhaps it was Marvin Harris who best synthesised the specificity of colour classification in Brazil when he stressed that, contrary to what happened in the United States, there were no racial descent rules in Brazil: that is, children did not inherit the same racial status as their parents. In the United States, there was a rule: children inherited the racial status of the progenitor with the lower prestige, i.e., children of mixed marriages were classified according to the status of the partner with the lowest racial position. Harries called this hypodescent. In Brazil, however, the colour of children was socially defined individually and independently of the parents, where a black father, for example, could have a white or *moreno* child if this child had white

phenotypical features. In other words, in Brazil it was physical appearance, physiognomic and socio-cultural markers which counted in colour classification and not origin or descent. For Harris, following earlier anthropologists, Brazilian colour groups did not constitute a "race" as such, as hereditariness was absent from these groups, but only a "class", that is a socially open group (to which an individual does not belong by birth) even if constituted by markers which are not totally acquired. A group of colour, but not race; a class, but not a race.

Donald Pierson, the pioneer in racial relations studies in Brazil, systemised this discovery thus:

"Of course, [colour] classification can be derived, in part, from physical appearance; but it is also derived from the possession of one or more criteria of social position; for example, personal, educational or occupational achievements, or an accumulation of economic resources". (Pierson 1971: 35)

Harris' position with regard to the ambiguity of the system of racial classification in Brazil became more radical after a field research conducted in the rural areas of the state of Bahia in 1962, leading him to even doubt the existence of a system, that is, of a permanent structure which gives meaning to the employment of colour terminology (Harris 1964: 27). Harris' misgivings were further expressed in his strong criticism of IBGE, where in successive censuses he cast doubt on its results concerning the colour of Brazilians, deeming them to lack objectivity. For Harris, IBGE, which treated colour or race as objective characteristics, should simply put an end to its predefined colour categories (*white, preto, pardo, amarelo*) and allow the interviewees to express themselves freely (Harris 1964: 22). For him, "the Brazilian census [...] neither registers a subjective concept of social races nor the objective opinion of biologists" (Harris 1964: 22).

Both the ideas of Harris (1970) and Freyre exerted considerable influence. In the 1970s, at the height of the military dictatorship, the Brazilian state looked to review its racial policies (Park 1971) taking the "colour" question out of the IBGE Demographic Census. The justification given by the mentors of this new policy was that census colour categories (*branco, preto, pardo* and *mulato*) were artificial and not used by the man in the street, where a plethora of designations prevailed. Under pressure from demographers (Costa 1974) and social scientists, however, IBGE decided to introduce an open question (that is a question whose answer was not preliminarily classified in the questionnaire) about colour in the questionnaire for the

1976 National Household Survey - PNAD, in order to empirically measure up to what point its earlier colour classification was adequate. In this survey IBGE collected 136 different answers to its question (Nobles 2000:114), that is 136 "colours", well over the 40 racial types found by Harris and Kotack (1965: 203) in Bahia.

What does this great quantity of colours mean? On the one hand, this quantity points to the importance of colour as a social marker. After all, a characteristic which was not very important would not be distinguished with so many names. But, on the other hand, if there are so many names, it also means that the demarcation power of these names on their own is not very great. At best, one could argue, like Harris, that there cannot really be racial groups defined from a characteristic subject to such great variation and ambiguity.

Nelson Valle Silva (1987, 1994, 1996) argued differently however. Of the 136 colours registered, 94% "of respondents spontaneously kept to the categories white, *claro* [light], *moreno claro*, *moreno*, *pardo e preto*, with the most dominant categories being *branca* (47%) and *moreno* (32% of answers)." That is, census categories were in fact consistent and, therefore, demarcated groups. What the open question was measuring was a phenomenon of social identity different from that asked by the closed question, not exactly racial, since it was outside a scale of colour. Silva believed, furthermore, as the category "*moreno*" encompassed elements of all other census categories, it would not be possible to introduce it alongside other categories in a closed question, or for it to substitute any of the other categories, without introducing enormous ambiguity in the scale, and making the results collected incomparable with those of earlier censuses.

We should stress, however, that keeping the question about colour in the Brazilian census was, in large part, a victory achieved through political pressure on the part of black activists and researchers in the Brazilian Congress and IBGE. A victory against the position championed by Gilberto Freyre (1979) who argued that Brazilians already constituted a metarace, of a *moreno* colour. Melissa Nobles tells us how, despite the opposition of the management body of IBGE, black activists and researchers were able to re-establish the colour question in the 1980 census, with the argument that it was only more refined statistical analyses that could yield knowledge about the social situation of blacks in Brazil (Nobles 2000: 117).

The fact is that anthropologists and sociologists returned to studying and thinking about Brazilian racial classification (Costa 1987; Teixeira 1987; Wood 1991;

Harris et al. 1993; Sansone 1993; Maggie 1994, 1996; Fry 1995-1996; Telles e Lim 1998; Schwarcz 2001; Telles 2002; Petruccelli 2002; Costa 2002, Osório 2003).

Moema Teixeira (1987) was one of the first to review the studies of the 1960s, in an attempt to keep her distance from the political writings of the black movement<sup>21</sup>, which saw the fluidity of Brazilian racial classification as a form of alienating blacks and as an ideology imposed by whites.<sup>22</sup> Teixeira returns to the basic principles of sociological analysis of the forms of social classification, as established by Durkheim and Mauss (1903 [1981]), to make two important observations about the Brazilian classification system. First, "that categories, despite not being explicit, have as an ultimate reference the duality of whites and blacks"; second, the ambiguity of colour categories as already noted by Harris and Kotack (1963).

Fry (1995-1996) and Maggie (1996, 1998) in a way follow the same line of analysis, though pointing to the simultaneity of different forms of colour classification in Brazil, which operate in different social contexts. Fry (1995-1996: 131) talks of three types of classification which act simultaneously: the multiple mode (which can have up to a hundred terms) and the census mode (closed question categories such as "what is your colour?"), present in the lower socio-economic groups, and the binary mode (blacks and whites), used by black activists, the media and intellectuals. Underlying Fry's analysis is the suggestion that the binary mode is being imposed on the lower socio-economic groups by politicians or intellectuals, as the census categories were imposed by the state. Maggie (1998: 160), on the other hand, prefers to use three orders of social relations in which colour identities are constructed: culture, society and inter-group relations.

Telles (2002:425), using data gathered by DataFolha (Turra 1995), compares the inconsistency between categorisation (classification by others) and self-classification in the census categories, coming to the conclusion that "only approximately 1/5 of Brazilians in the sample are classified ambiguously." That is, for 79% of Brazilians IBGE categories are those that are used on a daily basis to identify themselves and to be identified. For the remaining 21%, however, these are not the terms they use to identify themselves or others.

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<sup>21</sup> About the Brazilian Black Movement, see, among others, Leite (1992), Barbosa (1998), Bastide (1983), Ferrara (1986), Pinto (1993), Silva (2003) e Souza (2005).

<sup>22</sup> See, for example, Moura (1978: 39).

## Assessing the effects of affirmative actions and ethnic mobilisation

With the adoption of affirmative policies, mainly quotas for blacks at Brazilian universities, some authors such as Bayle (2008) have argued that there will be a tendency for the Brazilian population to declare themselves darker than they have done in the past. Although Bayle's argument may sometimes lead to errors, such as for example when he claims that universities adopt the bipolar system used by the black movements<sup>23</sup>, it seems right to expect that the influence of black mobilization in the media and the state creates actual material and symbolic incentives for the construction of black identity as an ethnic identity or at least, a colour one, and leads to a change in the Brazilian statistics. Telles and Flores (2010) have also recently observed the declining of whiteness in Brazil using data from the Americas Barometer.

To assess this general trend, albeit preliminarily, I will use some other available data. They seem to indicate the direction which racial re-classification is taking. We must keep in mind that the more ambitious affirmative actions - quotas for blacks at public universities - only started to be adopted in 2003, and became generalised in the following years, involving up to 40 universities. Current data, therefore, can only vaguely reflect strategies for racial re-classification which may have been produced by these measures. They reflect, in a general way, however, the large political black mobilisation of the last decades.

Let us start with census data. IBGE data shows that the number of whites oscillated very little between 1980 and 2000, but they also indicate that, for the first time since 1872, the whitening trend of the Brazilian population has stopped, with a small increase in the number of people who declare themselves to be "*pretos*" (see Table 1). Alternatively, if we take PNAD, also by IBGE, to obtain the latest official data, the number of whites falls 4 percentage points between 1995 and 2005, while there is also a relative increase in the numbers of *pardos* and *pretos* (see Table 2).

Unofficial current data, collected using different methodology, from representative sample surveys by DataFolha of the over-16 urban Brazilian population show more accentuated changes. DataFolha, in two surveys in 1995 and 2008 about racial prejudice in Brazil, gathered data on colour in two different ways: one was

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<sup>23</sup> In fact, the majority of universities use the IBGE classification, offering benefits to *pretos*, *pardos* and *indigenas* who have studied in secondary public schools. The term "*negro*" in the legislation only appears in a few universities, in states where this term is widely used by the population in general.

through an open question "what is your colour?" and the other using the same category alternatives as IBGE. Because they are more detailed and more recent, the comparison using these data can move us closer to a better understanding of how Brazilians today define their colour.

As the data is very detailed in terms of the demographic and socio-economic characteristics of the respondents, and as I have only been able to use cross tabulations, without being able to access the database for more refined statistical analyses, I will attempt to make a synthesis in order to describe more closely the colour groups that concern us - *branco*, *pardo* and *preto* - comparing changes which have occurred in their composition (see tables 3 and 4).

**Branco (white) :** In 1995, the tendency of the group was to declare themselves spontaneously "white" (92.1%). Only residually did they declare themselves "*morenos*" (5.5%) or not declare their colour (1.7%). The terms "*pardo*", "*negro*", "*mestiço*", "*mulato*" and "*moreno escuro*" only appear in insignificant numbers. It can be said that only 8% of Brazilians who are officially white, within this social group, have any doubts with regard to their racial identity.

In 2008, this group, however, is less sure of themselves. 83% spontaneously declared themselves to be "white", whereas 11% preferred to spontaneously declare themselves "*morenos*". Other colours declared in the open question were: *pardo*, *amarelo*, *clara* (1% each). 17% of the group therefore doubted their whiteness.

**Pardo (brown):** In 1995 this was a category that less people chose. Only 55.8% declared themselves spontaneously to be "*pardos*". They preferred to call themselves "*moreno*" (26.7%) or "white" (6.5%) and "*pardo claro*", when they wanted to whiten themselves; or "*negro*" (3%) and "*preto*" to become blacker. This was the colour category where the largest amount of people looked for alternative names, such as "*claro*", "*amarelo*", "*mulato claro*", "*mulato*", "*misto*" [mixed], "*castanho*" [chestnut brown], "*mestiço*", "*marron*" [brown], "*mulato escuro*" [dark mulato], "*moreno médio*" [medium moreno], "*branco brasileiro*", "*mulato médio*". 3.5% did not declare their colour spontaneously.

In 2008, "*pardo*" was chosen by even less people (45%), where an equal number preferred to identify themselves spontaneously as "*moreno*" (44%), or "*mulato*". Some who self-declared themselves "*negro*" (3%), "white" (2%) or "*amarelo*" (1%) also declared themselves "*pardos*" in the closed question.

**Preto (black):** In 1995, this category was less accepted: only 13% classified themselves spontaneously as "*pretos*", 64.9% preferred to call themselves "*negros*", and 11.7% preferred the denomination "*moreno*". The number of those that called themselves "white" (2.9%) or did not declare their colour (2.9%) is interesting. Both spontaneous declarations, in this case, seemed to denote a denial of the official categories, in the first case through an inversion game, in the second by a refusal to answer. There were other answers such as "*moreno claro*", "*escuro*" [dark], "*mestiço*" and "*moreno escuro*".

In 2008, the number that spontaneously declared themselves "*pretos*" increased substantially (to 27%). The majority of those who chose this category in the closed question had previously classified themselves as "*negros*" (40%) or "*morenos*" (25%). Other designations used were "white" (1%) "*pardo*" (2%) "*moreno claro*" (1%) "*mulato*" (15%) and "*moreno escuro*" (1%).

Seen as a whole, the classificatory displacement seems to have gone from white towards black, in the following way: first, the tendency to call oneself *moreno* increased (Table 5), probably due to the tendency of those who used to declare themselves white to start calling themselves *morenos*, that is, accepting a darker skin colour; secondly, the number of people spontaneously classifying as *pardos* in 1995 preferred to declare themselves *pretos* in 2008. People who earlier used to classify themselves spontaneously as *moreno*, and who when forced to chose between the census colours tended to chose white or *pardo*, now tend to declare themselves *preto*, *amarelo* or *indígena* - clearly demonstrating social valorisation. Table 6 shows the displacement of the spontaneous declaration of *moreno* colour to the closed census categories. Whereas in 1995, 14% of *morenos* moved towards white, in 2008 this number fell to 10%; the displacement of *pardos* decreased 12 percentage points, whereas the displacement towards *preto* (5%), *amarelo* and *indígena* (11%) grew.

In conclusion, there is strong evidence that the Brazilian population is using darker colours to classify itself racially. This change can be attributed to a range of factors and conditions that I cannot develop here. They range from demographics (the decline in European immigration since the 1950s) to the political (increased black mobilisation of the last decades); from the cultural (exposition of lower class Brazilians to other systems of race classification as emigration towards Europe and the United States soared in the end of XX century) to representations (the Brazilian media changed its secular misrepresentation of Blackness); from the psychological

(the development of self-esteem and even a certain pride of being Black) to the institutional (the recent establishment of affirmative actions creating material rewards to the assumption of Afro-descent). The fact is that if Brazil has ever had a unique system of race classification, this system is today under stress from other competing systems.

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## Tables:

**Table 1 – Brazil: Population by Color, 1872 to 1991 (%)**

Colour	1872	1890	1940	1950	1960	1980	1991
Branca	38,1	44	63,5	61,7	61	54,2	51,7
Preta	19,7	14,6	14,6	11	8,7	5,9	5
Parda	42,2	41,4	21,2	26,5	29,5	38,8	42,5
Amarela			0,6	0,6	0,7	0,6	0,4

Source: Reis, João José. Presença Negra: conflitos e encontros” In *Brasil: 500 anos de Povoamento*, Rio de Janeiro: IBGE, 2000, p. 94

**Table 2 – Brazil, population by colour 1995- 2008 (%)**

Year	Total	Colours			
		Branca	Preta	Parda	Amarelo/Indígena
1995	151922545	54,5	4,9	40	0,6
2005	181000608	50,5	6,3	42,5	0,7
2008	189995300	48,8	6,5	43,8	0,9

Source: PNAD, IBGE 1995, 2005, 2008.

**Table 3 – 1995: Self-classification by colour in open and closed questions**

Colour in open question	Colour in closed question (%)					
	Branca	Parda	Preta	Amarela	Indigena	nodecl
Branco	92,1	6,5	2,9	40,7	5	28,6
Moreno	5,5	26,7	11,7	15,2	56,5	11,1
Pardo	0,2	55,8	1,3	2,3	8,9	9,5
Negro	0,1	3	64,9	2,3	9,9	14,3
Preto		0,3	13			
Amarelo		0,1		27,9		1,6
Other	0,4	4,1	3,3	2,3	9	3,2
NoDecla	1,7	3,5	2,9	9,3	10,7	31,7
Total %	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: DataFolha 1995

**Table 4 – 2008: Self-classification by colour in open and closed questions**

Colour in open question	Colour in closed question			
	Branca	Parda	Preta	Other
Branca	83	2	1	4
Moreno	11	44	25	72
Parda	1	45	2	2
Negro		3	40	2
Preta	0	1	27	1
Amarela	1	1	0	8
Other	4	2	3	9
No declar	1	1	0	1
Total %	100	100	100	100

Source: DataFolha 2008.

**Table 5 – Changing classification in the open question (what is your colour?) from 1995 to 2008**

Branca	50	32	-18
Morena	15	33	18
Parda	20	17	-3
Negra	7	7	0
Preta	1	4	3
Other	3	6	3

No Declr	4	1	-3
Total	100	100	0

Source: DataFolha 1995 and 2008

**Table 6 - How those self-defining as morenos reclassified themselves using census categories – 1995 to 2008.**

Year	Branca	Parda	Preta	Outras	Total
1995	14	62	7	17	100
2008	10	50	12	28	100
$\Delta$	-4	-12	5	11	

Source: Datafolha 1995 and 2008