

White Hegemony in the Land of Carnival

**The (Apparent) Paradox of
Racism and Hybridity in Brazil**

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for Adela

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Abstract

This dissertation argues that racism in Brazil is largely a product of the Eurocentrism that presides over the formation and formulation of Brazil(ianness). The ideological construction of the nation on notions of identity and difference rooted in a Eurocentric definition of modernity has translated into an epistemological division between modern subjects (the Colonial Self: the Portuguese) and subjects of modernity (the Colonised Others: the Indian and the African). That is, between subjects and objects. The objectification of the Others can be found within the realm of the social (the Other as social object: the Slave), the cultural (the Other as cultural object: the Exotic), and the biological (the Other as sexual object: the Erotic). This epistemological division enabled the hierarchisation of differences between the Civilised Self and the Savage Other(s) and the racist (re)invention of Brazil in the 19th century.

This dissertation re-examines racism in Brazil by means of the analysis of the three historical events that have come to define the nation (Discovery, Independence and Abolition) as well as the so-called essence of the nation (Hybridity). The analysis reveals that the reinvention of Brazil as a hybrid nation has not eliminated the hierarchy of differences. On the contrary, the celebration of hybridity has served to obscure the largely exploitative character of the processes of cultural hybridity [*mestiçagem* or transculturation] and biological hybridity [*miscegenação* or miscegenation] and to mask secular prejudices and discrimination against the Indian and African Others. In Brazil, hybridity still operates within the Eurocentric discourse of Brazilianness that incorporated the Indian and African Others as objects or, at best, dependent subjects in the formation and formulation of Brazil(ianness). The corollary of this is that without unthinking and undoing the Eurocentrism that informs the national imagination there is little that hybridity can do to undermine racism and white hegemony in Brazil.

Declaration

This thesis contains no material that has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text of the thesis.

I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being made available for photocopying and loan.

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Notes on Language and Bibliography

I have opted not to use italics in some instances where their use is conventional or common practice, in particular, when mentioning historical events, ideological movements, or cultural manifestations specific to Brazil, and thus better referred to in Portuguese (i.e. Guerra dos Tamoios, Guerra dos Mascates, Inconfidência Mineira and Inconfidência Bahiana; Quilombismo, Sanitarismo and Trabalhismo; Candomblé, Batuque and Capoeira). Similarly, I have opted not to use italics when referring to certain figures and concepts that appear often in the text (i.e. mameluco, mascate, mazombo, caboclo, bandeirante, mulata, brecha camponesa, quilombo, batuque and ingênuo). In this case, I have opted for using italics *only* the first time these concepts and figures are mentioned in a chapter. The rationale behind this decision is to avoid cluttering the text with conventional italics which would detract from the visual impact of the *intentional* use of italics used to highlight a specific point.

I have also opted to use capital letters in some instances where their use is *not* conventional to differentiate between the common use of certain expressions (in which case they appear in lower case) and their use as concepts or institutions, that is, as words with a very specific meaning and tied to a particular place and time—as in the difference between president and the President (of Brazil). This applies to terms such as discovery/Discovery, independence/Independence, abolition/Abolition, modernity/Modernity, others/Others, and a few others.

Finally, I must note here that all translations from the Portuguese (and the Spanish) are mine, unless otherwise stated; although I owe a great deal of gratitude to Adela for her assistance in this matter. I have often relied on existing English translations of the quotes included here, but I have always made a point of consulting the original Portuguese (and Spanish) texts and almost invariably produced slightly alternate translations that, in my view, convey a more faithful (even if not always a more literal) representation of the meaning of the original text. Even then, I wish to extend my gratitude to all those authors whose translations have helped me come up with my own.

I have decided to list all sources in one single alphabetical list to facilitate their identification, although there is a wide variety of sources consulted for this dissertation. These include: primary sources (i.e. original texts, some documents, and plenty of newspaper and magazine articles, of which only those referenced in the text are listed in the bibliography), secondary sources, and notes and observations from visits to several museums and exhibitions. The latter are not listed in the bibliography, but indicated with footnotes.