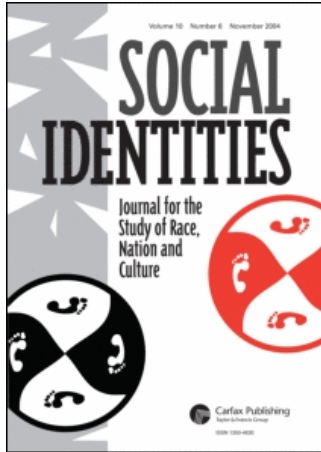


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Facts of Blackness:

Brazil is not (Quite) the United States ... and Racial Politics in Brazil?¹

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ABSTRACT: *Studies of racial subordination in Brazil usually stress the puzzling co-existence of racial inequality with Brazil's self-image as a 'racial democracy'. Frequently, they identify the absence of racial conflict and a clear white-black distinction as explanations for the low level of black political mobilisation. In doing this, these studies (unreflectedly) take the United States as a universal model of racial subordination of which Brazilian difference is a mere variation. What seems to escape these analysts is that the Brazilian construction of race was set against the view that 'racial differences' identify distinct groups, a view which still prevails in the United States and in sociological constructions of race. Actually, an analysis of writings on Brazilian subjectivity suggests that the texts which write blackness do so by deploying various modern categories of 'being' (race, nation, gender, and class) both in the narratives which have produced blacks as subordinate subjects in modernity and in the texts which aim to foster black emancipation.*

October, 1995. After three years living in the United States, during which time I had followed the unfolding of three episodes which placed race at the centre of the political debate (the L.A. riots, O.J. Simpson's trial and the Million Man March), I was very excited by the timing of my second trip back home. I would have the opportunity to participate in an event which seemed (finally) to place race at the centre of the political debate in Brazil: the 300th anniversary of the death of Zumbi dos Palmares, the last leader of the most lasting (one hundred year) community of runaway slaves in Brazil, *Quilombo dos Palmares*. Over the past 20 years, the black movement has chosen Zumbi as the symbol of a separate identity and has declared 20 November (the supposed date of his death) as the national day of black consciousness.

In 1995, however, Zumbi was at risk of being captured by the dominant racial discourse, as a national hero — as Palmares reconstructed by academics and politicians as an initial experience of racial democracy in Brazil. Throughout the year, city, state and federal administration promoted several events (conferences, parties, and political activities) to celebrate the third centennial of Zumbi's death. Black movement organisations, on the other hand, seized the opportunity (once again) to denounce the 'myth of racial democracy' and the continuing subordination of blacks in Brazilian society. Excited about the

chance to assess whether the black (Brazilian) social movement's rhetoric was reaching beyond the rather small circle of activists and intellectuals, upon my arrival I asked my friends and relatives (in the neighbourhood) whether they were following the heated political debate surrounding this celebration. The answer from most of them was negative.

What this trip did reveal, though, was the pervasiveness of the national discourse (what else could I expect after a mere three years absence?), whose force I witnessed even as I used it as a strategy against its assumption of white superiority. Indeed, on two occasions, I was reminded by younger and older relatives of my failure to bring home some of the lessons I had learned 'out there'. First, at my parents' home when we were planning my farewell party. Our plans included the preparation of a special meal for the occasion. As usual, I voted for a *feijoada*.² Most of my relatives who, unlike me, can have *feijoada* at any time suggested something different. When I insisted on having *feijoada*, a 15 year-old cousin complained: '*Feijoada*, I don't eat this!'. Surprised, I inquired why not. Her answer: 'The teacher told us that it was a slave dish, that it is poor people's food'. My mother looked at me expecting one of my speeches on racial pride, the importance of a black identity, and so on. But, to my own surprise, I caught myself declaring that *feijoada* is a symbol of Brazilianness, that every Brazilian, poor or rich, black or white, longs for a plate of *feijoada* when abroad. Of course, this argument turned out to be much more persuasive than any attempt to celebrate *feijoada* as an exclusive symbol of blackness.

The second occasion, also at my parent's house, involved a different group of relatives. One of my mother's cousins was saying that if a *preto* (black) person marries a white person he or she would have white kids. I disagreed saying that they would have mulatto not white children. She challenged my contention by pointing to her 16 year-old daughter and said: 'Look at Giselle, she is white. If she has kids with her boyfriend who is *preto* (and whose nickname is *moreno* [brown]) they will be white'. I had no response. This woman is mulatto; her father was white and her mother black; she married a white man and had three kids. Her daughter, Giselle, has yellowish curly hair and her skin is lighter than the other two children; her nickname is 'Blondie'.

Four months later, already back in the United States, I was further convinced that the problem of the politicisation of race in Brazil resides in the very framing of the black movement's rhetorical strategies. Carnival was just two weeks away. While browsing the *Jornal do Brasil* on the Internet, I was struck by the headline: 'Fora Michael Jackson (Get out Michael Jackson)'. Michael Jackson's choice of the *favela* (shanty town) Santa Marta to record scenes for his music video 'They don't care about us' (a cry against poverty, police violence and the authorities' disregard of poor people's living conditions) aroused a heated debate involving government authorities, community leaders, politicians, slum dwellers, and even local drug dealers.

The tale goes as follows. The authorities claimed that the video would portray a negative image of Brazil, by collapsing images of the Pao de Acucar (Sugar Loaf) with poor kids playing in the open sewers that run along the narrow paths separating the slum's shacks and brick houses. They argued that poor communities in the United States (such as Harlem and the Bronx) would

not allow a video that conveyed such a negative image; only the colonised and depoliticised impoverished Brazilians saw it as an honour. Community leaders and the favela's residents, on the other hand, celebrated Jackson's choice of the community: 'At least Jackson cares about us'. The leader of drug traffic gave a highly politicised interview to the press citing state abandonment as the reason for drug traffic's domination of the city's impoverished communities. Black politicians seized the opportunity to ally with Jackson, Spike Lee (the video's director) and the local community, and criticised white authorities for their negligence and anti-democratic veto of the video. However, as is common in Brazil, race was dismissed as the centre of the political debate. For those familiar with Brazilian society, however, race was the undeniable fulcrum of the controversy, and its silencing made this circumstance paradigmatic. Poverty and violence were the code words to address the community's relations with authorities and the white middle class neighbourhood located down the hill. To trained eyes, however, Michael Jackson and Spike Lee's unlikely partnership could only be overshadowed by their (racial) alliance with poor black Brazilians and local black politicians, against the white authorities.

While following the Michael Jackson affair in the press, I was surprised with this seemingly unlikely alliance that, even if obscured by the usage of code words, countered the prevailing construction of race in Brazil. The distinction between 'us' (Brazilians) and 'them' (US Blacks) was not tenable using the argument that foreigners (Jackson and Lee) were menacing Brazil's image as a (racially) harmonious and egalitarian society, by attempting to show to the world scenes of misery and abandonment of the (mostly black) impoverished Brazilians. The gap between the foreign Jackson and Santa Marta's residents was bridged by their *blackness*. Such identification, however, can only be read directly in Jackson's video where he sings about public authorities' contempt, poverty, and police violence. In the video, his 'white' skin seems to matter as much as the effacement of race in Brazilians' discourse about poverty and violence.

Yet, this silent emergence of race tells us more about differences than similarities between the protagonists, Michael Jackson and Santa Marta's residents (and my relatives). Indeed, Brazil is not the United States. If poverty and violence are the recurrent code words for (and the concrete expressions of) racial subordination in both countries, the similarities stop there. The prevailing racial discourse in Brazil celebrates the fact that, unlike the United States, our society lacks a clear-cut criterion for racial classification, and celebrates the absence of racial separation and conflict. Traditionally, sociological analyses of race relations in Brazil, though acknowledging the existence of socioeconomic inequalities, have portrayed Brazilian society as the perfect example of racial assimilation. More recent studies, however, denounce Brazil's racial democracy as a fallacy by pointing to the wide social, political, and economic gap separating blacks and whites in Brazil, but still stumble in the absence of obvious indicators of race consciousness among black and white Brazilians, and the rather insignificant political importance of race in Brazil (when compared with the United States).

Accordingly, three correlated questions trouble students of racial subordination in Brazil. How is racial exclusion possible without overt racial discrimination, and more or less explicit mechanisms of racial segregation? Why do such high levels of racial exclusion not entail the emergence of race consciousness, and the consequent political mobilisation among black Brazilians? Why do black Brazilians lack a separate (racial) identity?

I argue that the trouble suggested by these questions resides not so much in the "empirical condition" but in the presuppositions informing contemporary analysis of racial subordination in Brazil, which also provide the foundation for the black Brazilian social movement's rhetoric. On the one hand, following the dominant tendency in the discourse of modernity, such questions assume that the various "empirical conditions" are but expressions of universal (abstract) concepts. Thus, societies such as Brazil and the United States, with their modern social and political institutions, are seen as distinct embodiments of the abstract notion of the nation-state; moreover, that their populations are composed of individuals with distinct physical characteristics determine that they should be described as multiracial nation-states. However, while the categories employed in the study of multiracial societies emerged in the attempt to deal with a particular condition of multiraciality, the United States, they have been incorporated in the social scientific repertoire and acquired the status of abstract concepts of which the various multiracial nation-states are but more or less adequate expressions. On the other hand, although it is assumed that notions like modern multiracial societies found their origin in a universal, transcendental realm, it is also presupposed that in their actuality they maintain no relation. The multiracial societies of Brazil, the United States, and South Africa are portrayed in most sociological studies as having developed in isolation. Put differently, these studies suppose that the abstract notions of race and the nation, for instance, produced separate histories and subjectivities, whose interconnections exist only at the theoretical and analytical level. Yet, they also assume the universal (ontological) character of the categories employed in their analysis.

In sum, in this text I suggest a distinct approach to the fundamental connections existing between and within the realms of the 'empirical' and the 'theoretical'. Multiracial social spaces are not isolated empirical expressions of abstract notions of race and the nation, neither are they isolated entities whose histories have developed unaffected by the historical and cultural developments of other societies. Such perspective can help us understand why the Michael Jackson affair in Rio provided a unique moment in which race, yet silenced, reached an unusually high level of politicisation in Brazil. It would also reveal that this was possible because this event enabled a rupture in the prevailing discourse on race, when it provoked a clash between the two categories which form the basis of the narrative of Brazilian national subjectivity. In its specific combination of power, poverty, and race, this episode enabled the emergence of a separate black subjectivity whose sole signifier was, ironically, Michael Jackson's white(ned) skin.

Brazil is Not (Quite) the United States

Raimundo wandered in the streets, with his hopeless heart. The narrowness of the situation tormented him more than the brutal obstinacy of that family, which preferred to have their daughter disgraced than to have her married to a mulatto. It was to take too far the purity of blood ... In the disturbed stream of ideas, suicide mingled, as a false coin that stained the others. (Azevedo, [1881] 1973, p. 265)

Published seven years before the abolition of slavery, *O Mulato* chronicles a moment in which the (already certain) impending end of slavery raised the issue of the incorporation of former slaves in Brazilian society. That emancipation also meant reorganising Brazilian society according to the model of modern capitalist nation-states demanded consideration of the place of blacks and mulattoes in the social structure as well as in the construction of national subjectivity. Against the ideas prevailing in nineteenth century scientific and political discourses,³ in this novel Azevedo attacked Brazilian elites' refusal to accept a man of mixed race in their midst.

In the characteristically stereotypical mode of Brazilian literary naturalism the characters in the novel are divided between those who welcomed the conspicuous presence of blacks and *mestiços* in the upper social strata and those who saw their presence as a threat to the nation's image. In fact, during the five decades following the first appearance of *O Mulato*, these positions also divided Brazilian intellectuals and politicians (see Skidmore, 1993; Azevedo, 1988) who attempted to construct the country as a modern social space despite the negative assessment of the nation's future by leading figures of nineteenth century thought. Two arguments of nineteenth century theorising on race challenged the project of constituting Brazil as a viable modern capitalist nation-state: the view that the building of a modern civilisation resulted from whites' cultural (moral and intellectual) superiority, and the thesis that the mixture of very distinct races produced a degenerate population. Whether identified as a mere strategy toward the complete whitening of the population, or celebrated as the only means to construct a morally integrated multiracial nation, the basis of racial democracy, miscegenation became the central concern in Brazilian nationalist texts, and has become the very core of our national discourse.

Accordingly, miscegenation has also become central in studies of race relations in Brazil, in which the United States is forcefully an explicit or implicit basis of comparison. Most analyses of race relations claim that miscegenation explains the main features of racialisation in Brazil: the multipolar system of classification characterised by the existence of a third (mulatto) category, with no explicitly biological criteria for racial ascription. Second, they claim that class rather than race explains socioeconomic inequalities in Brazil, and most important, they point to the absence of racial conflict and the lack of legal or customary mechanisms of racial segregation.

Traditionally, comparativists saw such differences in characterising Brazil as a racial democracy. Tannenbaum (1946), for example, claimed that a mild type of slavery, with high levels of miscegenation and almost free of racial

prejudice, allowed for an easier incorporation of blacks in post-slavery society in Brazil. This version of the Brazilian racial paradise has been amply criticised by both Brazilian and US scholars. In his critique of Tannenbaum, for example, Degler ([1971] 1986) suggested that it was not a different type of slavery but miscegenation that hindered the development of a pattern of race relations similar to that prevailing in the United States: it prevented the establishment of a rigid colour line and created division within the black population. Thus, the third racial category, 'mulatto', provides an escape-hatch that allows for the existence of racial prejudice and discrimination in Brazil without racial conflict. Brazilian social scientists have also argued that miscegenation provides the ideological basis for racial subordination in Brazil. Fernandes ([1964] 1978), for instance, argued that the 'myth of racial democracy', which found its support in the celebration of miscegenation, is but a mechanism of racial domination. The most crucial ideological effect of this 'myth', according to Fernandes, has been to place upon blacks the responsibility for racial inequalities. Carlos Hasenbalg (1979), on the other hand, observed that one of the practical consequences of the generalised acceptance of this racial ideology has been to further the idea that class rather than racial distinctions account for social and economic inequalities among blacks and whites in Brazil.

More recently, comparativists have stressed the similarities between racial subordination in the two countries. Toplin (1981) observes that commonly held comparative assumptions should be questioned. Relying on historical evidence, he remarks that, in the United States, the colour line was never as rigid as it is believed, light-skinned blacks have historically received preferential treatment, and there has been an increasing consideration of the role of class in producing inequalities. He also suggests that today Brazil and the United States present an increasingly similar pattern of race relations. Similarly, Andrews (1992b) compares patterns of racial inequality in Brazil and the United States between 1950 and 1980, and concludes that by 1980 'the United States [ranked as] the more racially equal of the two societies' (p. 82).

Indeed, this critical trend has accurately pointed out that racial subordination in Brazil and the United States produce rather similar effects. What remains a puzzle, however, is why, unlike the US, racial inequality in Brazil is accompanied by neither a racially segregated social structure nor a widespread acceptance of racial separation. In the face of such difference, when scholars began focusing on the similarities between these two societies, they tended to interpret racial subordination in Brazil as a mere variation on the model that, as I argue below, was the point of contrast in the first place. This failure to consider how constructions of race in the United States play an important part in the Brazilian discourse on race appears more explicitly in analyses of racial politics in Brazil, which suffer (to borrow Mohanty's 1988 term) from an 'ethnocentric universality' that leads them to produce a reductionist account of black Brazilian subjectivity.

That Brazil is not ...

Comparing the United States and Brazil, for example, we would find that race

has in general been *a far more* politicised category in the United States, that racial divisions have been *more absolute and explicit*, and that consequently racial conflict has been more fundamental and antagonistic than in Brazil. This comparison would also begin to account for *the greater* social mobility and political power of racial minorities — especially in recent decades — in the United States (Winant, 1994, p. 140, my italics)

Yes, indeed. Brazil is not the United States. Framing Winant's analysis of racial politics in Brazil is a framework developed to account for racial subordination in the United States, the notion of racial formation. However, the deployment of this analytic device, which is actually quite appropriate to address the construction of race in the US, unreflectedly assumes the United States as the empirical condition presenting the most developed expression of a racial formation. As a result, in his text the peculiarities of race in Brazil appear as a matter of degree, as a less developed actualisation of a construction of race, which is premised upon a view of society as composed by clearly distinguishable racial groups.

With the notion of 'racial formation', Omi and Winant (1994) provide a theoretical construct which privileges the centrality of race in US social structure and culture. According to the authors, racial formation is the socio-historical process through which racial categories and racial meanings are constantly produced and challenged in the ongoing political contention regarding how society should be organised, ruled, and represented. 'Race', they argue, 'is a concept which signifies and symbolises social conflicts and interests by referring to different types of human bodies' (p. 55). Nevertheless, Omi and Winant's challenging reconceptualisation of race in political terms, as 'an unstable and 'decentred' complex of social meanings constantly being transformed by political struggle' (p. 55), remains prisoner to a specific construction of race. To address how social structure and representation are linked in a given social formation, the authors introduce the concept of 'racial projects' which are 'simultaneously an interpretation, representation or explanation of racial dynamics, and an effort to re-organise or redistribute resources along particular racial lines' (p. 56). That is, they are competing ideologies deployed in the political arena, which also provide the basis for common-sensical means of racial identification and perceptions of differential positionings in the social structure. However, while the authors argue that the meanings of race are produced within political struggle, this perspective is troubled by the fact that it implicitly assumes that racial differences are 'pre-political' substrata,⁴ upon which these distinct ideological positions and the meanings they accord to races are constructed.

It is in the very framing of race as a political concept that Omi and Winant suggest that the notion of racial formation is premised upon the acceptance of racial difference as a substratum of social relations. (It should be clear that I am not suggesting that the authors have a naturalised view of race, a view I am sure they would meet with dissatisfaction.) Both notions, racial formation and racial projects, presuppose a society in which racial differences characterise distinct groups. Thus, the historical process is one in which competing constructions of such racial differences will not just constitute various ideological

projects but also provide the meanings to be given to them. Moreover, the authors argue that in this historical process the prevailing ideology of race imposes racial identities (a process they term 'racial subjection'). What is problematic in the notion of racial formation, then, is that in conceiving power as oppression (and the correlated idea that ideology works through the imposition of meanings), it neglects the productivity of the strategies of knowledge which constructed race as a category of being.

Actually, this is a problem the notion of racial formation shares with other 'social constructionist' perspectives on race which still presupposes that racial difference is the substratum upon which competing social meanings are produced.⁵ It seems to me that the source of this problem resides in the fact that the incorporation of the notion of race in the sociological field has maintained the perception that racial difference is (like sex) a pre-social substratum upon which social relations develop. What is lost to sociological approaches is that the political importance of race resides not in the interpretation and the imposition of meanings upon these differences but in the very production of these differences *as racial*. Thus, to recuperate the historicity of race demands that one observes that the idea of 'racial differences' has been produced under certain historical and epistemological conditions.

To elaborate this criticism it is necessary to examine how the sociological reconfiguration of race maintains a rather naturalised conception of racial differences. Central to this argument is the idea that there was nothing 'racial' about the 'Others of Europe' until the notion of race was formulated in the nineteenth century to produce the 'truth' of the cultural and physical differences between Europeans and those inhabiting non-European spaces. The nineteenth century self-claimed 'science of man' actually produced these differences as *racial* differences, and in that movement they constituted Europeans and their 'Others' as *racial beings*. Thus, this initial scientific construction of race, in establishing a connection between physical traits and cultural differences, also provided a construct which did not just presuppose Europeans' cultural superiority but also became a means to identify, to name, human collectivities, to produce human groups as *racial* groups. In that process race was constituted as both an epistemological and an ontological category, the political significance of which resides precisely in the fact that in naming groups 'racial' it postulated that cultural differences, as well as European subordination of other peoples, were in accordance with natural (scientific) laws. Thus, in naming certain peoples Caucasian, Negro, and Mongolian, they imputed to these names the reason for their unequal political relations. What renders the sociological reconfiguration of the notion of race problematic is that, more than just keeping this construction as a presupposition, it uncritically applied this biological framework in the analysis of the historical process, where arguments regarding racial differences were deployed in the political struggle to define not just how the United States should be organised but also the very basis of American subjectivity.

Not merely for its material achievements, by the end of the nineteenth century the United States was politically and culturally identified as the embodiment of modern principles. This was so, both in terms of its defence of

freedom and equality, which were not only seen positively by European analysts, but of the pervasive individualism that characterised American culture (Tocqueville, 1969 and Arnold, 1888). Many contemporary cultural analysts have noted that the construction of American subjectivity was also based upon a racial identification with the Anglo-Saxon (Ringer, 1983; Takaki, 1985; Gossett, 1963). This can be seen not just in scientific and literary texts of the early decades of this century, which produced the American subject as an heir of the New England pilgrim's tradition of freedom and equality. It can also be noticed in how African Americans, Native Americans, Asians and immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe appear in these texts to produce the boundaries of American subjectivity. Indeed, while each of these peoples, in their 'racial difference', signified the outer limits of American subjectivity, they did so in distinct ways. Native Americans came to signify the frontier, the 'empty space' upon which the pilgrims and their Anglo-Saxon heirs built American civilisation (Berkhoffer, 1979). Asians, on the other hand, appear in political and academic writings in arguments that their racial outsidership rendered them unable to assimilate to American culture (see Ringer, 1983). Yet, it is in construction of African Americans' 'racial difference' that the centrality of race in the production of American subjectivity is most apparent. Being neither a metaphor for American space itself nor immigrants, they came to represent a fundamental split in American subjectivity. Integral to US history, the production of their *racial difference* signifies exactly that region of the country which represented the opposite of the nation's self-image, the South. Here, those who ruled the society the freedom-loving Puritan pilgrims had fled, the English cavaliers, built within American space a society based upon social distinctions, and more importantly slavery. Indeed, as the end of the Civil War enabled the incorporation of white southerners into American society, African Americans alone would represent that crucial split.⁶ It was precisely this construction of race, which writes American subjectivity in its racial difference in relation to other peoples inhabiting American space, that provided the basis of the sociological formulation of the concept of race relations.

While combining elements of various currents of early sociological theorising, Park (1950) framed the sociological construction of race upon a theory of racial and cultural contacts. The basic presupposition of this social darwinist construct is that civilisation emerges out of the process through which racially and culturally superior peoples assimilate inferior peoples they come into contact with through conquest, migration, and trade. Thus, 'the interracial adjustments' following such events

involve racial competition, conflict, accommodation, and eventually assimilation, which should be regarded as merely efforts of a new social and cultural organism to achieve a new biotic and social equilibrium. (p. 104)

Actually, this model, which provides the basic structure of the concept of race relations, seemed quite adequate to address the conditions in the United States during the first decades of this century: the problems faced by Asian and

Eastern and Southern European immigrants in the Northern cities, and the radicalisation of the relations between blacks and whites in the South. Accordingly, rather than a process, the sociological reconfiguration of the modern notion of race would conceive of race relations as a problem. Why so? The logic of the theory of racial and cultural contacts prescribed that in 'civilised' social spaces, racial and cultural differences were to be transcended with the assimilation of the weaker group, and the resulting social order would be one in which competition took place according to abstract principles.

The growth of modern states exhibits the progressive merging of smaller, mutually exclusive, into larger and more inclusive social groups. This result has been achieved in various ways, by a more or less complete adoption, by the members of smaller groups, of the language, technique and mores of the larger and more inclusive ones ... There is no reason to assume that this assimilation of alien groups to native standards has modified to any great extent fundamental racial characteristics. It has, however, erased the external signs which formerly distinguished the members of one race from those of another ... the breaking up of the isolation of smaller groups has had the effect of emancipating the individual man, giving him room and freedom for the expansion and development of his individual aptitudes. (Park, 1950, p. 205)

In the United States, however, while such logic seemed to operate in the case of European immigrants, the same was not true in the case of Asian immigrants and black Americans. The problem for Park was to account for the obstacles to their assimilation.

However, in stating that the origin of this problem of race relations resided in the physical marks distinguishing non-white groups, Park brought to the core of the sociological theorising of race what was indeed a product of the nineteenth century construction of race. In his framework, racial differences are but the physical expressions of people's 'being', their cultural difference.

[T]he chief obstacle to the assimilation of the Negro and the Oriental are not mental but physical traits. It is not because the Negro and the Japanese are so differently constituted that they do not assimilate. If they are given an opportunity the Japanese are quite as capable as the Italians, the Armenians, or the Slaves of acquiring our culture, and sharing our national ideals. The trouble is not with the Japanese mind but with the Japanese skin. (Park, 1950, p. 208)

This nineteenth-century construction of race, as a natural collective attribute, as an assumption within the sociological formulation still troubles sociological analyses of racial subordination. Neglecting that 'racial difference' was a product of modern knowledge did not just rob the concept of its historicity (as produced under certain relations between peoples); it also prevented the recognition that these racial differences were being produced in the very conflicts which characterised the US at the beginning of this century.

Furthermore, this neglect had an effect upon the array of concepts Park

elaborated to analyse this historical moment, which would constitute the basic framework of the sociological reconfiguration of race. According to Park, 'race prejudice', 'race conflict' and 'race competition' emerged out of the biological process of racial struggle. In formulating these concepts, he drew from the very arguments used to explain and justify the exclusion of immigrants and African Americans, that is, the lower 'standard of living' and perhaps the 'cultural level' of the immigrant population. Conflict and competition, according to Park, resulted from the native population's attempt to avoid 'the fact' that these 'strangers' lowered the standard of living, or forced them into extinction. Consequently, 'race prejudice' was also interpreted as a result of this 'struggle for existence': 'We hate people', Park argued, 'because we fear them; because our interests, as we understand them at any rate, run counter to theirs' (Park, 1950, p. 226).

According to Park, in their racial difference, in the visible marks of their cultural distance, resided the origin of the problem of race relations. The problem of race relations, he argued, 'arises from the difficulty, if not the impossibility of peoples of a markedly different racial type, as well as standard of living, entering freely, and without conflict, into competitive cooperation of an individualistic and democratic society' (Park, 1950, p. 159). Race competition is then placed at the beginning of a circular logic. Racial conflict and racial exclusion are posited as consequences of race competition, which in their turn engender 'race ideologies' and 'race consciousness' which further prevent the possibility of assimilation. While 'racial ideologies' belong to the protective strategies of the natives to ensure its existence and status, 'race consciousness' is more specifically a reaction on the part of the subordinate racial groups'

It is the necessity for collective action, the necessity that Negroes should cooperate to win for themselves the place and the respect in the white man's world that the Constitution could not give them, that has created among the Negroes of the United States a solidarity that does not exist elsewhere. Race consciousness is the natural and inevitable reaction to race prejudice. (Park, 1950, p. 294)

However, he noted, the effect of race consciousness is to increase the gap between racial groups, that is, to preclude the emergence of an egalitarian social order, further to prevent assimilation.

Even as contemporary analyses of racial subordination reject some of the premises and the logic of assimilation that underlies this initial formulation of a sociological construction of race, they uncritically deploy the concepts — 'race consciousness', 'race prejudice', 'race ideology', and 'race conflict' — formulated to account for this specific historical condition. In the case of Omi and Winant's project, this disregard for the biological premises informing the sociological construction of race has a more complicating effect in their attempt to construct race as a political category, which derives from the theoretical problem created by a straightforward application of a Marxist (Gramscian) framework to the analysis of racial subordination. The Marxist framework presupposes that specific historical (material) conditions create two distinct and unequal classes within an otherwise undifferentiated collectivity. Actually, a

necessary condition for capitalist exploitation is that dispossessed individuals are forced to sell their labour power in the labour market, and only under these conditions are they constituted as workers. Its application to the analysis of racial subordination is complicated when it is necessary to characterise the oppressed group. If modern capitalist relations of production produce the worker as an oppressed class, what produces the *racially* oppressed as such? Unless one assumes that racial differences themselves were produced under certain historical conditions, they will remain pre-theoretical and pre-social (naturalised) individual attributes from which social and historical relations of subordination derive.

Ironically, it is precisely because it leaves the historicity of 'racial difference' unaddressed that racial formation is a theoretical construct which successfully captures the political importance of race in the United States. It enables the authors to define the racial formation of the United States as a racial dictatorship, which constructed American society as culturally and racially white, founded upon racial divisions (the colour line). However, this success is also a failure. The idea of 'racial rule' adequately describes the United States precisely because the prevailing construction (but not ideology) of race is premised and organised around the idea that races are indeed god-given pre-social groups. This presupposition enables the re-writing of (most of) US history as a racial dictatorship. A discussion of the passage from a 'racial dictatorship' to a 'racial democracy' demands that one envisions a society organised as a collection of 'races'. Thus, the notion of racial formation becomes even more problematic when it provides the basis for analysing racial politics in multiracial spaces where 'racial difference' does not correspond to a view of society as composed of distinct racial groups.

Winant's (1994) application of the notion of racial formation to the analysis of racial politics in Brazil reveals the social and historical boundedness of this notion. First, racial formation presupposes both racially defined projects (ideological positions) and that racial differences structure meaning and society. That neither is present in Brazilian society leads Winant to place the emergence of racial formation in Brazil only in the 1970s when a black movement is organised, whose construction of race is premised upon a perception of Brazilian society as composed of (culturally and socially) distinct racial groups. Thus, it is during the phase of political *abertura* (opening), the transition from military rule to democracy, that race, according to Winant, would finally occupy the political terrain, constituting Brazil as a racial formation. Yet, even as he identifies instances, such as the phenomenon *afoxes*, which was able to 'reinterpret the question of race, and to valorise black identity, in a manner that addressed millions of Brazilians' (p. 145), he concludes that Brazil is characterised by 'the relative absence of racial politics'

What Accounts for this Absence?

Perhaps even more than in the 'northern' societies such as the United States, where the state attempted to enforce the *white-black distinction* (however ineffectually), perhaps even more than in the colonial societies

that Fanon most centrally addresses, where the *white-black* distinction was articulated in national terms (however unsuccessfully), in Brazil there was and is the most extensive development of *racial ambivalence* ... (p. 155, author's italics)

Two questions interrupt Winant's account of racial politics in Brazil. What is racial ambivalence? Where is it located? The answer to the first question is already provided by the author. Racial ambivalence is the failure effectively (and successfully) to maintain the line separating blackness and whiteness. Winant produces this idea of racial ambivalence by analysing the speech of black Brazilian activists whose project has been to deploy the image of Brazil as politically and socially structured around a clear distinction between blacks and whites. Ironically, he locates the cause for 'the relative absence of racial politics in Brazil' exactly among those who have been insisting upon the fundamentally political importance of race in Brazil.

Accordingly, it is not a higher degree of racial ambivalence informing social structure and culture, as Winant argues, that prevents racial conflict and the politicisation of race in Brazil. What complicates our emancipatory project is precisely the attempt to write race (black) consciousness against a (national) construction of race, which was produced against the idea of race separation. In Brazil, unlike the United States, neither culture nor social structure are organised around the idea of racial division. Yet, because the United States has become the model from which to access other multiracial social spaces, Winant reads Brazilian difference as one of degree.

Winant's 'ethnocentric universalism', however, should not be regarded as a sort of intellectual bias imposed by his national location. That would be a simplistic characterisation of a much more complex question. To begin with, such bias results from two characteristics of modern investments of knowledge. On the one hand, as observed by Foucault (1994), the modern epistemological field is characterised by the assumption of a fundamental connection between the empirical and the transcendental. That is, the very possibility of scientific knowledge requires that the empirical domain be seen as a manifestation of a transcendental domain, and also that the knowing subject and the categories employed in the analysis of actual conditions be seen as belonging to both domains.⁷ On the other hand, the principles organising modern knowledge also assume that modern social and political arrangements represent the most advanced manifestation of the transcendental domain. These presuppositions have an important effect upon Winant's analysis of racial politics in Brazil. Empirically, Brazil and the United States are potentially (at least) racial formations. Yet, when he applies this construct to analyse contemporary Brazil, the fundamental assumption of the model, that of racial divisions, is missing from this empirical condition. Still, rather than considering that this absence prevents the application of the notion of racial formation to this specific empirical situation, he defines Brazilian difference as one of variation of degree in relation to the United States, which in turn is constructed as the most advanced expression of the theoretical construct of racial formation. Moreover, rather than questioning the specific construction of race informing his framework,

Winant reads Brazilian difference in terms of racial ambivalence. In that movement, what is actually empirically specific — the white-black distinction — becomes the theoretical construct which Brazilian specificity is reduced to, namely, a less-developed expression of it.

To avoid this sort of reductionism demands an analytic perspective which works through, rather than rejects, the presuppositions informing modern knowledge. First, it should be noticed that what distinguishes modern epistemology is that categories of knowledge also enjoy an ontological status. That is, the scientific texts which aim to reveal how the empirical reflects an aspect of the transcendental provide the very categories to be used in constructions of being. What I am suggesting here is that to understand the process of subjectification one should move beyond what Foucault terms the 'repressive hypothesis' to grasp the very productivity of power in modernity, in which knowledge plays a fundamental role. Thus, attempts to produce the specificity of a given collectivity (national, racial or gendered, for instance) can also be read as narratives of being, texts, which by the articulation of modern categories of knowledge and being produces itself as a modern subject. Further, this intrinsically political nature of knowledge, added to the reflexive movement through which its categories came to play a central role in the interpretation of social and political relations, also suggests that modern collectivities are produced as political subjectivities.

Second, this perspective allows one to read these different narratives of being without presupposing that one 'empirical condition' is a more or less developed expression of a category of knowledge. To do so, one needs to avoid reading constructions of being as small teleological narratives which produce a subject only in its relation to the transcendental domain, for instance, to read narratives of the nation as solely the actualisation of the nation's 'Spirit'. Instead, one should attempt to locate in these narratives the strategies through which being is constructed against other possibilities of being. Following Derrida's (1976) claim that writing rather than speech is what provides the basis for modern constructions of being, I suggest that one should read in the texts that produce modern subjectivities how being is constructed in the movement of signification in which the specific articulation of certain categories (signifiers) produce a collectivity's specificity.

Finally, the strategy of reading also requires a shift from an instance which privileges 'history' to one which places this 'history' in relation to other contemporaneous 'histories'. Thus, instead of privileging 'Universal history' as the context in which to address the differences between the peoples of the world, one should take the world itself, the globe, as the context of analysis. Here, I follow Robertson's claim that rather than a consequence of modernity, globality should be conceived as 'the general condition which facilitated the diffusion of general modernity' (Robertson, 1995, p. 27). In sum, what I am suggesting is that the pervasiveness of modern categories has produced the globe itself as a text, a space where modern subjectivities (national, racial, or otherwise) proliferate in the efforts to address the inequities produced in the deployment of modern capitalist political and social structures.

When applying this perspective, it will be seen that much of what con-

tributes to the problems faced by the black Brazilian movement has to do with the effort to produce a black subjectivity, to write the text of blackness, by using the very categories used in the construction of Brazilian specificity. Moreover, it will also indicate that to foster racial emancipation in Brazil, or elsewhere, demands that one recognise that race is but one modern category of being operating in the production of *racial subordination* in multiracial social spaces

It is Written in the Brazilian Text

A nation is a soul, a spiritual principle. Two things, which in truth are but one, constitute this soul or spiritual principle. One lies in the past, one in the present. One is the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories; the other is present day consent, the desire to live together, the will to perpetuate the value of the heritage that one has received in an undivided form. (Renan, 1994, p. 19)

In his 1882 lecture, Renan spoke of the nation as a fact of history. It lies in the past, in the present, and proceeds in the never-ending project of self-actualisation in the future. This conception had already been articulated by Hegel at the beginning of the century. However, only in the last decades of the nineteenth century the nation was to be deployed within and outside the European space, to become a central category in the production of the 'being' of peoples.

The importance of historical, material conditions to the emergence of narratives of the nation is just as contested as the claim that nations are objective entities (see Anderson, 1983; Hobsbawn, 1994; and Gellner, 1983). Yet, whether an imagined community, a myth, or a requirement under the conditions created by capitalist development, by the end of the last century nationness had become a necessary dimension in the characterisation of modern global spaces. It defined external boundaries, and established both the sovereignty of a given territory and the right and ability to explore its resources (Hobsbawn, 1987). Under these historical conditions, the nation was to embody both the idea of a people as a cultural unity and as a political subject. Moreover, it would also produce internal boundaries by defining who among those inhabiting the national space constituted the national subject. In Europe, the impulse to produce a homogeneous ('undivided') teleology of the national subject justified not just the subordination of culturally distinct peoples within a given territory, but also served to justify expansionist advances premised upon historical rights and cultural similarities.

On the American continental space, however, the attempt to write national subjectivity was further complicated by another category of being which prevailed in nineteenth century thought, namely, race. Most accounts of the role of race in modern thought privilege either its contradiction in relation to the principles that organise modern culture or how it produced non-Europeans as inferior peoples. Yet, more importantly, as a category of being, race also presupposed that the ability to constitute a modern civilisation, to fulfill the necessary conditions to build a modern nation state was written onto the (white) bodies of those inhabiting the European space. Situated outside the

European space, and with populations that reflected European conquest and domination of other peoples and their lands, for those producing the narratives of American national subjects, race would necessarily become a crucial category in the writing of their histories. It not just demanded that narratives of the nation also contemplated conditions of multiraciality, but also that they incorporated constructions of race, which allowed the characterisation of the national space and the national subject as exhibiting the qualities that favoured the building of a modern civilisation, a modern social space.

Thus, to understand what produces Brazilian difference one should address how the notions of the nation and race were combined in the texts which attempt to produce the national subject as one able to fulfill the political and economic projects of modernity. It will be seen that while the narrative of the nation has remained basically a teleology of a European subject, the assessment of the nation's future varied according to the prevailing scientific construction of race. When the nineteenth century construction of race, which connected civilisation building to whiteness, provided the frame for constructing the being of multiracial social spaces, the celebration of miscegenation presupposed that the whitening (*branqueamento*) of the population was the only available solution for conceiving Brazil as a modern nation-state. Subsequently, when the building of a modern 'civilisation' was attached to the successful integration of peoples of different race and cultures, miscegenation was reconstructed as a goal. In that movement, the main categories of the sociology of race relations were articulated in the writings of the Brazilian text, where the difference in relation to the United States provided the ground for producing the image of Brazil as a more developed expression of a modern multiracial nation-state.

Reading the Brazilian national text from within its epistemological and historical circumstances addresses the two epistemological biases behind the 'ethnocentric universalism' that characterises most analysis of race in Brazil. It will be noted that 'empirical conditions' are not muddy reflections of abstract (scientific) categories to be cleaned up with the self-conscious attitude of the knowing subject. In the necessarily messy terrain of historical circumstances modern categories of knowledge combine to produce narratives of 'being' whose ultimate determinants are their political and social conditions of emergence.

The initial writing of the Brazilian text, the attempt to constitute Brazilian people as a fundamentally modern subject, was complicated by the prevailing argument that miscegenation produced an unstable, and inferior, racial type. For Brazilian intellectuals and politicians who, in the 1880s, thought it was time to re-organise the country along the lines of a modern capitalist nation state, to counter this argument became a central task. How to write a narrative of the origins of the Brazilian people, which revealed a uniquely Brazilian spirit, wrote the nation's individuality, and rendered Brazil viable as a modern social space? These writers constructed the problem as one derived from the specific historical developments which not only constituted the Brazilian space as inhabited by a large number of mixed-race people, but also determined that Native Brazilian, African, and Portuguese cultures produced a language,

religiosity, and customs which clearly departed from the European ideal. Their project was then to write this history so as it become the unfolding of a characteristically modern European subject.

From this effort emerged three basic themes of the Brazilian text: (a) Brazilian civilisation is a unique expression of a European (Portuguese) culture ('spirit') in the tropics; (b) Native Brazilians were pretty much eliminated already, and African physical traits were disappearing from the Brazilian population due to miscegenation and European immigration; (c) because the Portuguese, unlike the English, lacked racial prejudices, they freely mingled with Indians and Africans, which resulted in the constitution of the *mestiço*, a racial type well-suited to the task of building a tropical civilisation. While all three are recurrent themes in re-writings of the Brazilian text, the first two dominated the initial versions.

In one of the earlier texts concerned with the writing of Brazilian subjectivity, Romero already argued that miscegenation was the substance of the Brazilian spirit, what constituted Brazil's individuality. 'Brazilian history', he claimed, 'as it should be understood today, is not, as judged before ... the exclusive history of the Portuguese in America'. Every Brazilian, he claimed, 'is a *mestiço*, if not in blood, in ideas' (Romero, 1888, p. 7). Yet, while acknowledging that Indians and Africans had participated in this process of miscegenation, he characterised their influence as neither lasting nor determinant. The Portuguese, but mostly their mixed sons were, for Romero, the agents of Brazilian history. 'The *mestiço* is the genuine Brazilian historical formation', he argued, 'in the future only the pure white will remain with him, with which he sooner or later, will confound itself' (p. 66). Central in this writing of the Brazilian subject, then, is the necessity to produce its essential Europeaness. According to Romero, Portuguese blood and culture linked Brazil to the 'great group of occidental people', to which 'we owe our institutions, our culture, and contact with European civilisation' (p. 105). Thus, while miscegenation provided Brazilian space with its homogeneity and individuality, the history of the nation was but the teleological movement of a slightly tanned European subject.

The *mestiço* is the psychological product, ethnic and historic, of Brazil; it is the new form of our national difference. Our popular psychology is a product of this initial stage. This does not mean that we will constitute a nation of mulattos; since the white form is prevailing, and will prevail; it means only that the European here allied with other races, and from this union the genuine Brazilian emerged, the one which does not confound with the Portuguese and upon which our future rests. (p. 91)

Thus, Romero was engaged in a debate over the interpretation of miscegenation, but not necessarily over the interpretation of the meaning of racial differences. His defence of miscegenation was anything but a complete rupture with the nineteenth century's arguments for white superiority. However, it did provide a positive interpretation of the country's racial composition. Not only had the *mestiço* always played an important role in Brazil's progress, but the

high number of mixed-race people was one step on the road toward complete whitening.

That the writing of Brazil as a modern social space was seriously threatened by the arguments of the science of man determined that early writings (until well into the 1920s) privileged two themes: the disappearance of blacks from the population and the fundamentally white, European, quality of Brazilian culture, which was even increasing with European immigration. It did not matter that these immigrants were mostly Italian, Spaniards and Portuguese, those people who were not always positively written in the texts of the science of man. They were white, they inhabited European space, and their presence, in the present and in the future, would help further to support the image of Brazil as a modern social space.⁸

What constitutes the core of the Brazilian text is a teleology of assimilation, where Africans and Indians are sublated to the narrative of the always-already (white) national subject, the *mestiço*, which moves towards its full realisation, whitening, in the always-postponed (white) future. Yet, in the 50 years following the first writing of the national text, such construction was not sufficient to characterise Brazil as a viable modern social space. That was only possible in the 1930s, when race, rejected as a legitimate biological and anthropological concept, was then consolidated as a sociological category.

What is also usually forgotten in analysis of racial subordination in Brazil is that at the very moment Park was investigating 'the problem of race relations' in the United States, Brazilian intellectuals were involved in the task of providing a positive image of a society, which the earlier construction of race wrote as a rather inadequate expression of the idea of a modern (multiracial) nation-state. What this formulation suggested was that individuals' awareness and negative response to racial differences interrupted the 'natural' process of civilisation building. Thus, this shift from the view that the building of modern civilisation depended on whiteness to the idea that it turned on Europeans' (and their descendants elsewhere) ability to assimilate racially and culturally inferior peoples finally enabled Brazil to be written as a truly viable modern social space.

Indeed, in Gilberto Freyre's work, the texts that best synthesise Brazilian national discourse, one observes that the racially segregated United States was the privileged contrast for distinguishing Brazilian culture. Freyre's appropriation of the main arguments and concepts of the social theorising of race relations had two effects. First, by establishing that from the beginning Brazilian society exhibited the necessary conditions for constructing a modern 'civilisation', the ability to integrate peoples of differing races and cultures, it ensured that Brazilian society could be regarded as the most advanced expression of a modern multiracial nation-state. Second, his formulation of the national text also indicates why the prevailing sociological perspective on race cannot successfully address racial subordination in Brazil. Because already (unequally) united in the (transcendental) origins of the nation itself, the relations between whites and blacks would not play out in the (actual) political and economic dynamics of Brazilian society. The implication is that the historical subject is the Brazilian individual (who is fundamentally of mixed

origins), whose subordinate condition is a product of the unfolding of political and economic processes proper to a modern capitalist society.

In *Novo Mundo nos Trópicos*, Freyre (1969) argues that Brazil's civilisational achievements in technology, architecture, literature, and art resulted from specific Portuguese cultural traits. Central to his argument is the valorisation of the Portuguese style of colonisation over the English, who insisted in reproducing an exclusively European culture and civilisation in the tropical colonies of Africa and Asia. What is the secret of Portuguese success in the tropics? Freyre's answer to this question is well-known: adaptability, acclimation, plasticity. The Portuguese, Freyre claimed, are a European people who, because of their history and geographic location, possessed the necessary attributes for a successful colonial project. Portuguese specificity is produced in the text against the European coloniser considered superior to the Portuguese by all criteria of civilisational achievement, namely, the English.

Because of their folk-tales, the majority of the Portuguese who discovered and colonised Brazil knew that people of colour could be superior to white people, as were the Moorish in Portugal and in Spain; in their prolonged contact with the Moorish, considered in that part of Europe, not an inferior race but people superior in civilisation or in arts and sciences, much had the Portuguese assimilated the customs and ideas of the African people. (Freyre, 1969, p. 47)

More importantly, Freyre insisted, was that the superior Portuguese characteristics would provide the cultural foundations of the society that emerged in their American ex-colony, Brazil.

The secret of Brazil's success in constructing a human civilisation, predominantly Christian and increasingly modern, in tropical America, resides in the Brazilian ability to compromise. While the English, more than any other people, possess a capacity in the political sphere — their political system is an excellent combination of apparently antagonistic values — the Brazilian have achieved even greater triumph, applying this capacity to the cultural and social spheres in higher amplitude. From that derives their relative ethnic democracy: the broad, though not perfect opportunity given in Brazil all men, despite race or colour, to assert themselves as full Brazilians. (Freyre, 1969, p. 4)

According to Freyre, lacking race prejudice the Portuguese were not just able to mix physically and culturally with native Brazilians and blacks, but also to make use of their abilities and techniques to deal with the tropical environment. From that resulted not only creation of a human type better adapted to life in the tropics, the *mestiço*, but also the development of technologies, architecture, and diet which, unlike those the English created in India, were more appropriate to the climate. In this version of the national text, Brazil's specificity derives from the unique Portuguese ability to mingle with other races, to assimilate without losing an essentially European character. Brazilian civilisation needed to be placed on the same level as the European and Anglo-European civilisations. To this effect, it was constructed as an expression

of the cultural superiority of peoples inhabiting the European space: Civilisation is a European attribute, to build a civilisation in the tropics could only be accomplished by European peoples. In the case of Brazil, these were the Portuguese and their descendants — who for Freyre could 'be considered as Nordic, in relation to race and blood, as any British leader' (p. 16). It is exactly because, in Brazil, the logic of racial and cultural contacts was fulfilled that this social superiority over the United States could be stated (Skidmore, 1993). At the turn of the nineteenth century, the United States was considered superior (to Brazil) precisely because it could be constructed as a white nation, built by Anglo-Saxons. Now, under the sociological construction of race, Brazil's superiority over the United States could be placed at the core of the national text, a necessary gesture to produce a positive image of the nation (if only for internal consumption).

In *Casa Grande e Senzala*, on the other hand, Freyre ([1933] 1987) wrote a teleology of the national subject, again in a celebration of miscegenation. Here, he specified each race differential role in constitution of Brazilian cultural specificity. This narrative has a fundamentally pedagogical objective; it addresses an internal audience, telling the Brazilians the story of their origin and that it should be valued and kept. Here, again, miscegenation is also employed to characterise the construction of Brazilian civilisation and Brazilian subjectivity.

In relation to miscibility, no other modern coloniser has exceeded or even matched the Portuguese. It was by deliciously mixing with women of colour from the first contact and multiplying themselves in hybrid sons that only a few thousand intrepid machos were able to take possession of very extensive lands and compete with great and numerous peoples in the extension of the colonial possession and in the efficacy of colonial action. (p. 9)

Expectedly, the creative force, the ability and inclination to mix and assimilate, belonged to the coloniser, whose inherent predisposition to miscibility constitute the slightly-tanned Brazilian subject. Thus, even as he follows the prevailing construction of race and refuses the arguments of black's racial inferiority, Freyre still writes Brazilian subjectivity by stressing blacks subordinated position.

The Negro in Brazil, in their relations with culture and with the type of society that has been developed here, should be considered primarily under the criterion of the social and economic history. Of cultural anthropology. From that is impossible — we must insist on this point — separate them from degrading the slave condition, in which most of their best creative and normal tendencies were restrained and other artificial and morbid ones were accentuated. Thus, the African became a decisively pathogenic agent in the midst of Brazilian society ... The Negro was pathogenic, but serving white men; an irresponsible part of a system articulated by others. (p. 321)

Non-European peoples, mostly blacks (native Brazilian were, as in the US,

identified with 'empty' space) are then incorporated into the teleology of the national subject but as mere subjugated collaborators. Accordingly, what became the main instance of racial construction in the Brazilian text, much like the sociological texts from which Freyre drew, still presupposed blacks' racial inferiority. However, rather than produced as an attribute of a separate people, like the US, blackness became an intrinsic characteristic of the nation subjectivity. Blacks' inferiority (and subordination) has been written in the teleological narrative that constitutes Brazilian subjectivity. This specific construction of race had two effects. On the one hand, in that both the spirit and the bodies of the nation encapsulate African culture and physical traits, there is no basis for representing blacks as a separate group. However, precisely because such a construction of race is also premised upon the idea of European superiority that blackness remains a signifier of inferiority in Brazilian imagination, but one which cannot be identified with a specific group.

On the other hand, this construction of race in the Brazilian text produced a specific conception of black femaleness. With the placing of miscegenation at the heart of the national narrative, sex acquires a rather significant place in the text of Brazilianess. In Freyre's texts, gender difference more than adds to the already presupposed superiority of the white coloniser over the subordinate races. Most versions of the Brazilian text argue that this was a necessity given the absence of white women and the easy access to native (and later black) female bodies. It is in Freyre (1987), however, that black female subordination is produced in the same movement that articulates blackness at the core of Brazilian subjectivity. According to Freyre, the promiscuity characterising colonial society resulted from a combination of the male Portuguese uncontrolled lust and the easy access he had to the female slave body. Thus, while the male slave and white women had their sexuality controlled by the patriarchal mechanisms of subordination, the male Portuguese and the female slave appear as the main agents of miscegenation.

The Negro or mulatto women [were] responsible for the precipitation of the erotic life and sexual dissolution of the young Brazilian male. With the same logic one could hold responsible domestic animals, the banana tree, the watermelon ... Almost all of them were the objects upon which the sexual precocity of the young Brazilian man was, and still is, exercised. (p. 371)

The most important effect of this celebration of uncontrolled sexuality is not just that it masks the violence inherent in the social conditions facilitating miscegenation. Because the apology for miscegenation is ultimately a celebration of rape — in which the very existence of consensual sex is rendered unimportant since black female desire is explained by the effects of her subordination — the national text sanctions the idea that the black (and mulatto) female body is a sort of collective (male) property, in respect to which basic (patriarchal) moral rules do not apply. The sexual objectification of the black female is here celebrated as a national treasure. The effects of such a construction upon black female subjectivity have yet to be examined. But there are identifiable immediate consequences. On the one hand, the black Brazilian

woman has constantly to negotiate the assumption of her faulty morality and powerlessness — her blackness ultimately writes her as solely responsible for her own subordination. On the other hand, as the celebrated instrument of miscegenation, the black female body can also be (positively) used to escape racial subordination. This is more easily seen in the controversial figure of the *mulata* (a sort of exotic dancer), a profession for which the only required qualification is to be a physically attractive black female.

What the writings of Brazilian subjectivity suggest is the specific articulation of race, nation, and gender that characterises the Brazilian construction of race and strategies of racial subordination. Moreover, they suggest that this construction is not better or worse than that prevailing in the United States; it is different. And this difference should be the point of departure in any analysis of racial politics in Brazil.

Facts of Blackness:

Racial Politics in Brazil and the Crossroads of Black Subjectivity

Why has there been no social movement generated by Afro-Brazilians in the post-World War II period that corresponds to social movements in the United States, Sub-Saharan Africa, and the Caribbean? (Hanchard, 1994, p. 6)

Hanchard's question has been central, as observed earlier in this paper, to students of comparative race relations, and more importantly (from a self-interested point of view) to those of us involved in the project of fostering racial emancipation in Brazil. Ironically, Hanchard's problematic effort to answer the question also provides important clues for addressing this issue. Just as his rather explicit formulation of the problem, Hanchard's solution to the puzzle indicates that his analysis of racial politics in Brazil replicates the 'ethnocentric universality' characterising sociological studies of racial subordination in Brazil. He writes that '[a] process of racial hegemony has effectively neutralised racial identification among nonwhites to a large degree, making it an improbable point of mass mobilisation among Afro-Brazilians' (p. 6). Thus, according to Hanchard, the ideology of racial democracy explains the problems faced by the black social movement, namely,⁹

The absence of racial consciousness among Afro-Brazilians and, as a consequence, the non-politicisation of racial inequality by those who suffer most from it, and the continued discrimination against blacks in employment and education. (p. 74)

The lack of 'race consciousness' among black Brazilians explains for Hanchard the absence of significant black mobilisation in Brazil.¹⁰ Similarly to Winant, Hanchard not only forgets that this concept of 'race consciousness' emerged in a multiracial social space where racial separation is the main strategy of racial subordination, but also bases his analysis on a fundamentally repressive conception of power. He also forgets that African American's 'race consciousness' (honestly I prefer the term subjectivity) emerged out of a

particular condition of racial subordination. As a result, this particular construction of black subjectivity surreptitiously colonises his analysis of racial mobilisation in Brazil, as the most advanced (the 'true') embodiment of an abstract black (racial) subjectivity. Consequently, Hanchard cannot but claim that racial subordination in Brazil is the working of an over-powerful racial ideology, which in hiding from blacks their own blackness paradoxically denies that which premises modern constructions of race, that is, that racial traits produce culturally distinct peoples.

It is indeed quite tempting to reproduce the conventional wisdom in sociological studies and to portray Brazil as a puzzle. A multiracial society where manifestations of 'race prejudice' and acts of 'racial discrimination', and high levels of inequalities between blacks and whites co-exist with a construction of race which rejects racial separation and celebrates racial harmony. However, such a portrait has proved itself insufficient to account for the problems faced by black Brazilian activism. What lies at the core of the problem of black mobilisation in Brazil, I believe, is that in producing emancipatory texts with which to write black subjectivity in Brazil, the conventional view has drawn from the very texts against which the Brazilian specificity has been written, the same texts that in their forgetfulness produce the Brazilian situation as a paradox.

It should be recalled the 1970s did not inaugurate racial politics in Brazil. Historical studies of black mobilisation in Brazil have identified the existence of black institutions and a black press (see Fernandes, [1964] 1978 and Andrews, 1992b). In a fashion similar to some institutions among African Americans at the turn of the century, these organisations both denounced racial discrimination and concentrated their activities in the promotion of racial uplifting (see Maciel, 1985). In the 1930s, a major black political organisation, the Frente Negra Brasileira, was created constituting itself as a political party, which was dissolved along with other existing political parties by virtue of the 1930 Revolution. With the creation of the Teatro Experimental do Negro in the mid-1940s, black activism in Brazil would also participate in the virtually global black oppositional discourse, whose political and rhetorical strategies were provided by the second wave of Pan-Africanism and Negritude movement (Nascimento, 1980). Despite local variations, it can be said that the global emancipatory discourse emerging in this period has incorporated the fundamental premises of a modern construction of race. Central to its appropriation of race were the nineteenth century initial construction of race as a category which identifies distinct collectivities, and its sociological formulation that posed that racial differences provided the basis for political and economic subordination in modernity. Both constructions were central to the worldwide struggle against colonialism and racial exclusion that mobilised subordinated groups everywhere, in the Americas, Asia, and Africa, providing a common basis of their subordination, but also allowing the formulation of narratives of being, 'teleologies of racially subordinate subjects', which made it possible to establish connection across continental and national boundaries.

The 1970s black movement in Brazil not only incorporated the rhetoric of the negritude and Pan-African movements, but like black mobilisation in South

Africa, it was influenced also by recent developments in racial politics in the United States (Nascimento, 1989). Here is a classic case of selective incorporation. Enjoying civil rights since emancipation, the central issues for black activism in Brazil were existing racial inequality and discrimination, which according to the prevailing construction of race derived from class distinctions. Also central in this phase of black activism was the incorporation of the conclusions sociological studies of race in Brazil produced in the early 1970s to support the claim that Brazil was not a racial democracy (Monteiro, 1991). Applying the frameworks developed in the 1950s in the United States (mostly studies on racial stratification and mobility),¹¹ the studies of racial subordination in Brazil concluded that race did operate as a mechanism of social exclusion. What these various sources of black Brazilian emancipatory discourse share is the crucial presupposition of separation (physical and cultural) against which the Brazilian construction of race was produced. It is this common presumption, I believe, that constitutes the core of the problem of racial mobilisation in Brazil.

Hanchard suggests that the main weakness of the black Brazilian social movement is its inability to *convince* black Brazilians that Brazil is a *racially unequal* society and that they indeed have a separate racial identity. I suggest, by contrast, that the problems faced by the black Brazilian movement derives less from the grip of an all-powerful racial ideology than from our effort to incorporate rhetorical strategies formulated elsewhere. To understand such incorporation would require a discussion of how modern categories of knowledge and being also provide the basis for the writing of emancipatory (ontological) narratives. Nevertheless, while such a line of investigation would contribute to the understanding of the black Brazilian movement's construction of race, the most pressing question of understanding black Brazilian subjectivity would remain unaddressed. In other words, it seems to me that the answers to the problem of racial mobilisation should be sought in an investigation of how the Brazilian text itself enables the articulation of a black (subordinate) subjectivity.

Black Subjectivity is ...

When you are invited to go up the plaza of the Jorge Amado Foundation, to see from above the line of police officers beating up black crooks and mulatto thieves, and the others who are almost-white treated as blacks. Only to show to the others, almost-blacks, who are all almost black; and to the almost-white as poor as the blacks, how blacks, poor, mulattos, and the almost-white-almost-black because too poor, are treated.¹² ('Haiti' by Caetano Velloso)

Following the unfolding of the Michael Jackson affair in Rio, I also wondered whether it was possible to address what produces the space separating the black movement's rhetoric (and my own) and the construction of race prevailing among my relatives, the Santa Marta residents, and the majority of black Brazilians. To argue that such a gap is due to black activists' distinct (more

accurate) reading of the national text contributes little to the solution to the problem. This is tantamount to arguing that racial segregation enabled the emergence of a separate black community in the United States, whose cultural and social particularities render most African Americans unable to participate in mainstream society. That is to suggest that subordinate collectivities are solely responsible for their condition.

It seems to me that to understand discursive mechanisms of racial subordination it is necessary to read race as but one of several categories informing the construction of modern subjectivities. I believe that only by examining how race combines with nation, gender and class in the construction of black subjectivity is it possible to grasp strategies of racial subordination, the necessary step for formulating more efficient strategies of emancipation. Black subjectivities, I believe, are produced at the intersection of the various texts which deploy modern categories such as race, gender, the nation, and class, in attempts to produce the particularities of multiracial social spaces in different moments of their histories, and to construct the 'being' of the collectivities inhabiting these spaces.

To develop this argument, I decided to read, once again, a selection of life histories published in the early 1980s.¹³ This decision was premised upon the idea that my distance in relation to the text — since the content, direction and editing of the interviews were not informed by my own framing of the issue — combined with the fact that I somehow 'know' the subjects, either directly (people I know personally) or indirectly (lives that resembled those of people I know very closely), would place me, as a reader, in a somewhat privileged position.

Indeed, when re-reading this book (Costa, 1982), in the United States, as I switched between the statements of black activists and non-activists, I did not find myself in the same uncomfortable position of in-betweenness that I had experienced in the 1995 trip back home. It was as if to be in the US and being black *here* had given me an advantage of seeing myself through the eyes of the 'Others' — blacks and whites in this case. It seemed to have helped me to close the gap and to perceive that I with my fellow activists are more 'black Brazilians' than we are led to believe when at home. I want to share this with the reader, if possible.

I used to go out with the people in the neighbourhood but I confess I was a bit shy. I did not attempt to date girls because I had two problems: to be black and to deliver flowers. I saw my condition, as black, having a non-skilled job, and knowing that I could do something much better than that. So, I was ashamed ... At this time I did not have consciousness, as I have today, of what it means to be black, to accept the word black, because when I thought or heard the word, the immediate identification was with vagabond, deprecating things. I liked it when people called me *escurinho*, *pretinho*, *neguinho* ...¹⁴ There is no doubt I was ashamed of being black and on top of that to deliver flowers. Only now, though ... I have this thing in mind: It never came to me to notice that there was a much greater barrier at that time: my inability to accept

my identity as black. At the bottom, my shame came more from being black than a delivery boy. (pp. 22–23, Januario Garcia, age 38, photographer, black activist)

In both Macedo Sobrinho and Nova Holanda [slums], I have never felt this problem of race with anybody. White and black, everybody always respected and helped each other ... Everybody gets along well. When I was young, I had a *clarinha* (light-skinned) girlfriend, and nobody in her family came to me to say something. Also I have shaken hands with important people ... When I delivered for drugstores, since I was always clean, with my hair well cut, the rich ladies wanted me to do the delivery for them ... My mother ... used to say that we have to put the foot where we can reach, and I always remembered that. Not everyone can be Pele. To change now only if I win the lottery ... talking about that let me go and play. (p. 117–18, Emanuel Batista de Andrade, age 42, street cleaner, non-activist)

In their youth these men had quite similar lives. However, while the first became an internationally known photographer, the second, who had only four years of formal education, remained a non-skilled, low-paid worker, living in a shanty-town (*favela*). In Januario's account one can notice a rupture: he speaks as someone who has passed from a period in which he had no racial consciousness to one where he realised the meaning of being black. In another moment of his narrative he attributes this transformation to his going back to school and moving to a middle-class neighbourhood in Rio de Janeiro. In these places, he took part in meetings with (black and white) people involved in black activism, where they discussed the situation in the United States (early 1970s) and the independence struggles in the Portuguese speaking African countries.

A conventional reading of these accounts would emphasise that Emanuel is unaware of the existence of racial subordination in Brazil. He insists that there is no 'problem of race', that he has always been treated well by whites, and rich people. However, in three moments he lets us perceive that he does have a sense of the limitations his blackness imposes upon his life. First, he says that the rich old ladies liked him because he was clean; second he says that not everybody can be Pele (Edson A. Nascimento), the world famous Brazilian soccer player; and finally, he cites his mother saying that one should not desire what one cannot get. Here, one observes two distinct levels of perception of racialisation: the realisation that a black person must avoid stereotypes such as uncleanness to be well received, and that few blacks have upward mobility, recognising the limited opportunities of black Brazilians. Nevertheless, this realisation also comes with the recognition that there is no racial conflict or racial separation in Brazil.

What distinguishes the two men is that while Januario has become an active member of the black movement, Emanuel has not. The former, through his activism, has acquired a distinct perception of the predicament of black Brazilians, a 'race consciousness'; the latter, like the majority of black Brazilians, has not.

There in Jequié [Bahia], the city where I was born ... the teacher used to humiliate lots of people because we were *pretos* ... Then I noticed the difference because my skin was not like that of the majority of the people I knew. I felt that the *preto* people did not have a chance, they were humiliated. Now, yes, everybody is equal, there is no difference ... Now, one thing I say: I was never ashamed of being *preta*. In my family everybody was always very honest, everybody always worked. I am proud, because I have seen a lot of white people worse than people of colour ... When I came to Rio, one of my bosses, a Portuguese woman, liked me a lot. She always complimented me: 'She is *escurinha*, but she is a very nice *escurinha*, very good. I do not have her as a employee, I have her as a daughter'. That was so much so, that I left her house to get married ... When she married a daughter, I went to the wedding party with a new dress she had made for me. At the party I also stayed in the living-room. And she was always saying: 'She is *preta* indeed, but she is a respectable *preta*, a *preta* who does not shame anybody'. Of course I was proud. (pp. 124–25, Alda Cerqueira Santos, open market saleswoman, age 53, non-activist)

Alda's emphasis on respectability suggests that the national discourse is gendered in a rather disturbing fashion. The national discourse celebrates rape, as it postulates that the black female body was fundamental in the production of the national (racial) type; the female, the *mulata*, has become an object of national celebration, signifying both the coloniser's previous sexual deeds and the necessary availability of the black female body. This precludes any possibility of conceiving the black woman as the guardian of the values of a separate black community. Moreover, since white womanhood is protected, mostly because of the de-sexualisation of the black male (in the national text, miscegenation is always seen as resulting from sexual relations between the black female slave and the white male coloniser) the black female body is represented as necessarily available, without any alternative (racially specific patriarchal) moral ground for justifying its protection or appropriation. To be a respectable *preta*, however, assures such protection according to the all-inclusive norms of the national discourse: a respectable *preta* is but a respectable Brazilian woman.

And yet, what explains the gap between Emanuel's and Alda's perception of their subordination, and Januario's rhetoric? The immediate response is 'racial consciousness'. But again, what is 'racial consciousness'? In what ways does it differ from 'class consciousness', for example? Emanuel and Alda are members of the Brazilian working-class, thus they could also be characterised as lacking 'class consciousness'? Is there any basic distinction between racial subordination and class subordination? I would say, yes and no. Both are products of specific social, political and historical dynamics, but they are also different.

When asking these questions, I have in mind Spivak's (1994) discussion in 'Can the Subaltern Speak?'. Like post-colonial intellectuals, black Brazilian activists also perform a kind of epistemic violence. In this case, the silencing

comes from the incorporation by black activists of an aspect of racial subordination that is not present in the prevailing Brazilian construction of race. In Emanuel's and Alda's narratives, one is able to identify a distinct subjective position. Not articulated with the acknowledgment of a separate racial identity, it reads the negative meanings attributed to blackness in Brazil in moral terms. From their position of subordination, Emanuel and Alda inform us of the negative moral characteristics attributed to blacks: uncleanness, laziness, questionable morality, ugliness, poverty, slavery. When putting themselves in the position of subjects, Emanuel and Alda emphasise the fact that they do not possess these attributes.

The articulation of race in moral terms is perhaps the key for black Brazilian subjectivity. It is reflected in the multipolar system of racial (colour) classification, which emerges out of a construction of race where racial division is not a presupposition. It places racial differentiation in terms of phenotype rather than origin in accordance with the view that Brazilians of any colour share a common (mixed) racial origin. In Brazil, a black person (or a white person for that matter) seldom uses the terms black (*preto[al]/negro[al]*) and white (*branco[al]*) for self-identification, or to identify someone who is close to them. The extreme categories — *preto/branco* (black/white) — are usually used to refer to a third person. The Brazilian style of racial subordination has produced a nation where blacks and whites live in 'racial harmony', and it is guaranteed by a well-constructed system of racial classification (though it may seem aleatory to untrained minds), in which the extreme categories are seldom employed in exchanges between persons of different skin colour (see Pacheco, 1986 and Maggie, 1989). To name someone black, without the qualification that this person does not share negative meanings associated with blackness, is highly offensive. However, since all Brazilians share a common African origin, this form of picking out a person is not an offence to the group to which they belong: it selects certain members of the group to which everyone, blacks and whites, belongs, namely, the Brazilian people.

This brings us back to the appropriation of miscegenation in the Brazilian national discourse. More than in any other instance, it speaks of a mixed racial 'Spirit' to constitute national subjects. In the United States racial subjectivities are produced in abstract terms — through the reconstitution of a (racial) line of descent, and via the view that blacks have a separate culture. In Brazil, by contrast, racialisation focuses on the individual's body. Bodies are separated and categorised. The soul is 'undivided'; it is Brazilian (national). Accordingly, racial (actually colour) categorising in Brazil focuses on external physical characteristics to classify someone as more or less black or white. In the United States and in the colonial situation, the racialised Other was defined as part of a distinct group; in Brazil there is a laundry-list of traits that serve to classify a person in situations of contact. Thus, it is the body that needs to be known, to be described, to be spoken of endlessly. Only through this inexhaustive, continuous definition of the amount of blackness a body displays is it possible to separate races. Yet, the 'Other' is the 'Other-within', within anybody, any-body; any body is more or less black, more or less white, more or less both.

In short, different from what Bhabha (1994) proposes in relation to the

colonised, hybridity in this case is not the constitution of the 'Other' as a metonym or a metaphor of the I. Objectified in the figure of the mulatto, the Brazilian racial/national type, the *mulato(a)* is not a bad copy, a mimicry; is the real thing, the historical subject. Whatever departs from it is considered problematic, dangerous, and powerless. Neither fetish nor narcissistic object. In the Brazilian national discourse, the only 'Otherness' possible is the socio-economic one, to which race is reduced when one speaks of the inequalities between the 'more-white' and the 'more-black' Brazilian (bodies).

... but the Facts of Blackness

Being attentive, we conclude that we live in a double or triple society. As it imposes itself on your mind that it is a white society, that your behaviour should follow the white standards, you as preto annul yourself, you have to live another life, floating without any basis to land, without reference and parameters of what should be your peculiar way ... To be black is a given identity by those who subordinated us. To have a different future it is necessary that we think about ourselves human beings, and believe that the world is there for all human beings to live in it. We have contributed a lot in terms of culture, we should not be afraid of showing to whomever that we were capable of living under the whip for four centuries, we want to project this experience to the future, to the new generations to contribute to a world ... without domination. (p. 57, Maria Beatriz Nascimento, age 39, historian and researcher, activist)

Nascimento speaks from the awareness that racial subordination in Brazil leaves no place for the articulation of a separate black identity. Whether explicitly defending race as a basis for collective identity, whether celebrating Africanity, one will always be reminded that blackness and African cultural heritage belong to the text of national subjectivity. A black woman whose 'being' has been written in a text in which miscegenation brings race and gender together so as to situate the origin of the nation in (the womb of) the twice violated black female body, Beatriz's trajectory signifies yet another crucial dimension of black subjectivity.

Black, young, and gifted, in the mid-1970s Nascimento was most celebrated of the up-and-coming black Brazilian intellectuals and activists. When I finally met her in the mid-1980s, she was all but completely alienated from the intellectual and political conditions under which my own academic and political trajectory started. In our conversations, I sensed that much of what happened in her life in the previous ten years had contributed to her virtual abandonment of political and academic activities. Not that she did not participate in conferences, marches, and so on, but her posture in these events was usually that of a distant observer. Such distance was also reflected in her rather challenging opinions on the paths followed by black activists and intellectuals. On the part of her interlocutors, I also sensed a distance which usually reflected more a condemnation of her personal life than a real engagement with her,

usually sharp, interventions. My reading of this distance is obviously biased. But, it is now clear to me that it can only be understood if her personal tragedy is related to the gendered and racialised dynamics of Brazilian society.

Celebrated in the press as the most promising historian of her generation, Beatriz never managed to complete her research about communities of runaway slaves, *quilombos*. Fighting with alcoholism and other psychological problems, she did, however, collaborate on one of the most important documentaries on Afro-Brazilian culture and political activism, *Ori*. In our last conversation, which took place in the same bar where she was murdered a few years later, she told me that there was yet much to be done but that was a task for my generation; hers (she is among the pioneers of the 1970s black movement) had lost the grasp of the fundamental issues surrounding racial politics in Brazil. The disregard for the crucial economic and social problems affecting poor blacks were distancing the black social movement from its real objective.

In a sad irony, the circumstances of her death put her very near to the impoverished black Brazilians. Shot during an argument in a working-class bar, by a man who had just been released from prison, Beatriz's academic and political accomplishments were overshadowed by her race and gender. In the trial, the defence lawyer portrayed her as a drunk black woman, whose faulty behaviour more than justified his client's violence. After her death, the once black, Afro-Brazilian, Beatriz was re-constructed as a *preta*, but unlike Alda, she was a deviant, a 'non-respectable *preta*': a woman who used to have drinks in a bar, alone with men of dubious past.

In its difference, her abandonment of political and academic activity, and her later placement at the margins of Brazilian subjectivity, Beatriz's trajectory resembles that of other black intellectuals whose lives were also marked by a critical perception of how blackness had been constructed in their respective societies. Here I have in mind W.E.B. Du Bois and Franz Fanon. When located in time and space, their reflections upon their 'blackness' also reveal the fundamental connection between race, nation, class, and gender in the construction of racialised subjects.

Reflecting upon their lives, I was convinced that our shared blackness has been traversed by the particular effects of specific nation, gender, and class conditions. Slavery and colonialism composed the historical ground upon which race, gender and nationness have written the various versions of black subjectivity. However, in each case it is constructed from within a specific articulation of the categories of race, gender, class, and the nation, and according to historical and social conditions of a given multiracial social space. That intrinsically multiple quality of black subjectivity demands attention to the specific historical and discursive developments informing a society's strategies of racial subordination. However, because race has been the common discursive basis for worldwide subordination of nonwhites throughout the history of modernity, the study of any specific strategy of racial subordination must account for its placing in the global historical and discursive context in which the histories of modern societies and the biographies of racialised subjects have been written. Only then, will we be able to formulate insurgent

counterdiscourses, which will be at the same time truly non-ethnocentric theoretical and political interventions.

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Notes

1. I would like to thank Roland Robertson, Iris Young, and David Theo Goldberg for their comments (and suggestions) on earlier versions of this paper; and Philip Mabry for raising challenging (but crucial) questions and his careful editing of the various versions of the text.
2. *Feijoada* is a typical Brazilian meal, which includes black beans cooked with salted beef, salted and smoked pork parts (feet, ears, etc.), rice, fried cassava flour, and sautéed collard greens.
3. For reviews of the nineteenth century theorising on race, see for instance Stocking (1968), Stepan (1982), and Montagu (1964).
4. Read, for instance, the discussion in the introduction where the authors state that 'the determination of racial categories is thus an intensively political process' (p. 3). It is clear that what is being called political is the process of categorisation (giving name to certain physical differences) rather than the fact that the idea that certain physical traits identify certain groups as race was itself a political product.
5. A similar argument is developed by Butler (1993) regarding approaches to gender. 'The relation between culture and nature presupposed by some models of gender 'construction', she argues, 'implies a culture or an agency of the social which acts upon a nature, which is itself presupposed as a passive surface, outside the social and yet its necessary counterpart' (p. 4).
6. Unfortunately I do not have enough room to develop this argument, which is more elaborated in my dissertation. However, there are a great number of works dealing with how African Americans have been constructed as the 'Other-within' (for an interesting analysis of the strategies deployed in this construction in the early decades of the twentieth century see Robinson, 1997, and of how African Americans at the turn of the century responded to this construction, see Gaines, 1993). Moreover, the very insistence in the United States on defining race as a white-black issue indicates that the constructed differences between these two groups are central to American subjectivity. What seems to be the problem is that African Americans are the only racial group who have been present in American space since the beginning of the country's history. Yet, in the teleologies of American subjectivity, this history has been written so as to exclude their presence.
7. This argument is based upon a reading of Hegel's formulation of the notion of absolute knowledge, which according to Foucault (1994) and Habermas (1995) provides the grounds for modern culture and epistemology.
8. The project of whitening the Brazilian population was not only a rhetorical

- strategy, it was translated into a series of state and private initiatives to stimulate European immigration (Skidmore, 1993 and Azevedo, 1988).
9. Hanchard identifies only two instances in black mobilisation of the 1970s, instances that presented a stronger potential for black mobilisation: the *black soul* and the *Movimento Negro Unificado-MNU* (Unified Black Movement). Moreover, it should be noted that this work also attempts to address the problem of the effectiveness of stressing culture in projects of racial emancipation. However, while Hanchard's general criticism has a place in the debate about cultural politics, his use of the Brazilian case as a basis to develop it is rather problematic.
 10. Hanchard also sees this problem as resulting from the fact that, in Brazil, unlike the United States, Great Britain or South Africa, 'there is much greater confusion over the phenotypical category *negro* [black]' (p. 15).
 11. This was possible because Census and National Household Surveys classify the population into the categories whites, black and pardos (mixed race), and yellow.
 12. Caetano Veloso, Haiti, *Tropicalia II*.
 13. I analyse excerpts of interviews published in Costa (1982). In this book, Costa transcribes the reflections of black Brazilians about their lives and about racism in Brazil.
 14. Brazilian colour or racial categories such as *escurinho(a)*, *neguinho(a)*, and *pretinho(a)* are all mild ways of referring to somebody's race or colour. They are usually considered non-offensive categories, while *preto(a)* (black) and *negro(a)* (black) carries stronger negative meanings. This last category, however, is a politically constructed category. For as much as I know, the majority of black activists in Brazil have not incorporated categories such as African-Brazilian (*africano-brasileiro(a)*), and few use the term Afro-Brazilian (*afro-brasileiro(a)*). This is also (one but not the main reason) why I use the term 'black' in this text, another being that it is more economic than the 136 categories collected in the 1976 National Household Survey.

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