

because she does not come up to the popular specifications as to complexion. In a word, in Brazil the mere possession of a white skin does not entitle a man to superior civil rights and opportunities, nor does an increased pigmentation condemn its owner to the status of a pariah.

Occasionally, an attempt is made in Brazil to establish a standard of whiteness to which all aspirants to a life of the greatest usefulness must conform. Generally, if not always, these attempts to divide the Brazilian people are made by foreign residents. For instance, the son of a colored teacher was not long ago refused admittance to a college conducted by Belgian priests. I do not know how this affair ended, but the action of the rector of the school was severely criticized by the newspapers. A striking contrast to the attitude of the Belgian friar is the fact that, recently, one of the largest and wealthiest churches in Rio was crowded with people attending a mass of intercession for the early triumph of the ideals of the allies, including, of course, those valiant defenders of the rights of oppressed peoples who used to cut off the hands of the natives on the rubber plantations in the Congo. Most of the worshipers at that mass were altogether white and many of them were distinguished foreigners. The celebrant was a colored man, who when he is not saying mass or singing in the choir of a church, conducts a school whose students are nearly all white.

Americans, of course, are not slow in attempting to establish caste discrimination, especially when they first come here. A friend of mine told me, shortly after he arrived here, that the Negroes ought to be separated from the whites in public places. I do not know whether he got that notion so much from having resided in Alabama as from reading *The Outlook*, which is ashamed to tell the American public that in trying to show how superior they are to the "niggers," white people have disgraced their civilization by committing acts of savagery unexcelled by the lowest tribes in the heart of Africa. It does not mind labeling the colored people of the States by characterizing as "envy" the natural desire of a decent man to sit in a clean railway carriage, or to enter a restaurant without fear of buying a steak fried with spit or sharing the fate of the colored Georgian who, in neutral Chicago, was killed for the crime of unwittingly seating himself at the side of a Texan at a public lunch counter.

I got the Chicago story from an eyewitness, the son of a Confederate officer, who told it, with the greatest sangfroid, at lunch in a Brazilian

## A Letter from Brazil, 1918

José Clarana

*The following letter published in a 1918 edition of The Crisis, the official magazine of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, contains a Brazilian's critique of race relations in the United States. References to Texas, and particularly to the city of Waco, figure prominently in the letter. Waco was the site of a grisly lynching in 1916, known as the "Waco Horror." Coincidentally, Gilberto Freyre, the great memorializer of Brazilian race relations, began studying at Waco's Baylor University in 1918. Furthermore, Freyre's older brother had previously attended the same school. Was José Clarana a pen name for the young Freyre or his brother? Regardless of the answer, Freyre certainly came face-to-face with Jim Crow in Waco. One can only guess how that confrontation influenced his later, seminal works on Brazilian race relations.*

In acceding to your request that I send you "one or two letters about the color problems in Brazil," I keep within the limitations of my capacity, and comply with your admonition that I "make them as short as possible," by writing one letter with the simple statement that there is no color problem in Brazil.

By way of explanation, however, I must add that this does not mean that a black skin is an open sesame to any and every drawing room, and a shibboleth of easy access to the heart of any maiden and the purse of her father. It means, for one thing, that a man is not necessarily black because his skin is not so white as somebody else's skin. In the terms of the "social equality" that the telegrams say that German spies have been trying to obtain for the not-quite-white-enough in Alabama, it means that the color of the pelts in a drawing room is the exclusive business of the people who wear them, and that if the son of some gentleman violates the servant girl, there is no law to prevent him from marrying her

boardinghouse. I mention it here in the hope that some of the editors, politicians, and countinghouse anthropologists who make the color question in the United States, and who are really responsible for crimes against civilization and against the good name of the United States, like the Waco Horror, may have another concrete example of the effect of the "social equality" humbug in a land where nearly everyone has some learning, but too many of the people have only enough to enable them to read a newspaper.

Perhaps one reason for the absence of a color question in the countries of South America, where there is any great variation in the color of the inhabitants, is the fact that there are not so many people who can read as in the United States, but proportionately, more persons who do more than just read, because they have more time, let us say. One of the thinking readers of Brazil and unquestionably one of the greatest intellects of all America, Rui Barbosa, in speaking of slavery and its consequences in this country, says: "For three generations we were free, prosperous and rich at the cost of the oppression of our fellow-men. We are today undergoing the great expiation which never fails, which does not pardon historic outrages and capital crimes against humanity."

The fact that slavery was a crime against humanity and not merely an economic mistake is, I think, something that no important public man in the United States would admit without reserve. In Brazil, it is the essential immorality of the institution, the inherent injustice to its victims, that is most emphasized. The date of the abolition of slavery, May 13, is duly commemorated as a national holiday, and there is no effort to re-introduce it in any form. Whatever penalties the nation may now be paying for the original error of importing and maintaining African slaves, there is no desire to postpone the day of atonement and increase the sacrifice by aggravating the old offense.

A friend of mine, a very likable fellow in himself, assures me that "the only way to handle an American 'nigger' is to knock him on the head and talk to him about it afterward."

African blood is, perhaps, as plentiful in the States of Bahia and Rio de Janeiro as in Georgia or Texas, but in a country where great statesmen think and feel that the humblest blacks are their *fellow men*, it would not be possible for white men to drag a man through the streets, bleeding from head to foot from the nails and knives thrust into him, burn him, still living, and wear his dead teeth as charms to "keep the 'nigger' in his place."

Brazilians are very religious, but they are not quite that superstitious. Among them, everyone finds his place naturally. If one can afford to travel in a first-class public conveyance, no one will attempt to make him go second class and pay first-class fare. If a man wants a cup of coffee or a glass of milk or cane juice, which are the most popular beverages among the Brazilians—who, by the way, are not prohibited from drinking whiskey—if they want to, no café will refuse to serve him if he is clean and decent. They even serve Americans and Europeans who get drunk, so long as these do not offend other people. When the new minister of foreign affairs, whose policy is to be one of approximation to the United States, embraces the lawyer who makes a public address of Godspeed and presents the minister with a gold pen with which to sign his first official act, nobody has any objection to make because the minister is white and the orator brown. The newspapers do not even mention the color of the people concerned. They never do, except sometimes, in reporting civil statistics, accidents, and crimes. In such cases, the person is not called black if the skin is not black. Whether white or mixed, the color is mentioned only once, parenthetically, for identification, and not used to substitute proper nouns and pronouns, in a manifest effort to associate complexion with crime, as in the two-inch paragraph I once cut from the *New York Times*, which contained nine references to the color of a man accused of a commonplace crime. The man, of course, was a Negro, more or less.

Nobody wastes any time in the Republic of the Southern Cross in trying to determine the moral and intellectual potentialities of a people by skin color or facial configuration. In this country, a man's accomplishments are the measure of his ability. Even before the complete abolition of slavery, the greatest statesman of the Empire was a mulatto. A black of the deepest dye was a commanding figure in journalism. Today, there are men of Negro blood in the national and state legislatures, representing citizens of any and all hues. One of the most important diplomatic representatives of Brazil would be called a Negro in law and a "nigger" by custom in the United States. In short, in every walk of life, from the highest and most useful callings to the humble and unproductive one of begging and the less honorable but less prevalent one of stealing, Brazilians are engaged, without let or hindrance, purely because of their own or their grandmothers' color.

But withal, white civilization is still supreme, and is constantly increasing its power and influence, for it is supported by the national conscience

of a people passionately devoted to the practice of liberty and justice within their own borders and among their fellow men. Such a civilization must always endure, for it is only when [German chancellor] Bethman Hollweg declares, "We'll knock Belgians on the head, and then talk to them about it afterward," that Waco becomes Verdun and white civilization commits suicide.

The South American countries have had their Wacos and Verduns, and for this reason, they are not anxious to pay more than they can help of the penalties for wrongs done unto them rather than by them. For 400 years, Europeans, Africans, and American aborigines have toiled together, according to their gifts, to make this continent what it is today. Out of this long experience has been evolved the attitude toward men and citizens of the various countries, which is thus expressed by Don Francisco Garcia Calderón, former minister of Bolivia to the United States, in an essay titled "Pan-Americanism, Past and Future": "The biological notion of race, that internal fatality as inexorable as destiny of old, which is revealed by the cranial line and the color of the skin, is declining in prestige. Sociologists have given up discovering pure blood in confused nations, they do not recognize the hereditary pre-eminence, which used to be attributed to particular ethnic groups; they contest the summary opposition between Indo-Germanic and Semitic which explained, in the mind of ambitious historians, the development of the drama of peoples, their progress and decadence, the construction of empires and philosophies, the mission of Orient and Occident. But we do not abandon the idea of race as the synthesis of the diverse elements of a definite civilization. Religion, art, language, lengthy inhabitation of the same territory, tradition, moral affinities which fix, through the centuries, lasting cultures and unmistakable psychological characteristics."

This idea of race as being synonymous with nation holds true in Brazil. Perhaps, in the Great Republic of the North, the time is not far distant when an American will be no less than an American, no matter what the shape of his head or the color of his skin. And then, when you have no more Wacos, you need fear no Verduns. At least, you will have the satisfaction of knowing that none of the blood and treasure that you would generously spend for the redemption of Belgium is being paid in need-less sacrifice for the slavery that you maintain at home.

## Growing Up Black in Minas Gerais

### *Carolina Maria de Jesus*

*In twentieth-century Brazilian history, virtually no descriptions exist of the lives of poor people. Carolina Maria de Jesus (nicknamed Bitita) was an illegitimate black child, the granddaughter of slaves, who grew up in the 1920s in Sacramento, a small city in Minas Gerais where traditional Roman Catholic values and a rigid class system bestowed on her the status of a social pariah. Her memoirs, written in the 1970s after she briefly achieved fame for publishing her diary of slum life (Child of the Dark), only to fall back into poverty, offer remarkable detail about lower-class life and social relationships. Edited versions of her reminiscences were published in France shortly before her death, in Brazil a decade later, and in English as Bitita's Diary, but the following excerpts, discovered in manuscript form in 1998, reveal a greater degree of torment and offer more thick description than the sanitized, published editions of her autobiography.*

I found some of the old books. . . . When I arrived in Sacramento, my relatives received me with hostility. By now, I was more intelligent and studied their rancorous expressions. I thought: "They didn't miss me." My mother told me that if I came back, I would be sorry. "Didn't I tell you to stay there? I'm not saying this out of a lack of care for you, but it is for your own good. It is very hard for me to watch them ostracize you." Humiliated. . . . I showed them my dresses; my mother thought them pretty. The cloth is from São Paulo. My employer bought it. "Ha. . . . you had an employer? Stop being a liar. You want us to believe you, but I doubt it." I showed her the necklaces. She took the yellow one and left the green one for me. I bought a parasol and noticed that my cousins were envious of my clothing. When they bought clothing, I never was jealous. What I didn't respect was useless vanities. They worked just to buy clothes. They could have, instead, worked to buy a piece of land and construct a small house, the most important thing we can have.

tity: "[You] should defend the Brazilian flag with the same ardor, with the same dedication, as the Japanese soldiers defend their sovereign. What you should not do is interpret 'Yamato damashii' as only linked to the Mikado. . . . If you promise to defend the integrity of the Brazilian fatherland, its institutions and order . . . this is the essence of 'Yamato damashii.'" Put differently, something in the corporal nature of Japanese descent made *nikkei* the most loyal Brazilians possible.

Brazilian society cannot only be understood in terms of blacks and whites. Thousands of nonwhite / nonblack immigrants settled in the country, and many, including large segments of the Arab- and Japanese-descended communities, established themselves in the upper echelons of Brazil's social, economic, and political spheres. Using deeply rooted Brazilian myths about race and culture, members of these groups created a world for their hyphenated ethnicities by reconstructing elite discourse on "whitening" and "miscegenation." In many ways, the hegemony of the elite was broken as the descendants of Arab and Japanese immigrants fought to create a place for themselves as Brazilians.

#### Notes

- 1 Viriato Correia, "O Rei Salomão no Rio Amazonas," in *Album da Colônia Sirio Libanesa no Brasil*, edited by Salomão Jorge (São Paulo: Sociedade Impressora Brasileira, 1948), pp. 471-79.
- 2 Hachiro Fukuhara, "Brazil Founded by Asiatics?" in *Japan Times and Mail*, 26 June 1927; Hachiro Fukuhara, "Nipponese Gets 2,500,000 Acres as a Basis for a Vast Colony," *Japan Times and Mail*, 11 May 1930.
- 3 Plínio Salgado, "Oriente (Impressões de Viagens) 1930," in *Obras Completas*, vol. 18 (São Paulo: Editora das Américas, 1954-1956), p. 307.
- 4 Elias Farhat, in *Dinheiro na Estrada: Uma saga de imigrantes*, edited by Emil Farhat (São Paulo: T. A. Queiroz, 1986), p. 3. Translated into Portuguese by Afonso Nagib Sabbag.

## The Myth of Racial Democracy

### Abdias do Nascimento

The first voice protesting Brazilian racism against nonwhites was Abdias do Nascimento's. A black man born in the small city of Franca in São Paulo state to a mother who made candies to sell and a father who repaired shoes, he worked from the age of six as a delivery boy. He managed to study accounting and later economics, and fought in both the 1930 and 1932 military uprisings. By then, he had become a militant and worked for the betterment of conditions for blacks. After the 1964 military coup, he went into exile, joining the faculty of the State University of New York at Buffalo as well as the University of Ife in Nigeria. He published more than twenty books on racial issues and, in 1994, founded the Negro Experimental Theater in Rio de Janeiro; he is also a painter and poet. In February 1997, Nascimento was elected to the Senate on the ticket of the small Democratic Labor Party. Blunt and outspoken, he was ignored by most Brazilian intellectuals, although those on the Left paid lip service to his criticisms of society. The following statement on race was made by Nascimento in a thematic issue of the left-wing journal *Cadernos Brasileiros* on the eightieth anniversary of the 1888 "Golden Law" abolishing slavery. Nascimento was well aware of the U.S. civil rights movement, and frequently quoted James Baldwin and Martin Luther King as well as Jean-Paul Sartre.

Now that eighty years have passed since the abolition of slavery in Brazil, it is opportune to look objectively at the results of the law of May 13, 1888. Are the descendants of African slaves really free? Where do Brazilian blacks really stand in relation to citizens of other racial origins, at all levels of national life?

More than ten years ago, a reporter from a prominent Rio de Janeiro magazine asked various persons of color to respond to these questions. But the interviews were never published, although the questions obviously remain valid and hold the same significance, because since then

The abolitionist campaign stopped abruptly in 1888. . . . Abolition was a facade: juridical, theoretical, abstract. The ex-slaves were driven to the brink of starvation; they found only disease, unemployment, complete misery. Not only the elites, but all of Brazilian society closed the avenues through which blacks might have survived; they shut off the possibility of a decent, dignified life for the ex-slaves. They created a fabric of slogans about equality and racial democracy that has served to assuage the bad national conscience. Abroad, it presents our country as a model of racial coexistence; internally, the myth is used to keep blacks tricked and docile.

There was a phase during which the condition of blacks awakened the interest of scholars, especially in the Northeast. But although sincere, the intellectuals dealt with black culture as ethnographic material for their literary and academic exercises . . . [when, instead], the situation of blacks cried out for urgent practical action to improve radically their horrible existence . . .

It is a characteristic of our racial democracy myth that it accurately defines a "pathology of normality. . . ." There is no exaggeration here. We remember that Brazilians of dark pigmentation number nearly thirty million. Certain apostles of "whitening" would like to see the extinction of the Negro as an easy way to resolve the problem. . . . The white portion, or the less-Negro population, would continue to monopolize political power, economic power, access to schools, and to well-being, thanks to the legacy of the wretched "Golden Law," which Antonio Callado has correctly dubbed, "The Law of White Magic." Under the law of white magic, the black is as free as any other Brazilian. In practice—without any white or black magic—the Negro is simply this: a racial pariah consigned to the status of a subaltern.

Why should the Negro be the only one to pay for the onus of our "racial paradise"? I stand corrected. The Indian, as well, has been treated in the same way. According to a study by the federal government itself, practices to liquidate indigenous peoples have been employed in the [current] decade of the 1960s. Another mask yanked off the face of our vaunted Brazilian humanism, tempered with compassion and Christian spirit . . .

It is imperative for human dignity and a civic duty for Brazilians to struggle—blacks and whites—to transform the concept of racial democracy into reality. The Negro should organize to take up the promise

deeded to him by history. This should be done without messianism, without hatred or resentment, but firmly and steadfastly in pursuit of the just place to which we are entitled. The Negro should create pressure groups, instruments for direct action. In the process, we will encounter our qualified leaders. Only through dynamic organization will the Negro obtain equality of opportunity and the status of a better life . . . not only for Brazilian blacks, but for all the Brazilian people.

Naturally, anything directed against the status quo runs risks. But Negroes run risks from the instant of their birth. Do not fear the label of "black racist," because the product of intimidation is docility. It is enough for us to know that our cause has integrity, and follows our conscience as democrats and humanists. Our historical experience shows us that antiracist racism is the only path capable of extinguishing the differences between races.

and treated inhumanly. I worked so that you, the younger generation, can be better prepared to fight for our people. You have to do this, because I do not know if I will have enough time to fight until victory is achieved," she said, referring to her more than fifty years of life. She also encourages black women to fight: "we are women and we also have to claim our place in the sun. We have to fight alongside our comrades . . . and we have to organize, even if we are [only] domestic servants."

## The National Day against Racism

### Revista MNU

*Formal protests against racism in Brazilian life have been rare, although groups organized in Salvador (Bahia) and São Paulo during the 1970s. They staged public demonstrations on May 13, the anniversary of the abolition of slavery in 1888, which they called a "national day against racism." Few whites responded to these protests, however, rejecting claims of prejudice by citing Brazil's lack of Jim Crow laws and its nominal achievement of racial democracy. The Movimento Negro Unificado (Unified Movement of Blacks or MNU) published a newspaper, Revista MNU, in which this article appeared in 1981.*

Participating in São Paulo's antiracism campaign, more than 2,000 blacks protested on May 13 [Emancipation Day] in the Largo de Paissandú as well on the steps of the Municipal Theater, in remembrance of [what we have designated] the National Day against Racism. Other protests were held in Belo Horizonte, Salvador, Rio de Janeiro, and Brasília. Many of the speakers criticized the national government and the unemployment problem. "The worst victims of unemployment are us," said one of the members of the national executive committee of the MNU. An open letter distributed to the public asked everyone to look around them, in homes and among friends, to ascertain the gravity of the problems caused by unemployment in Brazil today. "Who does not have one unemployed friend today?" the leaflet asked. Members of the national executive committee also denounced the rising wave of police violence against the black population. "We are being abused psychologically as a part of a police plan to attack our mental condition as the first step in completely dominating us," said Milton Barbosa. Mrs. Geralda Severino, a domestic and the founding member of the association in her category, was roundly applauded when she said that domestics are treated as if they were slaves by Brazilian society. "I have been a maid all of my life

## What Color Are You?

### Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics

This list was drawn up in 1976 by the government agency responsible for taking the census—the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE)—to collect the terms used by people to describe their skin color. Polltakers simply asked people to identify their skin color; the results yielded the 134 different terms listed below. The study was commissioned in response to complaints that the five categories used by the agency—white, black, brown (parda), Indian, or Asian—were insufficient. Several of the expressions on the list describe physical attributes beyond skin color—crioula, for example, and agalegada. Brazilians have always considered such racial characteristics as hair texture, the shape of lips and noses, facial and body shape, as well as pigmentation of skin and hair. In North America, as we have noted, people are “white” or “black,” although African Americans within their own community historically have used dozens of terms for shades of skin color and phenotype, like “high yellow.” In the 1990 census, based on the IBGE’s five terms for skin color, the Brazilian population divided up as follows: 55.3 percent white, 39.3 percent brown, 4.9 percent black, and 0.5 percent Asian; no statistics for Indians were provided. It is interesting that some people described themselves with terms that, when used by others, have pejorative connotations.

1. *Acastanhada* (cashewlike tint; caramel colored)
2. *Agalegada* (an often derogatory term for a Galician; features considered gross and misshapen)
3. *Alva* (pure white)
4. *Alva-escura* (dark or off-white)
5. *Alverenta* (or *aliviero*, “shadow in the water”)
6. *Alvarinta* (tinted or bleached white)
7. *Alva-rosada* (or *jambote*, roseate, white with pink highlights)
8. *Alvinha* (bleached; whitewashed)

9. *Amarela* (yellow)
10. *Amarelada* (yellowish)
11. *Amarela-queimada* (burnt yellow or ochre)
12. *Amarelota* (yellowed)
13. *Amorenada* (tannish)
14. *Avermelhada* (reddish, with blood vessels showing through skin)
15. *Azul* (bluish)
16. *Azul-marinho* (deep bluish)
17. *Baiano* (Bahian or ebony)
18. *Bem-branca* (very white)
19. *Bem-clara* (parchmentlike; translucent)
20. *Bem-morena* (very dusky)
21. *Branca* (white)
22. *Branca-avermelhada* (peach white)
23. *Branca-melada* (honey toned)
24. *Branca-morena* (darkish white)
25. *Branca-pálida* (pallid)
26. *Branca-queimada* (sunburned white)
27. *Branca-sardenta* (white with brown spots)
28. *Branca-suja* (dirty white)
29. *Branquiça* (a white variation)
30. *Branquinha* (whitish)
31. *Bronze* (bronze)
32. *Bronzeada* (bronzed tan)
33. *Bugreziinha-escura* (Indian characteristics)
34. *Burro-quando-fôge* (“burro running away,” implying racial mixture of unknown origin; the opposite of *cor-firma*)
35. *Cabocla* (mixture of white, Negro, and Indian)
36. *Cabo-verde* (black; Cape Verdean)
37. *Café* (coffee)
38. *Café-com-leite* (coffee with milk)
39. *Canela* (cinnamon)
40. *Canelada* (tawny)
41. *Cardão* (thistle colored)
42. *Castanha* (cashew)
43. *Castanha-clara* (clear, cashewlike)
44. *Castanha-escura* (dark, cashewlike)
45. *Chocolate* (chocolate brown)

46. *Clara* (light)
47. *Clarinha* (very light)
48. *Cobre* (copper hued)
49. *Corada* (ruddy)
50. *Cor-de-café* (tint of coffee)
51. *Cor-de-canela* (tint of cinnamon)
52. *Cor-de-cuia* (tea colored; prostitute)
53. *Cor-de-leite* (milky)
54. *Cor-de-oro* (golden)
55. *Cor-de-rosa* (pink)
56. *Cor-firma* ("no doubt about it")
57. *Crioula* (little servant or slave; African)
58. *Encerada* (waxy)
59. *Enxofrada* (pallid yellow; jaundiced)
60. *Estranquecimento* (mostly white)
61. *Escura* (dark)
62. *Escurinha* (semidark)
63. *Fogoto* (florid; flushed)
64. *Galega* (see *agalagada* above)
65. *Galegada* (*Ibid.*)
66. *Jambo* (like a fruit the deep-red color of a blood orange)
67. *Laranja* (orange)
68. *Lilás* (lily)
69. *Loira* (blond hair and white skin)
70. *Loira-clara* (pale blond)
71. *Loura* (blond)
72. *Lourinha* (flaxen)
73. *Malala* (from Malabar)
74. *Marinhaira* (dark greyish)
75. *Marron* (brown)
76. *Meio-amerela* (mid-yellow)
77. *Meio-branca* (mid-white)
78. *Meio-morena* (mid-tan)
79. *Meio-preta* (mid-Negro)
80. *Melada* (honey colored)
81. *Mestiça* (mixture of white and Indian)
82. *Miscigenação* (mixed—literally "miscogenerated")
83. *Mista* (mixed)

84. *Morena* (tan)
85. *Morena-bem-chegada* (very tan)
86. *Morena-bronzeada* (bronzed tan)
87. *Morena-canelada* (cinnamonlike brunette)
88. *Morena-castanha* (cashewlike tan)
89. *Morena clara* (light tan)
90. *Morena-cor-de-canela* (cinnamon-hued brunette)
91. *Morena-jambo* (dark red)
92. *Morenada* (mocha)
93. *Morena-escura* (dark tan)
94. *Morena-fechada* (very dark, almost mulatta)
95. *Morenáo* (very dusky tan)
96. *Morena-parada* (brown-hued tan)
97. *Morena-roxa* (purplish tan)
98. *Morena-ruiva* (reddish tan)
99. *Morena-trigueira* (wheat colored)
100. *Moreninha* (toffee-like)
101. *Mulatta* (mixture of white and Negro)
102. *Mulatinha* (lighter-skinned white-Negro)
103. *Negra* (Negro)
104. *Negreta* (Negro with a corpulent body)
105. *Pálida* (pale)
106. *Paraíba* (like the color of *marupa* wood)
107. *Pará* (dark brown)
108. *Pará-clara* (lighter-skinned person of mixed race)
109. *Polaca* (Polish features; prostitute)
110. *Pouco-clara* (not very clear)
111. *Pouco-morena* (dusky)
112. *Preta* (black)
113. *Pretinha* (black of a lighter hue)
114. *Pixa-para-branca* (more like a white than a mulatta)
115. *Quase-negra* (almost Negro)
116. *Queimada* (burnt)
117. *Queimada-de-praia* (suntanned)
118. *Queimada-de-sol* (sunburned)
119. *Regular* (regular; nondescript)
120. *Retinta* ("layered" dark skin)
121. *Rosa* (roseate)



- 122. *Rosada* (high pink)
- 123. *Rosa-queimada* (burnished rose)
- 124. *Roxa* (purplish)
- 125. *Ruiva* (strawberry blond)
- 126. *Russo* (Russian, see also *polaca*)
- 127. *Sapecada* (burnished red)
- 128. *Sarará* (mulatta with reddish kinky hair, aquiline nose)
- 129. *Sarariba* (or *saraiba*: like a white meringue)
- 130. *Tostada* (toasted)
- 131. *Trigueira* (wheat colored)
- 132. *Turva* (opaque)
- 133. *Verde* (greenish)
- 134. *Vermelha* (reddish)

## Mixed Blood

### Jefferson M. Fish

*Dr. Jefferson M. Fish, a Caucasian clinical psychologist, and his African American wife, Dolores Newton, an anthropologist, have a daughter, Krekamey, who has just passed her medical board examinations. His essay on the differences in the way North Americans and Brazilians look at skin color and race is based on his daughter's experiences in Brazil, as well as on the way she looks at herself.*

Last year, my daughter, who had been living in Rio de Janeiro, and her Brazilian boyfriend paid a visit to my cross-cultural psychology class at St. John's University. They had agreed to be interviewed about Brazilian culture. At one point in the interview I asked her, "Are you black?" She said, "Yes." I then asked him the question, and he said, "No."

"How can that be?" I asked. "He's darker than she is."

The short answer to the question, What is race? is: There is no such thing. Race is a myth. And our racial classification scheme is loaded with pure fantasy.

Consider the avocado—is it a fruit or a vegetable? Americans insist it is a vegetable. We eat it in salads with oil and vinegar. Brazilians, on the other hand, would say it is a fruit. They eat it for dessert with lemon juice and sugar.

How can we explain this difference in classification?

The avocado is an edible plant, and the American and Brazilian folk taxonomies, while containing cognate terms, classify some edible plants differently. The avocado does not change. It is the same biological entity; but its folk classification changes, depending on who's doing the classifying.

Perhaps the clearest way to understand that the American folk taxonomy of race is merely one of many—arbitrary and unscientific, like all the others—is to contrast it with a very different one, that of Brazil. The

## How Brazil Works

Robert M. Levine

Brazilians spend untold time entangled in the bureaucratic labyrinth. Some cases of hopeless dealings stretch out for years. Starting in the early years of the twentieth century, for those who could afford it or who possessed political influence, however, an antidote emerged in the person of the despachante, a professional facilitator able to cut through the red tape. Sometimes, bribery was involved, or small favors, but usually despachantes simply got things done (for a fee) faster and without hassle because they knew the right people on the inside. Some veteran despachantes seemed to have magical powers. Passports for which mere mortals have to wait in line for hours, then return for a second or third or fourth time to wait at the federal police headquarters, are issued in minutes. Documents not available at all by legal means materialize the same way. The first part of this section shows how despachantes form part of the world of the *jeito*, the Brazilian way of getting things done.

Another practice is the intimidating ritual. In urban Latin America, where the gap between the very rich and very poor is great indeed, and where in many cases, rich and poor work or even live in close physical proximity, the affluent intimidate to get their way, as portrayed in the second part below. The mulatto novelist Affonso Henriques de Lima Barreto satirized the use and abuse of titles in his World War I-era novel, *Recordações de Escrivão Isáias Caminha*; his novel about the imaginary republic of the United States of Bruzundanga, a pseudo-Brazil, mocks the entrance examinations required by prestigious Brazilian professional schools: "Passing the preliminaries, the future leaders of the republic, the United States of Bruzundanga, take courses of study and end up more ignorant and presumptuous than they were when they entered. They are the sort who loudly boast, 'I have a degree. You are talking to a man with a degree!'"

### I. The *Jeito*

M., a maid working in an affluent condominium complex in São Paulo, at twenty-four married a seventeen-year-old young man and had a child. When her mother-in-law told her that she couldn't care for the baby all the time, M. sent for an eleven-year-old girl from the interior, telling people that she was "adopting" her. The girl, who presumably attended school a few hours each day, otherwise worked without papers (or wages) for M. as her servant.

What M. did is as much a part of the informal economy as it is a legal ruse, since she did not have to obtain permission from any civil authorities to bring the girl to her home. In cases where regulations have to be confronted, Brazilians pride themselves on being especially creative in their array and variety of gambits suitable for bending rules. Most of these ploys work best, of course, for those with connections, even as low level as a friend of a relative who works in a certain office or department. The system also bends for those who can throw their weight around. Thus, facing down a policeman trying to write a ticket on an illegally parked car is easy for someone wearing a Rolex and educated in an elite private school, because the weaker party to the action knows full well that society expects him to back away.

One element in the political culture that is available to almost everyone possessing a modicum of poise and self-respect is the *jeito*. The *jeito* (diminutive, *jeitinho*) is the "way" to grease the wheels of government or the bureaucracy to obtain a favor, or to bypass rules or regulations. *Jeitos* fall halfway between legitimate favors and out-and-out corruption, but at least in popular understanding, they lean in the direction of the extra-legal. Favors, in addition, imply a measure of reciprocity, a courtesy to be returned. One never pays for a favor, however, but a *jeito*, which is often granted by someone who is not a personal acquaintance, must be accompanied by a tip or even a larger payoff.

Peter Kellemen's 1963 tongue-in-cheek *Brazil for Beginners* offers an example of how the system worked even within the bureaucracy. A recent graduate of a European medical school was applying for a visa to emigrate to Brazil at the Brazilian Consulate in Paris. When he appeared, the Brazilian consul changed the applicant's profession from physician to agronomist. When the candidate protested, saying that he

did not want to sign a false statement, the consul told him: "In that way I can issue you a visa immediately. You know how these things are? Professional quotas, confidential instructions from the department of immigration. Utter nonsense! . . . In any event, this way will make it perfectly legal." The consul explained that he was helping the applicant by employing the *jeito*. After the physician took up residence in Brazil, he understood: he had immigrated to a country, law professor Keith S. Rosen notes, "where laws and regulations are enacted upon the assumption that a substantial percentage will be disobeyed," and where, quoting Kelleman, "civil servants, be they small or powerful, create their own law. Although this law does not happen to correspond with the original law, it meets with general approbation, provided that it is dictated by common sense."

Several kinds of behavior are associated with the *jeito*. Officials fail to perform a legal duty (for example, contracts to the highest bidder); persons employ subterfuges to circumvent a legal obligation that is proper (underinvoicing import shipments, receiving part of the purchase price abroad in foreign currency to evade currency control and taxes on part of the profits); speedy completion of paperwork only in exchange for a bribe or because the official knows the applicant; skirting an unreasonable or economically prejudicial legal obligation (for instance, laws requiring compensating bank balances or deposits at low interest); failure to enforce rules or laws because the official thinks that the law is unjust or unrealistic (the example of the visa applicant). The first three cases are corrupt, but the last two fall into a grey area where public purposes are arguably served by evading legal obligations. Some applications of the *jeito*, of course, involve mixed kinds of motives, combining payoffs or favoritism with a sense that the outcome will be reasonable and even legitimate.

*Jeitos* affect everyone. Once I was traveling to the interior of Rio Grande do Norte, a desolate backlands region with few signs of life. The van in which I was riding broke down outside a tiny, dusty town. The passengers and driver walked to the village to attempt to find parts to fix the motor; while we were sitting in a café, waiting, a man came in and identified himself as the police chief. He wore no uniform and showed no badge, but everyone in the café showed him deference and we assumed that he was some kind of official. He then asked to see our documents. The Brazilians had their federal identity cards; I had my passport.

The official demanded that each of the Brazilians pay the equivalent of \$6 for being given "refuge" in his town, and he "fined" the driver of the van a slightly lower amount for having obstructed the roadway. Then he turned to me. He asked me what a foreigner was doing in his town. I told him. He then asked to see my passport, taking it and thumbing through the pages one by one. "Why had I gone to Mexico?" he asked me, seeing a visa stamp issued in Mérida. "Venezuela?" "France?" Was I working for the "U.S. Intelligence Service?" I assured him that I was carrying out historical research. "What do you have with you?" he asked. I showed him my camera and lenses, and my notebook. He then grabbed my camera bag and passport, and stalked out the door.

More than two hours later, well after midnight, he returned. The van had been fixed by then and was sitting with its motor running because the driver was impatient to leave. I had visions of being stuck in this town or even being put in jail. Then the man returned. With a broad grin, he handed me my camera case and passport. On one of the blank visa pages, he had painstakingly issued a "visa" for me to enter his town. It was handwritten, with various misspellings, and it had a cutout printed paragraph from what probably was the state *Diário Oficial* pasted in—a regulation covering one rule or another that did not seem even closely pertinent to this case. He then demanded \$140 for the "processing fee." At this point, my Brazilian host interceded, pulling him aside in conversation. He then hustled me and the others out to the van, and we drove off. He told me later that he had given the man about \$2 and told him that he "should be honored to have a university professor passing through his jurisdiction."

## II. Intimidating Rituals

When a *porteiro* (doorman), dressed in a frayed uniform and carrying his starched lunch in a tin box as early as 5:00 or 6:00 A.M. after walking down hundreds of steps from his favela house (or arriving from a two-hour bus ride over bumpy roads from the periphery of the city), is asked by an impatient, immaculately dressed professional man or woman to carry something, or to run back for something forgotten, or hastily to clean their car of the dust accumulated overnight, sparks may fly, but the doorman is expected to react humbly, without complaint. Many such em-

employees, fearing the loss of their jobs, respond by adopting an air of near-total silence, often interpreted by employers as docility. Sometimes, this is internalized and becomes part of that person's personality, exhibited even outside of the employment framework. In other cases, the doorman (or the domestic servant, or the dishwasher, or the crossing guard) goes home and becomes another person, sometimes a tyrant, a hard drinker, or a wife or child abuser. These behavior traits are not seen by the employer class, because the private lives of the poor are well hidden, rendered all but invisible except for moments when that aggressive behavior crosses back over the boundary, such as in instances when a *marital* (marginalized man or woman) breaks the law, and is arrested for drunkenness or stealing.

This situation is exacerbated by the attitudes of some persons of higher status. Roberto DaMatta has captured the elite's expectation of deference and special treatment in identifying the ritual importance of the phrase, "*Você sabe com quem está falando?*" ("Do you know who you're talking to?"), the embodiment of the ritual that plays out when someone powerful is challenged by someone of lower status, such as in the case of a policeman confronting someone who has parked illegally, blocking traffic. Even physical size can be a factor in this kind of exchange: traffic cops are usually small and thin (in comparison to the burly members of the military police, or the police *delegados* who deal with crime), in contrast to the wealthy, who can be fit and athletic. Even if the offensive big shot is short and paunchy, his use of intimidating language makes perfectly clear what DaMatta terms the "radical and authoritarian separation between two social positions that are objectively or conceptually differentiated in terms of the rules of classification of Brazilian culture." This behavior reflects the true nature of social distance, and belies the myth endorsed by Gilberto Freyre and others of the Brazilian as cordial and tolerant of others. It takes other forms. For example, the common practice by affluent teenagers of cutting ahead in line, or cheating in school, because they are privileged.

Whether intentional or not, people in high positions intimidate. Being a *filho de papai* (the father's son, implying nepotism) counts for a great deal in Brazilian life. Verbal and behavioral reminders of status, in fact, have in many cases grown in use in recent decades, as traditional marks of social position—for men, for example, the cream-colored linen suits worn by true whites of seigniorial class, or fountain pens and walking

sticks—went out of fashion. As a researcher in Brazil, I found this out the hard way. Waiting in line at a bakery counter in Ipanema on a Sunday morning during the military dictatorship, I was rudely pushed back by a man wearing shorts who bolted ahead of me. I muttered something about "*falta de educação*" and beckoned to the clerk to do something about what was, by any account, a blatant violation of propriety. The clerk looked away, as did everyone else in line. Walking away after the purchase was finally made, another person who had been standing in line with me whispered that I'd better be damned careful. The man who had cut into line was a colonel in the military police, he told me, who usually sent a servant to buy things for him while he waited in his car.

I also remember Asís, the doorman of a residential apartment house on Recife's Boa Viagem. An emaciated *caboto* born in the *zona da mata* a half hour to the east of the city, with sunken, swollen eyes, he lived with his family in a hut that could not have been more than fifty square feet in size, behind the elevator. When residents of the building approached, Asís would lower his gaze to the pavement, avoiding eye contact in the same manner as slaves and other blacks on the streets of colonial and nineteenth-century Brazil. There was a chute near the elevator on every floor into which maids threw refuse, and Asís, several times a day, would tip back the dumpster on the ground floor, taking out anything in the garbage that was edible or could be scavenged. Sometimes, Asís permitted ragged children from the neighborhood to enter the dumpster room with him. One day, I saw him being confronted by the head of the building's *condomínio*, the residents' association, and ordered to stop "abusing" his position by taking the garbage. "*Mais amor e menos confiança*," I heard the man say: "Show respect and less impertinence." Asís groveled and promised to obey. Within a month or so, one of Asís's small children died. Rats now infested the grounds of the building. Then Asís and his family disappeared; another doorman took his place. It turned out that when Asís asked the *condomínio* president for an advance from his salary to pay for the burial of his child, he was fired on the spot.

## Voices from the Pavement

### *Cláudia Milito and Hélio R. S. Silva*

*Voices from the Pavement is an ethnography of street children, street educators, and the terrified middle classes of Rio de Janeiro. The following vignettes concern a young boy who works in the street, an elderly man who seeks revenge for an attack on his wife, and the authors' argument that "avoidance" has come to characterize Brazilian society's approach to street children.*

Eduardo lives with his parents in neighborhood of Austin (pronounced "A-oooh-sheen) in the Baixada Fluminense, in the state of Rio de Janeiro. He attends third grade at a state school, the afternoon shift, from 1:00 to 6:00. Like his father, forty-eight, and one of his brothers, he sells peanuts. Altogether, he has nine siblings, all from the same thirty-two-year-old mother.

His body carries the marks of a beating his father inflicted on him with a stick. The incident has left him with a big swollen spot on the head. In a calm, objective voice, Eduardo explains the reasons for his recent beating. Making his way to his place of work, a bar called Petisco da Feira, he'd caught the number 415 bus (Usina-Leblón) at dawn. But he was sleepy and dozed off, only to waken in Leblón—without his valuable supply of peanuts. His father wouldn't forgive him.

Likewise, his father is said not to forgive him when Eduardo sells few peanuts. In his defense, he asks, "What am I supposed to do, point a gun at the clients so they'll buy?"

But that's not how the father sees it. The boy must have been playing rather than selling in earnest. The lack of sales could only result from his bumming around, from being irresponsible. With little emotion, Eduardo swears he'll run away from home if his father beats him again. He speaks of an aunt in Niterói (adjacent to Rio) and of his godmother who lives in Caxias (a vast, gritty suburb of Rio). If he ran away to his aunt's

house, he says, his father would never see him again. But he doesn't seem very resolute. His graceful smile and little white teeth light up his face, which seems too young for his alleged age of twelve.

His family is from Governador Valadares, a city he does not remember because he was so little when they left there. His father recalls that he was beaten a lot as a child, which is why, Eduardo insinuates, he also inflicts beatings. The boy suggests the possibility that there might be something like a generational pattern of domestic torture, a Brazilian tradition that makes us recall the belt episode in Graciliano Ramos's *Childhood*.

He explains that peanuts come from the land. Hélio wants to know what land they come from, and Eduardo says that they were bought in Austin. He recites the names of the stations that come after Austin en route to Japeri: Queimados, Comendador Soares. . . . He swears that in Austin, whoever beats up a woman is as good as dead. Then he tells a long, utterly unintelligible story that involves a woman, a threat, a revolver, a man walking around his house, and his father "filming" the whole thing.

His oldest sister is seventeen and his youngest brother just four months: "He's a little tyke who doesn't even know how to walk."

He says that when he is unable to sell his entire stock, he doesn't go back home. He hangs out and catches a snooze on the buses.

He tells of spending Christmas and Christmas Eve with his grandfather, as well as New Year's and New Year's Eve, and Carnival. He asks, "Is there such a thing as Carnival Eve?" He describes with wonder the table full of cold drinks, alcohol, sweets, and food.

Hélio asks the boy if he skips school when he does not go home because he has not sold enough peanuts. He says he skips from time to time, but the teacher doesn't get worked up about it.

He yawns continuously as he talks, the sleepiness weighing heavily on his tired eyelids. It's close to midnight, and he has scarcely sold anything. He fashions his sole piece of paper money into a little airplane, flies it, and philosophizes: "Copacabana isn't a good place for selling things; it's good for robbing gringos."

*The willingness to exterminate precedes the realization of the traumatic act. The gentleman, retired, about sixty-five years of age, is in the bar on Carlos de Vasconcelos Street, where Hélio regularly gets a snack while*

doing fieldwork. The man talks about the kind of gun he uses. He's on the lookout for three boys who held up his wife in front of the army barracks, at the little square where the avenues Barão de Mesquita and Maracanã intersect. His wife resisted, and the resulting accident not only cost her a broken leg and other complications—she suffers from diabetes and hypertension—but also made him relinquish any moral resistance. The animal-out-to-kill, who lacks a conscience or remorse, is quite composed. What the children made off with was his cherished dream of a peaceful senior life in a traditional neighborhood, at the side of his companion. Now, it seems, anything goes. In nothing like hushed tones, he feels at ease telling the researcher, whom he doesn't know, of his intention—his obsession—to find and punish the three. The weapon is in his bag. The scene is reminiscent of American Westerns: the lone gunman set on settling a score.

The residents of Rio want civilization at any price.

*Avoidance* is better understood if we don't think of it as a quality exclusive to beasts, typecast criminals, or potbellied soldiers with a thirst for blood and destruction. "Killing those little dirty things" might be suggested by the upright doctor who offers free, humanitarian care, a man flanked by his children and grandchildren. Just as easily, it might be suggested by the university anthropologist who, after a brief period in the field with the kids, is pontificating, searching for a way to translate into sanitary, intellectual argot the mentality that he, as a resident of Rio, shares with the vigilante exterminators, soldiers, members of organized crime syndicates, and frivolous housewives: "They don't want citizenship; they want to take over the city."

## Pixote's Fate

Robert M. Levine

Hector Babenco's 1981 film *Pixote* depicted the violent world of abandoned and outlaw children in Brazil, and the failure of the system to offer any remedies. It was the third most commercially successful Brazilian film up to that time ever made. The other two—Dona Flor and Her Two Husbands and *Bye Bye Brazil*—were lighthearted and fanciful, in contrast to the brutality of *Pixote* (pronounced "pee-shoot," loosely translatable as "Pee-Wee"). Babenco, an Argentine making movies in Brazil, first intended to produce a documentary about Brazil's urban juvenile detention centers, the stark state institutions housing orphans and street children, but officials abruptly and without explanation canceled his permission. He and Jorge Duran then bought the rights to a novel about the same subject, journalist José Louzeiro's *Infancia dos mortos*, although in the end they wrote an original script about street youths, using only a small part of Louzeiro's narrative. *Pixote* was the result. Following in the tradition of Luis Buñuel and Vittorio de Sica, writer-director Babenco used seven real street urchins in his casting. Fernando Ramos da Silva, the eleven-year-old boy who played the title role, grew up in abject poverty in the gritty industrial district *Diadema*; unlike *Pixote*, however, he still had a family. When the film opened, Rio de Janeiro's chief youth court judge sought Babenco's indictment under the National Security Law "for inciting corruption of minors, advocating drug usage, and undermining social institutions."

The most tragic byproduct of the film was the fate of its lead actor, Fernando Ramos da Silva. After his fame from the film had subsided, Fernando had drifted into petty crime and was arrested twice for minor offenses. He complained that the police were out to get him, that they could not distinguish him from the role he played in the movie. At the age of nineteen, in August 1987, the boy who had been selected out of 1,300 applicants to play the title role of the thieving street kid in the film was shot to death by the police.

Fernando was born on November 29, 1967, the sixth of ten children, into a family whose poverty deepened when his father, João Alves, died when Fernando was eight. His parents were peasants from the northern state of Pará who had migrated to the coffee fields of Paraná before moving on to the city of São Paulo, where they hoped to find more reliable work. His mother, Josefa Carvalho da Silva, received a pension of less than \$10 a month, to survive, she and all of her children sold lottery tickets in the city streets. They were light-skinned and, therefore, did not face racial discrimination, but their status as rural migrants marked them as outcasts. Fernando attended grade school, but did not learn to read or write very well; at seven, he won a small part in a play put on by a theater group. He had no record of delinquency as a child.

The movie's national and international success came when Fernando Ramos da Silva was twelve, a year after the movie was made. *Pixote* was seen by an estimated two and a half million people in twenty countries, mostly in art cinemas. After his acting success, Ramos was signed to a one-year contract by TV Globo to play a small part in a prime time soap opera and was cast in the role of an errand boy in Bruno Barreto's film of Jorge Amado's novel, *Gabriela, Clove, and Cinnamon*. Globo dropped him for being lazy and because he couldn't read his lines, although his clumsy mannerisms and street vocabulary likely made people afraid of him. He was hired briefly to advertise UNICEF Christmas cards on Brazilian television. Moved by Fernando's story, the mayor of Duque de Caixias, a depressed-income city on the outskirts of Rio de Janeiro, gave him a house there and a scholarship to an acting school, but his mother and other family members moved back to Diadema some months later. He dropped out of the acting school after two days. "I don't think he truly wanted to be an actor, a job that requires a lot of dedication and patience," the actress Fernanda Montenegro was quoted as saying. In 1984, he was arrested on robbery charges in his old neighborhood. After his second arrest, in 1985, he told a reporter that he wanted the public to forget his image as *Pixote*. "I want a chance to live as a man, without being persecuted," he said. "They created a *Pixote*, but they did not know how to prepare him for life." He pleaded with José Louzeiro to write a sequel to his romance-reportage in which *Pixote* would be re-deemed. The request was not considered viable, however. "I pulled him out of this absurd dream, to wake him up for other projects, but he didn't seem to believe," Louzeiro said in response.

His brothers and sisters said that Fernando felt persecuted by being typecast as *Pixote* and wanted to play romantic roles. In 1985, now nineteen with two tattoos on his arms and a sparse beard, he married a sixteen-year-old girl from a family of migrants from the interior of Minas Gerais, Cida Venâncio da Silva. Fernando settled down to an ordered life after the birth of their daughter, Jacqueline. His wife later said that Fernando always had two personalities: the aggressive and self-sufficient character of *Pixote*, and a more emotional, romantic, and sensitive face, which she called the "real Fernando." His last job was in the Northeast, where he had been acting in a play, *Atalpia My Love*, in the part of a hired assassin.

When he returned to his family, he was playing cards in a neighborhood tenement when he learned that the military police were conducting raids in the area, looking for criminals. Fearing that he would be harmed, he fled unarmed to another house. The police found out about his flight, and although they had no formal charge against him nor any warrant, pursued him and dragged him out from under a bed where he was hiding. He pleaded with his captors not to harm him—he was overheard by several residents of the tenement as saying that he was the father of a small daughter that he had to raise—but was shot to death. The official police report claimed that on August 25, Fernando and a young boy were caught trying to holdup a pedestrian on a street near Diadema, and that in the ensuing chase, he opened fire on his pursuers with a .32 caliber revolver. His family vigorously denied this, and produced witnesses to swear that he was not involved in the street mugging. Virtually no one believed the official story.

His mother and wife cried to reporters that the shooting had been a police execution. The body had seven bullet holes in it; two in the right arm, five more in the chest. A forensic examination revealed that on the basis of the powder marks on his white cotton shirt, the youth had been shot with the gun nearly touching him while he was lying on the ground, but the official police report blandly said that he had died while resisting arrest. Police spokespersons, attempting damage control, rationalized the youth's violent end by emphasizing that he was a known bandit and that he used his fame as *Pixote* to demand clemency when he was caught. "Every time he was detained," Mario Miguel Bitrar, the police officer who first arrested him claimed, "[he] promised to straighten out, and he cried a lot. . . ." What Bitrar did not mention was that each

time that Fernando was arrested, the boy had been tortured with electric shocks, and that the police had treated him all the more roughly than other youths in their custody because of his fame. Fernando's death produced an outcry across Brazil, but it quickly subsided. A thin paperback book authored by Cida, Fernando's widow (skillfully edited, presumably by a professional), appeared, blaming the military police for murdering him. The three policemen who had killed him were dismissed from the force. One dropped out of sight, but the other two started a lucrative private security firm in Diadema, accusing the left-wing media of trumping up the charges against them.

On one hand, then, the outcry against what had happened suggested that people did care, that the success of the film *Pixote* and the publicly expressed sympathy at what had happened to the film's baby-faced title actor was a positive sign. But the fact was that nothing changed. Several of Fernando's own brothers died violent deaths without public outcry: they were, of course, unimportant *marginals* without the aura of film stardom. Six months before Fernando's murder, his older brother Paulo, twenty, was lynched by a crowd of more than fifty persons who left the body so badly mutilated that it took days to identify it. The motive for the lynching is not known, although Paulo was infamous for his womanizing. Three years later, another brother, Waldemar, was shot to death. Two of the surviving three brothers fled Diadema in fear of being killed as well. Of the seven child actors in *Pixote*, only the boy who played the androgynous Lilica, Jorge Julião, briefly succeeded in an acting career. The others fell back into poverty.

By deciding not to use professional child actors, the street children's performances, although minimal, were expressive and graphic, above all spontaneous. At the same time, they were complemented by the mature performances of the film's professional actors, notably Marília Pera, customarily cast as a comedienne, who played Sueli, a bitter, aging whore. Director Babenco revealed later that his street children-actors taught him so much about street life that he invited them to change the script as they worked through it. He estimated that, in the end, perhaps 40 percent of the original script was rewritten. Every day, Babenco held a workshop on that day's shooting, and everyone improvised. An assistant, a prison therapist, talked with the children every day to help them relax and to discuss the things they had to do in front of the cameras. At one point, Babenco piled the kids into his car and took them to a moviola

studio to show them how editing worked so that they would not gripe so much about having to retake scenes over and over. The shooting took sixteen weeks, and the film cost twice as much as budgeted. Overall, Babenco never relinquished control. His imprint remains indelible throughout the film. Some of the story's violence is quick and brutal; other scenes are choreographed like a soccer play; when the kids rob a pedestrian, the camera pulls back, giving us a view of the whole area, so that we "get the social picture."

In *Pixote's* opening scene, Babenco introduces the eleven-year-old Fernando with his real mother in front of their shack. Babenco looks strikingly like a grown-up version of Fernando, but one gets the idea quickly that the boy from the slums will never make it to the director's age. The director tells the audience that "Brazil has 120 million people of which approximately 50 percent are under twenty-one years of age. About twenty-eight million children have a lower standard of living than that stipulated in the UN's Children's Rights Declaration. Almost three million are homeless and have no real family." But it is important to know that the people who live in a slum work. Babenco points out that he is standing in "a working-class neighborhood in São Paulo, the great industrial center of Latin America, responsible for 60 to 70 percent of the gross national product of Brazil. . . . Typically, both parents work and the children stay home. Usually, the elder sister baby-sits, or a neighbor who is paid. Fernando, the star of the film, lives with his mother and nine brothers and sisters in this house. The whole film is acted by children who have this common background." The camera then shifts to Fernando, who becomes Pixote, a fictional wide-eyed and apprehensive new inmate hauled away in a police sweep of street kids (*trombadinhos*) brought in following the death of a prominent judge, who died after being pushed in front of a moving car during a mugging. Pixote is "a little camera taking it all in." He is quick: he learns that you keep your mouth shut, you do whatever stronger people tell you to, and you watch out for yourself.

In the hellish, Dickens-like juvenile center, Pixote witnesses a homosexual gang rape and other sordid scenes, climaxing in the killing of one of his comrades. He and several other suspects are singled out and taken to a city jail, where two are murdered. On their return to the juvenile center, they are confined to sleeping naked under a stairway. The prison and the detention center are nearly exclusive male worlds; the women



who appear briefly bring caring and help, but these interludes are very short. During one lyrical scene, a kind teacher helps Pixote learn to write, but the movie shrugs off sentimentality. Throughout the film, the police are depicted as arrogant, corrupt, violent, and accountable to no one—a wholly accurate portrayal, despite the official line defending police as enforcers of law and order. Babenco conveys this mood astutely by shooting mostly at night in confined spaces, casting a feeling of unrelied, ominous gloom. The detention center—one of its pavilions named for the eminent writer Euclides da Cunha—is unerringly exact in the way it is depicted.

Pixote intersperses shocking images relieved occasionally by fleeting moments of tenderness dashed by the intrusion of sordid reality. When brief scenes of tragicomic adventures occur, they are followed by events that take the children deeper into the world of alienation and pathos. The first part of the film, set in the institution and in the adult prison to which some of the children are taken, is brutal and violent. The story line demonstrates in short order how the children are doomed. They school themselves in the ways of the street, play at robberies, teach one another how to react under police interrogation, sniff glue, smoke marijuana, play soccer, and form a kind of family unit.

An ineffectual investigation by a police official whose superiors are leaning on him to find a scapegoat leads to the savage beating death of Fumaça, one of the youths accused in the crime that had led to the roundup. After Fumaça's body is found in a city dump, a television newscast blames his death on Diego, one of the older adolescents in the detention center. When the rest of boys learn that Diego has been beaten to death by the authorities, they riot, wreck their dormitory, and escape. The breakout is accompanied by an abrupt change in mood. Visually, after the harrowing and dark opening part, the film becomes suffused in pale, dawnlike hues; at night, the pastel-colored light gives way to ganish, raw neon—red, pink, and orange. The scene changes to the street, although its freedom becomes as confining as the detention center. Pixote joins with three others for solidarity and protection.

Each of the film's child characters are stereotypes. There is Lilica, the seventeen-year-old transvestite, ringleader "queen"; Chico, an abandoned street kid; seventeen-year-old Dito, a black kid the police are waiting for when he turns eighteen, sensitive and searching, and Lilica's lover; and Pixote, babylike and vulnerable. They snatch purses and pick

pockets, philosophize about life, and eventually travel to a grayish Rio de Janeiro, where they become involved in selling cocaine. They are soon enticed into a drug deal, but are ripped off. By the end of film, Pixote has killed three people, run drugs, and pimped, but he remains a child. He murders one of his victims by sticking a knife into her. He wants her money, not to kill anyone. The argument between the woman and the child is just like a kindergarten fight, Babenco recalls. "Give me my pocketbook." "I don't want to give it to you." "Please give it to me." "Whap."

While Pixote and his friends escape, they remain confined to a prison of degradation. Eventually, the boys buy the "rights" to the alcoholic whore Sueli, using her as a decoy to rob her clients. One of the schemes goes sour, and Pixote shoots both Dito and an American businessman who has come to Sueli's flat. Sueli, who earlier had aborted her fetus with a knitting needle, briefly comforts Pixote by taking him to her breast, but then, after thinking about escaping with him to the country to pose as mother and son, she expels him. The film ends with the boy walking impassively down a railroad track, kicking cans, with a gun in his pocket, heading for trouble. His friends have been killed, he has been rejected by his mother figure, and he is dazed by what he has seen, likely destined for a violent end himself.

an invasion, a brutish and unnecessary use of force, but others said it was inevitable, and even a relief. This difference of interpretation was not limited to the Morro, but arose from a division within Roman Catholicism that encompassed ideas about faith, history, politics, and basic understandings of how the world works.

### Liberation versus Conservation

The Morro had been at the center of a disagreement between the parish priest and the bishop for many months. That conflict, in turn, reflected a rift between those Catholics, clergy and laity alike, who wanted to guard the church's traditions and those who advocated a newer, more politically engaged Catholicism. The debate took shape around the controversies inspired by liberation theology, a religious and social movement felt in many parts of the Latin American Roman Catholic Church from the late 1960s until the early 1990s. Brazil provided especially fertile ground for the movement; Recife in particular was one of its hotbeds.

Liberation theology read the Bible as a blueprint for social change, and encouraged Catholics to make political awareness and action a part of their religious practice. It was not enough to pray for salvation, say the rosary, or listen to sermons, explained liberation clergy; to be in harmony with God's will, one's faith must serve as a guide toward changing larger patterns of social oppression and political injustice. This work should blend local initiatives—say, helping someone rebuild a home washed away by rains or starting an adult literacy program—with analyses of regional and even global systems of inequity. Marxist language of class analysis was used creatively. When it was at its height, some analysts claim, Brazilian liberation theology attracted between one and two million adherents, organized in as many as 100,000 *comunidades de base*, or base communities (CEBs), groups of neighbors who read the Bible together, and reflected on its implications for their work and critical analyses.

In Recife, no parish was more famous for liberationist activism than the Morro da Conceição. Reginaldo Veloso, the priest whom the bishop suspended, had a charisma and soft-spoken style that attracted hundreds who had been disillusioned by traditional Catholicism. To those Brazilians drawn to it, the goals of liberation theology seemed essential when

## Liberation Theology's Rise and Fall

### Robin Nagle

*Late on the morning of October 19, 1990, five trucks of military police arrived at the praça on the Morro da Conceição (Hill of the Immaculate Conception), a low-income neighborhood in the northeastern coastal city of Recife. Their charge was to take back the local church and parish house from "rebel" Catholics, who had held the buildings for several months in defiance of Recife's bishop, Dom José Cardoso, who had suspended their priest for insubordination a few months earlier. They believed that they were in negotiation with Dom José to get the ousted priest reinstated, or at least to have a say in his replacement. The bishop had other ideas; it was at his request that a local judge ordered the surprise police raid that day. Anthropologist Robin Nagle's analysis of the relationship between a poor northeastern community and the institutional Roman Catholic Church illuminates why reform-minded ideals often fail when confronted by day-to-day reality.*

When the police surrounded the Morro church, they were soon confronted by hundreds of angry, shouting residents. Jostled and taunted, the police held their line, but their nightsticks were drawn and their gun holsters unsnapped. Television news teams, on the scene within minutes, added to the chaos. After it was all over, no one knew how it had not become a riot. The Virgin Mary—Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception—seemed the only calm presence on the praça that morning. She stood a dozen yards away, a tall statue with an eternally benevolent expression.

The arrival of the police put the Morro at the center of one of the most dramatic expressions of religious tension that Latin America had seen in years. When events leading up to that day were pieced together later, however, the confrontation was not entirely surprising. Some community residents, local witnesses, and even international observers called it

the nation confronted a dictatorship in 1964 and then fashioned a return to democracy throughout the 1980s as the military eased out of power.

The problem was that liberation-style Catholicism became the Morro's only expression of the church. While it delighted many parishioners, it alienated many more. There were plenty of Morro residents who had been content with the church's traditional expressions of faith. These practices had resonated with what they had learned as children, and with stories they knew from earlier generations of what the church was supposed to be and do. The quiet of the church sanctuary, for many such Morro dwellers, was one of the few places they could go for refuge from an often troubling world, and the age-old rituals were sources of solace and comfort. Liberationism seemed to erase the fundamental distinction between what belonged outside the church and what belonged inside.

With Reginaldo's tenure, the very substance of the Mass was changed. Secular problems were made part of sacred time. Even the community's huge annual festivity honoring Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception was reconfigured. It was no longer a celebration of her holiness and willingness to intercede on behalf of petitioners. Liberation theology-minded *feita* organizers, said more religiously conservative Morro residents, turned it into a series of political rallies, with people praying for causes like Afro-Brazilian empowerment and the rights of landless sugarcane cutters.

At first, these disaffected Morro dwellers weren't a problem for liberationist Catholics. In fact, if they were noticed at all, they were not given much attention. Most either left the parish to worship at a church down the hill or stopped attending Mass completely. For years, they were quiet. But they were always numerous, and when Dom José became bishop, they discovered an ally.

#### Dynamics of Religious Conflict

A religious tradition must blend orthodoxy with malleability to survive. If it aspires to longevity, it must help its followers understand not only the world around them, but also the history that shaped that world across time. Liberation theology presented an interpretation of history that rearranged conventional depictions by putting "the poor" at the

center of both secular and sacred powers. Secular powers had consistently wronged the poor, they said, as Jesus's own life story made clear. Liberationists noted that Jesus was a carpenter and fisherman, thus a worker as humble as any other. That he was also the Son of God, they continued, who chose to take human form in such a simple role demonstrated that all the poor, and all workers like him, were a chosen people. Governments that allowed great disparities of wealth and need, and relations between nations that created imbalances of resources and wants were sources of poverty for millions of people all over the world, liberationists argued; if the poor are indeed God's chosen people, then it is the duty of all Christians to work toward eradicating the structures that create and perpetuate poverty.

As Brazil's dictatorship grew more brutal and silenced growing numbers of people in the late 1960s, the Roman Catholic Church slowly became an umbrella under which a disparate collection of activists and protesters found some protection. As the country's original transnational institution, the church had immunity from the government's most repressive measures (though individual clergy were singled out for torture, expulsion, and even murder).

At the heart of its message, liberation theology contended that the poor had been exploited long enough; it was time for them to become creators of their own history. In parishes that embraced liberationist teachings, this shift of emphasis was reflected in the Mass, in prayers of petition and thanks, in saints' feast celebrations, and in community political dynamics. On the Morro da Conceição, parishioners involved in the liberationist church became the founders of the residents' council, mother's club, sewing cooperative, day care center, and the school for retarded children. It was they who first won running water—and later, bus service, garbage pickup, and street paving—for the entire neighborhood. The liberation-trained laity welcomed the emphasis on their abilities, and flexed newly discovered political muscle with quickly learned sophistication and effectiveness.

Perhaps this would have caused uniform celebration among the Morro's Catholics if it had not signaled a complete replacement of older religious practices. It is true that when the residents' council succeeded in wresting public services from a reluctant city government, the entire hill benefited, and no one wished for a return to the days when household water came by bucket from a few public spigots. But the politiciza-