

THE AESTHETIC ESCAPE HATCH: CARNAVAL, BLOCOS AFRO AND THE MUTATIONS OF BAIANIDADE UNDER THE SIGNS OF GLOBALIZATION AND RE-AFRICANIZATION

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RESUMO: Este estudo é uma pesquisa culturo-semântica sobre a chamada *baianidade* em uma série de aspectos: o sentido tradicional do termo; a cordialidade; a democracia racial; a miscigenação. Sugere-se que, através do circulação do termo como prática e portanto como realidade, se concede certo espaço e prestígio simbólico à negritude a um nível estético-espiritual nacional em troca de certa passividade política port parte da comunidade negra. Propõe-se, porém, que tal efeito não deve ser classificado como uma manobra consciente do poder; responde, antes, a um imperativo da economia interna do tráfico do “capital simbólico”. Para exemplificar a fluidez e também o essencialismo semânticos do termo, enfoca-se a palavra *baiana* que pela etimologia significa uma região, mas que por metonímia cultural passa também a conotar certa religião à exclusão de outras, e certa culinária à exclusão de outras, e que, portanto, ilustra a hegemonia simbólica de um eixo identitário entre diversos possíveis para o termo. Em contra-partida, o artigo explora a adaptação da *baianidade* à (pós-)modernidade, como sociedade de consumo, de individualismo e tolerância. Finalmente, o artigo também compara a *baianidade* com outros discursos ideológicos estéticos da diáspora negra e as lógicas culturais poéticas correspondentes.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: baianidade; baiana; miscigenação; democracia racial; estética étnica

ABSTRACT: This article examines the notion of *baianidade*, the cultural cosmovision traditionally associated with the state of Bahia and more specifically with the region of the Baía de Todos os Santos. A series of connotations for the term are examined, including cordiality, racial democracy and miscegenation. Through the cultural practice of *baianidade*, a social compromise is effected whereby material space and symbolic prestige are conceded to the black community in exchange for a relative political passivity. This exchange is not construed here as a conscious manoeuvre by the established powers, but rather in terms of the internal logic of an economy of symbolic capital. To exemplify both

the fluidity and the semantic essentialism characteristic of *baianidade*, the article proceeds to the cultural semantics of the related term, *baiana*, a nominalized adjective which etymologically denotes a female native of the region, but by extension also denotes one among the various local religions and an associated culinary tradition. Against this essentializing consolidation, the article then considers contemporary uses of the term within a more individualistic consumer society. Finally, *baianidade* is compared synchronically to other major ideo-aesthetic discourses of the Black diaspora.

KEYWORDS: *baianidade*; *baiana*; miscegenation; racial democracy; ethnic aesthetics

Introduction: Bahian carnaval

The *carnaval* of Salvador, capital of Bahia state in Brazil, has grown immensely in popularity in recent years, so that it now rivals the more famous Rio *carnaval* in terms of numbers of visitors. *Carnaval* culture - music, dance, consumption and consequent entrepreneurial opportunities - has spread to the whole calendar of annual and weekly festivities, religious and secular, and has transformed Bahian society both in terms of its internal recreation patterns and in terms of its relations with external society. While the prominent traditional agricultural industries (cocoa, cattle, vegetables) have encountered difficulties and contracted, tourism, largely based around *carnaval* or carnivalesque attractions, has increased spectacularly and become the center of growth strategies. The old center of Salvador has been transformed from extreme poverty and physical decay into the central tourist destination. Bahian pop music has penetrated the national and international markets. Bahian practices such as *capoeira* (martial arts dance) have spread around the world. An ever-growing number of international visitors (about 400,000 a year in a city of 2.5 million) arrive by plane, in search of cultural vitality and authenticity. The sheer volume of international visitors and the prominence of tourism as a source of new employment has also transformed local experience through personal exposure to foreigners with different ideas. A significant number of persons from previously completely marginalized classes have visited or lived in Western European countries as a result of this contact. While world globalization (access and interaction between different locations) has been the pre-condition of the cultural marketing of Salvador to the world, the city itself has undergone globalization in terms of qualitative culture as well as economic modernization.¹⁵ The rise of Bahian *carnaval* beyond its former provincial status has been predicated on an afrocentric aesthetic transformation of *carnaval*

performance. From the late 1970s, afrocentric groups known as *blocos afro*, with Yoruba names derived from the Afro-Bahian religion of *candomblé* such as Ilê Ayê (“our house in this world”) and Olodum (“God of Gods”), have become the conspicuous mark of the *carnaval*, particularly from the external perspective. The *blocos afro* donned costumes derived from African patterns and cloths, and initially used only percussion instruments. The local population responded warmly to the expression, and many *bloco afro* songs became local hits. These groups articulated an afrocentric ideological agenda notable in Brazilian terms for its dissent from the conventional rhetoric of Brazilian civilization, which denies racism and discourages ethnic nationalism. Certain of the *blocos afro* have also developed active programs of social intervention including the establishment of schools for local poor black or mulatto (*negro-mestiço*) youth, where black identity (*negritude*) is privileged with a valorization reversing the stigma of racism. The dissident rhetoric and the social work of the *blocos afro* have enhanced the tourists’ sense of cultural alterity and authenticity.¹⁶

However, the transformation of *carnaval* has not been restricted to the emergence of *blocos afro*. In quantitative terms, the *carnaval* is still dominated by conventional *blocos*, oriented to strictly recreational entertainment without ideological overtones. Membership in these *blocos* generally reflects the socio-economic segmentation obtaining throughout the year, contradicting the notion of *carnaval* as inversion of social hierarchies. These *blocos* parade with huge trucks covered in speakers, with a band on top (*trio elétrico*). The *trio* bands are hired professionals and play whatever style of music is popular at a given moment. When the local population showed a preference for *bloco afro* songs, the *trios* adapted, appropriating the songs to their own harmonic orchestration and making necessary aesthetic adjustments such as a relative increase in the prominence of percussion. The *trios* recorded *bloco afro* songs which became radio hits around the country, and began the process of expansion of Bahian *carnaval* music. The musical product, called *axé music*, is now integrated to the (year-round) national pop music industry. Reflective of the intersection of globalization and local black subaltern energy, the term *axé music* marries *candomblé* authenticity (*axé* - Yoruba for beneficial sacred spirit of place or person) and international chic (the English “music” denotes no more than its Portuguese equivalent, *música*; however the use of English in Brazil enhances the cutting-edge flavour of concepts).¹⁷

The mercenary commercial appropriation of the *bloco afro* material lends itself to analysis in terms of socio-ethnic exploitation. However, the development of the Bahian *carnaval* industry can also be seen in terms of a local, organic cultural logic. First, the mainstream, represented by the *trios*, has been musically Africanized (or, more

exactly, Afro-Brazilianized). Second, the *blocos afro* themselves have tended not to protest this appropriation but rather to themselves adapt by moving toward the harmonic electrified orchestration which facilitates commercial distribution. The *blocos afro* have moved toward the societal mainstream in aesthetic terms, and, reflecting their emerging dependence on government and corporate patronage in a process of capitalization and commercial distribution of their cultural product, have been integrated to varying degrees into the city's political establishment. This dual process of adaptation suggests the classic pattern of fertile and opportunistic cultural miscegenation in Brazil and Bahia in particular, which is a part of the cultural code known as Bahianness, or *baianidade*.

Very few local scholars and organic intellectuals have ventured critical analyses of the eventual theoretical contradictions between afrocentric subaltern communitarian discourses and such concrete compromises with the status quo.¹⁸ The reticence of scholars (particularly non-Brazilians) reflects extreme discomfort with the idea of hostility (even discursive) directed toward the representatives of subaltern communities traditionally victimized by a society of which the scholars are usually drawn from the elite. The disinclination of organic intellectuals (current and former *bloco* leaders, artists, journalists, politicians, Afro-Brazilian religious leaders, communitarian activists and project coordinators etc.) is consistent with an inherent indisposition in Brazilian culture to sectarianism and to the social isolation consequent to consistent application of critical criteria. Brazilian civilization is based on webs of patronage and interdependence which render intellectual separatism problematic at a pragmatic level.¹⁹

How is this to be interpreted by the external critic? Though the present study does attempt to assess the political efficacy of ideological cultural agendas, the adopted approach is not scientific isolation and measurement of a given object, concept or process. The article scrutinizes cultural and ideological arguments via a gradual hermeneutic exegesis of the productive matrices of Bahian society, often encapsulated in the term *baianidade*, here considered paradigmatic for Brazilian civilization. The intellectual frames of the non-Brazilian academic - rationalist and, typically, liberal progressive - broadly parallel those of local academics, and it is presumably inconceivable to abandon such constitutional biases. The interest here, however, is more in the perspective of the organic intellectual, the constructor of *carnaval* and *bloco afro* as a concrete praxis. The study examines the pragmatic dilemmas and rhetorical contradictions of an ideological *carnaval* agenda caught in the balance between the constructive paradigms of Brazilian civilization and the inspiration of external afrocentric discourses. The subject of study is not the *bloco afro* per se (examined elsewhere by the

author and others),²⁰ but the mainstream cultural system (*baianidade*) in which the *blocos afro* exist. The ideological project of the *blocos afro* is characterized here as an attempt to renew the ongoing process of cultural miscegenation in a manner favorable to the interests of their ethnic constituency by the introduction of external afrocentric themes which balance the traditionally preponderant eurocentric values. Previous and posterior to these discourses, the *blocos afro* are born into a Bahian universe, struggle against it and may die within it.

Local and global terms of change

The cultural rubric of *baianidade* comprehends a series of formal and informal religious, aesthetic and social praxes as well as inferring particular community bonds (governing the terms of group adscription, orienting political affiliation, etc.). It is often difficult to draw a clear line between art and politics in this productive frame, not because Bahian art has been political but on the contrary because the general socially conciliatory tendency in *baianidade* diminishes overt class and ethnic conflict. *Baianidade* has tended to be apolitical, and to fuse aesthetic and moral issues by the subjection of the latter to the former. Its influence has been to diffuse social resentment and its logic to encourage the hope of improvement of an individual's credibility either through material gain or aesthetic prestige.

The ideological project of Olodum, currently the most important *bloco afro*, could be characterized as a call for a new generation of *baianidade*, which politicizes the mainstream social mentality while retaining the aesthetic energies characteristic of Bahian popular culture. Activist black cultural expression in Bahia draws its inspiration from external afrocentric models and its authenticity from the local tradition (including Portuguese as language), which infers aesthetic praxes as much as community bonds. The new generation propose a radicalization of the heritage, a sort of *baianidade conscientizada* (made socio-politically aware) in which globalization would be locally translated into awareness of international black identity and solidarity. In this sense, globalization is an informatizing tool to be used by an autonomous local subject community.

But globalization - as Westernization - also impacts Bahian society generally and, with the rise of the consumer generation, in ways which problematize community allegiance and instead encourage individualist strategies. In this sense globalization actually presents a continuity with certain aspects of *baianidade*, not so much in terms of ideology as rather at the level of a pragmatic conceptual strategy which tends to work to resolve material questions and issues of identity in

terms of the aesthetic domain rather than the moral; this process is here called an “aesthetic escape hatch”, drawing on the term “mulatto escape hatch” coined by political sociologist Carl Degler to describe Brazilian race relations.

The factors militating for resistance the tendencies to commodity over community and to aesthetification over moral and civil consciousness raising (*conscientização*) are limited in number but fundamental. Firstly, the Afro-Brazilian legacy is ongoing, dynamic and capable of incorporating Euro-Brazilians, so that rather than being objectified as a commodity, Afro-Brazilian culture can increase its presence in mainstream practice, i.e. enhance its profile as normative rather than being restricted to an occasional aesthetic legitimacy (temporally, during *carnaval*; spatially, within certain locales). Secondly, the whole logic of the aesthetic explosion of the re-Africanized Bahian *carnaval* has been a return to African roots. The Afro-centrifiction of *carnaval* occurred prior to commercialization, an incidental consequence. The *blocos afro* continue to see themselves unequivocally as representing a subaltern ethnicity whose concentrated aesthetic energies result largely from social marginalization. The *bloco afro* Olodum proposes a sort of globalization which exploits Westernization strategically, for material benefit, while at the moral level developing a global *conscientização* in terms of the African diaspora.²¹

While analytic thought usefully divides the material, the aesthetic and the moral, all affirmations of cultural identity tend to fuse the categories just as they are organically integrated in the individual. The notion of interchangeable deposits of aesthetic, moral and material “symbolic capital” has emerged as a prominent theme in characterizations of the postmodern and late capitalism. In a different way - local, historical and culturally particular - semantic fluidity between the aesthetic and the moral domains is a key facet in the generative matrix of Bahian culture. The phenomenon is explored in this article and proposed as a factor revealing the implicit terms of ethno-political compromise in Bahian society. Though the relation between the material, the aesthetic and the moral is examined in philosophical social theory and has been applied at an abstract analytic level to the cultural paradigm of the African diaspora, the imperative here is empirical rather than theoretical.²²

The cultural matrices of *baianidade*

Baianidade is conceived as the typical sociability (cordiality, tolerance, indulgence, laziness, optimism, humour) and characteristic cultural praxes (*candomblé*, *capoeira*, extroverted street dancing,

fashion, etc.) of Bahian society. It pertains essentially to the fertile plantation region around the city of Salvador (until recently often simply called Bahia) and All Saints Bay (*Baía de Todos os Santos*) called the *Recôncavo* (literally, the “cove”, though it is about the size of the San Francisco Bay). Salvador is also the capital of the large state of Bahia of which the greater part is the dry interior (*sertão*), which in cultural terms belongs more properly to the vast *sertão* which comprises most of the Northeast of Brazil, and which is dominated by different economic and social regimes and a racial make-up with relatively less African and more Amerindian elements. Salvador is now the only city in Brazil which is predominantly black (around 80%). The city was capital of Brazil for 250 years and as such the seat of civil and ecclesiastic government. Within the colonial world Salvador was a site of luxury, indulgence and aesthetic sophistication, building handsome baroque churches, producing noted poets and orators, welcoming famous visitors from Europe, and housing the idle sons of wealthy land-owners. From early times, a relatively higher proportion of slaves were domestics and thus attuned to practices only possible in urban settings, including the establishment of centres of Afro-Brazilian worship (*terreiros* of *candomblé*) enjoying the patronage of wealthy free persons of all colours. Finally, Salvador was the major Brazilian port receiving goods and persons from Africa and sending goods to Africa, such as tobacco and cowry shells; Salvador was integrated in the trade triangle between Portugal, Africa and Brazil. Despite British initiatives to outlaw slave ships, the Atlantic trade continued and expanded through the first half of the nineteenth century prior to its effective prohibition. There was also considerable movement of free individuals between Africa and Salvador (Verger 1964).

Possibly due to the circumstance that the last great wave of importation of slaves (1820s - 1840s) drew particularly on the coast of present day Nigeria and Benin where the dominant ethnic group are the Yoruba, this culture dominated the emergent Afro-Bahian religions collectively called *candomblé*. *Candomblé* preserves a pantheon of mostly Yoruba deities, but has also integrated Amerindian spirit entities and practices. The interrelation between the African and the Christian in *candomblé*, known as syncretism, is more complex and controversial. For some, syncretism means a genuine fusion of elements from heterogeneous belief systems which prove compatible for genuine synthesis. Persons of this persuasion stress the pagan elements common in Brazilian “Folk” Catholicism, which is marked by rich pre-Counter Reformation superstitions and beliefs, including the possibility of active intervention in the world by various saints, particularly if persuaded by acts of devotion - an agency parallel to that of the deities (*orixás*) of *candomblé*; the *orixás* are often called *santos*, and the

candomblé priest/priestess is the father/mother of the saints (*pai/mãe-de-santo*). For others it consists merely of a series of parallels between the codes, which remain separate despite the association. Proponents of the latter perspective, often afrocentric purists, stress the superficiality of the link at a spiritual level, pointing rather to its usefulness as subterfuge - dissimulating from oppressive authorities a set of prohibited but faithfully preserved beliefs.²³ Finally, beyond synthesis and/or association, syncretist society in Brazil has also meant simultaneous adscription to more than faith. For strictly religious studies, this is less important than accuracy regarding the real theology of each faith; however, from a cultural point of view, non mono-adscription has profound implications in terms of conceptual tendencies and ethical and political judgment (see below).

The broader societal paradigm of syncretism is the fusion of different ethnic cultures and creative reinvention (cultural miscegenation). Brazil's exceptional richness of racial and cultural miscegenation is widely recognized. Bahia, and *baianidade*, are the "degree zero" of this miscegenation, despite the predominance of Rio de Janeiro in its industrialized production and export, notably in Rio's *carnaval* (Armstrong 1999c). Rio is said to be Brazil's heart, São Paulo its brain and Salvador its soul. The inclusion of Salvador in this representative triumvirate is significant since the first two cities are megalopolises, while Salvador is today merely one of a number of second-string metropolises. Despite its long economic decline and reputation as the national capital of filth, poverty and ignorance (in São Paulo and Rio the term *baianada* means a barbarism or act of ignorant incompetence), Bahia anchors national cultural identity. This identity is rooted in the demographic distributions of the past, in which blacks and mulattos constituted the majority of the population. Interestingly, even in the twentieth century a significant portion of Brazilian intellectual cultural production has come from Bahians. The influence at the popular level is much greater. The recent rise in fortunes of the Bahian *carnaval* and the penetration of the national (and international) markets are not anomalous but rather reflective of a curious generative power in Bahian culture despite economic insignificance (loosely paralleled by the prominence of black culture in the U.S.).

Syncretism and its ultimate semantic ambivalence - as to meaning, ideological adscription, interaction between ethnicities and perhaps above all the simultaneous recognition of and periodic engagement with different systems - capture well the mechanisms of Bahian (and Brazilian) society and the psychological dispositions of *baianidade*. Different mechanisms and institutions of Brazilian society are structurally informed by distinct cultural elements from the colonial past. Brazilian government organs preserve the authoritarian and

conservative structures of the Catholic heritage, which can then be analyzed in terms of the different regimes of various prominent orders, including Dominicans (administrators of the Inquisition), Jesuits (administrators of the Indian missions) and Franciscans. The greatest current obstacle to democratization is the entrenched system of corruption involving the concession of advantages to friends and the negotiation of favors between individuals on the basis of differences of societal power (*clientelismo*), which has its roots in feudal Iberia. This political sub-culture resonates culturally with the system of personalized authority and the procurement of intervention by more powerful elements common to "Folk" Catholicism and *candomblé*.²⁴ Attitudes to syncretism and *candomblé* by local authorities have varied from the ongoing phenomenon of patronage (publicly unacknowledged) to outright legal prohibition. The oscillation of tolerance between identification, indulgence and periodic inefficient oppression is characteristic of Bahian civil society. However, despite leaders' inclination to conservative patriarchal rhetoric, at the level of informal cultural conception (how Bahians describe Bahia outside of official transactions) Bahia's reputation is as a place of extreme tolerance (and even impunity), sensual indulgence, miscegenist and tropical seduction.

Syncretism also involves the simultaneous adscription to different codes; in the classic religious instance Catholicism and *candomblé*. Psychologically speaking this infers a compartmentalization of the individual's rapports with different codes which are successively invoked according to circumstance. Taking the religious case as an instance, an example would be recourse to the Church to express repentance and beg forgiveness, and recourse to *candomblé* to facilitate execution of particular concrete tasks. In socio-racial perceptions of women, a Brazilian adage expresses succinctly pertaining preconceptions: *branca para casar, mulata para cama e negra para cozinha* (a white woman for marriage, a mulatto woman as mistress and a black women in the kitchen). The associations are thus white respectability, black servitude and the intermediary mulatto as sensual fantasy. Apart from the arbitrariness of these stigmas, the point is also that the (white male) Brazilian conception envisages the simultaneous maintenance of the three separate rapports. Marginalized genders, races and classes in Brazil may be less empowered to achieve such simultaneous multifaceted exploitation, but as members of the same organic culture are also susceptible to the same conceptual procedure. Thus a black male may pursue mulatto women with the aid of a black *mãe-de-santo* but prefer a white male lawyer; in a more contemporary context a mulatto women may cultivate negritude in personal cosmetics but tend to underestimate the competence of black politicians. In Salvador the combination of cultivation of black looks associated with

afro-centrism (notably dreadlocks) has in the last decade become common in certain working-class professions, however there seems to be no correlative development of voting along colour lines let alone the emergence of political clusters based around a consistent ethnic ideology.²⁵

The lack of patterns of a politicized black ethnicity in Bahia can be explained in various ways. A crucial characteristic of *baianidade* is its rejection of or disengagement from social resentment, i.e. the individual's ideological adscription, with emotional affect, to perceived systematic or occasional violations of principles and mechanisms of social justice. To consider this at the formal political level, Bahia and Brazil present, historically speaking, low indices of both social revolt and group solidarity despite material conditions propitious to collective resentment (poverty and extreme income distribution inequity). The Brazilian political party system is built around clusters of personal alliances with little consistent ideological markings along the conventional spectrum from Left to Right. In Brazil political judgments tend to be subjective and changeable, and not based on the consistent application of abstract principles (whether Left/Right orthodoxy or other criteria).²⁶ At the personal level, the absence of conventional mechanisms of resentment and retribution pertain in contexts which would be highly problematic for Western observers. Rape victims frequently do not report the crime, not so much because of a sense of personal shame but rather because, from the civic perspective, the expectation that the violator will be caught is low. There is thus a lacuna between personal experience and legal theory and/or cynicism as to the possibility of justice; the subaltern individual is thus psychologically disengaged from the assumptions about civil rights and public space which are necessary for healthy civic intercourse. This gap in political and ethical consciousness is aptly suggested by the term *cidadania* (citizenship) used in the ongoing civic education campaign: if in the West, citizenship is simply a right conferred or not to an individual, in Bahia (and Latin American generally) *cidadania* cannot be executed by legislation because it contradicts ingrained cultural precepts and habits. But the lack of (mechanisms of expression of) resentment also plays out in the private moral sphere. From a personal psychological point of view, the violation of rape may not be conceived as recoupable by punishment of the perpetrator (i.e., legal retribution would not, even at a symbolic moral level, "undo" or "make up for" the violation).

This aspect of *baianidade* as non-receptive to the notion of resent has frustrated the orthodox Left which has generally had little success in fostering socialist consciousness of collective identity and inter-class difference of interests. Vertical axes of personal alliances

(and admiration of socially superior elements even if unallied) prevail over horizontal class ties. The absence of conventional resentment patterns also contradicts the socio-ethical logic and dictums of the cultural discourse which in the West has come to substitute socialist solidarity as the dominant model of moral righteousness in the secularized public sphere - the “politically correct” discourses which defend a phalanx of heterogeneous cultural streams (based on gender, race, class, ecological soundness, religious features, etc.) clustered under the sign of subalterity and sharing the one characteristic of not belonging to and being denied power by the central authorities (white, male, bourgeois) who detain it.

Another factor in *baianidade* working against resentment is its Utopian impulse. Bahia, informally referred to as the “good earth” (*boa terra*) figures poetically as a paradise on earth. The history of Brazilian rhetoric includes a whole tradition of extravagant eulogy of the nation (*ufanismo*). *Carnaval* music continues in the same vein, both in the mainstream material (themes of bounteous fun, sun, dance, happiness, love, etc.) and in *bloco afro* self-referential celebrations (either of the *bloco* or the lyric protagonist of the song as heroic, super-endowed and spiritually fulfilled).²⁷ *Baianidade*’s compulsive beatific satisfaction with all things Bahian tends to erode the possibility of critical discourse and critical habits of thinking. A classic example of this is the use of musical entertainment in political rallies: aesthetic satisfaction is substituted for social commentary. Speeches without music are rare, and normally the speeches are much shorter than the music. The candidate’s largesse and the public’s satisfaction with the musical entertainment are the vital indices determining the seduction or not of the voter. The music played is *axé music*, of which the lyrical themes inevitably gravitate to the euphorias of love, festivity and simply being in Bahia.

In the intellectual domain, an interesting manifestation of *baianidade*’s baroque maintenance of a multiplicity of themes is the simultaneous subscription to apparently contradictory assertions about the cultural legacy. *Baianidade* celebrates both the creativity of miscegenation and the purity of the African legacy (*nagôcentrismo*) as fundamental characteristics of society, though the two phenomena evidently infer differing views of organic development. This simultaneous subscription is not processed critically but rather accepted because of its ideological desirability. Both processes are viewed as positive, and so both are incorporated into the conceptual economy. This tolerance of eventual logical contradictions is consistent with syncretism as a cultural paradigm.

One of the seminal artistic articulators of *baianidade* is the composer Dorival Caymmi (active from the 1930s to the 1960s and still

alive), who wrote for Carmen Miranda and others. Caymmi's repertoire of lyrical subjects - fishermen, *baianas* (women who cook and sell Afro-Bahian food in the street; candomblé acolytes, they wear an elaborate costume of white lace petticoats, as well as beads),²⁸ lovers, vagrants, family members as well as the natural elements (notably the sea) and cultural artifacts (food, etc.) presents the whole spectrum of Bahian life in terms of a folkloric tableau which is also a profound socio-psychological cultural portrait. In a study astutely titled *Caymmi: A Utopia of a Place*, the Bahian cultural critic Antonio Risério (1993) notes how Caymmi deliberately restricted his repertoire to this set of Bahian prototypes, completely disregarding the major social changes taking place during the period due to the petro-chemical industrialization of the *Recôncavo*. Caymmi depicted the traditional fishermen and not the more numerous port workers. Caymmi's work displays an indifference to both the socio-economic terms of modernization and, despite his championing of subaltern figures such as the poor fisherman, to conventional progressive discourses denouncing racial oppression. In his composition "São Salvador", Caymmi explicitly articulates the themes of felicitous miscegenation and equity of opportunity: Bahia is the land of the white who is effectively mulatto by acculturation, and the black university graduate ("a terra do branco mulato e do preto doutor").

The work of Brazil's most famous novelist, Jorge Amado, is particularly interesting in this light. Amado was an active Communist Party member and attempted in most of his early novels to follow Marxist socialist realism guidelines. An early novel, *Jubiabá*, actually juxtaposes a rebellious young protagonist who at the book's end discovers the greater cause of the anti-capitalist strike, and an old *candomblé* practitioner, widely respected by the community but ultimately co-opted by the establishment because he is unable to grasp the meaning of the strike. Despite his minimal role in the action, the *pai-de-santo* gives the book its title, marking the weight of the issue in Amado's mind. Amado's subsequent development involved a return to his cultural roots and, simultaneously, production of his greatest work and the accusation of dealing in provincial stereotypes. The controversy around Amado's work continues to the present; he is unique amongst leading Brazilian writers in having been the object of scathing hostility (on aesthetic and intellectual grounds) by a significant number of nationally dominant literary critics. The accusation of a beatific but opportunistic dealing in stereotypes could also be leveled against the most famous visual renderer of Bahia, the painter Carybé. Great Bahian art seems to be anchored in an aesthetic pantheon of a limited set of socio-ethnic stereotypical figures, of which the sovereign is the beautiful, sensual mulatto woman. The potential criticisms of this expression from a conventional progressive perspective need not be enumerated. While it is consistently

profoundly politically incorrect in gender terms it is racially and socially progressive in its celebration of miscegenation and the masses (*povo*), and in that it is genuinely popular with the *povo* (in Amado's case contradicting the almost universal law that poor Brazilians do not read novels).

This authenticity is enigmatic in that it again contradicts contemporary theory in the logic of subject positions (subalterns can not be accurately represented by non-subalterns). The great Bahian artists (Caymmi, Amado, Carybé, Caetano Veloso, Gilberto Gil) are male and disproportionately white (though Caymmi is *pardo*, and Gil black) and bourgeois. Further, the great intellectual and artistic subscribers to *baianidade* include foreigners who are "Bahian by choice" (*baiano por opção*). Carybé is Argentinean. The greatest artistic presence in the historically important *Recôncavo* town of Cachoeira was a German lithographer who settled there and changed his name to Hansen Bahia. The most important non academic scholar of *candomblé* in Bahia since World War II was the French photographer turned *pai-de-santo*, Pierre Verger. *Baianidade* is thus a discourse of miscegenation which celebrates negritude and admits persons regardless of race and even nationality as community members and representatives.

Brazilian race constructs

The general background of race relations and race discourse in Brazil present a series of aspects which problematize conventional objective assessment: i) the objective reality of quantitatively verifiable indices of racial inequity, division and even de-facto segregation; ii) the celebration of miscegenation as a national cultural trope and the centrality of Afro-Brazilian motifs in the repertoire of nationally defining aesthetic symbols; iii) the popular acceptance of government rhetoric denying racial inequity (the myth of "racial democracy", *democracia racial*) and, crucially, discouraging as unpatriotic the establishment of formal organizations based on exclusivist racial identities. Bahia and Rio have been the fundamental loci of socio-cultural perspectives affording scholarly credibility to the notion that Brazil really is different (from the U.S.).

Investigation of Brazilian race relations sustained two major discourses which partially overlapped chronologically. One line, that of racial democracy, followed up on Gilberto Freyre's seminal socio-anthropological explications of harmonious cultural miscegenation, emphasizing class as a structural impediment to the social ascension of non-whites. The argument of this line is that, pragmatically, "the rich black is white; the poor white is black", inferring the possibility of

individual ascension on the condition of economic capital. The notion of differential social possibilities of two racially similar individuals is fundamental. First, it denies that Brazilian racism is racist (biologically based). Second, in its stress on variation it implies a crucial structural circumstance: individual subjectivity. Social ascension infers an implicit change of racial status toward whiteness; this in turn means that an individual can psychologically project him/herself into a different socio-racial position. Evidently, it is easier for a lighter skinned person of color to perform this operation, whereas it would take more money for a black person to ascend socially and “become white”. In the Brazilian racio-social system lightness of skin and money are alternate forms of symbolic capital legitimizing an individual’s claim to the status of whiteness. These processes of class over race, the subjective agency of the individual are captured in the term “mulatto escape hatch” coined by the American Carl Degler (see Degler 1986). Several classical studies in this line are based on Bahian society just prior to the end of the period through which, due to economic stagnation, socio-cultural conditions were relatively stable, before the modest industrialization from the late 1950s and the current rapid population expansion and rise of tourism.²⁹

The other line basically represents the acknowledgment, assimilation and application of North American quantitative sociology. Adopting a materialist line, the “São Paulo school” (Florestan Fernandes, Octávio Ianni and others), through the adoption of quantitative data, verified the existence of structures of racial inequity and therefore “racism”.³⁰ Rationalists’ objections to the apologias of Brazilian race relations as a soft, class-based race code (rather than “real” racism, i.e., biologically-based) have also been verified and quantitatively substantiated in studies conducted in Bahia.³¹ Notwithstanding the opportunities for the individual to negotiate the system’s ambiguity and subjectively determine his/her ethnic affiliation (the “mulatto escape hatch”), the extent to which an individual is subjected to racism by others purely on the basis of assumptions about the appropriate status and cultural meaning of his/her genetic make-up, as well as the extent to which class differentiation parallels racial differentiation may be quite independent of this, and thus tend to broadly replicate North American quantitative data.

Afro-Bahian culture (often re-articulated in Rio and then exported) has tended to obfuscate other traditions in representations of Brazilian identity.³² Alternate ethno-cultural profiles include other Afro-Brazilian traditions (for example, in the religious domain the *Xangô* cults in Pernambuco, *Tambor de Mina* in São Luis), the Euro-Brazilian mainstream, and Amerindian ethnicities outside of the Amazon. There is very little scholarly acknowledgment of the diachronic dislocation

between the rhetorical equity of the foundational Brazilian racial triangle (whereby Europeans, Africans and indigenes are all contributors to national culture) and the color binarism of the modern urban coastal cultural scenario.

The common lexicon registers various phenotypes indicating specifically Amerindian (*índio*) genealogy³³. Brazilian Portuguese has specific terms for each basic type of *mestiço* (Black/Amerindian: *cafuzo*; Black/White: *mulato*; White/Amerindian: *caboclo*); there are many more very specific terms for miscegenist permutations.³⁴ However, while common Brazilian language, unlike North American, has thus historically distinguished a series of intermediary racial types between Negroid, Caucasian and Mongoloid, these are tending more and more to function, as it were, as shades of gray, i.e., as combinations of two opposed designators (black and white) rather than in terms of the multiple combinations of three prime colors. Modern quantifiers, notably the census, use the terms *branco* (white), *negro*, *pardo* or *mulato* and *amarelo* (yellow, i.e. descended from Asian immigrants and not Amerindian). *Pardo* and *mulato* (brown and mulatto) have become essentially synonymous, though *pardo* is vaguer in the connotation of African ascendance and infers a hew (intermediary brown color between "black" and "white", due to either African or Amerindian blood) rather than a specific racial origin. The *amarelo* element (2%) is inconsequential demographically and marginalized in national cultural representation. The census categories reflect a practical cultural reality in urban coastal concentrations of population: Amerindians are subsumed into the *pardo* class. The term is historically conveniently ambiguous as to the specific racial provenance of non-whiteness, thus justifying the grouping of brown Amerindians and brown Afro-Brazilians. In terms of connotation, the term then drifts semantically if not to *mulato* genes then to Afro-Brazilian cultural praxis, because this has been the dominant popular culture of the urban masses. Thus *pardo* and *mulato* are tending to become synonymous. With the greater utility of *pardo* as a census term for non-whites, the retention of the term *mulato* may in future be unnecessary; it really reflects past social conditions in which persons of mixed African and Caucasian origin profited from a term making the white element explicit, for the sake of social privilege.

In Brazil, the cultural expansion of black identity so as to constitute the major recognizable cultural standard of the popular classes is a corollary of the socio-racial principle of *baianidade* and gives a kind of distorted logic to the racial democracy argument. Rather than vertical equity in the social hierarchy there is an inverse compensation for the white cultural coloring of the elite. Such compensation for the bias at the top by the bias at the bottom is hardly just. However, in a sense it validates the precept in racial democracy

that what matters is not color but data external to genealogy. Differences between theories and differences between theory and reality often derive from the ambivalence of the notion of ethnicity, which infers notions of both race and culture. In Brazil, it is not the case that class dictates racial identity so much as that class dictates cultural identity, which is in turn usually associated with a particular racial heritage; the denial of racism hinges on this structural nuance, whereas for orthodox quantitative sociology the social concomitance of the terms verifies the presence of racism. Class may thus be said to determine “ethnicity” in the sense of ethnicity as the common cultural praxis of a community and not as a biological register. A view of race relations in Brazil drawing on both the quantitative data suggesting racism and the qualitative essays affirming harmonious miscegenation may be captured in the following précis: though it reveals classic patterns of racial segmentation and discrimination, Brazil racism is democratic in its biases are shared relatively consistently across ethnicities and classes, and in that its subjective character facilitates a high degree of individual potential mobility. Brazilian race relations may also be considered democratic in that different ethnicities are differentially assigned representative status. While the elite is psychologically colored in as white, the normative ethnic representation of the masses is black, despite the bio-demographic recession of this element of the population. From this perspective, the greatest victims of the schema are the numerous people of color who are not predominantly Negroid, such as the *caboclos* of the *sertão*, the *mamelucos* of the Amazon and so on.

This constitutes a phenomenon of socio-cultural appropriation, albeit by a group designated as subaltern according to the conventional indices of social power. This *de facto* cultural imperialism from the bottom is largely based on two modalities of prestige, one aesthetic and the other derived from perceived authenticity. The notion of traditional Afro-Brazilian culture as authentic is manifest in the way the *baiana*'s colonial-era clothing and *candomblé* affiliation bespeak the historical heritage in a way that, for example, converts to Protestantism (*crentes*) do not, regardless of current numbers. Aesthetics and authenticity are invoked in the obligatory practice of placing *baianas* at the head of Rio's *escolas-de-samba*. This latter phenomenon is contained within a quintessential national identificational ritual in which the Rio locale bears the national mantle. The symbolic etymology of the *baiana* reveals, however, the central role of Bahian culture in the national mythological pedigree.³⁵

There is clearly strong resistance to conventional North American liberal notions of the normative indices of racism in the productive logic of *baianidade*. If one cannot discount the objective data of the material rationalists, it is also true that analyses of *baianidade*

along the lines of the denunciations of the myth of racial democracy as a government or elite conspiracy to dupe the masses do not adequately explore the richness of articulations generated within the cultural system of *baianidade*. This richness is not merely a folkloric circumstance but rather a substantial economic resource - incarnated in the *baiana* and reflected in the weight of tourism in the Bahian economy, in the fact that this tourism is substantially cultural rather than centered around features of physical infrastructure (beaches etc.), and in the economic and cultural impact of tourism on local conditions. At another level, as an active popular creative discourse, the circulation of the mythology of *baianidade* influences perceptions and realities based on perception (if one does not believe racism exists one is less likely to suffer from it, at least subjectively and consciously), and is therefore an influential element of sociological experience regardless of its inadequacy as an encapsulation of material reality. Finally, the rationalist model is virtually useless in humanist explications of artistic output produced within and characteristic of the discursive system of *baianidade*; the rationalist approach, at least as it has usually been applied, tends to be negatively reductive, arguing that great Bahian art such as that of Jorge Amado and Dorival Caymmi reflects alienation of the people and/or exploitation by the artist. Conversely, the Utopian impulse in *baianidade* to marginalize the moderate, critical spirit problematizes its own testimonial value.

Baianidade thus reveals surprising strengths and weaknesses as a socio-racial philosophy and as a generative cultural system; the following section proposes that the deeper cultural logic of Brazilian race relations is as a compensatory system of racial representation which camouflages an equation of social power between racial segments. The equation affords selective representation rather than equity; in the distributive economy of symbolic capitals, aesthetic and moral indices are scrambled in a way which facilitates the preservation of a pattern of material inequity. Blacks are prominent within a restricted set of icons of Brazilian national identity and *baianidade*; the aesthetic prestige afforded these figures compensates for the ongoing moral stigma associated with the same Afro-Brazilian cultural forms. The moral prestige of Catholicism over *candomblé*, for example, translates into a moral devaluation of black praxes (*candomblé* as *macumba*, black magic) and ultimately legitimizes the continuing socio-economic marginalization of blacks. Nevertheless, the ceding of space in the aesthetic domain to Afro-Brazilian representations creates a domain of symbolic empowerment and entrepreneurial opportunity. Pragmatically, this is a more significant outlet for Afro-Brazilians than the path prescribed in the apologies of Brazilian race relations. Quantitative indices of the marginalization of blacks in Brazil show little improvement over time

because of the denial of racism, so that the notion of the mulatto escape hatch in the socio-economic domain is, quantitatively speaking, a chimera. In the aesthetic domain, however, a reverse racism pertains. Afro-Brazilians actually benefit from a symbolic capital greater than that of whites. Various praxes considered typical of Brazilian identity are associated with blacks: the *baiana*, *samba* and other dances, Rio *carnaval*, *futebol* (soccer), *malandragem* (persuasion, tricksterism), *jogo de cintura* (literally, "the play of waist"; dexterous maneuvering, disengagement from danger); in short, a series of plastic and psychological praxes and approaches, most of which are constitutive element of *baianidade*. As suggested on the one hand by the prominence of visual icons and on the other by the inclusion of ethically dubious elements such as *malandragem*, the semantic link between these elements is aesthetic grace. This selective representation opens a space for blacks, but the open paths are restricted to the aesthetic domain. Consistent with the cultural matrices of syncretism, as icons these praxes infer a specific moral symbolic capital in addition to their aesthetic symbolic denotations; the moral charge is generally negative, the aesthetic positive. Thus the escape route for blacks is fueled by the perception of aesthetic grace but dragged by the perception of moral dubiousness: it is a merely an "aesthetic escape hatch".

Rather than as a simple populist illusion, the discourse of *baianidade* works as a two-edged sword. While eroding rightful resentment against material inequity between racial groups and eroding group solidarity, it also serves to validate Afro-Bahian (and therefore Afro-Brazilian) ethnicity as nationally constitutive. It is a guarantor of representational existence. However, this representation is in turn conceptually filtered. Religious and ethical components tend to be reduced to or at least encapsulated within aesthetic corollaries which are, as it were, semantically fickle as to their ultimate symbolic capital. The aesthetic valorization of a community is always secondary to its moral constitution. Such valorization affords benefits and opportunities, but to what extent it validates and guarantees the worth and the legitimacy of the ideological underpinnings of the community is unclear (indeed, from the conspiracy theory point of view, the whole point is that commodification of a ethno-cultural ecology putatively validates an identity without in fact guaranteeing the objective enforcing of its moral code).

In political terms, *baianidade* has tended to be more compatible with individual subjectivity than with inter-group differentiation and exclusion. In the terms presented here, this also plays out in an inclination for the aesthetic compromise solution, amenable to all regardless of cult, over the rigidity of a moral code: aesthetic solutions, of which *carnaval* is the most prominent, substitute

for genuine material changes. But while infrastructural reforms affecting Bahians' every lives have been slow to materialize, *baianidade* itself possesses a certain representational gravity affecting art, and thus the terms of the social process and in turn material conditions. Surprisingly, *baianidade* has proved to be partially a self-fulfilling prophecy: the mulatto escape hatch cannot be seen merely in terms of letting the person of color cash in material assets for social credibility; rather aesthetic assets warrant an ambivalent credibility, at one level susceptible to merely ephemeral valorization (notably in *carnaval*), but in another sense of the greatest potential value, because, as the arbiter of authenticity, they dominate the terms of national identity. Afro-Brazilian cultural praxis is the master discourse of national spiritual identity, and the pragmatic recreational vehicle of a good part of the population, including many poor whites.

Globalization and negritude

This cultural affirmation of negritude is extremely ambiguous in its fluid movement between class and ethnic connotations. It is characteristically subaltern and black; ultimately the question is whether or not there is a necessary concomitance of these terms at the pragmatic level of generative rhetoric. The Brazilian cultural matrix allows for the ethnic adscription to negritude of (poor) non-blacks and is thus apparently a colonizing culture likely to survive and grow. But if this form of negritude is ultimately a discourse of subalterity rather than Africanness, its ethnic authenticity is compromised and, more importantly, its vitality is parasitically dependent on the marginalization of non-whites. In the latter sense the danger is that the celebration of negritude, despite a rhetoric of valorization, will not lead to the transformation to full membership rights in society (*cidadania*). In light of the civic ambiguity of aesthetic valorization of Afro-Brazilian expression, the issue casts into doubt the relation between form (aesthetic manifestation) and content (social agenda) in the Africanization of the *carnaval* of Salvador.

The rhetoric of the *blocos afro* movement combines a series of progressive agendas. The emergence of the *blocos* was concomitant with the re-establishment of democracy in Brazil after military dictatorship (1964-1985), and reflects the "New Left" discourse of grassroots empowerment, consciousness-raising (*conscientização*) and *cidadania*. At the same time and as a part of the process of globalization, New Left elements in Europe including the Catholic Church, governments, international aid banks and a host of "non-government organizations" (in Brazil, *ONGs*) sponsored many communitarian

projects throughout Latin America. An important element of the at-the-grass-roots philosophy was presentation of the progressive agenda in terms of local cultural authenticity, seen as the only guarantor of the real assimilation of new values. In Salvador the designated roots culture has virtually exclusively been Afro-Brazilian. Virtually all major communitarian projects in Salvador receive aid in some form or other from Europe (and other wealthy regions). The best known community project in Salvador in the 1980s and 1990s has been the *Projeto Axé*, aimed at protecting and reforming street children. The title draws on the same *candomblé* word used in *axé music*; the founder and leader of the mission is an Italian priest. At the informal level, tourists visiting Salvador range from the conventional frequenters of historic sites and beaches, to persons intent on sexual exploitation of local poor women and prostitutes, to highly informed and interested individuals who stay for long periods, take classes in local cultural activities and indirectly contribute greatly to *conscientização*. Thus, at a moral as well as an economic level afrocentric projects in Salvador have been underwritten by European support.

Given the rich Brazilian tradition denying racism and discouraging afrocentric nationalism, Afro-Bahian organic intellectuals drew inspiration almost completely from a series of external models. Three general schools of afrocentric ideology were of particular pertinence: i) anti-colonial Pan-Africanism; ii) the African-(North)American struggle for civil rights and subsequent aesthetic revolution (“Black is beautiful”); iii) Rastafarianism.

The emergence of Ilê (1976) directly followed the collapse of the Portuguese colonial empire and the liberation of Angola, Mozambique and Guinea Bissau. Ilê’s *carnaval* depiction of African revolutionaries carrying (fake) AK-47s and wearing African clothes was a seminal moment of symbolic liberation and a shock to Salvador’s population and to the Brazilian military government. The liberation struggle produced a series of heroes and critical writings offering inspiration. The early years of both Ilê Ayê and Olodum focused (in the annual *carnaval* themes) on Africa in the form of contemporary states and the “Black Athena” theme of Negroid Egyptian pharaohs.³⁶ This reflects the prominence of pan-Africanism as the initial afrocentric rhetoric.

In subsequent years the afro-diaspora in the New World has become more important, focusing on Caribbean states such as Cuba, and African-American leaders such as Malcolm X. The relative decline of pan-Africanism is attributable to a series of factors. The movement lost momentum in Africa and across the globe once most states were liberated (though attention subsequently passed to apartheid South Africa). More importantly, the New World models offer the real organic parallel for Brazil, as states where the presence of blacks was due to

slavery, and the contemporary marginalization of blacks an organic development from that condition. Just as U.S. quantitative sociology (verifying racism) eventually infiltrated leading sectors of Brazilian academia despite its implications for state-sponsored national mythologies, African-American hard-edged perceptions of and approaches to dealing with racism were accessible and influential, reflecting the emerging hegemony of the U.S. model in virtually cultural trends.

Bloco afro leaders, like the rest of the population in Salvador, have always been greatly influenced by prominent black artists. African American artists are admired, expressive trends are emulated, (at times in terms of a purely aesthetic, recreational agenda rather than with ideological inflections - this seems to be the case with the ongoing popularity of funk in Rio³⁷). This form of direct, organic ideological passage is best exemplified in the case of Rastafarianism afro-centrism as communicated through the reggae of Bob Marley and others. While Brazil has few genuine practitioners of the Rastafarian religion and few books on the topic have been translated into Portuguese, the reverence for Marley is immense. His music is played constantly and it is not uncommon for people to memorize lyrics even though they are in English. There are a large number of men with dreadlocks called *rastas* in Salvador and elsewhere who subscribe ideologically to reggae (regardless of their actual intellectual digestion of Rastafarianism) and a significant minority element of the youth who prefer to dance to reggae, implying an ideological support.

The compatibility of *bloco afro* ideology and these external models is problematic because of the organic peculiarities of each. Pan-Africanism has declined as a model both because of the fundamental differences of African society from Brazil and because of the relative dearth of continental African superstar artists. But structural conflicts can also be construed in terms of the character of *baianidade* as a generative model. Independently of government promotion of the racial democracy discourse, *baianidade* proposes a model of racially miscegenist integration around a rhetorical pole of negritude; this model insists its openness to persons of all color. In general, authentic Bahian culture is based on practices which while associated with negritude are considered Brazilian rather than African. Capoeira, for example, originally known as *capoeira angola* and believed to derived from Bantu peoples in Angola, is being exported back to Africa, (where it was no longer, if ever, practiced) but at a slower rate than its circulation in Western countries and around Brazil. An interesting example occurs in the domain of the one great putatively purist axis of African legacy, *candomblé* (of which Yoruba is the liturgical language). Despite the notion of faithful preservation, the orthodox rhetoric speaks of

syncretism and the ritual formally invokes Catholicism. In what could be called high *candomblé* (in *terreiros* with the most material resources, where rituals are observed with greater scruples of purity), one must be baptized in the Catholic Church to be a member; the most conspicuous public manifestations of *candomblé* are ritual *lavagens* (washings) of the steps of churches, certain of which are considered particularly holy sites for *candomblé* (notably the church of *Nosso Senhor do Bom Fim*, Our Lord of Good Venture). The recent rise within *candomblé* of an element proposing purification, i.e., elimination of syncretist “pollution” constitutes a genuinely continental afrocentric perspective. However outside of wealthy *terreiros* the dominant trend is the rise of *candomblé de caboclo* (Amerindian), a school of *candomblé* with greater integration of indigenous spirits and practices (including consumption of tobacco and alcohol) previously disparaged as less powerful in magic and socially marginal - partly because it did not enjoy the patronage of the Euro-Bahian establishment. This detail is suggestive of the organic social links between races in the most powerful *terreiros*, which may well militate against their “purification” despite the fact it is elements within this privileged circle that have been most receptive. Ironically, it may well be the case that the only domain where purism dominates is among university-trained religious anthropologists. Thus, local conditions present a series of logistic obstacles to the purification movement, and contrary trends are also emerging in less privilege sectors which are more attuned to the logic of *baianidade* and the habitual mentality of the general population.

The African American model of activism for civil rights based on quantitative verification of socio-economic discrepancies between racial groups and pursuit of parity by means of intervention including “affirmative action” and quota obligations for employers encounters serious logistic and conceptual obstacles in Brazil. The democratization process brought some concessions, such as the outlawing of racism. However, the general immaturity of Brazilian civil democracy has meant a huge gap between the declaration and the enforcement of civil laws (the classic example being the concomitance of new laws acknowledging children’s rights to protection, and the proliferation of “death squads” eliminating homeless children). Pertinent Brazilian civil institutions (universities, governments, corporations) do not dispose at present of the infrastructural resources for implementation of models such as affirmative action. Secondly, this would require formal acknowledgment and quantitative substantiation of indices of racial disparity. Brazil’s census perennially presents a sharp underestimate of the proportion of “blacks” and overestimate of “whites” through the agency of subjective ethnic affiliation; a complete cultural transformation even at the initial stage of identifying racial identity would be required. Finally, a further

transformation would be necessary in terms of political affiliation, since in Brazil there is neither a race-based nor a class-based voting block. Thus, the lobbying process in favor of blacks as an interest group, fundamental to the passage of legislation in the U.S., has no parallel in Brazil. As stated earlier, the general operative principle of Brazilian politics of candidates earning votes through systems of personal alliance (*clientelismo*) implies a logic of axes of allegiance which in relation to social hierarchies are vertical rather than horizontal and thus transcend the existence of socio-economic segmentation according to race. Though not a peculiarity of *baianidade*, *clientelismo* is its characteristic political model. In terms of acculturated modes of perception of civil life, the absence of resentment characteristic of *Baianidade* - or at least the disinclination to actively seek retributive justice - problematizes the possibility of social mobilization to demand reform of racially inequitable conditions. Though slowly improving levels of education and steadily increasing professional expectations are facilitating a gradual integration of the extensive North American sub-culture of litigation for personal injury and damage (reflective of very sophisticated criteria of personal responsibility, and, contrarily, against the notion of organic community, of an ever heightening sense of distance between individuals), the contemporary "carnavalization" of Bahian society (organization of social life around *carnaval* or carnivalesque festivities, investment of more personal resources in recreational pursuits, and a general philosophy of hedonistic *carpe diem*) militates against the premise of sharp divisions between each individual's personal space and the ready defense against incursions through formalized civil mechanisms including litigation and recourse to tribunals of justice.

Caribbean black nationalist separatism in the form of a secularized pop version of the precepts of Rastafarianism, proselytized largely through reggae, presents the afrocentric discourse most stridently contrary to the cultural logic of *baianidade*. While the notion of necessary return to Africa (in either the Garveyite sense pertaining to West Africa, or to the Ethiopia of Haile Selassie) has faded into the mythological background of Rastafarianism ideological religion, the faith still comprehends a racio-historical essentialism determining differential roles according to genetic make-up, and complete rejection of the (post-)colonial Western aesthetic codes which largely determine mainstream societal norms.³⁸ The celebration of miscegenation in *Baianidade*, the insistence on the right of access to Afro-Bahian cultural currents of persons regardless of race, and the power of rhetoric suggesting felicitous racial camaraderie constitute a cultural ideology of an opposing order to that of Rastafarianism. The protagonist of *Baianidade* is not so much a people as a societal locus, a Utopian discourse which transcends the genuine woes of historical experience. The rhetoric of *baianidade* as to

slavery is restricted to anecdotes of personal sentiments such as cruelty, sexual attraction, affection and so on, completely obfuscating essentialist determinism and thus the notion of the historic role and destiny of blacks.

Despite this inpropitious scenario, reggae has stimulated an ongoing ideological resonance in Bahia. Rastafarian style (notably for hair) provides the normative look for the aspiring black artist; the sacred colors of black, red, yellow and green orient the ornamental color schema for Olodum (used in clothes, on drums, on CD covers and so on). The generic heroization of Bob Marley is not really specific as to ideological content: Marley is admired for his courage, loved for his musical talent, wailed for his untimely death; he figures as a role model, as the perfect integration of a series of superlative qualities for a black man.

The Rastafarian insistence on a black aesthetics also resonates profoundly in Bahia as a rebuttal of previous eurocentric cosmetic standards. The relative valorization of a person on the basis of appearance (in racism, racial essentialisms, everyday work-place biases, gender interaction and so on) is suggestive of the liminality between moral and aesthetic symbolic capitals. Within Bahian culture, a system heavily predicated on aesthetic capital (the indispensable importance of beauty and style for personal advancement, particularly for blacks), the new afrocentric aesthetic valorization articulates and as it were promises a fulfillment of the individual which also impacts material and moral standing. While successive African American styles have provided the bulk of innovations of look, Jamaican aesthetic dignity is more morally sure-footed because it is based on a consistent and profound afrocentric ideological system. The impact of this cohesive anti Euro-centric logic as a symbolic inspiration in Bahia must not be underestimated.

At the same time, the ultimate ideological dissonance between black ethnic nationalism and baianidade is fundamental. According to recent scholarship, Rastafarianism's ideological rigor and purism is organically linked to the Protestant fundamentalism which had flourished in the Jamaican black underclass.³⁹ *Baianidade* is based on syncretism, itself based on the tolerance (in the culture) of Catholicism for approximations of beliefs and the endless deferral of the abolition of "superstitions". *Baianidade* is eminently "humane" and non-judgmental - it is eclectic, psychologically flexible, and tolerant of contradictions and hypocrisy in ideologies, politics and personal identification.

Rastafarian doctrine is the most complete example of afro-centrism specifically oriented to New World as opposed to contemporary continental African experience. New World afro-centrism is characteristically predicated on black subalterity; it contests oppression through a moral defense of blacks which is aesthetically substantiated

in a series of praxes (notably in music) and valorizations of looks (rebutting the eurocentric stigmas of black looks as ugly because different). Rastafarianism presents the resolution of ethnic alienation through a radical inversion of white/black totem/taboo. The rhetorical trope of such afro-centrism is a positive negative - marks of black ethnicity which previously marked inferiority or ugliness are reinvented as positive icons. For example, kinky hair - called "bad hair" in Jamaica and in Brazil (*cabelo ruim*) - is adapted to the dreadlocks style, to which it is better suited than straight hair, and made a sacrosanct item of ritual paraphernalia. In terms of historical experience, the slavery period is recast to focus not only on victimization but also on successful resistance (notably runaway slave enclaves, in Brazil known as *quilombos*); the black person emerges as heroic survivor.

Black cultural expressions in the New World are intimately associated with populism because artists generally derive from the popular classes and create cultural product for popular audiences. This naturally leads to a semantic confusion of black ethnicity and class subalterity: black energy becomes a street energy, an energy of the masses, capable of representing the masses despite significant racial variation within the population.

The *blocos afro* of Salvador capitalize on this association to varying degrees. Ilê Ayê, representing as it were the aristocracy of *blocos afro*, is more influential amongst older people, is oriented to black aesthetic prestige, looks more to Africa, and is politically integrated to the local conservative politicians. Olodum is socially militant. Its aesthetic style (percussion, presentation) is cruder and more energetic, reflecting a conscious appeal to adolescent energies and an outlet for subaltern recreational dissidence. Ilê Ayê implements the afrocentric pole of *baianidade*: aesthetically refined negritude, a sense of the purity of African heritage, and complete integration to the political status quo. In the social critiques in its official literature Olodum imports contestatorial discourses alien to *baianidade*; however scrutiny of its song lyrics (the more substantial outlet for discourse) suggest an increasing tendency to return to the Utopian fold of *baianidade*, in extravagant praise of self and state.

The *blocos afro* of Bahia are positioned between competing rhetorical models. On the one hand, Afro-Brazilian material conditions replicate those of other New World ex-slave societies, and Afro-Bahian activists have found inspiration in these foreign cultural champions of negritude, above all reggae artists. On the other hand, looking from the bottom up, *baianidade* effectively constitutes a dissident afro-centrism within the New World fold because its discursive energies do not pursue themes based on distance between blacks and whites (enforced by whites, suffered by blacks and eventually rhetorically

contested and re-invented in afrocentric perspectives), but rather downplay the history of oppression and racial distance and instead engage Utopian notions of felicitous miscegenation.

The evolution of mainstream *baianidade*

From a conventional Western liberal academic perspective, the difficult thing to grasp in Bahian cultural developments is that the apparent political radicalism of discourse in songs and announcements does not necessarily express everyday perceptions and strategies. Aesthetic innovation is not filtered through the same obstacles as social projects. Differences of speed in different domains of advance (for example aesthetic, moral and material), generate gaps between different faces of progressive rhetoric. *Baianidade* has traditionally been more tolerant of aesthetic afrocentric liberation than in the U.S., but less tolerant of militancy for material equity. The moral status of blacks is affected by both aesthetic and material indices and tends to oscillate between them with a slippery ambiguity favorable to the maintenance of the established order. Aesthetic valorization implies moral legitimacy and therefore ultimately *cidadania*; however, if the valorization is in fact restricted to certain public and private spaces (*carnaval*, artistic performance, the street, but not Church or bourgeois salon), it can substitute real *cidadania*.

Further, despite the obvious susceptibility of *baianidade* to logical deconstruction and exposure as a frame convenient to the interests of the status quo, it is a formidably productive cultural model. This is particularly important to black cultural expression as an organic communitarian process because of the traditional insistence on authenticity and the criterion of public acceptance. Secondly, Bahian artistic expression of negritude is highly responsive to commercial valorization - *blocos afro* (Olodum and particularly Ara Ketu, though not so much Ilê Ayê) have tended to move toward the ethno-aesthetic middle ground of the *axé music* of the *trios*. Thus, both from a local, traditionalist, communitarian view and a globalizing, entrepreneurial, individualist perspective, significant factors militate against radicalization.

Instead of deconstructing the hypocrisies of *baianidade*, this generative system must be acknowledged as the pertinent functional model orienting *blocos afro*. Traditional *baianidade* has undergone globalization and mutated. For the black population of the *Recôncavo* globalization has meant exposure to the structural advances of Westernization and to new international afrocentric rhetorical models. These have been integrated by *blocos afro*, notably Olodum, which

simultaneously emphasizes its cutting edge modernity and its subaltern communitarian pedigree. Olodum insists on the right of its members to ideological and religious freedom of opinion. While eminently progressive, this tolerance is also consistent with *baianidade* and problematic in terms of political mobilization. The marrying of the motifs of modernity and traditional community in Olodum, or the compatibility within Ilê Ayê of aesthetic radicalism and political apathy, are also instances of cohabitation of heterogeneous logics which may provoke criticism or skepticism by progressive Western rationalists, but which are characteristic of syncretism in *baianidade*.

The moral and material investigations in academic studies of the current expansion of *carnaval* have, like the aesthetic attention of tourists, been focused on *blocos afro*, virtually to the exclusion of the mainstream *blocos* which quantitatively dominate the *carnaval* and which tend ethnically to white, socio-economically to the middle class, and aesthetically (in music style) to miscegenation, i.e. reproducing the dominant paradigms of Bahian culture. Despite the prevalence of “bubble gum” lyrics in axé music, closer examination of a notable trio text in the light of the present theory of *baianidade* suggest a surprisingly significant and complex semantic texture.

The most famous song of axé music, “O canto desta Cidade sou eu” (“I am the song of this city”; Mercury 1992), while not a *bloco afro* song, exemplifies the phenomenon of a narrative subject which is postulated as representing the spirit of the moment and of the place, of being the essence of *carnaval*. The song begins:

*A cor dessa cidade sou eu / O canto dessa cidade é meu /
O gueto, a rua, a fé, / Eu vou andando a pé, / Pela cidade
bonita, / O toque do afoxé / E a força, de onde vem? / Ninguém
explica / Ela é bonita (...)*

*I am the colour of this city / The song of this city is mine /
The ghetto, the street, faith / I get around on foot / Through the
beautiful city / Afoxé percussion / The power, where does it
come from? / No one can explain / It is beautiful (...)*

The text acknowledges the significance and interplay of non-white ethnicity and aesthetic proprietary (*cor* and *canto*); with the justification of intuition rather than explanation, it marries socio-ethnic marginalization and domination of the public space of the street (*gueto* and *rua*), and the beauty with religious righteousness (*fé*, *bonita*). The song also invokes Salvador’s afro roots (*afoxé* - percussive music derived from *candomblé* and performed in *carnaval* by *blocos de afoxé* rather than *blocos afro*) though the song is itself the epitome of *trio* music, i.e.,

completely secularized, harmonically westernized and heavily amplified band music played by groups with no specific community affiliation.

The lyrical subject of the song is in fact the spirit of *carnaval*, but because of the extensive use of the first person it was associated by many listeners with the singer and author of the song, the reigning diva of axé music, Daniela Mercury. As a white singer performing Afro-referent mestiço music in a largely Black city, this apparent appropriation of the spirit of *carnaval* by the media princess caused a certain resentment. Moral resentment against the implication of the lyric was weaker than the aesthetic enthusiasm for the song, however. The singer was not criticized by the *blocos afro*. She later collaborated with the only *bloco afro* to practice ethnic exclusivism, Ilê Ayê, and used their dancers in her shows.

The song illustrates a number of points framing the present study: black ethnic heritage as a creative resource and as point of reference for authenticity; the harmonious resolution of difference through integration, ritually marked by aesthetic deference to afro-centrism; the interaction between *blocos afro* and *trios*, which, within the *carnaval* world, constitute the communally sacred and the merely hedonistic tangents of an event which is both ritual and recreational opportunity.

The singer's ambiguous colour adscription, between the whiteness which presumably facilitated her professional ascension and the righteous invocation of non-whiteness in the lyric, suggests a sort of straddling of positions along the race axis: markers of ethno-cultural praxis associated with one group are appropriable by another; blacks can whiten with money, whites can appropriate black art and sell it more easily than blacks. This freedom erodes group exclusivity (and therefore solidarity) and encourages the process of assimilation to the cultural mainstream, even if after an initial phase of valorization of the alternate ethnicity. The song also suggests that classic afrocentric rhetorical tropes can be appropriated by the white singer. Along the lines outlined earlier of the New World afrocentric totemization of taboo, victim status (*gueto*) is reworked into a positive talisman of identity, marking the community's authenticity and its role as origin of artistic inspiration.

The flexibility of the ethnicity axis has a parallel in the oscillation between moral and aesthetic references. The song moves fluidly between and associates semantic units of either category. Together, they coalesce to achieve an impressive and mysterious force (*força*). This association, and the creation of a sort of incarnation of the abstract spirit of *carnaval* is consistent with syncretism.

Carnaval is not the maximal symbol of *baianidade* merely because of the material circumstance of being the biggest single event

and the major tourist attraction. The semantic logic of *carnaval* is consistent with the cultural system of *baianidade*. According to classical theorizations, *carnaval* temporarily invokes the abolition of social hierarchy, and substitutes this chronologically limited opening for real abolition (and thus preserves the existing order). This scenario is consistent with classic *baianidade*. One must also interpret the current tendency to permanent carnavalization, i.e. regular indulgence of *carnaval* enthusiasm and license in the celebration through the year of an extraordinary number of festivities. This seems to be a modernization of *carnaval* as a consumer activity; no longer chronologically restricted, it affords a constantly consumable good, which could be alternately diagnosed as healthy recreation or as an opiate (given the extreme poverty of many enthusiasts). Ongoing exposure of very poor people to spectacles of luxury and consumption in television programs and advertisements is often postulated as a possible incentive to consumer discontent and thus (non-ideological) civil disobedience. In this sense a permanent *carnaval* outlet may be useful from a demagogical point of view.

At the same time the experience of *carnaval*, poised between ritual and hedonism, and including the fundamental feature of the expression of fantasy through disguise, also plays at the boundary between the collective and the individual, whether the former is defined in terms of a particular community or in the gross terms of racial identity. *Carnaval* is an opportunity to be someone else, changing genders (cross-dressing is common), ethnicity (whites parading as black pharaohs in a *bloco afro* performance), historical moments (as in the classic Marie Antoinette costume) and so on. While theories of *carnaval* have focused on the flattening of social hierarchy, the process is more complex in that it involves the possibility of appropriation of a different identity, and implies possible penetration between categories.⁴⁰ This dissolving of barriers between cultural categories is the base rule of the ideology of miscegenation in *baianidade* (for example: a white can become a *pai-de-santo* in *candomblé*). *Carnaval* is an act of travesty: an aesthetic overcoming of barriers marking difference, not by real abolition of the differences but by a simulacrum. Its importance should not underestimated given the major differences between societies which do and do not indulge this ritual exercise. Within the world of *carnaval* there are also different logics. While the mask *carnaval* of Venice, for example, ritualizes and focuses exclusively on the plastic dimension of substitution, the Dionysian emphasis in Bahian (Brazilian) *carnaval*, in going outside oneself, experiments psychologically with (the idea of) abolition of barriers and denial of necessary difference between roles and types - including genders, classes and races. The catch, however, is that the superlative aesthetic freedom exercised under *baianidade*

(and exemplified in the drastic formal evolutions of Bahian *carnaval* including its re-Africanization) creates a chimera of conceptual freedom in which other existential domains are similarly mutable. Thus, *carnaval* discourse rhetorically invokes notions of societal change which are presented as immanent or necessary though they are merely speculations, and subsequently substitutable by other figures with which they may be logically inconsistent. This exercise of imaginative inspiration over political aspiration is not offensive to the sensibility of *baianidade* though it can be frustrating for academics attempting to elucidate a consistent social philosophy.

The vitality of *baianidade* is also manifest in its adaptability to globalization as Westernization. The industrial marketing of both folklore and dynamic contemporary afrocentric for tourism, as well as the modernization of afrocentric organizations implicitly negotiates between a series of alternate values and processes inscribable within Westernization and re-Africanization as opposing paradigms. Against afro-centrism, Western modernization is eurocentric or non-ethnic; the ideology of new afro-centrism attempts to utilize modernization as conscientização of the individual in opposition to the commodification of culture, and thus moves towards political mobilization as opposed to consumerism; afrocentric *carnaval* organizations stress the ritual representative and moral aspects of their identity, whereas common *blocos* compete virtually exclusively on the basis of ludic enjoyment; the rhetorical link between subalterity and negritude militates in favor of adscription to a community as opposed to the focus in Western society on individual differentiation and fulfillment. In general, afro-centrism infers a political *cidadania* and rights of moral identity, while Westernization promises economic *cidadania* and rights as a consumer to a materially desirable lifestyle. *Blocos afro* consciously balance afrocentric ideological commitment with the determination to prosper materially such that a significant part of their official rhetoric consists of insistence on their administrative prowess. On the other hand, non afro artists such as Daniela Mercury freely appropriate afro styles and afrocentric rhetorical tropes wherever this is perceived to give a commercial edge (and in some cases also because of genuine ideological solidarity).

Separate to the passive imitation of external, world-wide systematic changes which naturally play a major role in all Brazilian developments, traditional *baianidade* has characteristics as a cultural system which are compatible with postmodern society. The logic of syncretism, not only as a religious phenomenon but rather as a cultural practice leads to a sophistication of what might be called subject position jumping. Traditional societies classically restrict individuals to specific locations (as determined by professional role and social prestige for

example); postmodern capitalism, through the development of the consumer as the ultimate mode of social engagement, maximizes the desire for individual differentiation (articulated by the market in an ever increasing diversification of product) and also constantly reduces barriers between consumer and product. Given that the ultimate consumer vehicle is personal identity (the individual expresses identity through choices about consumption), access to identity positions is imperative (expressed in the acquisition or consumption of goods and services associated with those roles). The underlying market logic of profit notwithstanding, the characteristic experience of the postmodern subject involves a series of identity engagements. There is an accelerated rate of changes in personal identity adscription even in the ideological domain, for example religious affiliation (the young person who first abandons the family's religion for another, and then another). Though the process is completely different in its historical etymology, syncretism in *baianidade*, in its facilitation of simultaneous pluralism (within the society or within the individual) effects a parallel multiplicity of options and deferral of exclusive adscription.

Secondly, the ideology of miscegenation, extrapolated in the credo of racial democracy and implicitly invoked by individuals who exercise the subjective options in Brazilian racial identification, works against group solidarity and in favor of individual differentiation. Again, though the historical etymology is again different to that of capitalism, the consequence is that consistent with late capitalism, the culture of race relations in Brazil problematizes ethnicity as an exclusive identification by the individual and propels him/her toward the engagement of strategies of personal as opposed to community improvement.

Conclusions

Afro-centrism in Bahia as expressed in *blocos afro* powerfully advocates an ideological agenda comprehending moral dignity for blacks, and successfully disseminates an aesthetic complex of representations and performances as the complement to its communitarian agenda. However, there is little evidence of a solid relation between moral ideas and societal change beyond the domain of self-esteem. The afrocentric rhetoric of *blocos afro* may even be structurally dysfunctional in its ostensible call for *cidadania*, both in that it is predicated on an organic link between negritude and subalterity, and in that, to the extent that it is consistent with the broader social logic of *carnaval*, it actually serves as an opiate in the Marxist sense.

Afro-centrism as a moral discourse and aesthetic system has proved a powerful rhetorical model, emerging as the predominant code of cultural identification for ethno-social subaltern elements, including non-blacks. Afrocentric models are growing as a code of aesthetic fulfillment for the individual (generally but not always black). Finally afro-centrism is highly successful as a cultural commodity for the export of *carnaval* and the attraction of tourism dollars. There is also considerable ideological support from Europe for afrocentric communitarian projects, so that afro-centrism is also an ideological commodity exportable beyond the obvious ethnic domain of the black population.

Despite its political consonance with racial democracy, *baianidade* must be considered as something much more complex than a deliberate mechanism of alienation of black ethnicity, manipulated by the Euro-Bahian oligarchy in order to sustain its dominance over Bahian blacks. Rather, *baianidade* is an ideology of miscegenation, which, in its celebration of the African legacy, constitutes an aberrant afro-centrism within the range of New World afrocentric discourses. The unique aspects of *baianidade* as afrocentric discourse include its openness to non-whites, its syncretic capacity for simultaneous subscription to heterogeneous and contradictory discourses, and its structural valorization of subjective individual strategies over group solidarity. Through these same qualities, *baianidade* is well-suited for adaptation to and creative assimilation of the changes effected through globalization as Westernization, but structurally incompatible with globalization as afrocentric *conscientização*.

The disinterest in insistence on historical racial differentiation (exemplified here in relation to Rastafari, and also characteristic of the North American Nation of Islam) induces beatific rhetorical genres in traditional *baianidade* which are based not on the classic New World “positive negative” model (redemption through resistance, overcoming oppression and emerging as morally victorious). New *baianidade* under the sign of afro-centrism as in the songs of the *blocos afro* does engage foreign afrocentric rhetorical tropes, and there is great admiration for the diverse New World heroes of negritude (Bob Marley, Malcolm X, Martin Luther King etc.). However this should be interpreted as fraternal solidarity rather than real ideological adscription to any particular external discourse.

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