

## CHAPTER 10

### The Race Issue in Brazilian Politics (The Last Fifteen Years)<sup>1</sup>

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The issue of race and politics in Brazil can be approached from different angles. One of these might be the way in which politicians and public policies deal with matters relating to racial differences within the Brazilian population. Alternatively, one could look at the way in which some racial minorities organise politically, either in terms of developing a specific ethnic feeling or by means of institutions and political parties. One could also refer to the particular way in which different racial contingents have been absorbed into a unique Brazilian national identity.

Over the years, however, Brazilian political science has constructed its own distinctive method of approaching the race issue. Bolívar Lamounier (1968) and Amaury de Souza (1971) list three substantive questions for studying the relationship between race and politics in Brazil. The first is whether blacks and whites display different political behaviour; the second is whether there is a collective political behaviour on the part of blacks that expresses racial solidarity; and the last is 'how the political system operates to demobilise the potential for collective political behaviour'. Souza and the majority of those who have written about the relationship between race and politics in Brazil have restricted their studies to the first of these questions,<sup>2</sup> while Lamounier has dedicated his energy to examining the third. This chapter will try to deal briefly with all three questions.

The discussion on race and politics, as sketched out above, must face a preliminary challenge in Brazil — the task of establishing the existence of a race issue. Like the rest of Latin America, Brazil was formed from the American colonial matrix, that is, the transplantation of European peoples to the Americas in a position of dominance over both the indigenous populations and the large population of enslaved Africans. Nevertheless, it will be maintained here that there is a general belief in a certain Brazilian exceptionalism that has supposedly overcome the original racial differences. This is because the Brazilian solution to the problem of integrating formerly enslaved black people and the descendants of indigenous peoples into the national society occurred in two stages. First, it denied the existence of biological differences (innate abilities), political differences (rights), cultural differences (ethnicity) and social differences (segregation or prejudice) between these peoples and the European descendants, with or without race mixture. Secondly, it is because the Brazilian solution incorporated all these original differences into a unique syncretic and hybrid matrix, in biological terms as well as in cultural, social and political terms. This is what we conventionally call racial democracy.

In order to develop the theme of this presentation, I find myself obliged to demonstrate that this idea of Brazilian exceptionalism is part of the problem, meaning that it is an historically dated political solution, which is now in headlong decline.

This chapter will begin by briefly putting into historical context the process of building a Brazilian national identity in which the first 'solution' to the race issue was settled. Secondly, the results of studies on the voting behaviour of Brazilian blacks will be presented. This will be followed by an examination of the emergence of black social movements. In addressing these issues special emphasis will be devoted to the changes recorded since 1985.

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<sup>2</sup> Silva and Soares (1985); Castro (1993); Berquó and Alencastro (1992); Prandi (1996).

## Brazilian Racial Democracy

Brazilian modernity is a product of the last 70 years. Sociologists and political scientists have generally delimited that modernity with reference to the 1930 Revolution, which put an end to the First Republic (1889–1929). In comparison with the Empire (1823–89), the First Republic sought to modernise Brazil by adopting new institutions, Europeanising customs<sup>3</sup> and encouraging European emigration.<sup>4</sup> It also maintained continuity with the Empire in the form of a conspicuously polarised nationality marked by enormous distance between whites and blacks — the civilised and the provincial. It was only after 1930, particularly with the New State regime (1937–45) and the Second Republic (1945–64), that Brazil definitively acquired a ‘people’, meaning that the nation invented for itself a tradition and an origin.

The fundamental idea of the new nation was that different races do not possess innately different civilising qualities but rather different cultures. Brazil began to think of itself as a hybrid, mestizo civilisation — not only European but also the product of miscegenation among whites, blacks and Indians. The Brazilian ‘ethnic melting pot’ was capable of absorbing and *Brazilianising* the cultural traditions and manifestations of the various peoples that immigrated during their respective eras, rejecting only those considered incompatible with modernity (superstition, animism, etc.). This idea allowed for the cultivation of a uniquely Brazilian ‘high culture’ that was also compatible with ‘popular culture,’ a phenomenon that emerged in the 1922 Modern Art Week. But in a way it was the social sciences, not only the arts and literature, that invented this modern Brazil, through seminal works like those of Gilberto Freyre (1933 and 1936), Sérgio Buarque de Holanda (1936) and Caio Prado Júnior (1937).

The material and economic foundations for this modernity were laid by the 1930 Revolution. They consisted, basically, of incentivising industry and substituting the foreign labour force with a Brazilian one, leading to the constitution of a true proletariat with recognised and regulated political status.

The importation of about five million Africans supplied the labour market of the colony (1560–1823) and the young independent state during its first decades of existence (1823–52). However after the abolition of the slave trade, Europe became the main source of labour for Brazil’s export agriculture and emerging industry. An estimated four million Europeans immigrated to Brazil between 1850 and 1932, mainly Portuguese, Italians and Spaniards. This foreign labour force, concentrated almost entirely in São Paulo, the states of the southern region and Rio de Janeiro, dominated the industrial and artisan labour supply, completely excluding the black and mestizo populations from the market.

The end of foreign immigration in the 1930s and the constitution of a market reserve for Brazilian workers made the incorporation of an enormous mass of mestizo and black workers possible. They migrated to São Paulo and to the states of the Brazilian south and south-east from various parts of Brazil, primarily Minas Gerais, rural São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and the states of the north-east — the most heavily populated regions.

Until the 1930s it had been recognised that Brazil had a race issue with biological and demographic foundations. Thus, as long as the importation of African slaves continued or as long as the volume of European immigration was negligible, we were seen by our elites as a nation without a people and without a national culture.<sup>5</sup>

With European immigration came the perceived threat of cultural division of the country. As Nina Rodrigues expressed in exemplary terms at the end of the nineteenth century:

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<sup>3</sup> Freyre (1936).

<sup>4</sup> Seyferth (1990); Schwarcz (1993).

<sup>5</sup> Skidmore (1976).

Even the most careless and imprudent Brazilian cannot fail to be impressed by the possibility of the future opposition, which can already be glimpsed, between a white nation, strong and powerful, probably of Teutonic origin, which is being constituted in the states of the South, where the climate and civilisation will eliminate the black race, or subjugate it, on the one hand; and, on the other, the states of the North, where lives a mixed race, vegetating in the sterile turbulence of a live and ready intelligence, but one associated with the most decided inertia and indolence, with laziness and sometimes subservience, and thus in danger of being converted into the submissive pastures of all the exploitation wrought by petty dictators.<sup>6</sup>

In other words, this period was characterised by fear for the quality of the Brazilian demographic stock, for the absence of cultural uniformity, and for national unity — all these fears nourished by beliefs about race.

Vargas in politics, Freyre in the social sciences and the Modernist and regionalist artists and writers in the arts were the personalities primarily responsible for providing the 'solution' to the race issue. During centuries of colonisation and biological and cultural miscegenation diluted in the Luso-Brazilian and mestizo matrix, European demographic and civilising predominance had never been complete enough to impose segregation upon blacks and mestizos. On the contrary, the dominant strategy was always that of 'transformation' and 'whitening,' meaning the incorporation of socially successful mestizos into the 'white' ruling group.

While the First Republic was responsible for Europeanising Brazilian customs and bringing millions of Europeans into the south and south-east regions of Brazil, to the detriment of the mestizo population emerging from the colonial legacy, the 1930 Revolution and the Second Republic had the foresight to defuse the ethnic bomb that was forming just as Nina Rodrigues had feared.

Racial democracy as a 'solution' to the black issue did not signify, however, an effort to combat inequalities in income and social opportunities between blacks and whites. Only partially, in the areas of culture and ideology, did it involve curbing discrimination and prejudice. In legal terms, for example, only one law, the Afonso Arinos Law of 1952, recognised racial prejudice as a problem in Brazil and began punishing it as a misdemeanour. Nevertheless, its practice continued, widespread and unrestrained. Still, one must recognise that, in ideological terms, belief in racial democracy and in the Brazilian people's mixed origin served to solidify the formal pretence of equality for blacks, mulattos and mestizos in Brazilian society.

As we will see, not even racial democracy was enough to diffuse black social protest. First, however, some words about dismantling racial democracy during the last 15 years are in order.

While internal migrations and the creation of a solid national culture with mixed and popular foundations, originating mainly in the north-east, Bahia, Rio de Janeiro and Minas Gerais, managed to defuse the ethnic bomb that was forming in São Paulo before the 1930s, they were nonetheless incapable of preventing the emergence and continuation of new problems like race and regional prejudice and growing racial inequalities. In the same way, the belief in racial democracy which has been woven into the legend of Brazilian exceptionality was no longer a plausible solution once other post-colonial societies, like the United States and Canada, began overcoming racial segregation through solutions like multiracial and multicultural coexistence in a democratic context that was more egalitarian in terms of opportunities.

Furthermore, racial democracy ended up becoming excessively associated with nationalist sentiments, the official ideology of the military regime and the process of economic expansion in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. The exhaustion of Import Substitution

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<sup>6</sup> Rodrigues (1933), p. 19.

Industrialisation and the downfall of authoritarianism, which led to the crisis of the 1980s, eroded the very foundations of nationalism and its myths. Feelings of national demoralisation and disintegration corresponded with the economic crisis and the crisis of governability. Brazil began to experience phenomena previously unknown or already erased from national memory, all of them opposing their founding myths: a) the demand for attribution and recognition of their indigenous ethnicity by populations long integrated into the national life as '*caboclas*'; b) the emigration of large numbers of Brazilians, mainly to the United States, in search of a new life; c) the appearance of separatist movements in the country's south, as well as racist attacks on blacks and immigrants from the north-east in São Paulo; d) the desire for a double nationality (a second passport) among the white middle-class of European descent.

In other words, Brazil, for Brazilians, was no longer the best country, nor the only country, at least not in terms of social organisation. The significant increase in formal education and growth of the labour market in the previous decades now translated into enormous feelings of frustration. Differences among Brazilians also became increasingly visible.

### **The Black Vote and Political Science**

Focusing specifically on São Paulo between 1888 and 1988, George Andrews (1991) offers an interpretative synthesis of the political tendencies of black Brazilians. His argument is that, historically, the political sympathies of the black population had always been with the monarchy, for it was known that the emperor leaned toward the abolition of slavery much more than the large landowners. Similarly, the First Republic, which closely followed Abolition, was a republic of large landowners that used political means to promote cultural policies of Europeanising customs and was never looked upon with favour or loved by blacks. Only Getúlio Vargas's New State, with its policies for protecting Brazilian workers and instituting state tutelage of trade unions (and later the labour politics of Vargas, Jango and Brizola) regained the political sympathies of the black masses on the same scale as the imperial family. In his synthesis, Andrews reproduces the consensus of a great part of the literature available on the subject.

Gilberto Freyre made the first attempt to explain the differentiated political behaviour of blacks in modern Brazil. The two excerpts cited below effectively synthesise his opinion about black people's preference for populist politicians, mainly for the labour tendency represented by Vargas, Goulart and Brizola:

The ironic side of the simultaneous disappearance of two institutions — slavery and the monarchy — was that former slaves found themselves in the position of men and women who had no Emperor or autocrat of the Big House to protect them, consequently becoming the victims of deep feelings of insecurity (...) Years were needed for political leaders to understand the true psychological and sociological situation of these former slaves, disguised as free workers and deprived of the patriarchal social assistance they were given in old age or in sickness by the Big House or, when that house did not do them justice, by the Emperor, the Empress, or the Imperial Princess.<sup>8</sup>

This explains — coming to modern Brazil — the great popularity of Getúlio Vargas when, as president, for some time with dictatorial powers, he decided to establish the social legislation that gave the great majority of Brazil's working population protection against old age, sickness and exploitation by commercial or industrial corporations. This also explains why Vargas came to be known as the 'Father of the Poor' and won a degree of popularity

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<sup>7</sup> Generally, this term refers to persons of mixed-race but with prominent indigenous phenotype in rural areas.

<sup>8</sup> Freyre (1956), p. 46.

with the people that surpassed that obtained by D. Pedro II [the Emperor] in 48 years of good, honest and paternalist government.<sup>9</sup>

In 1968 Bolívar Lamounier initiated a new scientific tradition in the study of the relationship between race and politics in Brazil by setting forth a research agenda that addressed three broad issues: a) differential voting behaviour between whites and blacks; b) autonomous political organisation of blacks; c) methods of integrating black people into the political system. For Lamounier the Brazilian case offers an apparent paradox: deep and growing social inequalities between whites and blacks coexist with the relative absence of violent conflicts and with the near non-existence of race issues in the political sphere. Without treating in detail the first of these issues, but accepting Freyre's observation that blacks, more than whites, support populist and labour leaders, Lamounier concentrates his attention on the last of the themes and offers an explanation for the paradox he has pointed out. In his view, first of all, the Brazilian state has been capable of generating symbols of black integration and incorporation that suffice to counterbalance tensions arising from racial prejudice and discrimination. Second, the state has been perceptive enough to anticipate racial tensions or abort them at the source. Third, Brazilian social institutions have been successful in co-opting emergent and aggressive black leadership.

Amaury de Souza (1971) was the first to use voting records and multi-varied analysis, controlling social class, educational levels and other variables of social position, to demonstrate that blacks really do display political behaviour different from those of whites. Souza validates the theory that had already been promoted by Freyre in theoretical terms.

From that point forward the interpretation that the black vote was concentrated on populist politicians, at least with regard to the period of the Republic, became anchored in empirical research on voting intentions. De Souza (1971) concluded that in the 1960 presidential elections, blacks, independent of their socioeconomic status, voted more consistently for Jango than whites, revealing a certain pattern in the black vote, which systematically leaned toward the populist and labour candidates. In analysing Brizola's victory in the Rio de Janeiro State gubernatorial elections a decade later, Gláucio Soares and Nelson do Valle Silva (1985) amply demonstrate a voting preference for the Vargas heir's candidacy among '*pardos*', meaning mulattos, even when controlling other explanatory variables like socioeconomic status, degree of urbanisation, etc.

Using voting intention data from four medium-sized Brazilian municipalities in the 1989 elections, Mônica Castro (1992) also documented the existence of a specifically black vote. A vote that operates in complex tandem with socioeconomic status: while the poorest blacks tend to be politically apathetic (abstaining from the polls or invalidating their vote), more economically well off blacks tend to favour the left. Castro did not, however, find significant differences between the behaviour of *pardos* and *pretos*.<sup>10</sup> Gilberto Freyre (1956) interpreted blacks' preference for the emperor and for Vargas-style populism as a product of their feelings of insecurity and as a search for social protection by strong and dominant figures. Souza (1971) and Andrews (1991), however, suggest that such a preference had solid material foundations and returns. In the case of populism, for example, Souza argues that the Vargas-era labour laws gave black Brazilians guarantees regarding their inclusion in class society.<sup>11</sup> His data also shows that there was greater upward mobility among young blacks than whites in 1960, although this greater mobility was insufficient in eroding the

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *Pardos* are lighter-skinned, *pretos* dark-skinned blacks. This is a 'native' distinction as well as one made by the official Brazilian Census Bureau, IBGE. There is a widely accepted convention now both among intellectuals and Black activists of classing *pretos* and *pardos* together, the sum of the two categories being referred to as the 'black' (*negro*) or Afro-Brazilian population.

<sup>11</sup> Souza (1971), p. 64.

identification of blacks with the working class and the poor. Ideologically, 'at least during the first years of liberal democracy, from 1945 to 1964, the political categories of blacks and the people were almost interchangeable'.

Reginaldo Prandi, interpreting the same period, asserts:

It is the populist strain of Vargas labour politics that explains black people's adherence to this party and its candidates. Populism denies the class struggle and dilutes the races into a homogeneous unit, the people, which is ideologically the source of all legitimacy. Racial differences make no sense, nor does any racial identity movement; populism, then, is an ideology of blacks' integration as equals.<sup>12</sup>

After the promulgation of the 1988 Constitution, which extended suffrage to the illiterate, incorporating millions of blacks into the Brazilian electorate, and in the face of a growing black movement preaching the vote for black candidates, the relationship between race and politics once again began to concern political scientists. Benedita da Silva's candidacy for governor of Rio de Janeiro state in 1989, with the racial and class polarisation that followed, frightened Brazilian political, economic and intellectual elites. Could we be moving towards the *racialisation* of Brazilian politics? Could blacks in Brazil be developing communitarian political sentiments and behaviour?

Through their analysis of data from sample surveys carried out in São Paulo and in Vitoria (Espírito Santo state), Berquó and Alencastro (1992) see the possibility, given the end of the disenfranchisement of illiterates, for a black ethnic vote to arise in Brazil. By this they mean a tendency of African descendants to vote for candidates that represent the Brazilian black community, even though only 14 per cent of those who consider themselves black actually state such an intention. Until then the ethnic vote had been restricted to ethnic communities in São Paulo (Italians, Syrians and Lebanese, Portuguese, Japanese, etc.) and Rio de Janeiro (Portuguese).

Analysing voting intention data for the 1994 elections, Prandi (1996) also noted blacks' electoral preference for certain candidates (Lula, Brizola, Quércia) to the detriment of others (FHC, Amin, Enéas), even when variables like geographical region, age, sex, income and educational levels are controlled. In Prandi's view, colour was the main factor for predicting voting intention, surpassing education and age. However Prandi rejects the interpretations of Souza, Castro, Berquó and Alencastro, Soares and Silva, who interpret this vote as being motivated by ideology or ethnicity. He prefers to return to an explanation akin to that of Freyre: the idea that deep feelings of insecurity and impotence would supposedly lead blacks to identify with the programmes of a few charismatic candidates.

An attempt will now be made to explain the political position of the blacks through another perspective — their incorporation into national politics through black protest.

### **Black Movements**

Black protest in modern Brazil, that is from 1930 to the present, has grown during the moments of greatest tension in the national fabric. In the 1930s, for example, different ethnic groups such as Italians, Syrians and Lebanese, as well as Portuguese, were so well organised that black and mestizo Brazilians felt threatened by exclusion. At the same time, São Paulo regionalism began to take on separatist tones.

The Brazilian Black Front (Frente Negra Brasileira — FNB), which arose during this period, was an ethnic organisation in the sense that it cultivated specific community values; however, it based its criteria for recruitment and identification on 'colour' or 'race', not on 'culture' or 'traditions'. In fact, the FNB sought precisely to assert that blacks were 'Brazilians' by renouncing the Afro-Brazilian cultural traditions considered responsible for

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<sup>12</sup> Prandi (1996), pp. 63–4.

the stereotypes attributed to black people and denouncing the colour prejudice that excluded Brazilian blacks from the labour market in favour of foreigners.<sup>13</sup> The FNB was also a political organisation that actually became a political party before being abolished by the New State regime. While it contained some socialist dissidents, the majority of the FNB was politically rightist with fascist overtones and even included a paramilitary group. Thus, in 1932 blacks were reluctant to join the São Paulo Constitutionalist Revolution, which was regionalist and separatist in nature, and in 1937 they supported the Vargas coup, which in a certain way implemented some policies meeting their demands. We were dealing, then, with black protest against a social order (that of the First Republic) that had materially and culturally cornered the black and mestizo populations into secondary and marginal spaces. Although its policies enjoyed mass support, the Vargas dictatorship dispensed with free political organisations. Black protest could only re-emerge with the restoration of civil liberties seven years later.

As we have seen, the re-democratisation process of 1945 was marked by a strongly nationalist political project, both in economic and cultural terms. This represented, on one hand, the rejection of European and US economic liberalism and cultural imperialism, and on the other the construction of state-regulated capitalism and an indigenous national culture with a popular foundation. This plan of nationhood offered blacks more effective economic participation and began to consider different cultural traditions of African or Luso-Afro-Brazilian origin as Brazilian: the baroque colonial art of Pernambuco, Bahia and Minas, Catholic processions, public square festivals, samba, Carnival, *capoeira*, *Candomblé*, *Congadas*, regional culinary traditions, etc. In other words, political federalism was, in some ways, fortified by the nationalisation of the different cultural regionalisms, all of these racial in nature. The national matrix became seasoned with the increasing mobility of the population and by the 'integration of blacks into class society',\*\* referring to their integration as *workers* and as *black Brazilians*. While Brazil was not in fact a racial democracy, the idea that it would come to be one in the future was good enough for the national social imagination.

Black protest, however, did not disappear. On the contrary, it broadened and matured politically during this period. First, because racial discrimination, to the extent that markets and competition were expanding, became more problematic. Second, because prejudice and stereotypes continued to oppress black people. Third, because the great majority of the black population was still marginalised in shantytowns (*favelas*, *mucambos*, *alagados*) and in subsistence agriculture. It was precisely the blacks climbing the social ladder, those recently incorporated into class society, who would most forcefully verbalise the problems of discrimination, prejudice and inequality.

The main black organisation in Brazil at this time was the Black Experimental Theatre (Teatro Experimental do Negro — TEN) of Rio de Janeiro. Clearly cultural at the outset, its goal of opening the field of national scenic arts to black actors grew into one of professional training, of collective psychodrama for the black population and of recovering the image and self-esteem of black Brazilians. Its main intellectuals, Abdias do Nascimento (1950, 1968) and Alberto Guerreiro Ramos (1957), especially the latter, went further in their critique of European and North American cultural imperialism, preaching that social science should commit itself to a plan of nation-building. Because for Guerreiro Ramos the Brazilian people were indeed black, there was no sense in speaking of a 'black issue' or cultivating as exotic certain forms of cultural expression that were innate to the situation of poverty and ignorance in which the majority of Brazil's poor population was found (he was referring mainly to Afro-Brazilian religions). TEN's intellectuals and their ideology

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<sup>13</sup> Bastide (1955, 1983); Fernandes (1955, 1964).

\*\* This is an allusion to the title of Florestan Fernandes's classic work on race discrimination in Brazil (1964). T.N.

were consistent with the nationalist and populist politics of the period, and their greatest expression was manifested in the Vargas labour tradition. From an ideological perspective, Guerreiro Ramos radicalised Gilberto Freyre's exaltation of racial mixture and the mulatto, according to which all Brazilians carry in their soul the mark of miscegenation. In this sense, he made negritude the assumption of a Brazilian national identity free of the inferiority complexes left over from Portuguese colonisation.<sup>14</sup>

While civil society was basically anaesthetised during this repressive period between 1964 and 1978, in contemporary times black protest has been recovered in all its vehemence by the Unified Black Movement (MNU).

The profile of the MNU, founded in 1979, is radically different from that of its predecessors.<sup>15</sup> Politically, it is aligned with the revolutionary left; ideologically, it assumes, for the first time in the country, a radical racialism. Its most evident and recognised influences are: first, Florestan Fernandes's critique of the racial order originating in the slave system, which the Brazilian bourgeoisie had kept intact and which had made racial democracy a myth; second, the civil rights and black nationalist movements of black Americans in the United States; third, the freedom struggle of the peoples of southern Africa (Mozambique, Angola, Rhodesia, South Africa). In addition to these one must recognise at least three more influences: the international feminist movement, which made possible the emergence of black female activism; the new Brazilian trade unionism, which took its protest to the factory floors and removed its leadership from the orbit of traditional political parties; and the new urban social movements, which kept civil society mobilised throughout the 1980s.

### Black Protest Ideology during the 1980s: *Quilombismo*<sup>16</sup>

During the 1980s the MNU was a divided movement — split between a leftist leadership, generally young university students, some of whom were involved with the fight for democracy organised by the socialist organisations protected by the PMDB, and another leadership committed to cultural resistance, which spontaneously spread throughout the poorest black population, influenced by the culture of mass consumption. The presence of a historical leadership with an international character, like that of Abdias do Nascimento, closely related to Brizola's labour politics, was also a decisive component of the movement's ideological development. Because of length and time constraints, allow me to examine only *quilombismo*, the doctrine created by Abdias, an ideology that permeated the black movement of the 1980s, allying cultural radicalism with political radicalism.

Abdias do Nascimento's doctrine on *quilombismo* exhibits two central influences. The most obvious is Afro-centrism, a doctrine created in post-war France and French Caribbean but that was very influential for blacks (in Britain and the Commonwealth as well as North America) during the 1970s voiced by African intellectuals from Nigeria and Ghana living in the United States and Britain. Afro-centrism inspired the task of connecting black Brazilians to a transnational black 'nation', which would evolve in occidental culture, but had its strongest roots in the Ancient Egyptian Empire and in the African presence of the pre-Columbian Americas. At the same time, this movement evidently dealt with inventing traditions and reclaiming the black civilising process. The second influence was clearly Marxism, primarily through its connection to the Brazilian nationalism of the 1960s. From this Marxist nationalism Abdias extracted not only formal analogies and revolutionary vocabulary, but also the fundamental idea that the

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<sup>14</sup> See Bastide (1961).

<sup>15</sup> Gonzalez (1982) Santos (1985).

<sup>16</sup> *Quilombo* refers to the community established by runaway slaves in Brazil, *quilombismo* to the culture and characteristics these communities took on.

emancipation of black Brazilians signified the emancipation of the entire Brazilian population from capitalist exploitation. The universal character of black emancipation in Brazil was intimately connected to an idea of an exploited majority and not of an oppressed minority, as in the United States. The broad definition of *black* as *African descendant* (not only as people of black colour or phenotype) was essential to this struggle. As a matter of fact, this amplified definition of black had already been made by Guerreiro Ramos and by Abdias<sup>17</sup> himself when, in the 1950s, they took possession of the ideas of negritude coming from the Francophone world, mainly Senegal and the Antilles, that had a strong impact in Paris. As Roger Bastide (1961) argued, at this point black Brazilians gave a rather distinctive meaning to the negritude movement, denying its cultural aspects (seen in Brazil as a barbaric anachronism) and emphasising its libertarian and nationalistic character. The novelty in the 1980s was adopting both a nationalist and cultural position at the same time.

The adoption of a bipolar racial classification (*black* and *white*, abolishing the intermediary categories *pardo* or *moreno*) seems to be politically motivated. Far from being the product of minds 'colonised' by US cultural imperialism or imprisoned by archaic radicalism,<sup>18</sup> it was the conscious decision of a movement that opted for a struggle in which blacks could be assimilated to an exploited working class and instead of being relegated to the position of an oppressed minority.

Like all political movements the black movement was nourished by tradition and by its connection to other contemporary movements occurring both within and outside Brazil. The black movement extracted much of its ideological efficacy and its current manifestation from such movements. These were the contributions of the principal intellectual and political leaders like Abdias do Nascimento and Lélia Gonzalez.

Take for example, Abdias do Nascimento's *quilombismo*. In his internal reference Abdias sought to integrate the programme of *quilombismo* with the movement to re-democratise Brazil, through a radical Marxist-inspired struggle for emancipation (Table 10.1, item A).

Similarly, Abdias defined the black Brazilian not only as the most exploited member of Brazilian society, but also as the majority, mobilising ancient traditions of the mulatto identity of the bush captains, persecutors of the *quilombolas* (Table 10.1, item B). Abdias also drew an analogy between the struggle of black Brazilians and the struggle against apartheid in South Africa, defining Blacks as workers par excellence, the most Brazilian of all Brazilians, a majority oppressed by a racist minority composed primarily of foreigners (Table 10.1, item C).

Emphasising aspects of residential segregation, exclusion from the formal sector and police brutality, Abdias used analogies to connect Brazilian and South African racism (Table 10.1, item D). At the same time, the reference to police brutality was indivisibly linked to the human rights movement, that in this era was already mobilising the political forces fighting for Brazil's re-democratisation. More clearly, Abdias argued that the situation of authoritarianism and the absence of rights has been permanent for blacks (Table 10.1, item E). For Abdias the answer was an anti-imperialist nationalist struggle, connected to the national liberation movement and class struggle, but that protected Brazilian blacks' cultural peculiarities and specific needs vis-à-vis other blacks in the diaspora or the Brazilian proletariat (Table 10.1, item F).

An analysis of Lélia Gonzalez's classic text and of the MNU documents shows the same elements, although not very explicitly. The black Brazilian movement was nourished ideologically by the struggles for emancipation being simultaneously waged by other black

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<sup>17</sup> Now that I have established a certain continuity between Abdias's thoughts from the 1950s to the 1980s it is necessary to clarify that between 1960 and 1980 his thought shifted from an axis of negritude to one of Afro-centrism.

<sup>18</sup> The distance the black movement kept from the biological notion of 'race' is reiterated innumerable times. See Nascimento (1980), p.163: ('I advise the backbiters, intriguers, malicious and quick to judge: the word race, in the sense used here, is defined in terms of history and culture and not of biological purity.')

peoples (in the United States, South Africa, Lusophone Africa) and by the traditions of popular resistance in Brazil — of abolition and of Black Experimental Theatre.

### The Limits of Co-optation

As in the two previous periods (1930–37 and 1945–64), contemporary black protest was also formed in an atmosphere of intense intellectual effervescence and political mobilisation in Brazilian society. However, unlike the FNB and the TEN, which quickly found responses to their demands within the framework of traditional politics, whether in the New State coup or by way of Vargas' labour politics and nationalism, the MNU's radicalism has made current black protest longer lasting. Moreover, the MNU is only one among the many black organisations created in the last 15 years. Other organisations of varying ideological and political orientation and goals have emerged with the common objective of combating racism; among these, cultural, political and legal action NGOs stand out.

The recent black movement has brought an agenda that allies the politics of recognition (of racial and cultural differences), identity politics (racialism and the ethnic vote), citizenship politics (the fight against race discrimination and the assertion of black people's civil rights) and re-distributive politics (affirmative or compensatory actions) to the Brazilian scene.

A small list of the black movement's demands in the last fifteen years gives an idea of their breadth and radicalism. First, the MNU rejected the official date that celebrates the incorporation of blacks into Brazilian society (13 May, the date of the abolition of slavery) and instituted the festivities of 20 November, which marks the death of Zumbi, who led the Palmares Quilombo resistance in 1695. Second, the MNU began to demand a total change in education, through eliminating stereotypes and prejudices against blacks from schoolbooks, curricula and teaching techniques and instilling, on the contrary, black self-esteem and pride. Third, it demanded a special campaign by the Brazilian government to make it clear to the black population (*pretos* and *pardos*) that they should declare their colour as '*preta*' in the demographic census of 1991 and 2000. Fourth, it sued for and won the case that promulgated the modification of the constitution to make racism a crime without bail or statute of limitations and was later successful in passing legislation to regulate the constitutional provision, thereby making it enforceable. Fifth, it articulated a national campaign to denounce racial discrimination in Brazil, preaching and obtaining, in some places, the creation of special police stations to combat crimes of racism. Finally, it is now concentrating on demanding affirmative action policies to combat racial inequalities in the federal government.

Some of its demands have found quick responses from the Brazilian state, particularly those that could more easily fit into the contemporary matrix of nationality, whose nature is one of syncretism among the three founding races. Indeed, it was out of the very peculiar understanding of multiracialism and multiculturalism as synthesis (in the Freyrean tradition), and not as coexistence among equals (in the North American manner), that Brazilians began to accept some of the black movement's ideas, such as respect for cultural traditions and expressions of African origin and for the black aesthetic. The fact is that the Brazilian state was also agile in responding to the calls in this vein, whether by creating cultural foundations (the Palmares Foundation, for example) and state-level black community councils; incorporating black symbols (like the official recognition of Zumbi as a national hero and of 20 November as the Day of Blacks); developing more appropriate legislation to combat racism (the 1988 Constitution and Laws 7.716 and 9.459, which regulate the crime of racism); or changing school curricula in some municipalities where the pressure and presence of blacks is more intense, to allow for multiculturalism.

Other demands, however, like those that deal with fighting racial inequalities in income distribution and access to public services and demand affirmative and innovative policies, still face considerable resistance. This is true even though new institutions are slowly being created to deal with demands including: college entrance examination preparatory courses for blacks and the poor, exemption from college entrance examination fees for those coming out of such courses, bills of law that reserve places in public (non-tuition-paying) universities for students coming out of the public school system, the introduction of colour identification questions in higher education institution entrance forms and records, etc.

The broad range of demands has guaranteed the continuous nourishment of black political activism in greater measure than that of its co-option. In the same way, slogans like the ethnic vote (blacks should vote for blacks) and the cultivation of black consciousness (of a racial nature) are unlikely to be well absorbed. The reaction has been for the ideological and party profile of black activists to diversify rapidly due to the efforts of all political parties deliberately to court the black vote. In some instances, black leaders with great charisma, such as Benedita da Silva in Rio de Janeiro (1989), have appeared, and may reappear, on the political scene to compete for elected office in leftist parties (for example the PT<sup>19</sup> and PDT<sup>20</sup>). Through various radical proposals to modify racial inequalities, their presence may threaten to destabilise the system.

Finally, this chapter will examine a few other reasons why contemporary black protest has been more lasting and more difficult for the state to absorb. Beyond the reasons I have already suggested (national identity crisis, radicalism and the wide range of black demands), there is now a new international scenario from which the Brazilian state is no longer able partially to isolate itself, whether in economic terms or in cultural and political terms.

With regard to the effort to absorb protest and co-opt activists, state action has had to limit itself to the creation of foundations and some state-level councils, while political parties have sought to bring some black demands and politicians into their programmes.<sup>21</sup> But governmental parties and institutions incorporate only part of the black leadership, that is, those who are affiliated with or sympathetic to the political parties in power. This excludes both opposition leaders and activists independent of political parties. The latter, grouped in non-governmental organisations and funded by international donations, have been very active. Both the scope of these organisations, which make activism a profession, and the sources of their funding guarantee them greater autonomy and radicalism in their actions and proposals. Moreover, these organisations not only cooperate, they also compete with each other for ethnic representation. Secondly, consumer society and the internationalisation of cultural industry have made possible the appearance of black cultural movements, influenced not only by Brazilian folk culture of African origin, but also by the culture of the Black Atlantic. Movements that congregate the urban youth, such as Rio de Janeiro's funk,<sup>22</sup> Afro-Bahian carnival blocs,<sup>23</sup> the reggae of Maranhão State,<sup>24</sup> and São Paulo's rap,<sup>25</sup> are independent of any political or ethnic organisation. Some are very radical in their protest, a fact that is forcing black political leaders to keep abreast of these movements.

## Conclusions

In this chapter I have sought to develop an original understanding of the state of the relationship between blacks and whites in Brazil, starting with a reinterpretation of what is

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<sup>19</sup> Workers' Party (Partido dos Trabalhadores).

<sup>20</sup> Democratic Labour Party (Partido Democrático Trabalhista).

<sup>21</sup> Pereira (1982).

<sup>22</sup> Vianna (1988).

<sup>23</sup> Risério (1981).

<sup>24</sup> Silva (1995).

<sup>25</sup> Félix (2000).

called Brazilian 'racial democracy'. Fernandes treated racial democracy as an ideology of domination, as a myth, no more than a cynical and cruel way of maintaining the socioeconomic inequalities between blacks and whites, covering and silencing the permanence of colour prejudice and racial discrimination. This is the way in which most black Brazilian intellectuals understand 'racial democracy'. Denouncing its cruelty (such an ideology anaesthetises and alienates its victims) has been the main instrument for political mobilisation and the formation of a combative racial identity.

Countering this interpretation are some anthropologists who argue that 'racial democracy' is properly a founding myth of the Brazilian nation, in other words, a fundamental part of its civilising process. <sup>26</sup>Although this myth has not completely eradicated discrimination and prejudice, it permits greater intimacy and interaction between blacks and whites, solidifying a foundation for overcoming racism.

My understanding is that we should see in 'racial democracy' a political commitment from the modern state of the Republic of Brazil that was in force from Vargas's New State until the end of the dictatorship. Such a commitment has resulted in the incorporation of the Brazilian black population into the workforce, in the amplification of formal education and, finally, in the creation of infrastructures of a class society that challenge the stigmas created by slavery. The image of blacks as 'ordinary Brazilian people' and the banishment of the concept of 'race' from Brazilian social thought, substituted by concepts of 'culture' and 'social class,' are the greatest expressions of this commitment.

Since the 1980s Brazilian democratisation has sought to actualise this commitment but has encountered growing difficulties. First of all, racial inequalities, not only prejudice and discrimination, have become subjects of denouncement and are providing motivation for political demands. Second, the formation of a black identity has demanded the adoption of multiracial and multicultural policies that surpass the state's concept of society as being divided into classes (which marked the pact of racial democracy). Third, black mobilisation in Brazil has not followed the pattern of minority politics, but is based exactly on the idea that the Brazilian people are black, aspiring to the emancipation of an exploited majority.

**Table 1 – Some Ideological Elements of Quilombismo**

Anti-capitalism (A)	‘Black people have a collective project: the erection of a society founded on justice, equality and respect for all human beings on freedom; a society whose intrinsic nature makes economic or racial exploitation impossible. An authentic democracy, founded by the destitute and disinherited of the country. We have no interest in the simple restoration of obsolete types and forms of political, social and economic institutions; this would serve only to procrastinate the advent of our total and definitive emancipation, which can come only with radical transformation of existing socioeconomic and political structures. We have no interest in proposing an adaptation or reformation of the models of capitalist class society.’ <sup>27</sup>
Bi-racialism (B)	‘Citation of the bush captains is important. As a rule they were mulattoes, that is, light-skinned Blacks assimilated by the white ruling class and pitted against their African brothers and sisters. We must not allow ourselves today to be divided into a categories of “Black” and “mulattoes”, weakening our fundamental identity as Afro-Brazilians, Afro-Americans of all the continent, that is, Africans in the Diaspora.’ <sup>28</sup>
Oppressed majority (C)	‘Along with the briefly enslaved and then progressively exterminated Indians, the African was the first and only worker, throughout three and a half centuries, who built the structures of this country called Brazil. I think it dispensable to evoke once more the vast lands Africans sowed with their sweat, or to remember again the cane fields, cotton fields, coffee fields, gold, diamond and silver mines, and the many other phases or elements in the formation of Brazil, nourished with the martyred blood of slaves. The Black, far from being an upstart or a stranger, is the very body and soul of this country. Yet despite this undeniable historical fact, Africans and their descendants were never treated as equals by the minority white segments that complement the national demographic tableau, nor are they today. This minority has maintained an exclusive grip on all power, welfare, health, education and national income.’ <sup>29</sup>
Exclusion, terror (D)	‘The contemporary condition of Black people has not changed since then, except for the worse. At the margins of employment or left in situations of semi-employment and underemployment, Black people remain largely excluded from the economy. Residential segregation is imposed on the Black community by the double factor of race and poverty, marking off, as Black living areas, ghettos of various denominations: <i>favelas, alagados, porões, mocambos, invasões, conjuntos populares</i> or “ <i>residenciais</i> ”. Permanent police brutality and arbitrary arrests motivated by race contribute to the reign of terror under which Blacks live daily, In such conditions, one comprehends why no conscious Black person has the slightest hope that a progressive change can occur spontaneously in white society to the benefit of the Afro-Brazilian community.’ <sup>30</sup>
Black civil rights (E)	‘Almost 500 years of <i>Authoritarianism</i> is enough. We cannot, must not and will not tolerate it anymore. One of the basic practices of this authoritarianism is the brutal contempt of the police for the Black family. Every kind of arbitrariness is fixed indelibly in the routine police raids conducted to keep the Afro-Brazilian community terrorised and demoralised. With these raids, beatings, murders and torture the impotence and “inferiority” of Black people is confirmed to them daily, since they are incapable of defending themselves or of protecting their family and members of the community. This constitutes a situation of perpetual humiliation.’ <sup>31</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Nascimento (1980), p.160.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 156.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 149.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 149–50

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 162.

Anti-imperialism (F)	<p>‘In this passage the authors [of a Manifesto] touch upon an important point in the Quilombist tradition — the nationalist character of the movement. Nationalism here must not be translated as xenophobia. Quilombismo being an anti-imperialist struggle, it articulates itself with Pan-Africanism and sustains a radical solidarity with all peoples of the world who struggle against exploitation, oppression and poverty, as well as inequalities motivated by race, colour, religion or ideology. Black nationalism is universalist and internationalist in itself, in that it sees the national liberation of all peoples respecting their unique culture and political integrity, as an imperative for world liberation. Faceless uniformity in the name of a ‘unity’ or ‘solidarity’ conditioned upon conformity to the dictates of any Western social model is not in the interests of oppressed non-Western peoples. Quilombismo, as a nationalist movement, teaches us that every people’s struggle for liberation must be rooted in their own cultural identity and historical experience.’<sup>32</sup></p>
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