
Black Cinderella?: Race and the Public Sphere in Brazil

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On June 26, 1993 an incident in Vitória, capital city of Espírito Santo, Brazil, drove another nail into the coffin of the ideology of Brazilian racial democracy. Ana Flávia Peçanha de Azeredo, a nineteen-year-old college student, was accosted and punched in the face by a forty-year-old woman and her eighteen-year-old son in the service elevator of an apartment building where Ms. Peçanha was visiting a friend. The physical assault was the result of an argument between the three over Ana Flávia's use of the elevator. The mother and son did not like the fact that this young black woman not only had entered their building and held up the social elevator to talk to a friend, forcing them to use the service elevator, but also that she had dared tell them to respect her after they informed her that "black and poor don't have a place here" in the building where they lived.¹

This incident, like so many other acts of racist violence in Brazil, would have gone unnoticed if Ana Flávia's father, Albuino Azeredo was not the governor of the state of Espírito Santo. With the resources available to him, Governor Azeredo employed lawyers and physicians to examine his daughter's situation, and filed suit against Teresina and Rodrigo Stange, the alleged assailants. If convicted of racial discrimination under Article Five of the federal Constitution,

I would like to thank Kit Belgum, Claudia Briones, Richard Graham and Hendrick Kraay for their helpful comments on an earlier version of this paper.

1. See "Cinderela Negra" in *Veja*, 7 de Julho, 1993, p. 66-71.

Public Culture 1994, 7: 165-185

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0899-2363/95/0701-0010\$01.00

both mother and son could be sent to prison for one to five years. Ironically, the Brazilian press referred to Ana Flávia as the black Cinderella, with her father the Governor playing the role of prince. One may wonder, however, which Cinderella were they referring to? The one who is fitted with the errant glass slipper and who lives with the prince happily ever after, or the one who wears worn-out clothing and spends her days performing domestic labor? In fact, as a woman of African descent, Ana Flávia is neither. She is closer to a composite of status-filled and status-less roles in Brazilian society; considered a member of Brazil's elite when identified by birth, treated as a lowly, powerless member of society when identified by race.

The tale of black Cinderella is resonant with many of the constitutional, legal, cultural and societal issues of Afro-Brazilians within the Brazilian public sphere. It encapsulates the intersection of race, citizenship and modernity in a society that in theory is committed to liberal-democratic principles, but in practice still struggles with the legacies of patron-clientelism, racial slavery and oppression. The above incident might seem commonsensical enough from a comparative perspective, but within the context of Brazilian racial politics it further confirms the denial of full citizenship to people of African descent in Brazil during this most recent period of democratization. Comparatively, it also attests to the pervasiveness of black subjectivity in societies under the template of modernity, both inside and outside the West. The public sphere, far from being simply the location of bourgeois culture's prized subject—the individual—has also been the place where the West's others have been displaced and marginalized, inside and outside its borders. Indeed, as I will argue in this explication and critique of notions of the public sphere put forth by several social and political theorists, it has been upheld as the benchmark of modernity, the principal indicator of political and socio-economic development.

People of African descent, however, have been granted contingent and partial citizenship within these spheres, and only as a consequence of their own political struggles that have gone beyond the boundaries of liberal discourse. What I would like to demonstrate in this essay is the symbolic function of Afro-Brazilians within Brazilian society as bearers of noncitizenship, in accordance with racist ideologies and practices by the Brazilian state and in civil society during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In short Afro-Brazilians—like many other Afro-diasporic populations—have been depicted as embodying the antithesis of modernity.

This depiction, however, has two specific implications for scholarly intervention. First, it highlights modernity's limitations in terms of racial politics, and the manner in which its ideals have been intrinsically racialized. Second, it high-

lights the abstractness of theorizing on citizenship and the public sphere by theorists like Charles Taylor and Jürgen Habermas, as well as the radical disjuncture between ideals of the public sphere and their historical embodiments.

While many theorists have considered racism within the public sphere as a mere aberration along the road to modernity, I suggest that the distinctly oppressive conditions under which people of African descent have lived partially constitute modernity and the public sphere. Racial difference is but one of modernity's internal contradictions and disjunctures; it has been a criteria of both citizenship and noncitizenship.

Through a brief analysis of the Afro-Brazilian public sphere I examine how the dialectics of race and modernity are embodied in Brazilian racial politics. This in turn suggests first that Afro-Brazilians have been accorded partial and contingent access to the public sphere, a domain which has been defined explicitly and implicitly as white. While this in itself is no innovative conclusion, it can be utilized to interrogate the notion of the bourgeois public sphere as the sole arena or possibility for cultural articulation. This then leads to my second point: through segregation and other forms of racial alienation, alternative public spheres operate within a broadly defined public sphere. Marginalized groups create territorial and epistemological communities for themselves as a consequence of their subordinate location within the bourgeois public sphere. Along these lines, Afro-Brazilians have constructed public spheres of their own which critique Brazil's societal and political norms.

Race and the Public Sphere

In his pathbreaking work, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Jürgen Habermas defines the bourgeois public sphere as "the sphere of private people come together as a public; they soon claimed the public sphere regulated from above against the public authorities themselves, to engage them in a debate over the general rules governing relations in the basically privatized but publicly relevant sphere of commodity exchange and social labor."² The important historical precedent, within Habermas's interpretation, lies in the confrontation between "public authority," namely, depersonalized state power, and individual, propertied subjects over the "private sphere of society that has become publicly rele-

2. Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991), 27.

vant.”³ With the advent of capitalism, commerce and the related growth of mass news and information, propertied subjects came to use reason in ways formerly reserved for private concerns such as the domestic economy and household management and private business interests. This interface would radically shift the locus of power from feudal landlords to state institutions and socially engaged, private citizens who had become public.

Rather than engage in an extended discussion of Habermas’s explication of the public sphere, for which there is already an extensive literature,⁴ I shall point out several contradictions that emerged from this historical precedent and have been commented upon by public sphere specialists and social theorists more generally. While the creation of this new public sphere did supplant the old, becoming the dominant, most logical social forum and institution in countries like France, Germany (Brubaker, 1992), Britain and Denmark, it did not automatically sever the formerly dominant modes of economic and political relations (Robinson 1983). Unpropertied social groups, who were never *private* citizens under the previous socio-economic order, still remained outside the category of citizen within the new public sphere. The mark of difference—education, religious affiliations, dress, habits, speech, language, an entire way of life—haunted these unpropertied social groups as they were reinscribed into newly subordinate social relationships.

Thus the bourgeois public sphere was simultaneously expansive and exclusive. It burgeoned with new forms of social inequality to parallel new forms of public authority and financial organization. Yet the working classes were neither entirely nor permanently outside the new social order, since universal suffrage, freedom of assembly and association, provided certain sectors of working-class groups the opportunity to contest the inequalities of the new order, and in the process, construct what I shall call micro-public spheres, that is spheres of public articulation that were not limited to, but dominated by the idioms, norms and desires of working-class women and men.⁵

3. Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, 19.

4. For critiques of the exclusionary character of Habermas’s public sphere, or rather, considerations of the evolution of micro-public spheres for groups and subjects excluded from participatory roles within the bourgeois version see Nancy Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy,” in Craig Calhoun, ed. *Jürgen Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), 109–142 and in the same volume Mary Ryan, “Gender and Public Access: Women and Politics in 19th Century America,” 259–288.

5. The work of E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Vintage Books, 1966), Paul Willis, *Learning to Labor* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), and George

The bourgeois public sphere's ability to be perceived not as one space among several, but as the only forum for all social groups to engage in normative debate — either amongst themselves or between two or more groups — was the crowning ideological achievement of bourgeois culture. Another way to view this (mis)perception relates to the evolving presumption that the bourgeois public sphere superseded private/public relations of the feudal order and, all previously subordinate subjects and groups henceforth operated as social and political equals. The reality, however, was that “the oligarchy of capital was replacing the oligarchy of birth” (Viotti 1985: 55). Habermas clearly recognized this contradiction within the remaking of civil society. Yet other social theorists, particularly liberal ones and architects of modernity in the New World did not, and in some cases ignored it completely. This misconception has led *the* public sphere to become reified by most analysts of it and of its virtues and problems. The most serious consequence of this reification is the equation of an ideal type public sphere with Western polities, thus ignoring the internal contradictions within Western polities themselves concerning the realities of racial and ethnic difference.

Race, Modernity and the Public Sphere in the New World

Habermas has suggested that the philosophical discourses of modernity are distinguished by their orientation towards the future, their need to negate previous conceptions of time and history. In *The Philosophical Discourses of Modernity*, Habermas applies Hegel's understanding of modernity: “Modernity can and will no longer borrow the criteria by which it takes its orientation from the models supplied by another epoch; *it has to create its normativity out of itself*. Modernity sees itself cast back upon itself without any possibility of escape.”⁶

Yet modernity cannot efface history entirely. It needs history for points of reference from which to distinguish itself. A much greater impediment to complete historical denial was the discovery of the New World and the slave trade. This discovery led to the presence of New World and African people and/or their artifacts and other forms of production in the West, as well as in emergent New World nations. By the end of the nineteenth century, elites in most American nations decided to appropriate French or U.S. models of republicanism and liberal

Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1958) provides evidence of a public sphere of working classes that is quite distinct from more affluent counterparts.

6. Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourses of Modernity*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987), 7.

democracy in the transition from colony to free nation-state (Davis 1961). The fundamental contradiction in cultural terms that emerged from this was the presence of non-Western peoples amidst projects of modernity and the public sphere in the New World. Latin American elites and intellectuals had less difficulty reconciling European modernity's break with the past in nation-states with no previous *national*-state history (Cuba, Brazil, Colombia and Argentina, for example), than in accounting for the presence of sizable populations of "premodern people." Such populations were regarded as being without reason and rationality; they were treated as the ant colonies of Latin American modernity—excavating mines, constructing cities, harvesting crops, tending to children. They enabled those very same elites to become modern like their Western models.

In Brazil and many other Latin American countries, the shift from slave to wage labor was not as momentous an event as the shift from feudalism to capitalism in Europe. However the repercussions of this shift profoundly affected the dynamics of social interaction between landed and landless groups, as well as among white, indigenous and African-derived populations. This shift signalled the inauguration of *the modern moment* in Latin America, in which various nations in this region of the world attempted to pattern themselves after the nation-states and civilizations of Western Europe. Yet the modern moment in Latin America differed from its Western European model due to the relatively late growth of industry, mass communications networks and centralized state power. Furthermore, the landowning classes were not rendered obsolete but rather transformed their mode of social dominance. These historical differences complicated the evolution of an ideal type public sphere, for the slaveowners and landowners occupied the sociological location of the bourgeoisie without actually constituting a bourgeoisie themselves. Thus, the collision between feudal and slave labor on the one hand, and capitalist wage labor on the other, was not as radical as it may have appeared. The dominant ideological amalgam in Brazil came to be known as conservative liberalism. Viotti characterizes conservative liberalism as a contradiction between liberal discourse and liberal practice, the expressed interest in the bourgeoisie's economic project without its attendant political and "valuative" responsibilities, like respect for the rights of individuals (Viotti 1985: 55). Thus slavery and patron-clientelism fused with liberal rhetoric to create a much more ambiguous setting for civil society than in European nation-states.

The specific consequences for the various African slave populations in Brazil was first, that they were the last slave population in the New World to be granted emancipation (Conrad, 1983). Elites justified the long delay in unchaining the enslaved on the grounds that Brazilian slavery was actually less harsh than the

working conditions of peasants and wage laborers in Southern Europe, and that slaves were actually spared the horrors of savage Africa by being transported to the more civilized and enlightened Brazil. This justification, buttressed by purported cultural differences between Portuguese and other European civilizations underpinned the now well known myth of racial democracy (Freyre 1946). The realities of Afro-Brazilian life by 1888, when slavery was abolished, were quite different. In 1871 slavery was clearly on the wane, and planters in the province of São Paulo decided to subsidize Southern European immigration to Brazil in order to develop a European proletariat, even though there were more free Afro-Brazilians than slaves in the province of São Paulo (Andrews 1991). It was a simultaneous expression of racial and economic interests through state implementation of racially and economically specific policies.

These policies basically disqualified freedpersons from objective market competition in the emergent capitalist marketplace, thus limiting their prospects regardless of occupational differentiation within Afro-Brazilian communities. Large landowners in most cases refused to hire former slaves, in part on the grounds that they were recalcitrant and demanded specific conditions under which they would labor, but largely due to their desire to engage in economic relationships with those whom they most resembled, even in subordinate roles. European immigrant labor was preferred despite the fact that many Afro-Brazilians were skilled laborers at the time of abolition, and already had the skills which Italian and other immigrants were just developing (Dean 1976). Previously freed Afro-Brazilians did not fare much better even though by 1872, seventy-four percent of all Afro-Brazilians were free (as compared to six percent in the South of the United States on the eve of emancipation).⁷

The employment practices were consistent with the marginalization of enslaved and free blacks during the period of national formation that culminated in Brazil's independence from Portugal. The first national elections of 1821 for a centralized government—one year before independence—created the electoral conditions for the Brazilian elite to participate in public debate about Brazil's transformation into an independent monarchy, but excluded those who remained enslaved until 1888 (Bastos 1994). Bastos suggests that the 1821 election was a defining moment in Brazilian political culture, for the new constitutional order helped integrate previously marginalized groups such as small merchants, artisans, salespeople

7. See Herbert S. Klein, "Nineteenth Century Brazil," in David Cohen and Jack P. Greene, eds. *Neither Slave nor Free: The Freedman of African Descent in the Slave Societies of the New World* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972); 309–334, 319.

and others by elevating them to the status of citizens. These groups were similar to those who constituted the petit bourgeoisie in revolutionary France by the late-eighteenth century. The Constitution of 1824 defined Brazil as a constitutional monarchy; it gave black freedmen the right to vote, but they could not be chosen as electors.⁸

The slave population was well aware of the struggles between monarchial nationalists and loyalists to the Portuguese Crown. In fact, slaves and mulattos were key participants on both sides. Moreover, Africans in Bahia, like their counterparts in other slave societies in the New World, used moments of elite crisis in Brazil to their own advantage, fomenting revolts and rebellions at critical moments of disunity among these elites who were largely rural landholders that had maintained their power after independence in 1822 (Kraay 1993). Revolts in 1835 and 1837 in Bahia led to waves of repression not only against blacks, but also against the poor and other urban elements who remained politically excluded after independence. In Salvador, Bahia, local officials responded to the 1835 revolt by African-Brazilians by imposing stringent laws that monitored the movement of freed and enslaved blacks. Porters and stevedores, who were predominantly black, had to be registered on a single list and were required to wear a copper bracelet engraved with their registry number (Reis 1993).

These and other acts suggest that by the 1830s in Brazil, the status of African and Afro-Brazilian slaves and *libertos* (freed slaves) held marginal distinctions, even though there were considerable social tensions between Brazilian and African-born slaves (Graham 1994). The free and the enslaved often worked side by side (Flory 1977). By this time, the Brazilian empire relied on the discourse of the social problem to refer to free and nonfree blacks as vagrants and idlers (*vadios e ociosos*) to avoid the complexities of distinguishing the *escravo* from the *liberto*.⁹ As in the United States, blackness overrode the constitutional or legal mandate of citizenship for Afro-Brazilians. Republican institutions, despite their status as impartial purveyors of law and merit, actually institutionalized racist discourses and practices, and empowered many individuals who believed that African presences in Brazil doomed their nation to second-class status. Immigration laws and policies specifically prohibited nonwhite immigration to Brazil (Mitchell 1977), and there were congressional debates over the alleged racial

8. Brazil, *Constituição política do Imperio do Brasil*, Art. 94 in combination with Articles 6 and 91, quoted in Graham.

9. Thomas Flory, "Race and Social Control in Independent Bahia," *Latin American Studies*, vol. 9, no. 2 (1977): 199–224, esp. 203.

inferiority of Africans, Chinese and Southern Europeans (Mitchell 1977). When coupled with the powerful albeit contradictory ideology of whitening which asserted that miscegenation would eventually eliminate people of African descent, Afro-Brazilians were remarginalized in the shift from slave to wage-labor in a manner which suggested far more than a desire to exclude these people from choice labor markets.

The politics of racial exclusion was even more comprehensive. The uneven but continuous oppression and marginalization of Afro-Brazilians in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries was an effort by Brazilian elites to expunge Afro-Brazilians and their cultural practices from their portrait of modernity. Modernity, in short, did not include Afro-Brazilians. They were the antithesis of a modern nation. This effort contrasted with the efforts of Brazilian Modernists such as Mário and Oswald de Andrade, the anthropologist Gilberto Freyre and even some politicians, who sought to refute the Positivist legacy in Brazil by suggesting that African and indigenous elements in their nation were uniquely Brazilian. It also contrasted with Afro-Brazilian modernism in dance, religious practice, drama and the plastic arts. Yet the landholding elites, the Catholic Church and culturally conservative politicians carried the day, setting the tone for any future discussion of Afro-Brazilian and national identity.

The irony of such maneuvers, which took place well into the 1930s, was the proliferation and expansion of African cultural presences within modern Brazil, presences that were stronger than in any other nation-state in the New World. These presences, at once residual and dominant in the sense that Raymond Williams uses these terms, are evidenced by national, transracial participation in Afro-Brazilian religions like Candomblé and Umbanda; and the importance of an African-derived corporal esthetics for a national standard of beauty.¹⁰ In popular

10. See Williams's essay "Dominant, Residual and Emergent Cultures" in *Marxism and Literature*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1977). It may seem contradictory to suggest that the presence of Afro-Brazilian cultural practices and productions is at once residual and dominant, but it is the closest I can come at the present time in characterizing the pervasiveness of the "Africanisms" in Brazilian daily life and the relative powerlessness of Afro-Brazilian religious, cultural and political institutions relative to both state and civic institutions of the Brazilian polity. They are residual in a more explicitly political sense. Afro-Brazilian cultural practices are considered *national* practices, and are manipulated for their symbolic resonance by Brazilian elites to display the heterogenic cohesiveness of Brazilians; they are dominant in the sense that they are suffused in an almost transracial way throughout the norms and values of civil society. An example of this in Brazil, and found in Latin nations like Cuba and Venezuela, is a corporeal aesthetic of the female body which emphasizes distinctly African considerations of physical attractiveness—large hips, buttocks and narrow waist, with little attention to breast size—as opposed to the more Western standards of feminine beauty which in the twentieth century favor narrow hips and waist, large breasts and thin thighs. For a U.S. audience, or more broadly, those familiar with contemporary U.S. popular culture and rap

culture Samba was appropriated by the emergent middle classes in the 1940s. They were seeking a popular form of recreation, and selected Samba despite the disdain it evoked among elites who detected an expression of sensuality not found in the fox-trot or other European imports. By the 1940s, African elements of Brazilian culture were selectively integrated into the discourses of national identity. With the ascendance of the ideologies of racial democracy and whitening, Afro-Brazilians came to be considered part of the cultural economy, in which their women and men embodied sexual desire and lascivious pleasure. At the same time, Afro-Brazilians were denied access to virtually all institutions of civil society that would have given them equal footing with the middle classes of modernizing Brazil. Prestigious schools, neighborhoods, clubs and professions were closed off to Afro-Brazilians much in the way that they were to African-Americans in the United States, Afro-Cubans and other New World blacks during this period, only in more ambiguous, coded ways (Fernandes 1969; Andrews 1991). Thus in both eighteenth-century Europe and twentieth-century Latin America, the bourgeois public sphere was a contradictory, politically bifurcated domain, open to some groups and closed to others. The extent of marginality was, and is, determined by the degree and conditions of otherness on each continent.

Claims to citizenship and equality of opportunity in labor and ancillary markets could not be the hallmarks of Afro-Brazilians' modern identities. Instead the denial of participatory citizenship in the bourgeois public sphere for Afro-Brazilians marked their existence as subaltern elements of modern life. Yet they lived within this sphere nonetheless, so that any characterization of their lives as premodern or archaic (Fernandes 1969) ignores the discontinuity of modern time and the multiplicity of spheres within bourgeois civil society.

A common characteristic that Afro-Brazilians shared with their counterparts of the African diaspora in the New World was the constant attacks on their dignity. Charles Taylor identifies dignity as a key element in the constitution of the modern, individual self. It reflects "our power, our sense of dominating public space; or our invulnerability to power; or our self-sufficiency, our life having its own centre, or our being like and looked to by others, a centre of attention."¹¹

music in particular, one would have to imagine Sir Mix-A-Lot's hit "Baby's Got Back" not merely as a popular song, but as an expression of a *national* disposition towards a particular standard of beauty, to appreciate the extent to which the fetishization of the *bunda* (buttocks) in Brazil is as much evidence of African presence as it is a specifically national cultural norm. The "Africanization" of the female bodily aesthetic (male gaze) is one of Brazil's distinctive features as a nation with the largest population of people of African descent outside of Nigeria.

11. Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 15.

The keywords and phrases relevant to my critique of Taylor's passage are "public space," "invulnerability to power," "self-sufficiency" and "centre." Taylor appears to use the phrase "public space" in a manner indistinguishable from contemporary usage of "public sphere." This usage has come to be equated with civil society itself, in which a diverse array of interests, institutions and individuals are intertwined to constitute the modern moment. An important, if subtle, distinction could be made here that relates to a point I raised earlier about the totalizing quality implicit in the notion of the public sphere. This particular sphere could be a dimension of public space but not its totality, despite its representation as such. Yet, for Taylor, this form of dignity is seemingly universal and not limited to a particular sphere.

What happens to this notion of dignity when the role of racial or gendered inequality in Taylor's public space is viewed from theoretical and historical perspectives? In theoretical terms, is it possible for people who are denied the constitutional and normative rudiments of modern citizenship to operate in public space with such a *general* sense of dignity, a presumption of citizenship? Considering the previous discussion of Afro-Brazilians and the emergent public sphere in Brazil, would it not have been impossible for those porters and stevedores in Salvador, Bahia to have imagined that they could "dominate public space" even in the mild form that Taylor suggests? For Ana Flávia, the Governor's daughter, her inability to dominate public space as an individual stemmed from the lowly status accorded those who resemble her, regardless of their differences as individual, private citizens. Thus, the public and private distinctions so neatly laid out by Taylor collapse at the intersection of reason and coercion, power and powerlessness. Considering the legacy of the civil rights movement in the United States, the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa and other social movements engineered by people of African descent in distinct parts of the world, there clearly has not been "invulnerability to power" in public space for them in modern times.¹² The sense of self-sufficiency, which Taylor defines as the ability to provide for oneself, one's family, and to command respect, is structurally inaccessible for African-American communities of the New World.

12. Unless of course, one considers Gandhi's or King's nonviolent resistances as movements which, given their appeals to a higher moral order, projected a sense of invulnerability to the power of the state, colonial authority or dominant ethnic group. Yet one is still struck by the reality of their respective struggles; they made appeals based upon the moral authority of reason, and were answered with coercion, the highest form of unreason.

Despite Taylor's lofty standards and claims, his universalizing principles for the moral sources of dignity presuppose a subject who is male, property-owning, Western and white. His characterization is informed by what feminist psychoanalytic critics call the male gaze, a projection of his particular "subject position" onto the rest of the world, with the desire that others conform to the image he has of himself, and of others as a wished-for extension of himself (Mulvey 1989). In racial and gendered terms, being a "centre of attention" has distinct connotations for different racialized and gendered subjects.

As a communitarian Taylor could respond to this critique on theoretical and historical grounds. The claim might be made that the Brazilian polity is not the West that Taylor had in mind; this is a legitimate point since Brazilian society is pervaded by the confluence of feudalism and dependent capitalist culture. It could be further argued that both Habermas and Taylor have laid the economic, administrative and normative foundations for the public sphere/space and cannot be critiqued for the less-than-ideal functioning of these domains in the real world. After all, the histories of racial oppression shared among peoples of African descent in the West, which Habermas and Taylor briefly note and deplore, also disclose the malfunctioning of the public sphere according to its own principles. The eventual, if uneasy, inclusion of previously disenfranchised groups could be perceived as another triumph of reason and rationalization, a pit stop along the tortuous track toward liberal pluralism (Taylor) or democratic socialism (Habermas).

Such neat distinctions between Western and non-Western, ideal and practical public spheres have a flimsy ontological basis. They ignore the fact that the geographic distinctions of West and non-West are not only arbitrary but also neglectful of the role of Western *influences* globally, in hundreds of societies built upon variations of parliamentary, republican models. Moreover, such distinctions ignore the reaction within Western polities to the others, and the chasm between liberal theory and liberal history (Mehta 1990). Recent events in both Western and Eastern Europe demonstrate the intensity of reactions to otherness—anti-immigration violence, Neo-Nazism and other fascist movements—and how intensely the public sphere is *racialized*. This refutes positions supporting notions of abstract, individual propriety in the public sphere, and emphasizes the ways that citizenship is differentially embodied by race and gender. Modernity requires some sense of the past in order to distinguish itself, and it uses people of African descent in predominantly white nation-states as contrasting symbols of noncitizenship in the public sphere, just as colonial rulers have used "Third World"

peoples in the same manner (Chatterjee 1986). Afro-Brazilians, like so many other people of African descent in the New World, are used for the same purpose.

Blackness Then and Now

It is not really race in a narrow, phenotypical sense that links Ana Flávia, the Governor's daughter, to the seemingly disparate incidents of the slave revolt in 1835 or the marginalization of Afro-Brazilians in the shift from slave to wage labor between 1880 and 1920. More precisely, the *meanings* attached to purported racial groups are markers that convey the alleged disparities in intellect, industriousness, wealth, beauty and aesthetics—as well as the capacity to alter them. As long as Brazilian society in general, whites and nonwhites alike, share a commonsense basis for negative stereotypes of blacks and positive stereotypes of whites, then the apparent fluidity historically associated with racial categorization in Brazil needs to be qualified. The preoccupation with color categories belies the other dimension of racial “common sense” in Brazil: the widespread belief held by many whites and nonwhites that Brazil is a racial democracy.

The equation of blackness with sloth, deceit, hypersexuality and waste of all kinds is confirmed by the relative infrequency in which the terms *preto* or *negro* (black) are used in daily life. Brazilians reluctantly use these terms in describing others; they rarely describe friends this way, for fear of insulting them (Maggie 1988). This underscores the paradox of racial politics in Brazil and in much of the hemisphere. While racial identification is more contextual in Brazil than in other multi-racial polities certain limits also obtain. One person's mulatto is another's negro; yet negro remains a racial category many people do not want ascribed to them. If preto or negro only meant dark skin color, then why would the usage of these terms be any different from say, referring to someone as white? Part of the reason for a multiplicity of descriptions for nonwhite Brazilians, particularly for those whose African descent is visible in the texture of their hair, the shape of their nose or buttocks, is because such categorizations attempt to avoid the mark of blackness. Why is it more likely that a “colored” person would be described as “brown” or “mulatto” than as half-white, nearly or quasi-white? Focus on the numerous color categories in Brazilian racial politics can obscure the broader racialized social totality in which these categories operate and the racial meanings which *structure* social interactions and limit individuals' ability to simply choose their own racial category.

When considered comparatively these examples illustrate limits of blackness over historical/racial time. In the case of the 1835 revolt in Bahia, African-

Brazilians responded to their mistreatment through revolt, regardless of occupational distinctions among them. The animosity between Brazilian-born slaves, mulattos and whites on the one hand, and African-Brazilians on the other suggests at the least that blackness, laden with negative connotations, pertained to African-Brazilians and not necessarily to those who looked black. Ana Flávia, the daughter of a black man and a white woman, could easily be considered a mulatta in both contemporary and historical Brazil. Her blackness in the eyes of her assailants implies a broadening of the category of negro/a in Brazil and more importantly, an increasing polarization of racial categories. Her beating may signal that the mark of blackness has come to include Brazilians who are perceived as people of African descent, whether from Brazil or not. Unlike the distinctions between African- and Brazilian-born slaves in the previous century, Africanness—the parent symbol for blackness—no longer marks a place; it now marks a people.

The seemingly arbitrary manner in which Ana Flávia the mulatta could become Ana Flávia the negra affirms the greater importance of the interpretive, as opposed to the phenotypical, criterion of racial differentiation. Like McCarthyism in the United States and the military dictatorship from 1964 to 1985 in Brazil, the enemy is continually invented. Thus in the absence of “real” blacks, Ana Flávia becomes black, much in the same way that liberals and other moderates were transformed into communists during the era of anti-communist hysteria. Once identified as the enemy, the actual ideological or racial position of the signified has secondary importance. The meaning of racial or ideological difference attached to the individual or group is paramount for understanding the politics of polarization, of distancing the marginal or soon-to-be marginal subject from the center of the body politic.

This gives credence to Thomas Skidmore’s assertion that Brazil’s racial politics are becoming more and more like the relatively dichotomous patterns of racial interaction in the United States (Skidmore 1993). With the emergence of groups calling themselves Skinheads and Black Muslims in São Paulo, the existence of organizations that reflect the most obvious forms of and responses to racial animus affirms racially discriminatory practices in Brazil that are long-standing and embedded in the ideology of racial democracy. As far as I know such organizations are new to Brazil, yet such sentiments must have been in place for some time in order for them to assume organizational, collective form.

The meanings attached to blackness, whiteness and positions in between constitute the public aspect of the racial dimension of public spheres: these meanings are located in specific social contexts. Habermas’s etymological and genealogical considerations of the terms publicity and public opinion are relevant here. Tracing

the meaning and conceptualization of these terms in philosophers as diverse as Locke, Rousseau, Kant and Hegel, Habermas notes how public opinion was often meant to infer a normative matrix of the good, right and just in emergent civil societies of the West. Though Hegel would disparage public opinion as unmediated mass knowledge, each aforementioned philosopher acknowledged public opinion's power to convey a popular authority, what Foucault refers to as a regime of truth. Racist ideologies are facets of publicity and public opinion, insofar as they mark bodies to inform others of the meanings of those bodies in racial terms.

It is not, therefore, only discursive formations, processes of reason and rationalization, that shape publicity and public opinion about race. *Nondiscursive* formations also define people's location and degrees of participation in public realms. In short, it is the *structures* of race, racial difference and racism, which often go unsaid that provide the parameters of racial dynamics and the range of possibilities of discourse itself. This is why the Brazilian historian João Reis suggests that the Bahia slave revolt of 1835 was not, as previous historical accounts imply, merely a Muslim revolt of a certain category of slaves. Both slaves and *libertos* participated in the revolt, along with a high percentage of non-Muslim Africans. Reis regards the revolt as principally the result of an "embryonic Pan-African identity," an emergent ethnic consciousness among *liberto* and *escravo* participants that was forged by the similarity of racial and economic exploitation.¹³ Religious affiliation was the vehicle through which the revolt's leadership emerged, but was certainly not the sole reason for the revolt itself.¹⁴

Moreover, the distinctions between *escravo* and *liberto* were principally *occupational* distinctions, which by themselves tell us little about the respective treatment accorded individuals from either category in the public sphere. As noted earlier, *libertos* were not given the same status or rights of whites, and could only vote in primary elections. Therefore, while the degree of racial/civic exclusion might have been less for the *liberto*, the nature and kind of exclusion was more similar than dissimilar to that of the *escravo*. Reis and Silva describe the broader context in which these occupational distinctions operated:

If the freed black stopped being a slave, he did not exactly become a free man. He did not possess any political right and, even though con-

13. João Reis and Eduardo Silva, *Negociação e Conflito: A Resistência Negra No Brasil Escravista* (São Paulo: Editora Schwarz, 1989), 109.

14. Reis notes that the *malês* decided upon Ramadan as the moment for revolt because it is a time when Allah is said to "control malignant spirits and reorder the affairs of the world." See Reis and Silva 1989, 122.

sidered a foreigner, was not granted the privileges of a citizen from another country. The stigma of slavery was irreducibly associated with the color of his skin and above all, his origin. The free Africans were treated by whites, blacks, browns and even by creoles as slaves. They were not second or third class citizens. They were simply not citizens.¹⁵

At the level of resistance, however, the 1835 revolt is an historical example of an activity which emerged from a micro-public sphere, one which operated outside the purview of the liberal-minded but ultimately oligarchic elite within the dominant public sphere. The participants in the revolt were mindful of the activities and crises of their masters and employers, and fashioned modes of racial and ethnic consciousness in response to them. The simultaneity of these two spheres suggests that an elite public sphere, such as in the case of nineteenth-century Brazil or eighteenth-century Europe, is also an essentially *privatized* domain. This privatization is also apparent in twentieth-century Brazil, as Ana Flávia was rudely reminded that public space is not necessarily a democratic space. It is not democratic precisely because of the manner in which it is privatized for members of a certain race and/or class. Thus, while the old Brazilian adage that “money whitens” is true in certain cases, it is equally true that blackness taints.

This leads us to another understanding of how the public sphere and public space is privatized by the manner in which its privileged subjects or citizens publicly discriminate against the less privileged. Even in circumstances where citizenship is a given, as in contemporary Brazil, some people are considered lesser citizens than others. Racial prejudice is not only privately held but invariably, publicly articulated and at some level sanctioned. Thus the liberal presumption of reason in Habermas’s formulation is often rebuffed at the lived conjunctures of white and black, as in the case of Ana Flávia. It was precisely at this moment that ideology and coercive power outstripped reason as the bordering, structuring parameters of the elite public sphere. Moreover, contrary to the liberal—and often communitarian— notion that citizens are abstract bearers of rights, black Cinderella highlights the need to conceive of citizenship as that which should inhere in concrete persons. Along with property, gender, age and reason, race and racial difference imbue individuals with their concreteness, a material and symbolic grounding of their existence.

15. Reis and Silva 1989: 106. The translation is mine.

As Wade (1993) has noted in his study of Afro-Colombians, one of the comparative peculiarities of Latin American racial politics has been its rhetorical collapse of racial difference under the banner of national identity. In Brazil, Mexico, Cuba, Venezuela, Colombia and other nations of the region, Afro-Latino Americans are supposedly without a racially specific identity, unlike their Afro-North American, Afro-European or English-speaking counterparts in the Caribbean. Some allege that this has been due to the absence of legislated racial discrimination and segregation. Such forms of racial apartheid have led to the development of parallel institutions in other multi-racial polities such as the United States. Thus, music, cuisine, dress and artifacts that would be representative of a particular racial, or more accurately, cultural group elsewhere appears as a national commodity in Latin American polities (Fry 1983).

Afro-Brazilian cultural production fit this model until the 1970s, when Afro-Brazilian cultural and political activists affiliated with the *movimento negro* began to explore symbolic linkages with other communities of the African diaspora. These explorations led to the formation of organizations and cultural expressions that were neither Brazilian nor national but Afro-diasporic. Ironically, racially specific Afro-Brazilian cultural practices, namely forms of expression produced and directed toward Afro-Brazilians, emerged during the height of the military dictatorship in Brazil. Black Soul, the dance hall phenomena of the 1970s that first emerged in Rio de Janeiro but later spread to other cities in the country, was the precursor to the African blocs (*blocos Afros*) such as Olodum and Ilê-Aiyê. Such organizations have a specifically Afro-Brazilian leadership and constituency; they produce lyrics and musics that utilize Afro-Brazilian identity and racial discrimination as a principal theme.¹⁶ These organizations are quite distinct from Samba schools, Candomblé, Umbanda and other Brazilian cultural artifacts that are perceived and manipulated as national symbols. In the realm of cultural and religious practice, *terreiros de candomblé*, samba schools, ethnic brotherhoods and the emergent *blocos Afros* like Agbara Dudu, Olodum and Ilê-Aiyê represent the increasing racialization of Afro-Brazilian cultural practice. Afro-Brazilians increasingly recognize the need to use cultural practice and production as an organizing principle against racial oppression, and as tools for constructing

16. For more information on Afro-Brazilian cultural practices, especially Black Soul, see *Orpheus and Power* (Hanchard 1994), "Religion, Class and Context: Continuities and Discontinuities in Brazilian Umbanda" (Brown and Bick 1987), and "Black Soul: Aglutinação espontânea ou identidade étnica" (Rodrigues da Silva 1983).

and enacting Afro-Brazilian identities. In many instances these organizations are successful attempts at creating both spaces and values of Afro-Brazilian identity and community which are related to but distinct from the Catholic Church, mass culture and markets. The emphasis on space within the *terreiro* provides the articulation of an alternative public sphere (Braga 1992; Elbein dos Santos and dos Santos 1984).

Organizations such as Olodum and Illê-Aiyê do not necessarily affirm an increasing polarization along clearly demarcated racial lines, but rather an increasing awareness among Afro-Brazilians and white Brazilians that Afro-Brazilians *can* use racial identity as a principle to organize collective action. It is not a sign of increasing racism among Afro-Brazilians, though at some level it is surely a response to racism in the land of racial democracy. The Afro-Brazilian public sphere shares a paradox with its white, more dominant counterpart: it is at once public and private.¹⁷ Brazilian national culture has always translated and transformed Afro-Brazilian cultural practices into national cultural practices, thereby rendering them as commodities in popular culture to be consumed by all (Hanchard 1993, 1994). Thus, the question, just what is Afro-Brazilian culture? is much more complicated than in the United States, South Africa or Britain, where residential and other forms of racial segregation make distinct histories more obvious. It appears, however, that with the increasing racial polarization in Brazilian society, African blocs and other organizations are using music, dance and religion as explicit organizing principles to create schools, child care facilities, political and other organizations specifically for Afro-Brazilians. In turn, this increases tensions between a Brazilian elite that has historically claimed Afro-Brazilian cultural practices as simply Brazilian cultural practices, and Afro-Brazilian activists and intellectuals who seek to claim some form of autonomy within their own public sphere.

The struggles between dominant and subordinate racial groups, the politics of race, help constitute modernity and modernizing projects across the globe. It

17. The diaphanous nature of the barrier between black private and public spheres is also evident in other national contexts. Consider the following autobiographical observations of Wahneema Lubiano, a U.S. African-American theorist, on her childhood experiences as a preacher's daughter whose father's church was next door to a brothel. "Our church and our apartment were both private and public: the two constituted a space that described both the destitution and constellation of the neighborhood, and what black people in that neighborhood and town meant to themselves and to the larger social, economic and political space of the town. It marked us, we marked it." See Wahneema Lubiano, "If I Could Talk about It, This Is Not What I Would Say," *Assemblage* 20 (April 1993), 56.

uses racial phenotypes to assess, categorize and judge persons as citizens and noncitizens. Racial politics operate not only in a polity's defining moments but in the ongoing process of its re-creation. It permeates the minutiae of daily life: nervous, furtive glances are exchanged in elevators, men and women are rendered suspects without ever having committed a crime; not yet socialized by racist practices, white children run gleefully into the arms of their parents' racial others as their parents watch nervously. This is racial politics between whites and blacks in the late-twentieth century, and Brazil is no exception. For Ana Flávia—the black Cinderella—the clock struck midnight the moment she was born.

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