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Author(s): Dain Borges
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'Puffy, Ugly, Slothful and Inert': Degeneration in Brazilian Social Thought, 1880–1940

DAIN BORGES

Brazilian discussions of race between 1880 and 1940 were partly a use of European scientific theory to rationalise the native system of colour discrimination. When scientific orthodoxy turned against 'race' between 1920 and 1945, much of the intellectual racism of Brazil also dispersed. Quite rightly, most intellectual histories of race in Brazil stress a disjuncture around 1930.[1] However, from the 1870s onward, and most clearly after abolition, there was also a medical-psychiatric strand to 'race' that can be unravelled from the rest of the skein. Part of racial thinking in Brazil reflected the general medicalisation of social thought that began when early-nineteenth-century physicians called for hygienic reforms within upper-class families to protect children from hereditary or environmental contaminations.[2] The Spencerian and Comtean positivist social science that became fashionable in Brazil after 1870 also contributed to medicalisation. It saw society as an organism, and compared the role of the social scientist to the role of the physician: to examine symptoms of disease and propose therapies.[3] From the 1880s through the 1920s, the national ailment that the medicalised social thought of Brazil most often diagnosed, an ailment that connected individual health to national well-being, was degeneration.

Degeneration, though never far from colour in Brazil, was more than colour. It was a psychiatry of character, a science of identity, and a social psychology. As in Europe, it became an argument that national decline should be understood through the metaphor of progressive hereditary illness in a body, that the nation was a sick man. It survived the disrepute

[1] T. Skidmore, *Black into White: Race and Nationality in Brazilian Thought* (New York, 1970); E. Viotti da Costa, 'The Myth of Racial Democracy: A Legacy of the Empire', in *The Brazilian Empire: Myths and Histories* (Chicago, 1985), pp. 238–40.

[2] D. Borges, *The Family in Bahia, Brazil, 1870–1945* (Stanford, 1992), pp. 90–9; J. Freire Costa, *Ordem médica e norma familiar* (Rio de Janeiro, 1979), pp. 171–5.

[3] R. M. Morse, 'Latin American Intellectuals and the City, 1860–1940', *Journal of Latin American Studies* 10, 2 (1978), pp. 219–38; C. A. Hale, *The Transformation of Liberalism in Late Nineteenth-Century Mexico* (Princeton, 1989), pp. 210–15.

Dain Borges is a visiting scholar at the Centro de Estudos de demografia Historica da América Latina, Universidade de São Paulo.

of racism and continued to shape the *Modernista* generation of Brazilian social criticism in the 1930s. The contemporary Brazilian social-welfare state and many contemporary themes of national identity derive from an ignored and discredited psychiatry of the nineteenth century.

Race and degeneration theories

In its late-nineteenth-century heyday, degeneration was an inclusive, much-abused, catchall term.[4] Though often confused in contemporary usage, it may be helpful to distinguish three of its meanings. In each of them there was the sense that the past was better, that the present was declining or falling away from a more perfect type, that there had been a loss of status, of place, or of distinct energies. (*a*) In a general way, at least since the eighteenth-century biologists such as Buffon, 'degeneration' referred to the fall of man or another form of life away from an original, perfect type. Even that usage may have derived from much older conventional reference to Adam's fall or the curse of Ham. But in the nineteenth century French thinkers coined two new, commanding applications of the term. (*b*) In sociology, Arthur de Gobineau's *On the Inequality of the Races* (1853) defined degeneration as the inevitable historical process in which pure conquering races, through mixture with pure inferior races, lose their special qualities and energy. (*c*) In medical and psychiatric science, separately but almost simultaneously, Benedict-Augustin Moreau's *Treatise on Physical, Intellectual, and Moral Degenerations* (1857) identified degeneration as a specific syndrome of cumulative hereditary psychiatric decline that ran in families. A nervous or alcoholic individual transmitted a hereditary disposition toward illness to his offspring. Children of the second generation, weak and epileptic from this heredity, might fall into a debilitating milieu. In the third generation, madness was likely, and by the fourth, imbecility and sterility would end the lineage.[5]

By the late nineteenth century, European psychiatry and criminology had placed study of degeneration at the centre of their disciplines, and they rather confidently extended their conclusions about hereditary flaws

[4] J. E. Chamberlain and S. L. Gilman (eds.), *Degeneration: The Dark Side of Progress* (New York, 1985), presents a range of approaches to the understanding of degeneration. See also R. A. Nye, *Crime, Madness, and Politics in Modern France: The Medical Concept of National Decline* (Princeton, 1984); D. Pick, *Faces of Degeneration: A European Disorder, c. 1848–c. 1918* (Cambridge, 1989).

[5] A. de Gobineau, *The Inequality of the Races* (New York, 1967), p. 25. B. A. Morel, *Traité des dégénérescences physiques, intellectuelles et morales de l'espèce humaine* (Paris, 1857; rpt. New York, 1976), p. 4. See also J. A. Boon, 'Anthropology and Degeneration: Birds, Words and Orangutans', pp. 24–48, and E. T. Carlson, 'Medicine and Degeneration: Theory and Praxis', in Chamberlain and Gilman, *Degeneration*, pp. 121–44; R. Starn, 'Meaning-Levels in the Theme of Historical Decline', *History and Theory* 14, 1 (1975), pp. 1–31.

within families to matters concerning crowds, the nation, or the 'race' as a whole. Among laymen and among some criminologists, the latter two notions of 'degeneration', as familial decline or as race mixture, were often united or confused. Despite Gobineau's connections with Brazil (he had been consul in Rio and he corresponded with Emperor Pedro II), many Brazilian social scientists accepted psychiatric degeneration in Moreau's usage, but resisted hybrid degeneracy in Gobineau's fatalistic theories. They preferred to assert that race mixture could have an elevating, or 'whitening' effect on the national race.[6]

European societies, particularly French society, provided Brazilians both with their model of civilisation and with 'scientific' diagnoses of social evolution and social degeneration. During the 1880s and 1890s, a variety of alarmist analyses of national decline in Europe accounted for differences within and among the 'white' nations. They took many forms, and they came from both medical authorities and laymen. The Italian Cesare Lombroso identified the type of the low-browed, tattooed, 'born criminal' in 1876. In the 1880s the American George Beard popularised the figure of the 'neurasthenic', incapable of confronting the demands of civilisation. French criminologists and sociologists of the 1890s linked current fears of crime and falling birth rates in theories of degeneration brought about by milieu as well as ancestry. English social critics, alarmed by reports of the physical deterioration of Boer War recruits in 1902 and 1904, blamed outcasts bred in the urban 'residuum'.[7] The most influential popularisation of the idea of degeneration as the *fin-de-siècle* spiritual malaise was the German Max Nordau's widely translated essay on literature and culture, *Degeneration* (1892), which defended a healthy middle ground in literature and castigated the sick extremes of mysticism and crude naturalism. Perhaps the most widespread popularisation of the idea that degeneration was a political threat was Gustave Le Bon's *The Crowd* (1895), which argued that some collective, quasi-hypnotic contamination or suggestion regressed crowds into an atavistic, primitive stage.[8]

[6] Skidmore, *Black Into White*; Viotti da Costa, 'Myth'. In this, Brazilian intellectuals were quite different from those in the United States; cf. G. M. Frederickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817–1914* (New York, 1971), pp. 265 and 321.

[7] J. A. Davis, *Conflict and Control: Law and Order in Nineteenth Century Italy* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ, 1988); Nye, *Crime, Madness and Politics*, pp. 310–40; C. E. Rosenberg, 'George M. Beard and American Nervousness', in *No Other Gods: On Science and American Social Thought* (Baltimore, 1976), pp. 98–108; Beard defined neurasthenia in 1869, and popularised it in books in 1880 and 1881; G. S. Jones, *Outcast London: A Study in the Relationship Between Classes in Victorian Society* (New York, 1984), pp. 330–3.

[8] M. Nordau, *Degeneration* (New York, 1968). G. Le Bon, *The Crowd* (New York, 1960); R. A. Nye, *The Origins of Crowd Psychology: Gustave Le Bon and the Crisis of Mass Democracy in the Third Republic* (London, 1975); S. Barrows, *Distorting Mirrors: Visions*

With many variations, the analogy between the nation and an organism, and the metaphor of the nation as sick man, pervaded late-nineteenth-century thought. By and large intellectuals in Europe, unlike intellectuals in the Americas, were not directly threatened by, or concerned with, differences between white and non-white races. European anthropology sufficiently explained white racial superiority and brown inferiority, ranking past and present societies on an evolutionary ladder. European tropical medicine furnished a footnote to the main text of degeneration, responding to concerns that white settler families in tropical colonies would degenerate.[9]

The mainstream concerns of European thought were different. Danger to the social organism came not only from brown people or Jews. It came from alcoholics, sexual deviants (especially homosexuals), syphilitics, prostitutes, and criminals. 'Excesses' of all sorts, including excesses of civilisation – too much urbanity, too much soft comfort – could weaken a nation and breed neurasthenics. Degeneration theory did not add to the pre-existing roster of deviants, so much as it lumped and interconnected them in a new way. It fed a new concern with the reproduction of society, and a new focus upon women and men in procreation, maternity, and child rearing.

Like colour racism, but once again more broadly, the analysis of degeneration relied on aesthetic criteria to evaluate individuals and peoples. Medical analysis looked for signs ('stigmata') of degeneration in the face and body of a patient: protruding jaws, beetling brows, dark skin colour. Not all of these signs were inborn. Tattoos, Cesare Lombroso thought, were the most revealing indication that a criminal was an evolutionary atavism, a throwback to a more primitive stage of humanity. The nineteenth-century sciences of physiognomy and phrenology, though in decline, provided the link between psychiatry, anthropology, and the visual arts. In painting and caricature, ape-like or animal facial types became conventional signs of social menace and bestial traits.[10]

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of the Crowd in Late Nineteenth-Century France (New Haven, 1981); J. S. McClelland, *The Crowd and the Mob: From Plato to Canetti* (London, 1989).

[9] A. L. Stoler, 'Making Empires Respectable: The Politics of Race and Sexual Morality in 20th-Century Colonial Cultures', *American Ethnologist* 16, 4 (1989), pp. 634–60; M. Harris, *The Rise of Anthropological Theory: A History of Theories of Culture* (New York, 1968).

[10] G. Tytler, *Physiognomy in the European Novel: Faces and Fortunes* (Princeton, 1982); L. P. Curtis, Jr., *Apes and Angels: The Irishman in Victorian Caricature* (Washington, D.C., 1971); H. Honour, *The Image of the Black in Western Art*, vol. IV, *From the American Revolution to World War I*, Part 2, *Black Models and White Myths* (Cambridge, Mass., 1989); G. Mosse, *Toward the Final Solution: A History of European Racism* (New York, 1978).

Like any hegemonic idea or scientific 'paradigm', degeneration less often dictated conclusions than it provided a biased foundation for polemical debates and for contradictory elaborations. Within the general idea that the well-being of a nation could be compared to the health of an organism, there were strong differences. For example, in congresses from 1885 to 1897, Italian and French criminologists split sharply over whether the criminal mind was formed at birth, or whether it was shaped over time by the influence of the milieu. Psychiatrists refined their classifications and explanations of degeneration, producing paradoxes such as the 'mad genius'. Social thinkers and politicians disagreed over the nature of policies, from prohibition of alcohol to prison reform to military service, that might regenerate the national race. 'Hard' eugenic measures, such as sterilisation of imbeciles and alcoholics, eventually provoked the greatest controversy.[11]

The understandings of degeneration could diverge so widely and still be shared because the biological definitions of heredity were then much broader and fuzzier than they became after the 1920s. Even self-proclaimed Darwinians might hold a neo-Lamarckian belief that a child's heredity derived not only from the parents' nature, but also from the parents' milieu and life experiences, their acquired history of diseases and sins. The influences that an infant bore from the seed, as well as those it received in the womb and from the milieu of childhood and adulthood, were all called 'heredity'. Thus, between 1915 and 1945 a stricter definition of genetic heredity in biology, and its segregation from a new concept of culture in anthropology, contributed significantly to the breakup of the scientific paradigm of degeneration.[12]

Uses of degeneration for a tropical nation: Brazil, 1880–1919

Each European nation had its local emphases in the science of degeneration, though intellectuals in one nation responded to those in another. But Brazil's participation in cosmopolitan science was a one-way dialogue. Brazilian thinkers listened to Europeans, but were rarely heard by them; with few exceptions, what Brazilians wrote had little impact on – and received little criticism from – scientific communities abroad.[13]

[11] Nye, *Crime, Madness, and Politics*, pp. 103–9; Pick, *Faces*, esp. pp. 139–43; Carlson, 'Medicine and Degeneration'; D. Kevles, *In the Name of Eugenics: Genetics and the Uses of Human Heredity* (New York, 1985).

[12] C. E. Rosenberg, 'The Bitter Fruit: Heredity, Disease, and Social Thought', in *No Other Gods*, pp. 25–53; Nye, *Crime, Madness, and Politics*; N. L. Stepan, *The Idea of Race in Science: Great Britain 1800–1960* (Hamden, Conn., 1982); Harris, *Rise of Anthropological Theory*.

[13] There were certainly exceptions, including the criminal anthropological work of Raimundo Nina Rodrigues, and the bacteriological work of the Oswaldo Cruz Institute; see M. Corrêa, 'As ilusões da liberdade: A Escola Nina Rodrigues e a

From the early nineteenth century on, Brazilian physicians had adapted French medical ideas to analyse social problems and to propose reforms, when they criticised customs of hygiene in family medicine. For example, physicians had long argued that slave wet nurses were likely to transmit syphilis, and even 'hereditary' traits, to the babies they nursed. They enjoined upper-class mothers to breast-feed their own children. Physicians had discussed theories that consanguineous marriage led to familial degeneration.[14] There was no salient, pioneer exponent of degeneration ideas in Brazilian medical circles; a number of physicians absorbed and spread them gradually through the 1870s and 1880s.

Their arrival coincided with the late Empire (1880–9), a radical moment in Brazilian politics and ideas, when the zeal of romantic idealism was being combined with scientific arrogance, abolitionist fervour, republican fanaticism, the rebellion of a young generation, and a new anticlerical rancour. The legacy of the past was not a golden age but a curse or an embarrassment. Reformers believed change required a new national identity.[15] Consequently, the rhetoric of degeneration became associated with social criticism, and remained so even in the 1890s and 1900s when degeneration turned into the central, near-official ideology of the conservative, oligarchical Republic (1889–1930). In the late republican decades of the 1910s and 1920s, debates over national health and degeneration often implied criticism of the 'moral corruption' of republican politics. During the Vargas dictatorships of 1930 to 1945, degeneration oriented the nationalisms of both left and right.

However, the Brazilian scientist who made the most prominent and creative use of a degeneration paradigm was racist and anti-liberal. Between 1888 and 1906, the Bahian physician Raimundo Nina Rodrigues took degeneration out of the realm of preventive family medicine and

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antropologia no Brasil', PhD diss., Universidade de São Paulo, 1982; and N. L. Stepan, *The Beginnings of Brazilian Science: Oswaldo Cruz, Medical Research and Policy, 1890–1920* (New York, 1976).

[14] Borges, *Family in Bahia*, pp. 96–104. The most cited early nineteenth-century medical text on wet nursing was the manual of J. B. A. Imbert, *Guia médica das mães de família* (1843), excerpted in R. Conrad (ed.), *Children of God's Fire: A Documentary History of Black Slavery in Brazil* (Princeton, 1983) pp. 135–6. On views of consanguinity, see J. da Silva Botelho, *Herança* (Salvador, 1878), and one of the first Mendelian treatises in Brazil, G. Moniz, *A consangüineidade e o Código Civil Brasileiro* (Rio de Janeiro, 1925). See also Freire Costa, *Ordem médica*; R. Machado et al., *Danação da norma: Medicina social e constituição da psiquiatria no Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro, 1978); S. Lauderdale Graham, *House and Street: The Domestic World of Masters and Servants in Nineteenth-Century Rio de Janeiro* (Cambridge, 1986).

[15] See J. Needell, *A Tropical Belle Époque: Elite Culture and Society in Turn-of-the-Century Rio de Janeiro* (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 1–22 and 185–96; Skidmore, *Black Into White*.

placed it in the newly-established fields of criminal anthropology and psychiatry. A correspondent of Cesare Lombroso's criminological school, Nina Rodrigues always hoped to identify incontrovertible craniometric indices of born criminality. He studied mestizo communities in rural Bahia for physiognomic signs and symptoms of criminality and degeneration resulting from race mixture.[16] This led him to historical and anthropological research into the primitive origins of brown and black Bahians in African sub-races, religions, and beliefs.[17] Nina Rodrigues (who some said was a mulatto himself) thus founded the field of Afro-Brazilian anthropology, but he used his Afro-Brazilian findings primarily for criminology. His political programme was quasi-segregationist. He concluded that the civilisational differences among races in Brazil were so profound that most blacks and mulattoes should not be held competent to stand trial by civilised law, and he proposed that courts add racial-psychiatric consultations to all proceedings. This utopian plan, which would have required an enormous expansion of the court system, was never put into effect. Nina Rodrigues died young in 1906, and most of his work only appeared posthumously. But disciples such as Afrânio Peixoto, Oscar Freire, and Artur Ramos, occupied important posts in the Brazilian psychiatric establishment and spread his work through medical legal institutes.[18]

During his brief career Nina Rodrigues also explored the Brazilian implications of French theories of collective psychology. His other major work was in social psychology and the sharing of mental pathology: dual madness, collective delusions, the delusions of crowds, the relation between leader and mob.[19] All Nina Rodrigues's investigations led him to criticise the smug assumption of Bahian liberal elites that they understood the mentalities of the 'citizens' over whom they ruled: 'We can only speak of a Brazilian people from the political point of view. From the sociological and anthropological point of view, much time will pass before we can consider the Brazilian population unified.'[20]

Social ideas of degeneration, and psychiatric themes of character,

[16] R. Nina Rodrigues, 'Metissage, dégénérescence et crime', *Archives d'Anthropologie Criminelle* 14 (1899), pp. 477–516; see also 'Os mestiços brasileiros', in A. Ramos (ed.), *As collectividades anormaes* (Rio de Janeiro, 1939), pp. 195–218.

[17] R. Nina Rodrigues, *Os africanos no Brasil* (São Paulo, 1976), and *O animismo fetichista dos negros bahianos* (São Paulo, 1935).

[18] R. Nina Rodrigues, *As raças humanas e a responsabilidade penal no Brasil* (Salvador, 1957); Corrêa, 'Ilusões da liberdade'.

[19] R. Nina Rodrigues, 'A loucura epidémica de Canudos: Antônio Conselheiro e os jagunços', in *As collectividades anormaes*, pp. 50–77; Nina Rodrigues, 'A loucura das multidões: Nova contribuição ao estudo das loucuras epidémicas no Brasil', in *As collectividades anormaes*, pp. 78–153.

[20] R. Nina Rodrigues, 'Lucas da Feira', in *As collectividades anormaes*, pp. 153–64.

probably found their widest application, not directly in medical writing, but indirectly through naturalist literature. Brazil's underdeveloped intellectual establishment had only feeble professionalisation and compartmentalisation; medical education was as literary and rhetorical as it was practical, and medical writing often borrowed images from romantic and naturalist literature, just as it lent them. Naturalism was a scientific aesthetic, and from 1880 through 1930, the science of its choice was medicine. It often assumed medical knowledge on the part of the reader, sketching a character type with a few medical indications.[21]

The idea that there was a science that could connect interior states to external appearances, that there could be an identity of appearances and reality, that the photographic rendering of appearances could constitute a scientific interpretation of individual cases and of society, appealed to those in search of a key to national reality. Yet the positivist method of the analysis of phenomena, and the degenerationist belief that physiognomic stigmata – skull shape, face, even tattoos – signified degeneration, collided with Brazilian cultural emphases on suspicion of appearances. Brazilian culture gloried in narrations of mistaken identity and fraudulent misrepresentation. Brazilian folklore (like that of most slave societies of the Americas) included tests that could reveal the African ancestry of someone passing for white. The carnival mask was a conventional symbol of *desconfiança*, the suspicion that was prudent in a hostile world. Brazilians constantly chided each other for being lulled by appearances.[22] Thus, European physiognomic codes were at once tremendously appealing as truisms and somewhat sceptically applied. Inevitably the result was scientific claims of clearer vision. The Brazilian medical literature on hygiene, for example, warned that families too often chose a wet nurse simply because she was pretty, rather than trusting the expert eye of a doctor to examine her for the subtler signs of disease.[23] In

[21] F. Süssekind, *Tal Brasil, qual romance? Uma ideologia estética e sua história: o naturalismo* (Rio de Janeiro, 1984); D. Scott Loos, *The Naturalistic Novel of Brazil* (New York, 1963). On medical education and literature, see Borges, *Family in Bahia*, pp. 87–90 and 102–3; on literature and social sciences, see A. Candido, 'Literatura e cultura de 1900 a 1945', in *Literatura e sociedade: Estudos de teoria e história literária* (São Paulo, 1976), pp. 109–38, esp. 120–1.

[22] R. Da Matta, *Carnivals, Rogues and Heroes: Toward an Interpretation of the Brazilian Dilemma* (Notre Dame, Ind., 1991), pp. 137–97. See L. Moritz Schwarcz, *Retrato em branco e negro: Jornais, escravos e cidadãos em São Paulo no final do século XIX* (São Paulo, 1987), on science, appearance, and illusion in the popular press, pp. 11–12, 85, 100–11, 232 and 237; M. Engel, *Meretrizes e doutores: Saber médico e prostituição no Rio de Janeiro (1840–1890)* (São Paulo, 1988), pp. 80–1, 89–90, on the association of prostitution with disguise.

[23] Imbert, *Guia médica*; J. Leite de Mello Pereira, *Breves considerações sobre a educação physica e moral dos meninos* (Salvador, 1853), p. 3. See conventional advice in L. A. de Souza Bahiense, *Da alimentação das crianças na primeira infância* (Salvador, 1898), p. 22; and P.

1897 Raimundo Nina Rodrigues measured the skull of the rebel prophet Antônio Conselheiro, expecting to find atavistic abnormalities of fanaticism; instead, he found that the skull was *deceptively normal*, just as the Catholic festivals of black Bahians camouflaged fetishist beliefs.[24]

Brazil's foremost naturalist novelist, Aluísio de Azevedo, explored the tension between a science of physiognomy and mistrust of appearances in *O homem* (1887). His 'case study' of the hysterical degeneration of Magdá is medically orthodox. At fifteen her body is a compendium of images of health and stock romantic similes: 'A well-made body, elegant, dark eyes flecked with blue, gorgeous chestnut hair, skin as fine and delicate as the petals of camellias, serene nose in one straight line, hands and feet of a fascinating distinction.' Her body deteriorates along with her mind in several precisely described hysterical fits. By the end of the story, she is so alienated that she cannot recognise her own 'livid and fleshless image' in the mirror. Refusing to see it, she instead hallucinates a caricature of the Song of Solomon: 'I have blood in my lips, a shine in my eyes, fresh skin! My breasts are full and succulent as two mangoes pecked by a little bird!' The novel is full of deceptive identities and appearances: her true love Fernando is secretly her half-brother; another suitor is a well-dressed count without money; the wine at a wedding toast is poisoned. Perhaps even the percipient family physician, Dr Lobão, is deceived as to the source of her hysteria: not simple sexual frustration of an unstimulated uterus, but rather frustrated incest.[25]

Where theories of physiognomy seem to have overcome the reservations of the Brazilian intelligentsia was in rationalising their aesthetic revulsion at the (by classical European standards) mestizo ugliness of the people, channeling it into troubled certainty that predictions of racial doom were exact. The journalist Monteiro Lobato, in a letter to a friend in 1908, described his dismay at the Rio de Janeiro crowd: 'There pass by in review all the degenerations, all the human shapes and mis-shapes, all except the normal.' The sociologist Gilberto Freyre confided an epiphany to his diary in 1921 and then to his American readers in 1956: shocked upon seeing a group of Brazilian sailors – scrawny mulattoes and *cafuzos* – crossing the Brooklyn Bridge, at first 'they impressed me as being the caricatures of men, and there came to

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de Barros Albernaz, *Primeira infância* (*Hygiene e aleitamento*) (Salvador, 1898), pp. 24 and 48–53.

[24] Nina Rodrigues, 'Loucura das multidões', pp. 131–2. He also found seeming normality in the skull of the bandit Lucas da Feira, which led him to conclude that Lucas was not a born criminal, but the type of an African chief misplaced in a European civilisation; Nina Rodrigues, 'Lucas da Feira', pp. 158–62. On beliefs, see *Animismo fetichista*, pp. 13–20.

[25] A. de Azevedo, *O homem* (São Paulo, 1970), pp. 36 and 202.

mind a phrase from a book on Brazil written by an American traveller: "the fearfully mongrel aspect of the population"'. Only in reaction, later, could he remember an incident in which an unbecoming backlands mestizo had proved to be a master mechanic.[26]

Physiognomy produced ambivalent results, but Brazilian scientific and literary adaptation of European degeneration theories did develop three characteristic themes: (1) the deterioration of individual character into sterile laziness; (2) the diversity of mentalities in a primitive, tropical milieu, and (3) the similarity of social relations to parasitism. Enunciated in full bio-medical context in the 1880s and 1890s, these themes persisted in an attenuated form in Brazilian social thought through the 1930s.

The identification of a 'lazy Brazilian' character syndrome was perhaps the most important of these themes. Here, science and literature built on a popular evaluation of Brazilian character that had been current since at least the eighteenth century.[27] They elaborated this stereotype and lent it precision. Brazilian medicine and Brazilian naturalism pessimistically evaluated the Brazilian character, especially the upper-class character. The medical literature on child rearing, for example, speculated on the ways in which the upbringing of boys (an excessive maternal indulgence, combined with an excessive paternal harshness) spoiled Brazilians.[28] In the novel, as well, the past weighed heavily on protagonists; heredity and deficient education produced feckless and often self-destructive personalities. Both sympathetic characters and antiheroes of Brazilian novels were thus afflicted; one may think of the prudent, accommodated merchant Paulo Boto in Xavier Marques's *O feiticeiro* (1897/1922), as well as the voluble Braz Cubas in Machado de Assis's *Epitaph of a Small Winner* (1881).[29]

In the novels of Aluísio de Azevedo, the pathology of the male

[26] [J.B.] Monteiro Lobato, letter to Carlos Rangel, 1908, cited in D. Patai, 'Race and Politics in Two Brazilian Utopias', *Luso-Brazilian Review* 19, 1 (Summer 1982), pp. 66–81, p. 73. G. Freyre, 'Preface to the Second English-Language Edition', in *The Masters and the Slaves* (New York, 1956), p. xxvii; G. Freyre, *Tempo morto e outros tempos: Trechos de um diário de adolescência e primeira mocidade, 1915–1930* (Rio de Janeiro, 1975), p. 112.

[27] L. de Mello e Souza, *Desclassificados do ouro: A pobreza mineira no século XVIII*, 2nd edn. (Rio de Janeiro, 1986), pp. 55–7, 64 and 215–22, traces an 'ideologia da vadiagem' (an ideology of laziness) regarding poor freemen, from eighteenth-century Brazil back through fourteenth-century Portugal.

[28] Mello Pereira, *Breves considerações* (1853), pp. 18 and 20–1: 'Servile treatment turns the character vile and low.'; E. Carteado, *Da cultura d'alma na infância* (Salvador, 1913), p. 79.

[29] X. Marques, *O feiticeiro* (São Paulo, 1975), first published as *Boto & Cia*, in 1897, revised as *O feiticeiro* in 1922; J. M. Machado de Assis, *Memórias póstumas de Brás Cubas* [translated as *Epitaph of a Small Winner* (New York, 1990)]; on Braz Cubas, see R. Schwarz, *Um mestre na periferia do capitalismo: Machado de Assis* (São Paulo, 1990).

characters is symbolised through sterile sexuality and the frustration of reproduction. In *Mulatto* (1881), the intelligent Raimundo is killed, thus ending the line of his family; in an epilogue we see his love Ana Rosa contentedly married to the clerk who had betrayed him. In *O homem*, the Conselheiro's lie – his refusal to acknowledge his illegitimate son Fernando – leads his daughter Magdá into a fatal infatuation with Fernando that unleashes her hereditary bent toward hysteria. His indecision about her treatment ultimately leads her to poison two honest, working-class newlyweds. Even a lower-class hero, such as the herculean Portuguese stonecutter Jerônimo, in *A Brazilian Tenement* (1890), is rather benignly contaminated by the snake-like erotic spell of the *mulata* Rita Bahiana's dance, by the Brazilians' better music, by their food, coffee, and rum, by the heat of their sun. The immigrant's assimilation to the Brazilian milieu is both degeneration and a sort of redemption: as he softens he begins to bathe more often. More bluntly, the novel ends when the evil landlord João Romão denounces his mistress Bertoleza as a runaway slave; in despair she commits suicide by slicing open her childless womb.[30]

The sketch of the psychiatrically degenerate man, the end of his line, is perhaps most complete in Amâncio, the antihero of *Casa de pensão* (1884). Amâncio's pathology epitomises the syndrome of laziness, lack of resolve, and lack of character. Azevedo details the ways in which an overindulgent mother, a distant father, and a mediocre education in Maranhão form him. He arrives in Rio de Janeiro at the age of nineteen, weakened by recent fevers and by latent syphilis acquired as an infant from his wet nurse. There, the heat, the debauchery of student life, the music of the waltz, and above all, the venal and corrupting milieu of the boarding house, degenerate him. He becomes a slave of his passions, and eventually is murdered.[31] In their relations to other people, the debilitated 'lazy' heroes of the Brazilian naturalistic novels were often victims – of an ancestry they did not know, of a milieu of provincial mediocrity and provincial prejudices, or even of witchcraft. In much the same way, the clinical cases described by contemporary psychiatrists found inexorable processes leading toward epilepsy and madness in family histories of deviance and alcoholism.[32]

[30] A. de Azevedo, *O mulato* (Rio de Janeiro, 1938) [translated as *Mulatto* (Rutherford, N. J., 1990)]; *O homem*; *O cortiço* (Rio de Janeiro, 1948) [translated as *A Brazilian Tenement* (New York, 1926)]. See also, P. Fry, 'Léonie, Pombinha, Amaro e Aleixo: Prostituição, homossexualidade e raça em dois romances naturalistas', in A. Eulálio et al., *Caminhos cruzados: Linguagem, antropologia e ciências naturais* (São Paulo, 1982), pp. 53–63.

[31] A. de Azevedo, *Casa de pensão* (Rio de Janeiro, 1940).

[32] A. Peixoto, *Epilepsia e crime* (Salvador, 1898); E. da Rocha Barros, *Estygmas da degeneração psychica* (Salvador, 1893); Corrêa, 'Ilusões da liberdade'.

When Brazilians diagnosed their collective psyche, they found imbalance in their diversity. It was inevitable that Brazilian social critics would exploit the folkloric and exotic materials that they could bring to the conventional topics of medical naturalism and degeneration. However, they went beyond simple display of exoticism, centring their attention on the clash of traditional and scientific ideologies. Anticlerical discourse supplied one set of conflicts. The 'superstitions' of the Catholic religion, whose benightedness was a barrier to progress, offered ample local colour. The literary type of the villainous priest or the fanatically religious *beata* often appeared as the counterpart of the scientifically sophisticated young man. 'High' and 'low' spiritisms supplied another contrast with scientific rationality. Official medicine faced the challenge of a folk culture prone to spiritual interpretations of disease and preferring 'soft' therapies such as homeopathy, incantation, or the charity of spirits.[33] In addition, as Nina Rodrigues often pointed out, medicine faced the competition of Afro-Brazilian magic. The net result was a very broad spectrum of religious and magical beliefs.[34]

However, Brazilian writers sometimes showed folk wisdom defeating scientific knowledge. In João do Rio's *As religiões do Rio* (1904), Afro-Brazilian *macumba* adds an exotic, decadent accent to a muckraking survey of the kaleidoscope of cults in a modern metropolis. But elsewhere, writers made folk wisdom a lever to oppose or deflect science.[35] For example, Xavier Marques's *O feiticeiro* exhibits the dilemma of a middle-class family who find it necessary to beg a sorcerer to clean their household of spells sent by rivals. Though the good young man they win for their daughter is quite capable of rationalising away witchcraft illness as a mere psychiatric case of 'fixed-idea obsession', they themselves suspect that they are puppets of occult supernatural forces.[36] Whatever the conclusions, Brazilian social thought identified the diversity of culture, of 'levels of civilisation', as both a symptom and a cause of malady.

[33] On therapies, see D. Warren, 'A terapia espírita no Rio de Janeiro por volta de 1900', *Religião e Sociedade* 2, 3 (1984), pp. 1–36, and 'The Healing Art in the Urban Setting, 1880–1930', paper presented to the Symposium on Popular Dimensions of Brazil, University of California at Los Angeles, 1–2 Feb. 1979; D. Hess, 'The Many Rooms of Spiritism in Brazil', *Luso-Brazilian Review* 24, 2 (1987), pp. 15–34.

[34] Nina Rodrigues, 'Loucura das multidões'.

[35] J. do Rio [P. Barreto], *As religiões do Rio* (Rio de Janeiro, 1904). Süssekind, *Tal Brasil*, pp. 142–4, argues that Domingos Olímpio's naturalistic novel, *Luzia-Homem* (1903) cuts across the conventions of naturalist scientism by subversively showing the triumph of folk wisdom and folk magic over science in the plot. It may be that *costumbrista* conventions (or rural, 'regionalist' settings) gave Brazilian authors leverage to satirise science, as in Cardoso de Oliveira's *Dois metros e cinco* (Rio de Janeiro, 1905).

[36] Marques, *O feiticeiro*, p. 209; see also the claims of Nina Rodrigues, in *O animismo fetichista*, pp. 71 and 91–2, that many upper-class Bahians were clients of *candomblé*.

The most influential semi-scientific essay of this period, Euclides da Cunha's *Rebellion in the Backlands* (*Os sertões*, 1902), applied the social psychology of race and of crowd theory in order to emphasise the imbalances and contrasts in Brazilian culture, degenerating imbalances that led the best to insanity. Contemporary intellectual historians tend to focus on Da Cunha's ambivalent acquiescence to the hybrid degeneracy hypothesis and to read this as an essay on 'race relations' in the modern sense, but *Rebellion in the Backlands* deals more with minds and crowds than with bodies and populations. It is an essay in political social psychology.[37] As an analysis of the causes of Antônio Conselheiro's messianic community at Canudos and of the republican army's massacre of the 'fanatics' in 1897, it deals with how the past weighs on the present: how the land, the climate, racial heredity, a heritage of medieval religiosity, and the failure of government education policies have unfortunately led to an impasse between backwardness and civilisation, and ultimately to war. Analysing Canudos, Da Cunha suspends judgment on the thesis that race mixture induces degeneration, but he consistently grounds his analysis in social psychology and the broader medical-psychiatric concept of degeneration, in which body, climate, milieu, spirit and morality were confounded as facets of 'race'.

> It was natural that the deep-lying layers of our ethnic stratification should have cast up so extraordinary an anticlinal as Antônio Conselheiro... This unfortunate individual, a fit subject for medical attention, was impelled by a power stronger than himself to enter into conflict with a civilization and to go down in history when he should have gone to a hospital.[38]

Da Cunha followed Nina Rodrigues's psychiatric diagnosis of Antônio Conselheiro, in which steady degeneration (descent from a family prone to feuds, shame at his wife's abandonment, life as a hermit) was completed by the psychic force of the backlands crowd: 'The multitude created him, refashioning him in its own image. It broadened his life immeasurably by impelling him into those errors which were common two thousand years ago.'[39]

[37] For an example of a reading emphasising 'race relations', see Skidmore, *Black Into White*, pp. 103–9; cf. D. Borges, 'El reverso fatal de los acontecimientos: Dos momentos de la degeneración en la literatura brasileña', in B. Ciplijauskaité and C. Maurer (eds.), *La voluntad de humanismo: Homenaje a Juan Marichal* (Barcelona, 1990), pp. 121–33. For revisionist accounts of Canudos see R. Della Cava, 'Brazilian Messianism and National Institutions: A Reappraisal of Canudos and Joaseiro', *Hispanic American Historical Review* 48, 3 (August 1968), pp. 402–20; R. Levine, *Vale of Tears: Revisiting the Canudos Massacre in Northeastern Brazil, 1893–97* (Berkeley, 1992).

[38] Da Cunha, *Rebellion in the Backlands*, pp. 117–18.

[39] *Ibid.*, p. 129; Nina Rodrigues, 'Loucura epidémica'.

But this diagnosis was far less challenging to readers than Da Cunha's political use of it as a mirror to display the degenerate face of the Republic and its leaders. Canudos is the symptom of a 'national diathesis', that is, a national hereditary predisposition toward illness. The riots in the fashionable Rua do Ouvidor of Rio upon the announcement of the defeat of the Moreira Cesar expedition and the Canudos rebellion show 'a certain similarity... one equalling the other in savagery'. The Conselheiro's antagonist, the epileptic Colonel Moreira Cesar, is the incarnation of the *jacobino* mobs that had arisen under the dictatorship of Floriano Peixoto. He receives a treatment parallel to that of the Conselheiro. He has a 'convalescent's face' that betrays his character, 'the weird, uneven temperament of the confirmed epileptic, the nervous instability of a very sick man, hidden beneath a deceptive placidity'. His life story, like that of the Conselheiro, traces a degenerating line of episodes of epilepsy. A potential dictator, he stands between 'a strait jacket or the royal purple' just as the Conselheiro belongs in history or in the hospital.[40] *Rebellion in the Backlands*, through Moreira Cesar, criticises all that is divergent in Brazilian culture, and consequently, the failure of the civilising mission of the republican governments.

The irony of degeneration metaphors in the political discourse of the First Republic of 1889–1930 was that Brazil – unlike France – was usually considered a 'young' nation, en route to civilisation and progress, too young for the disorders of an old nation.[41] After the neutralisation of radical movements by 1898, official republican policies co-opted diagnoses of degeneration such as Da Cunha's to legitimate conservative measures to 'regenerate' the nation. Policies to encourage European immigration and discourage Chinese immigration obviously responded to patriotic racial concerns with 'whitening' the national stock, as well as the direct interests of planters in obtaining cheap labour.[42] But a wide range of imperial and republican social policies – of regulation of prostitution; sanitation of ships, factories, and barracks; licensing of domestic servants; sports and physical education; universal military service – were also

[40] Da Cunha, *Rebellion in the Backlands*, pp. 277, 279, 230–1 and 234.

[41] See, e.g., Viveiros de Castro, *Attentados ao pudor (Estudo sobre as aberrações do instincto sexual)* (Rio de Janeiro, 1895), pp. xi–xii: 'Any superficial observer notes immediately that the Brazilian character has a propensity to sensuality and to love... Is there, however, merely an exuberance of the sexual instinct or are we already in degeneration?'

[42] C. M. Marinho de Azevedo, *Onda negra, medo branco: O negro no imaginário das elites, século XIX* (Rio de Janeiro, 1987); R. Conrad, 'The Planter Class and the Debate over Chinese Immigration to Brazil, 1850–1893', *International Migrations Review* 9, 1 (Spring 1975), pp. 41–55; T. Meade and G. A. Pirio, 'In Search of the Afro-American "Eldorado": Attempts by North American Blacks to Enter Brazil in the 1920s', *Luso-Brazilian Review* 25, 1 (Summer 1988), pp. 85–110; Skidmore, *Black Into White*.

justified in terms of protecting the race from contamination or regenerating its health.[43] The government never undertook a national educational reform of a magnitude that would address the fear of disparate mentalities. Instead, its most ambitious measures focused on sanitation. The urban reforms of Rio de Janeiro from 1903 to 1906 built drainage, levelled slums, modernised the port, and opened Parisian-style boulevards. They included a symbolic and substantive sanitation campaign: not only water and sewage works, but also mosquito eradication and compulsory smallpox vaccination in 1903 and 1904.[44] These policies were in the broad sense 'racial' or later, 'eugenic'; many scientists argued that improvements in the environment would lead to Lamarckian hereditary changes in the race, that modernisation could lead to racial progress.

Official adoption could never entirely domesticate the critical implications of degeneration. The crudest reading was that brown Afro-Brazilians embodied degeneration, while whites represented progress. However, from the 1880s through the most conservative years of the early Republic, some Brazilian intellectuals countered colour racism within the boundaries of the theory of degeneration. Left-wing intellectuals appropriated the metaphor of parasitism to mock the upper class and to challenge the official post-emancipation amnesia with regard to slavery. Manoel Bomfim's *América Latina: Males de origem* (1903) scorns the absurd pretence of the idea that European races, which had been tribal mere centuries ago, dominated because they were superior in evolution. Nevertheless, Bomfim reluctantly uses a biological metaphor to argue that the exploitative colonial legacies of Brazil and of Spanish America had degenerated their national spirits, like parasites that had lost higher functions in the course of evolution.[45] Likewise, Manoel Querino's *The African Contribution to Brazilian Civilization* (1918) names examples of black achievement and reminds everyone that Brazilian society had been built parasitically upon the sweat of black labour.[46] A sceptic such as Machado

[43] Social-control policies seem to have taken on a new urgency around 1890. On prostitution, compare Engel, *Meretrizes*, and M. Rago, *Do cabaré ao lar: A utopia da cidade disciplinar, Brasil, 1890–1930* (Rio de Janeiro, 1985); on domestic service, Graham, *House and Street*.

[44] Needell, *A Tropical Belle Epoque*; N. Sevcenko, *Literatura como missão: Tensões sociais e criação cultural na Primeira República* (São Paulo, 1983); J. Murilo de Carvalho, *Os bestializados: O Rio de Janeiro e a República que não foi* (São Paulo, 1987); J. Needell, 'A Revolta Contra Vacina', *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 67, 2, (May 1987), pp. 233–70.

[45] M. Bomfim, *América Latina: Males de origem* (Paris and Rio de Janeiro, 1903); F. Süssekind and R. Ventura, *História e dependência: Cultura e sociedade em Manoel Bomfim* (São Paulo, 1984).

[46] M. R. Querino, 'O africano como colonisador', in *A raça africana e os seus costumes* (Salvador, 1955), pp. 121–52; translated in M. R. Querino, *The African Contribution to Brazilian Civilization* (Tempe, Arizona, 1978), Special Studies no. 18, p. 19.

de Assis – doubly degenerate as a mulatto and an epileptic – satirised the scientific pretensions of psychiatry and positivism in fictions such as 'The Psychiatrist' (1881) and *Epitaph of a Small Winner*. He consistently exposes the illusion of identity by resemblance or parodies self-serving scientistic truisms:

> Hunger (and he sucked the chicken wing philosophically), hunger is a discipline to which Humanity subjects its own viscera. But the sublimity of my system really requires no better documentation than this very chicken. It was fed on corn that was planted, let us say, by an African imported from Angola. This African was born, grew up, was sold; a ship brought him here, a ship built of wood cut in the forest by ten or twelve men and driven by sails that eight or ten men wove, not to mention the rope and the rest of the nautical apparatus. Thus, the chicken, on which I have just lunched, is the result of a multitude of efforts and struggles carried on for the sole ultimate purpose of satisfying my appetite.[47]

The critical symbol of parasitism took a literal turn with the shift of the public health movement from the cities to the countryside around the time of the First World War. Medical expeditions in the interior documented extraordinary rates of debilitating endemic diseases such as malaria and hookworm. Rural Brazil was seen as 'an immense hospital'.[48] Proof of the new public health interest was the mercurial conversion of Monteiro Lobato. Monteiro Lobato had invented the hillbilly Jeca Tatú in a 1914 essay to epitomise the São Paulo *caipira*: an alcoholic, degenerate *caboclo*, the client of *coronéis*, abusively clearing the land with uncontrolled brushfires. Jeca fits the stereotype of races without vigour: 'Only he, in the midst of so much life, does not live.' His infuriating reply to good advice is '*não paga a pena*' ('not worth the trouble'). Jeca immediately took on an independent existence in cartoons and speeches as the type of the *caboclo* bumpkin. But in 1918, influenced by the rural health surveys, Monteiro Lobato reissued the sketch as the title piece of a collection, this time with an apologetic preface: 'I didn't know you were like that, my Tatú, because of illness', and in a later edition added that 'it is proved that you have a tremendous zoo of the worst sort in your blood and guts. It is that cruel menagerie that makes you puffy, ugly, slothful, inert.'[49] He began to write vehement essays in favour of the public health campaign. Among the articles written in 1918, was a short essay, 'Jeca Tatú: The Resurrection', which tells how Jeca, following the advice of a doctor (hookworm pills, shoes, and no more rotgut), turns into a prosperous

[47] Machado de Assis, *Epitaph*, p. 172; 'The Psychiatrist', trans. of 'O alienista', in *The Psychiatrist and Other Stories* (Berkeley, 1963).

[48] L. A. de Castro-Santos, 'Power, Ideology, and Public Health in Brazil, 1889–1930', PhD. diss., Harvard University, 1987.

[49] Monteiro Lobato, 'Urupês', in *Urupês*, 9th edn (São Paulo, 1923), p. 254; and prefaces, pp. vii and x.

small farmer and then a planter – so rich that he now surveys his estate with a telescope from the veranda.[50]

Within a few years, Monteiro Lobato made an emblematic shift from seeing the laziness of the populace as an innate, inescapable curse of the race, to seeing it as the symptom of a foreign body, a parasite that could be expurgated. The Brazilian nation could be redeemed by positive action, quite specifically, by rural health posts. The focus of action then became political. The most heated spokesmen of the public health *sanitaristas*, Belisário Penna, argued in *Saneamento do Brasil* (1918) that the real illness in Brazil was a moral anaemia of the Brazilian political system, corrupted by *coronelismo* bossism, and that the only practical public health programme would require a moral purge of politics.[51]

Modernism and nationalism, 1919–40

Degeneration and race science narrowed their acceptance in the 1920s and 1930s. For small but growing communities of psychiatrists and laymen worldwide, Freudian psychoanalysis provided a non-organic explanation of sexual deviance and mental illness. As early as World War I, some American psychologists had questioned the results of intelligence tests and criminological investigations. In the 1920s and 1930s Mendelian genetics clarified and delimited the mechanisms of heredity, and in the 1940s biology achieved its 'evolutionary synthesis' of genetics with Darwinism, virtually excluding the neo-Lamarckian ambiguity that had lumped all sorts of environmental influences into a multicausal 'heredity'. Political events polarised scientific communities. German medicine became dogmatically racist, while by 1935 the extremism of Nazi race laws had provoked a reactive rejection of hereditarian explanations in England and the United States. By the end of World War II this reaction extended to U.N.-commissioned studies debunking race.[52] Independent of biomedical science, idealist countercurrents of European social thought rejected positivisms, including organicist hereditary determinism. More complex social theories incorporating 'consciousness' variables – char-

[50] Monteiro Lobato, 'Jeca Tatú: A resurreição', collected as 'O problema vital' in *Mr. Slang e o Brasil e O problema vital, Obras completas* vol. 8 (São Paulo, 1948). Monteiro Lobato said that the story 'Jeca Tatú' had been reprinted as a pamphlet by a pharmaceutical company, which circulated 15 million copies in the countryside, and became known as the 'Jecatatuzinho'. This was not Monteiro Lobato's last word on race; in 1926 he published *O presidente negro, ou, O choque das raças*, a cynical potboiler of eugenic science fiction in which all American blacks are sterilised by a hair-straightening ray. See Patai, 'Race and Politics'.

[51] B. Penna, *Saneamento do Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro, 1918).

[52] Carlson, 'Medicine and Degeneration', pp. 134 and 138; C. Degler, *In Search of Human Nature: Darwinism in American Social Thought* (New York, 1991): R. Proctor, *Racial Hygiene: Medicine under the Nazis* (Cambridge, Mass., 1988).

isma, hegemony, the unconscious – challenged determinist positivism, as did irrationalist philosophies of will and intuition.[53] For Brazil, the most direct influences were diverse: Franz Boas's anthropological theory that culture rather than racial heredity determined differences among human communities; and the European avant-garde's aesthetic primitivism.

World War I also marked a watershed in Brazilian public discourse. The barbarism in civilised Europe discredited the *belle-époque* pretensions of Brazil's elite. The worldwide revolutionary mood catalysed mobilisation such as general strikes in 1919 and a cluster of middle-class ideological movements in 1922: the first rebellion of junior army officers; foundation of the Communist Party, the feminist Federação Brasileira para o Progresso Feminino, and the Catholic right's Centro Dom Vital. Even within the oligarchy's Congress, calls for labour legislation, rural public health campaigns, universal military service, and public education took on an urgent and critical tone.[54] A new, nationalist generation of intellectuals took shape following the Modern Art Week show in São Paulo in 1922. Not all were avant-garde *Modernistas*, but all shared a preoccupation with the nation. Many of the writers of this generation challenged facile racial stereotypes of national identity with fresh researches or myths of national origins. They continued to exploit the repertory of questions and symbols in degeneration, as they exhausted it.

Pioneer social essayists of the 1920s and 1930s directly attacked colour racism in the course of explorations of national history, but they did so with an imagination informed by degeneration. For example, Paulo Prado's *Retrato do Brasil* (1928) ends by refuting the notion that races had unequal aptitudes, and contesting the theory that miscegenation caused degeneration. The essay is primarily an inquiry into the historical origins of 'sadness' in national spirit. But it ambiguously analyses 'melancholy' as a spiritual and physical syndrome, both figuratively and literally a post-coital depression:

> In Brazil melancholy followed the intense sexual life of the settler, misdirected into erotic perversions, and of a markedly atavistic sort. In turn, greed is a morbid entity, an ailment of the spirit, with its own symptoms, its own causes and evolution. It can absorb all the psychic energy... Lust, greed: melancholy. In peoples, as in individuals, it is the picture of a process of psychopathy...[55]

The contemporary Brazilian manifests his sadness in his body, 'victim of disease, of pallid indifference and of the vice of rum'.[56]

[53] H. S. Hughes, *Consciousness and Society: The Reorientation of European Social Thought, 1890–1930* (New York, 1961).

[54] Angela Maria de Castro Gomes, *Burguesia e trabalho: Política e legislação social no Brasil 1917–1937* (Rio de Janeiro, 1979).

[55] Paulo Prado, *Retrato do Brasil: Ensaio sobre a tristeza brasileira* (São Paulo, 1981), pp. 93 and 136–8.

[56] *Ibid.*, p. 94.

Exposure to the new anthropological concept of 'culture' while studying at Columbia University gave Gilberto Freyre a stronger antiracist stand in his essay in national history, *The Masters and the Slaves* (1933). Freyre himself claims that the anxiety that motivated his research was the same as that of the racial anthropologists: had some ancestral race mixture condemned the Brazilian people to degeneration?[57] His confident rebuttal cites Franz Boas's scientific rejection of hereditary determinism. Not race, but culture, is what families, communities, and societies communicate to their offspring. Simultaneously and ambiguously, Freyre defends Brazilian vigour in eugenic terms: the Portuguese were a strong race, not 'decadent Latins'; contemporary tropical medicine demonstrates that white settlers need not degenerate in the tropics; environmental traits may be inherited.[58]

If Paulo Prado portrays a Brazilian soul lacking 'psychic energy', Freyre resolves the laziness theme primarily by asserting the vigour and energy of Portuguese colonisation, and by displaying the richness of Brazilian material culture. Whatever is wrong with contemporary Brazilians, Freyre attributes to the predatory conquest of Indians, which entailed sadism, and to slavery, which induced a parasitic inertia. He presents the Luso-Brazilian slaveowner as debilitated by syphilis, confined to his hammock, and corrupted by the services of the slave. 'In the case of the slaveowner the body becomes little more than a *membrum virile*. A woman's hands, a child's feet; the sexual organ alone was arrogantly virile.'[59] As explorer and settler, the Portuguese was dynamic; as slaveowner, the Brazilian became a parasite.

Freyre also resolves the perennial dilemma of disparity of mentalities by emphasising cultural harmony and fusion. Brazilian culture, he argues, was unified during the colonial period by the infusion of Indian and African 'contributions' into Portuguese culture. The contemporary Brazilian (male and middle-class) ego is metaphorically mestizo, marked 'on the soul, when not on soul and body alike', by the tarbrush of cultural miscegenation, by 'the shadow, or at least the birthmark, of the aborigine or the Negro'.[60] In presenting the historical process of fusion, Freyre argues that the plantation Big House was the institution that enacted most of this cultural mixing. Some took place in the kitchen, and some in the master's hammock. Colonial concubinage did not produce differences and alienation, but rather harmony, among Brazilians. Coerced sexual relations

[57] Freyre, 'Preface', pp. xxvi–xxvii.

[58] N. L. Stepan, 'Eugenics in Brazil, 1917–1940', in M. B. Adams (ed.), *The Wellborn Science: Eugenics in Germany, France, Brazil and Russia* (New York, 1990), pp. 110–47, esp. pp. 138–44.

[59] Freyre, *Masters*, p. 428.

[60] Freyre, *Masters*, p. 278.

left a legacy of perversions of sadism, but the condescending paternalism of Portuguese fathers maintained intimacy and fraternisation among all the women and children of their household, leaving a legacy of harmony. Freyre's psychology of the relation of sexuality to civilisation and individual character, though eclectically touched with Freudian insights, draws most heavily on degeneration sexologists such as Moll and Krafft-Ebing. He inverts their moralism with an affirmation of 'shameless sexuality' derived from avant-garde bohemianism and the informal Brazilian ethos. Most contemporary readers of *The Masters and the Slaves* experienced its eroticism as a radical argument that irreverent, modernist values could endorse the complex ethnic harmony of the nation.[61]

A characteristic device of the Brazilian avant-garde of the 1920s and 1930s was to take the arguments and symbols of the positivist generation and invert them in parody. Not only the value-relativism of Boasian anthropology, but also the primitivism of the avant-garde, afforded Freyre licence to emphasise the positive contribution of African culture to Brazilian culture.[62] The avant-garde *Modernistas* of São Paulo played even more aggressively with the notion that brown primitivism was superior to white civilisation. They took on the absurd identity of the cannibal Tupí to mock the self-deception of the cosmopolitan positivist elite, 'top hats in Senegambia'. Mário de Andrade's satire *Macunaíma* (1928) builds an anti-hero who caricatures the degenerate Brazilian. Macunaíma is an impossible hybrid who fuses all of Brazil's racial categories: he is the black son of an Indian mother, turned part white by washing in a magic fountain. His moral traits – sexual perversion, gluttony, and lying – also define him as the opposite of the healthy citizen of progressive nationalism. Macunaíma's most memorable and consistent trait is his laziness. He yawns out his motto of bored enervation, '*Ai, que preguiça!*' ('Too tired!'). Yet Macunaíma does possess forest powers of magic that confound São Paulo's technology, and he has a rogue's quick wit that lets him see through the rhetoric of politics. He can leap onto a soap box and parrot a progressive speech: 'With fewer ants and better health, Brazil will lead the world in wealth.' ['Pouca saúde e muito saúva, os males do Brasil são.'][63] *Macunaíma* expresses the frustration of young intellectuals of the 1920s, who wanted progress oriented by national realities, not the shallow sloganeering of the *sanitarista* patriotism.

[61] A. Candido, 'Prefácio', in S. Buarque de Holanda, *Raizes do Brasil*, 14th edn (Rio de Janeiro, 1981).

[62] G. Freyre, 'Acerca da valorização do preto', in *Tempo de aprendiz: Artigos publicados em jornais na adolescência e na primeira mocidade do autor (1918–1926)* (São Paulo, 1979), 2, pp. 329–30.

[63] Mário de Andrade, *Macunaíma*, trans. E. A. Goodland (New York, 1984), pp. 76–7; *Macunaíma* (São Paulo, 1944), p. 103.

In the 1920s and 1930s the ridicule of the nationalist avant-garde had little impact on Brazil's medical-scientific community. Routine psychiatric practice, particularly in asylums, remained oriented by degeneration psychology.[64] But many psychiatrists joined the eugenic movement, founded with the São Paulo Eugenics Society in 1918. They extended their attention to 'preventive' mental hygiene through state social services for the working class and the control of delinquents. Physicians, prominent among them disciples of Nina Rodrigues, promoted such diverse measures as prenuptial exams, institutions for delinquent minors, an identification card and fingerprinting bureau, and maternal health clinics.[65] But the Brazilian eugenic movement never united in favour of prohibition of alcohol or sterilisation of degenerates. The debacle of United States Prohibition in the 1920s, the scandal of Nazi race policies in the 1930s, and the prohibition of sterilisation and contraception by the Catholic encyclical *Casti Connubii* (1930) inhibited a potential conservative coalition. The international debates over heredity split their scientific base and further divided them. By 1929, the prominent eugenicist Roquette-Pinto was challenging racist measures partly on Mendelian grounds. The *sanitarista* wing of the eugenic movement suffered least from the disrepute of race science, and became the centre of consensus. The success of urban public health campaigns, initiatives in rural public health, and the encouragement of the Rockefeller Foundation gave them most legitimacy. [66]

Brazil's right-wing nationalists focussed on the spirit more than the body. Like the left avant-garde, they sought a fusion of the people to overcome differences and imbalances. Some of them, such as Oliveira Vianna, were traditionally racist, but not all were. Plínio Salgado, the small-town schoolteacher and avant-garde novelist who founded the fascist Ação Integralista Brasileira in 1932, argued that Brazil had achieved a racial fusion in the mestizo type of the *caboclo*. More importantly, Brazilians had fused Tupí, Jesuit, and African religion into a spirituality that resisted materialism. The task of revolutionary integralism was to overcome the hierarchies and conflicts of a materialist society, mobilising all Brazilians into a unanimous synthesis of spiritual and material

[64] M. C. Pereira Cunha, *O espelho do mundo: Juquery, a história de um asilo* (Rio de Janeiro, 1986), pp. 178–83; P. Fry, 'Febrônio Indio do Brasil: Onde cruzam a psiquiatria, a profecia, a homossexualidade e a lei', in *Caminhos cruzados*, pp. 65–80.

[65] Corrêa, 'Ilusões da liberdade'; M. Corrêa, 'Antropologia e medicina legal: Variações em torno de um mito', in *Caminhos cruzados*, pp. 53–63; Stepan, 'Eugenics'.

[66] Stepan, 'Eugenics'; J. Freire Costa, *História da psiquiatria no Brasil: Um corte ideológico* (Rio de Janeiro, 1976); M. Luz, *Medicina e ordem política brasileira: Políticas e instituições de saude (1850–1930)* (Rio de Janeiro, 1982), esp. pp. 173–88; Castro-Santos, 'Power, Ideology'.

civilisation.[67] Getúlio Vargas's authoritarian Estado Novo coup of 1937 disbanded Integralismo and implemented a more paternalistic and eclectic fascism, moving Brazil toward becoming a social-welfare state. The Estado Novo experimented with integrative mobilisation: mandating corporativist labour representation, commissioning civic sambas, forming youth through religious instruction, sports, and choral song.[68] It continued to advance *sanitarista* hygienic reforms. But it held back from a radical fascism of revolutionary mobilisation and eugenic management of the race. Rather, the common denominators of the Brazilian right were nationalism, Catholicism, and distaste for class conflict. One vague common belief was that 'spiritualism' could transcend conflict. The right also inherited from the republican oligarchy the organic metaphors of government. Thus, intellectuals linked to the Vargas regime justified frontier settlement, the closing of foreign-language schools, and the restriction of immigration, as protecting the integrity of the body of the nation. Alcir Lenharo argues that the authoritarian right found its ultimate, spiritualised, purified symbol of the nation in the Mystic Body of Christ, within which all the faithful were integrated.[69]

Degeneration was a major vehicle of social criticism and social analysis for Brazilian intellectuals between 1880 and 1940. Originating as psychiatric criminology, it became popularised and spread into literature and sociology. The threat of degeneration furnished an ideological common denominator to diverse reform proposals of republican governments. White immigration, urban renewal, smallpox inoculation, regulation of prostitution: all were to restore the energy and health of the body of the nation. As such, degeneration provided one of the ideological props of the welfare-state consensus that developed after 1930. Between 1919 and 1945 the 'race science' base of degeneration in theories of heredity crumbled and discredited colour racism. But themes derived from organicist social ideology survived. The nationalism of the 1920s and 1930s maintained the concern that the nation's diversity could never be balanced. Both right and left wings found harmony and fusion of the people in identities – whether as children of the plantation, mythical antiheroes, or spiritual fraternities – that transcended difference. A weak science provided a creative matrix for social vision.

[67] R. Benzaquem de Araújo, *Totalitarismo e revolução: O Integralismo de Plínio Salgado* (Rio de Janeiro, 1987).

[68] S. Schwartzman, H. M. Bosquet Bomeny, and W. M. Ribeiro Costa, *Tempos de Capanema* (Rio de Janeiro, 1984); C. Matos, *Acertei no milhar: Malandragem e samba no tempo de Getúlio* (Rio de Janeiro, 1982).

[69] A. Lenharo, *Sacralização da política* (Campinas, 1986); B. Lamounier, 'Formação de um pensamento político autoritário na Primeira República: Uma interpretação', in B. Fausto, ed., *História geral da civilização brasileira*, Tomo III, *O Brasil republicano*, vol. 2, *Sociedade e instituições (1889–1930)* (Rio de Janeiro, 1977), pp. 343–74.