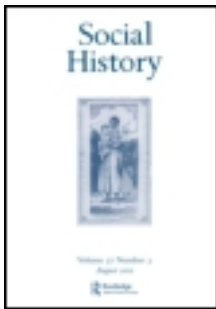


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Of sentiment, science and myth: shifting metaphors of racial inclusion in twentieth-century Brazil

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Paulina L. Alberto

Of sentiment, science and myth: shifting metaphors of racial inclusion in twentieth-century Brazil

Over the course of the twentieth century, the phrase ‘racial democracy’ came to denote a particularly Brazilian brand of racial inclusiveness based on the celebration of a history of widespread racial and cultural mixture, and on the absence (in post-emancipation Brazil) of laws that discriminated on the basis of race. Scholars typically attribute the emergence of the phrase and concept of ‘racial democracy’ to the writings of Brazilian sociologist Gilberto Freyre in the 1930s, though the term is also commonly extended to ideologies of racial harmony that arose at least as early as the nineteenth century. By the 1960s and 1970s, many Brazilian and foreign scholars, together with a reinvigorated Brazilian black movement, forcefully denounced racial democracy as a ‘myth’ – an insidious ideology that served to veil racism in Brazilian society and, even more effectively than the open racism of the United States or South Africa, impeded effective anti-racist mobilization.¹ In subsequent debates over

¹This revisionist critique of Brazil’s racial democracy has produced a substantial literature, from the mid-twentieth century until quite recently. Some of the earliest scholars to promote this view were Brazilian social scientists, notably sociologist Florestan Fernandes and his students, whose works documented widespread, persistent racial inequalities in Brazilian society. See, for instance, Florestan Fernandes and Roger Bastide, *Relações raciais entre negros e brancos em São Paulo* (São Paulo, 1955); Florestan Fernandes, *A integração do negro na sociedade de classes* (São Paulo, 1965 [1964]); Fernando Henrique Cardoso and Octávio Ianni, *Cor e mobilidade social em Florianópolis: Aspectos das relações entre negros e brancos numa comunidade do Brasil meridional* (São Paulo, 1960); and Octávio Ianni, *Raças e classes sociais no Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro, 1972). On these scholars’ contributions towards dismantling the idea of Brazilian racial harmony, see Emília Viotti da Costa, ‘The myth of racial democracy: a legacy of the Empire’ in her book *The Brazilian Empire: Myths and Histories*, 2nd edn (Chapel Hill,

NC, 2000), 234–46. By the 1970s and 1980s, the denunciation of racial democracy as ‘myth’ became a central feature of Brazilian black activism; see especially Abdias do Nascimento, *O negro revoltado* (Rio de Janeiro, 1982); Abdias do Nascimento, *O genocídio do negro brasileiro: Processo de um racismo mascarado* (Rio de Janeiro, 1978). For examples of important US-based contributions to this line of argumentation, see Carl Degler, *Neither Black nor White: Slavery and Race Relations in Brazil and the United States* (New York, 1971); Thomas E. Skidmore, *Black into White: Race and Nationality in Brazilian Thought* (New York, 1974; reprinted with a new preface and bibliography, Durham, NC, and London, 1995 [1993]); Robert B. Toplin, *Freedom and Prejudice: The Legacy of Slavery in the USA and Brazil* (Westport, CT, 1981); George Reid Andrews, *Blacks and Whites in São Paulo, Brazil, 1888–1988* (Madison, WI, 1991); Michael Hanchard, *Orpheus and Power: The Movimento Negro of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, Brazil, 1945–1988* (Princeton, NJ, 1994); France W. Twine, *Racism in a Racial*

whether racial democracy was indeed a pernicious falsehood, or a potentially positive and distinctively Brazilian phenomenon that demands understanding on its own terms, commentators have generally shared the assumption that 'racial democracy' described a coherent, fixed racial ideology at work across time and place.²

In the last decade or so, however, historians and anthropologists have questioned earlier accounts of racial democracy as a uniform, top-down apparatus of social control. In various ways, these scholars have shown how people from a range of racial and social backgrounds apprehended, shaped and used notions of Brazilian racial inclusiveness over the course of the twentieth century. By revealing ideologies of racial harmony to be constructed from below as well as from above, these works have helped to undermine the stark binary distinction animating much of the earlier scholarship on racial democracy: whether it was, as one leading critic famously phrased it, 'myth or reality'.³ Ideologies of racial inclusiveness, recent research demonstrates, are powerful precisely because they contain elements of both reality and myth. They constitute a space of contestation and negotiation,

Democracy: The Maintenance of White Supremacy in Brazil (New Brunswick, NJ, 1998); Howard Winant, 'Racial democracy and racial identity' in Michael Hanchard (ed.), *Racial Politics in Contemporary Brazil* (Durham, NC, 1999), 98–115; G. Reginald Daniel, *Race and Multiraciality in Brazil and the United States: Converging Paths?* (University Park, PA, 2006). For influential revisionist critiques of racial ideologies elsewhere in Latin America, see George Reid Andrews, *The Afro-Argentines of Buenos Aires, 1800–1900* (Madison, WI, 1980); Richard Graham (ed.), *The Idea of Race in Latin America, 1870–1940* (Austin, TX, 1990); Winthrop Wright, *Café con Leche: Race, Class, and National Image in Venezuela* (Austin, TX, 1990); Aline Helg, *Our Rightful Share: The Afro-Cuban Struggle for Equality, 1886–1912* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1995); Jeffrey Gould, *To Die in This Way: Nicaraguan Indians and the Myth of Mestizaje, 1880–1965* (Durham, NC, 1998).

²Many Brazilian and a few European-based scholars have strenuously objected to some strains of the revisionist perspective, which they accuse of imposing US-based definitions of race and racial politics on a very different Brazilian scenario. See, among others, Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant, 'On the cunning of imperialist reason', *Theory, Culture and Society*, xvi, 1 (1999), 41–58; Luíza Bairros, "'Orfeu e Poder": uma perspectiva afro-americana sobre a política racial no Brasil', *Afro-Ásia*, xvii (1996), 173–86; Peter Fry, 'O que a cinderela negra tem a dizer sobre a "política racial" no Brasil', *Revista USP*, xxviii (1995–6), 122–35; Peter Fry, 'Por que o Brasil é diferente?', *Revista Brasileira de Ciências Sociais*, xi, 31 (1996), 178–82; Roberto da Matta, 'Notas sobre o racismo à

brasileira' in Jessé Souza (ed.), *Multiculturalismo e racismo: Uma comparação Brasil-Estados Unidos* (Brasília, 1997), 69–74; Antonio Risério, *A utopia brasileira e os movimentos negros* (São Paulo, 2007); Denise Ferreira da Silva, 'Facts of blackness: Brazil is not (quite) the United States ... and racial politics in Brazil?', *Social Identities*, iv, 2 (1998), 201–34. For a defence of the revisionist scholarship against such critiques, see Michael Hanchard, 'Resposta a Luíza Bairros', *Afro-Ásia*, xviii (1996), 227–34; John French, 'The missteps of anti-imperialist reason: Bourdieu, Wacquant and Hanchard's *Orpheus and Power*', *Theory, Culture and Society*, xvii, 1 (2000), 107–28. A broader range of Brazilian responses to this polemic appears in the special issue of *Estudos Afro-Asiáticos*, xxiv (2002). For an overview of these debates in the scholarship on Brazil and Latin America more broadly, see Peter Wade, 'Images of Latin American mestizaje and the politics of comparison', *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, xxiii, 3 (2004), 355–66. In the last decade, such academic debates over the effects of fusionist *v.* segregationist racial systems have been articulated, in Brazil, with heated public discussions over the implementation of affirmative action policies, and whether (and in what form) such policies are suited to the Brazilian context. For a nuanced introduction to these linkages, see Patrícia de Santana Pinho, *Mama Africa: Reinventing Blackness in Bahia* (Durham, NC, and London, 2010), 10–22.

³Abdias do Nascimento, "'Racial democracy" in Brazil: myth or reality?', unpublished paper (University of Ife, Lagos, Nigeria, 1976).

a common language and a set of ideals strategically construed as shared, through which Brazilians of different backgrounds articulated competing ideas of citizenship and belonging in the century after abolition.⁴

There are two other important ways in which scholars have begun to break down a one-dimensional or totalizing notion of racial democracy. Brazilian sociologist Antonio Sérgio Alfredo Guimarães has demonstrated that Gilberto Freyre did not use the term 'racial democracy' until the mid-1940s. The idea to discuss race in terms of 'democracy', Guimarães argues, came to Freyre and other Brazilian and foreign scholars in the particular post-Second World War conjuncture, when the fall of European totalitarianism, the ascendancy of anti-racist tendencies in the social sciences, and Brazil's own return to constitutional government made democracy a compelling political and social metaphor.⁵ These findings help pinpoint the specific, situated historical origins of 'racial democracy'. Yet there remains a need and an opportunity to identify the content and form of the ideologies of racial harmony that preceded the emergence of 'racial democracy' in the 1940s, and to trace the ways in which these distinct metaphors of racial inclusiveness continued to evolve in later decades. Like the idea of 'racial democracy' that emerged in the 1940s, earlier metaphors of inclusion – as well as subsequent iterations of 'racial democracy' itself – also reflected the specific social and political concerns of their time.⁶ Finally, as a few scholars have begun to suggest, understanding the historical specificity of ideas of 'racial democracy' requires paying attention not only to national conversations over time, but also to the local and regional contexts that informed various interpretations of that ideology.⁷ This crucial but still understudied insight reveals the

⁴See, for instance, Hebe Maria Mattos, *Das cores do silêncio: Os significados da liberdade no sudeste escravista, Brasil, século XIX* (Rio de Janeiro, 1995); Peter Fry, 'Politics, nationality, and the meanings of "race" in Brazil', *Daedalus*, cxxix, 2 (2000), 83–118; Robin Sheriff, *Dreaming Equality: Colour, Race, and Racism in Urban Brazil* (Rutgers, NJ, 2001); Sueann Caulfield, 'Interracial courtship in the Rio de Janeiro courts' in Nancy P. Appelbaum, Anne S. Macpherson and Karin Alejandra Roseblatt (eds), *Race and Nation in Modern Latin America* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2003), 170–86; Tiago de Melo Gomes, *Um espelho no palco: Identidades sociais e massificação da cultura no teatro de revista dos anos 1920* (Campinas, SP, 2004); Martha Abreu, 'Mulatas, crioulos, and morenas: racial hierarchy, gender relations, and national identity in post-abolition popular song (Southeastern Brazil, 1890–1920)' in Pamela Scully and Diana Paton (eds), *Gender and Slave Emancipation in the Atlantic World* (Durham, NC, and London, 2005), 267–88; Brodwyn Fischer, *A Poverty of Rights: Citizenship and Inequality in Twentieth-Century Rio de Janeiro* (Stanford, CA, 2008); Micol Seigel, *Uneven Encounters: Making Race and Nation in Brazil and the United States* (Durham, NC, and London, 2009); Pinho, *op. cit.* For similar 'post-revisionist' perspectives elsewhere in Latin America, see

Alejandro de la Fuente, *A Nation for All: Race, Inequality, and Politics in Twentieth-Century Cuba* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2001); Alejandro de la Fuente, 'Myths of racial democracy: Cuba, 1900–1912', *Latin American Research Review*, xxxiv, 3 (1999); Ada Ferrer, *Insurgent Cuba: Race, Nation, and Revolution, 1868–1898* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1999); Rebecca Scott, *Degrees of Freedom: Louisiana and Cuba after Slavery* (Cambridge, MA, 2005); and the review article by Nancy P. Appelbaum, 'Post-revisionist scholarship on race', *Latin American Research Review*, xl, 3 (2005), 206–17.

⁵Antonio Sérgio Alfredo Guimarães, *Classes, raças e democracia* (São Paulo, 2002), chap. 5.

⁶For the case of Cuba, for instance, Ada Ferrer, *op. cit.*, demonstrates how ideals of Cuban 'racial fraternity' drew meaning not from a generic ideology of racial mixing, but from the specific experience of black and white soldiers fighting side by side in Cuba's late nineteenth-century independence struggles.

⁷See especially Barbara Weinstein, 'Racializing regional difference: São Paulo versus Brazil, 1932' in Applebaum *et al.*, *Race and Nation*, *op. cit.*, 237–62; Pinho, *op. cit.*; Marcos Chor Maio, 'UNESCO and the study of race relations in Brazil: regional or national issue?', *Latin American Research Review*, xxxvi, 2 (2001), 118–36.

supposedly 'Brazilian' ideology of racial democracy to be a product of diverse local and regional expressions of racial ideologies and interactions, often competing for national status.

In this article, I argue that black and brown Brazilians' own changing ideas of racial inclusion throughout the twentieth century shed new light on the history of Brazilian racial ideologies along all three of the dimensions identified above: these ideologies' partial construction from below and their variability across both time and place. This is particularly true for the vocal subset of Brazilians of colour I call 'black intellectuals' – thinkers, writers and community leaders who proudly claimed their African racial or cultural heritage and who aspired to represent other Brazilians of colour in national discussions about race and national identity.⁸ Black thinkers, for whom the horizon of full citizenship seemed continually to shift or recede throughout the twentieth century, were acute observers of the changing panorama of national and international thought and politics regarding race. They were unusually attuned to the ways in which racial conversations in Brazilian public life required changes in both the form and the content of their demands for inclusion. Moreover, even as they upheld the notion of an essentially Brazilian commitment to racial inclusiveness, black thinkers understood that the power of that idea lay in its potential for dynamism and political engagement; frozen and timeless, discourses of racial harmony could quickly turn into instruments of political inertia or reaction against race-based mobilization. The writings of black thinkers over the course of the twentieth century are thus a sensitive barometer of significant, yet still largely unremarked, transformations in Brazilian ideologies of race and citizenship.

This article provides an overview of black intellectuals' perspectives on race in twentieth-century Brazil by tracing the rise and fall in black politics of a single powerful symbol: the *Mãe Preta*. The figure of the 'Black Mother' recalled the African-descended wet nurses who breastfed generations of children of the well-to-do in slavery times. Calls to commemorate the *Mãe Preta* emerged in the mid-1920s in both the 'black press' (newspapers written by and for people of colour) of the city of São Paulo, and the mainstream press of Rio de Janeiro, lasting with some regularity until the end of that decade. The article begins with an extended analysis of the political meanings black thinkers and their white interlocutors assigned to the *Mãe Preta* during the 1920s, decades before the term 'racial democracy' first appeared. In the context of the deeply undemocratic First Republic (1889–1930), black thinkers saw sentimental ties to white elites, including a shared love of black mothers, as a bulwark against scientifically backed discourses of racial exclusion. The article then turns to two moments later in the twentieth century when the *Mãe Preta* briefly but visibly resurfaced in local and national discussions about race: the years between 1945 and 1955, during Brazil's Second Republic (1946–64),

⁸In using the term 'black' to describe intellectuals of varying measures of African ancestry, I am choosing to follow (in translation) the usage of the protagonists of this history, who used the terms *preto* or, increasingly over the course of the century, *negro*, to describe themselves, their organizations and publications, and other Brazilians of African descent. Although the Portuguese words *negro* and *preto* both translate into English as 'black', they have different connotations. For much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries,

negro was considered a particularly derogatory (racial) term for people of African descent; the more polite form, used in official documents, was the word *preto*, which literally means the colour black. When activists in the early twentieth century began to refer to themselves as *negros*, they were reclaiming a derogatory term as an emblem of racial unity, in contrast to multiple identifications based on colour gradations, like *preto* or especially *pardo* (which literally means 'grey' or 'brown').

when both democracy and ‘racial democracy’ became important parts of Brazilian political discourse; and, more briefly, the decade of the 1970s, in the midst of Brazil’s military dictatorship (1964–85), when black thinkers and activists expressed deep scepticism about racial democracy.

Reconstructing the historical and political meanings surrounding the Mãe Preta at distinct points in the twentieth century reveals how the form and content of ideologies of racial inclusiveness evolved over time, in dialogue with the changing panorama of national and international politics. It also shows how these ideologies varied from place to place, reflecting regionally specific ways of envisioning race and citizenship. Above all, uncovering the changing meanings of the Mãe Preta can help us better understand the shifting circumstances and political strategies of twentieth-century black thinkers as they moved from endorsing ideals of racial inclusiveness to disavowing them as a dangerous delusion.

‘SUPERIOR SENTIMENTS’ (1920–30)

In the last decades of the nineteenth century, several currents of European ‘scientific’ racism, proclaiming the innate and incontestable superiority of lighter over darker races, gained widespread currency among members of Brazil’s economic and political elite.⁹ Yet at the turn of the twentieth century, these precepts began to give way to a newer ideology of race, represented as distinctly ‘Brazilian’. Rejecting the notion that racial mixture necessarily led to degeneration, but preserving the idea of the superiority of whiteness, several Brazilian thinkers optimistically posited that the process of intermixture produced offspring of intermediate, rather than inferior, qualities. Since white ‘blood’ and European culture were superior, these thinkers argued, those traits would prevail over time, ‘whitening’ and thus improving the race. Racial mixture, aided by an influx of new white ‘blood’ (in the form of coveted state-sponsored European immigrants), and by the low reproduction and high mortality rates of people of colour (caused by miserable living conditions), would gradually help Brazil overcome the ‘problem’ of its mixed-race population.¹⁰

By the middle of the 1920s, however, a few Brazilian thinkers, like their counterparts elsewhere in Latin America, moved ideas of mixture away from an exclusive emphasis on whitening and towards the celebration of a *mestiço* or racially and culturally mixed nation. In the shadow of growing US imperialism in the region, and especially in the wake of the First World War, writers, artists and intellectuals upholding a new strain of cultural nationalism questioned the superiority of European and North American models of whiteness, civilization and progress. Perhaps, many Latin American intellectuals began to argue, their own people and

⁹On scientific racism, see Skidmore, *op. cit.*; Nancy Stepan, *The Hour of Eugenics: Race, Gender, and Nation in Latin America* (Ithaca, NY, 1991); Dain Borges, “‘Puffy, ugly, slothful and inert’: degeneration in Brazilian social thought, 1880–1940”, *Journal of Latin American Studies*, xxv (1993), 235–56; Lilia Moritz Schwarcz, *O espetáculo das raças: Cientistas, instituições, e questão racial no Brasil, 1870–1930* (São Paulo, 1993).

¹⁰On whitening, see Thomas Skidmore, ‘Racial ideas and social policy in Brazil, 1870–1940’ in Graham, (ed.), *The Idea of Race in Latin America, 1870–1940, op. cit.*, 7–36; Skidmore, *Black into White, op. cit.*; Giralda Seyferth, ‘Construindo a nação: Hierarquias raciais e o papel do racismo na política de imigração e colonização’ in Marcos Chor Maio and Ricardo Ventura Santos (eds), *Raça, ciência e sociedade* (Rio de Janeiro, 1996), 41–58; Andrews, *Blacks and Whites, op. cit.*

cultures – for all of their once-maligned mixture – had the elements to create more vigorous, virtuous and racially harmonious societies than the corrupt and decadent ones of the North Atlantic.¹¹ In Brazil, anthropologists like Edgard Roquette-Pinto or modernist writers and artists like Oswald de Andrade, Mário de Andrade and Tarsila do Amaral came to see mixture among Brazil's indigenous, European and African populations as the source of a vigorous hybrid national identity, and as the very essence of Brazilianness.¹²

Two campaigns to honour the historic figure of the Mãe Preta in the 1920s – one initiated in 1926 by white journalists in Rio de Janeiro (and enthusiastically backed by people of colour in both Rio and São Paulo), and one initiated in 1928 by writers of colour in São Paulo's black press – demonstrate that this ideological shift took place not just in the highest academic circles, but also in the more accessible public sphere of journalism.¹³ These campaigns, and the writings they generated, constitute some of the richest sources on black and brown Brazilians' thoughts about race in this period. They also provide a rare, clear glimpse into black and brown Brazilians' commentary on, and contributions to, the emergent celebration of a racially and culturally hybrid Brazil.

The mães pretas, as black wet nurses were called, had by the 1920s largely faded from the social landscape of Brazil's major cities. Following the abolition of slavery in 1888 and the rise of a new republic in 1889, a series of government-led sanitation and social hygiene campaigns aimed at improving Brazil's mixed-race citizenry increasingly cautioned white families against engaging the services of black wet nurses, whom they presented as potential sources of contamination and danger.¹⁴ Yet as the mães pretas became a feature of the past by the early twentieth century, some Brazilian men began nostalgically to describe the women who had nursed them as symbols of tenderness (though not equality) between the races. In April 1926, Cândido de Campos, the white editor of the mainstream Rio de Janeiro daily *A Notícia*, called in a front-page editorial for a statue to the historic figure of the black nursemaid in the city centre.¹⁵ Over the next few months, his newspaper published multiple articles about the

¹¹In some parts of Latin America, this trend began in the late nineteenth century. See José Martí, 'Nuestra América' (1891) in Roberto Fernández Retamar (ed.), *Cuba, Nuestra América, los Estados Unidos* (Mexico, 1973); José Enrique Rodó, *Ariel* (Madrid, 2000 [1900]); José Vasconcelos, *The Cosmic Race/La raza cósmica*, trans. Didier T. Jaén (Los Angeles, 1979 [1925]); Fernando Ortiz, *Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y el azúcar* (Caracas, 1978 [1940]). For an overview of this trend, see Lourdes Martínez-Echazábal, 'Mestizaje and the discourse of national/cultural identity in Latin America, 1845–1959', *Latin American Perspectives*, xxv, 3 (1998), 21–42.

¹²Skidmore, *Black into White*, *op. cit.*, 176–90; Christopher Dunn, *Brutality Garden: Tropicália and the Emergence of a Brazilian Counterculture* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2001), chap. 1. Oswald de Andrade's 1928 'Cannibalist manifesto' set the tone for modernism's mestiço vision: see Andrade, *Obras completas* (Rio de Janeiro, 1972).

¹³For discussions of the Mãe Preta on different grounds, see Seigel, *Uneven Encounters*, *op. cit.*, chap. 6; Gomes, *Um espelho no palco*, *op. cit.*, chap. 4; Orlando de Barros, *Corações de Chocolate: A história da Companhia Negra de Revistas (1926–27)* (Rio de Janeiro, 2005), 268–82. On the deceptively similar figure of the Black Mammy in the US, and attempts to monumentalize her, see M. M. Manring, *Slave in a Box: The Strange Career of Aunt Jemima* (Charlottesville, VA, 1998); Micki McElya, *Clinging to Mammy: The Faithful Slave in Twentieth-Century America* (Cambridge, MA, 2007), chap. 4.

¹⁴Sandra Lauderdale Graham, *House and Street: The Domestic World of Servants and Masters in Nineteenth-Century Rio de Janeiro* (Cambridge, MA, 1988), 35, 117–31.

¹⁵Cândido de Campos, 'O Brasil deve glorificar a raça negra, erguendo um monumento à Mãe Preta: A significação desta figura luminosa', *A Notícia*, 5 April 1926, 1. *A Notícia* carried editorials and reprints in praise of the Mãe Preta campaign almost daily between April 1926 and the end of the

campaign almost daily. Reprints of other newspapers' enthusiastic articles, telegrams and letters to the editor showcased the broad-based support the idea had garnered not just in the nation's capital, but also across Brazil. Prominent Brazilian thinkers, politicians and professionals – all of them men – sent in pictures of their own dear *mães pretas*, in many cases putting forth their good treatment of these women as evidence of the purported benevolence of Brazilian slavery.

In their contributions, these white writers often deployed fraternity as a sentimental bond that proved Brazil's traditions of racial tolerance, celebrated the (hierarchical) inclusion of blacks into the Brazilian family, or cancelled the debt to slaves that white slaveholders had incurred over the course of centuries.¹⁶ During the campaign, none of these men openly embraced the doctrinaire 'scientific' racist beliefs about black inferiority and the degeneracy of racial intermixture that had become so prevalent in the late nineteenth century – though opposition to the monument in a few instances showed how powerful ideologies of whitening still were.¹⁷ Yet even as the proposed monument to the Mãe Preta embraced Brazil's African past, it proposed largely conservative readings of *mestiçagem* or mixture. In ways that later critics of Brazil's 'myth of racial democracy' would recognize, white writers' celebrations of the Mãe Preta relied on a modernized scientific consensus about the acceptability of racial and cultural hybridity, but echoed earlier notions about the ultimate desirability of whiteness. Even as white champions of the Mãe Preta placed the 'black race' on a pedestal, they eulogized blackness as part of Brazil's past. Many articles, moreover, explicitly expressed longing for the Mãe Preta as a figure from olden days when, they implied, social discord did not exist and people of all classes and colours knew their place in the social hierarchy. This was a particularly powerful message at a time when the rapid pace of social change – including mounting labour unrest, growing feelings of nationalism and xenophobia, and the self-assertion of 'modern women' – made many members of a traditional elite yearn for a return to a more stable, patriarchal social order.¹⁸

year. For the many articles that formally begin with the headline 'Monumento à Mãe Preta', I cite only the relevant subtitles (when available) in order to avoid ambiguity.

¹⁶See, for instance, in *A Notícia*: C. Campos, 'O Brasil deve glorificar a raça negra', 5 April 1926, 1; W. Luís, 'Carta do Dr W. Luís, presidente eleito da República, a Vicente Ferreira', 23 April 1926, 1; C. Carneiro, 'Uma carta de applauso e um donativo enviados à "A Notícia"', 8 April 1926, 4; Coelho Neto, 'A Mãe Preta', 23 April 1926, 3; A. Torres, 'Gratidão à raça negra', 4 May 1926, 3; and C. Campos, 'O applauso de cinco illustres escriptores', 13 April 1926, 1.

¹⁷The author of one published letter complained that erecting a statue to a black woman in Rio's downtown would undermine the 'struggle we Brazilians have undertaken to convince foreigners that we are neither *negros* nor *mulatos*', and would therefore 'degrad[e] us in the eyes of the nation and the world'. C. Esher, 'Monumento à Mãe Preta', *Diário Nacional*, 1 November 1928, 3. Cf. Michael Mitchell, 'Miguel Reale and the impact of conservative modernization on Brazilian race relations' in Hanchard, *Racial Politics*, *op. cit.*, 116–37.

¹⁸On these social changes, see Sueann Caulfield, *In Defense of Honor: Sexual Morality, Modernity, and Nation in Early-Twentieth-Century Brazil* (Durham, NC, 2000), 79–81; Susan K. Besse, *Restructuring Patriarchy: The Modernization of Gender Inequality in Brazil, 1914–1940* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1996), chap. 1; Nicolau Sevcenko, *Orfeu extático na metrópole: São Paulo, sociedade e cultura nos frementes anos 20* (São Paulo, 1992); Andrews, *Blacks and Whites*, *op. cit.*, 151–2; Boris Fausto, 'Imigração e participação política na primeira república: O caso de São Paulo' in Boris Fausto, Oswaldo Truzzi, Roberto Grün and Célia Sakurai (eds), *Imigração e política em São Paulo* (São Paulo, 1995), 7–26; Kit McPhee, "'A new 13th of May": Afro-Brazilian port workers in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 1905–18', *Journal of Latin American Studies*, xxxviii (2006), 165–7, 174–6. See the following articles in *A Notícia* for examples of the Mãe Preta as a symbol of a bygone patriarchal order: A. de S., 'Uma idéia feliz', reprinted 15 May 1926, 3; M. Rodrigues, 'Mãe Preta', 9 and 10 April 1926, 3; unsigned, 'Monumento à Mãe Preta', 15 April 1926, 4; C. Carneiro, 'Uma carta de applauso', 8 April 1926, 4; and Coelho Neto, 'A Mãe Preta', 23 April 1926, 3.

What did people of colour make of these white men's celebrations of black wet nurses? Let us turn first to São Paulo, which had the most active press by and for people of colour in early twentieth-century Brazil. In that city and its environs, writers seeking to affirm black and brown Brazilians' historical protagonism in the nation responded enthusiastically to the elite-led monument campaign in Rio. Indeed, such was their enthusiasm for the proposed monument that writers in the black press often reprised – uncritically, we might think – some of the more troubling aspects of white writers' celebrations of the black mother. A few writers of colour, like Jayme de Aguiar, the co-editor of *O Clarim d'Alvorada*, reminisced nostalgically about 'those doting mothers, who even today, once in a while, seek out their [white] child to remember times gone by'.¹⁹ In several other articles, writers of colour (and some white contributors) waxed poetic about the comfort they received at the Mãe Preta's 'opulent', 'swollen' or 'rounded' bosom.²⁰ And a piece in the usually combative newspaper *O Getulino* closely prefigured Gilberto Freyre's arguments about the central role of black wet nurses in forging Brazil's racial and cultural harmony, crediting the Mãe Preta's milk with the power to transmit a taste for African words, foods and beliefs to Brazilians of all backgrounds.²¹

Yet however uncomfortably these sugar-coated, sexualized depictions of enslaved wet nurses may fall upon modern ears, the men of colour who endorsed such interpretations of the Mãe Preta were not simply duped or constrained by the backward-looking politics of their white counterparts. Their adoption of the Mãe Preta as a symbol of racial fraternity and racial claims-making can only be understood from the perspective of their evolving politics, as writers and intellectuals of colour, in the burgeoning city of São Paulo. The story of their politics, in turn, requires tracing the emergence of São Paulo's black press in response to the problems educated men of colour faced in that particular corner of post-emancipation Brazil.

Beginning in the early 1900s, writers in São Paulo's black press described an 'incomplete emancipation', astutely diagnosing the many ways in which citizenship for people of colour in the new Republic, though not restricted by a formally colour-blind legal system, was none the less abridged and undercut both by the law and by a range of discriminatory extra-legal attitudes and practices. The constitution of 1891 declared all Brazilians equal citizens, regardless of colour or race, and removed property requirements for voting. Yet women and illiterate men were denied the vote. People of colour almost all fell into at least one of those two categories, and were thus almost completely excluded from their nation's formal political life.²² Emancipation was also 'incomplete' in the sense that, in São Paulo State and across much of Brazil, planters and politicians influenced by ideas of scientific racism and ideologies of vagrancy (which portrayed people of colour as incapable of working in the absence of coercion) devoted their energies to securing new sources of labour from Europe, rather than negotiating the terms of free labour with former slaves. These policies increasingly

¹⁹Moysés Cintra (Jayme de Aguiar), 'A Mãe Preta', *Clarim d'Alvorada*, 25 April 1926, 1. See also Ivan, 'Monumento symbolico à Mãe Preta', *Getulino*, 13 May 1926, 3.

²⁰See, for instance, S. de Navarro, 'Mãe Preta', *Clarim d'Alvorada*, 13 May 1927, 1, and Ivan, 'Monumento symbolico à Mãe Preta', *Getulino*, 13 May 1926, 3. This tendency continued for the rest of the decade; see D. R. de Castro, 'Mãe Negra',

Progresso, 19 August 1928, 2; and Helios [pseud. for Menotti del Picchia], 'Monumento à Mãe Preta', *Clarim d'Alvorada*, 28 September 1929, 4.

²¹Ivan, 'Monumento symbolico à Mãe Preta', *Getulino*, 13 May 1926, 3.

²²Andrews, *Blacks and Whites*, *op. cit.*, 42–53; Joseph Love, 'Political participation in Brazil, 1881–1969', *Luso-Brazilian Review*, VII, 2 (1970), 3–24.

marginalized the recently freed, as well as many in the even larger ranks of previously free people of colour, from the expanding labour market of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.²³ Two or three decades after abolition, therefore, people of colour continued to occupy the lowest social and economic positions in Brazil. This situation took on particularly dire contours in São Paulo, the state where local elites most vigorously, and most successfully, implemented the national project to replace African-descended labourers with white immigrants.

These racially inflected labour policies transformed Brazil in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in ways that varied according to region. The country's population (as reflected in national censuses) officially shifted from a non-white to a white majority over the course of the First Republic.²⁴ But whereas in the national capital of Rio de Janeiro white immigration contributed to the growth of a significant *pardo* (brown or mixed-race) population, in the city and state of São Paulo white immigration led to sharper distinctions between people of European and African descent, defined around the poles of a shrinking black (*preto*) minority and a swelling white (*branco*) majority.²⁵ During the Republic, São Paulo's elites successfully presented their state's large population of European immigrants, its small population of African descent, its rapid urbanization and industrialization, and its cultural and artistic vanguardism as the model for a modern and white Brazil, unfettered by the racial legacies of slavery.²⁶

As a lettered, cultured and modestly employed subset of São Paulo's pretos and pardos – a select 'class of colour' in one of the nation's wealthiest and most rapidly modernizing states – writers in São Paulo's black press met the constitution's explicit requirements for citizenship.

²³ Andrews, *Blacks and Whites*, *op. cit.*, 42–53; June Hahner, *Poverty and Politics: The Urban Poor in Brazil, 1870–1920* (Albuquerque, NM, 1986), chap. 6; Warren Dean, *Rio Claro: A Brazilian Plantation System, 1820–1920* (Stanford, CA, 1976), chaps 5 and 6; Maria Helena Machado, *O plano e o pânico: Os movimentos sociais na década da abolição* (Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, 1994); Mattos, *Das cores do silêncio*, *op. cit.* On ideologies of vagrancy, see among others: Andrews, *Blacks and Whites*, *op. cit.*; Celia Maria Marinho de Azevedo, *Onda negra, medo branco: O negro no imaginário das elites – século XIX* (Rio de Janeiro, 1987); Sidney Chalhoub, *Trabalho, lar, e botequim: O cotidiano dos trabalhadores no Rio de Janeiro da belle époque* (Campinas, SP, 2001); Boris Fausto, *Crime e cotidiano: A criminalidade em São Paulo (1880–1924)*, 2nd edn (São Paulo, 2000); Olívia Maria Gomes da Cunha, *Intenção e gesto: Pessoa, cor e a produção cotidiana da (in)diferença no Rio de Janeiro* (Rio de Janeiro, 2002).

²⁴ See figures in João José Reis, 'Presença negra: conflitos e encontros' in IBGE (ed.), *Brasil: 500 anos de povoamento* (Rio de Janeiro, 2000), 94.

²⁵ According to census data for 1872 and 1940, the percentage of those classified as whites in the state of São Paulo jumped from 51.8 to 84.9; that

of pardos (brown or mixed-race people) dropped from 28.2 to only 4.7; and that of pretos (blacks) decreased from 20.1 to 7.3. The numbers of blacks and browns in the city of São Paulo were slightly higher than the state average. Andrews, *Blacks and Whites*, *op. cit.*, 247–54. In the city of Rio, by contrast, pretos and pardos together constituted just over 37 per cent of the population at the advent of the Republic, with pardos making up the larger of the two groups (25 per cent). The census of 1940 shows that even after extensive urban reforms aimed at whitening the city, and after decades of European immigration, pretos and pardos still made up a significant portion of Rio's population – almost 29 per cent (with pardos still the larger group, at 17 per cent). Luiz de Aguiar Costa Pinto, *O negro no Rio de Janeiro: Relações de raça numa sociedade em mudança*, 2nd edn (Rio de Janeiro, 1998), 73. For a discussion of studies pointing to a more dichotomous (black/white) pattern of race relations in Brazil's heavily immigrant south, and on the weak pardo/preto distinction in São Paulo specifically, see Andrews, *Blacks and Whites*, *op. cit.*, 250–1.

²⁶ Weinstein, 'Racializing regional difference', *op. cit.*, 243; Sevchenko, *Orfeu extático na metrópole*, *op. cit.*

In their many social clubs and newsletters, beginning in the early years of the century, these men expressed hopes that displays of respectability, learning and patriotism would help them overcome the lingering racial prejudice that still barred even middle-class men of colour from certain jobs and public spaces.²⁷ Yet the process of becoming an increasingly discriminated minority in a city overrun with whiter immigrants soon eroded these writers' faith in the Republic's ability to fulfil the promises of emancipation. In the early to mid-1920s, the black press of São Paulo began to insist that European immigrants were increasingly edging people of colour out of jobs, housing, and even public spaces and businesses. Adding insult to injury, these newcomers were helping to revive forms of racism that, some writers of colour contended, had 'naturally' begun to fade among native-born Brazilians.²⁸ By 1923, newspapers by and for the 'class of colour' in the cities of São Paulo and nearby Campinas reached the bitter conclusion that people of colour were becoming 'foreigners in the land of their birth'.²⁹ It was a short step from being treated as outsiders in the national community, some writers warned, to seeing explicit racial exclusions newly inscribed in the law.³⁰

This specific experience of racial exclusion, which writers of colour described as 'foreignness', shaped the strategies these *paulista* (from the state of São Paulo) writers pursued as they struggled to defend their belonging as Brazilians in the first quarter of the century. Writers in São Paulo's black press decried the increasing marginalization of pretos and pardos by immigrants in São Paulo's labour market; advocated the creation of race-based political and social organizations; debated and sought to discredit racist beliefs and practices; and otherwise contributed to portraying Brazilians of colour, past and present, as vital contributors to the formation of the Brazilian nation, people and culture. In the context of São Paulo's particularly sharp colour line, writers in the black press also began, by the mid-1920s, to leave behind colour-based terms like 'pardo', 'preto' and '*de cor*' ('of colour') in favour of the once-pejorative term *negro* – a choice that reveals both a proud sense of racial unity across colour gradations as well as a keen sense of group difference and marginalization in an increasingly white city.³¹ It was from this precarious position bordering on foreignness that black thinkers in that time and place latched on to, and helped to shape, a set of ideas increasingly gaining

²⁷On these exclusions, see Roger Bastide, 'A imprensa negra no estado de São Paulo' in José Marques de Melo (ed.), *O negro na imprensa e na literatura* (São Paulo, 1972), 55–60; Andrews, *Blacks and Whites*, *op. cit.*, chap. 5.

²⁸See, for example, 'Prefere-se branca', *Getulino*, 11 November 1923, 1; B. Florencio, 'Os pretos em São Paulo', *Getulino*, 21 September 1924, 1; see also Florencio's articles with the same title on 28 September 1924, 1 and 5 October 1924, 1, as well as his 'Carta Aberta', 2 November 1924, 1; and B. H. Ferreira, 'Que atrevimento!', *Getulino*, 4 November 1923, 2.

²⁹E. Oliveira, 'A teoria do preconceito', *Getulino*, 5 October 1924, 1. The phrase originally came from an article in the mainstream São Paulo daily *A Gazeta*, from 24 September 1924, which is partially reprinted in Oliveira's piece. See also B. Florencio, 'Os pretos em São Paulo', *Getulino*, 21

September 1924, 1, and G. de Moraes, 'Carta de um negro', *Clarim d'Alvorada*, 13 May 1927, 7–8. The idea of 'foreignness' as a way to describe racial marginalization made its way into Florestan Fernandes's influential work decades later, probably through his black informants; see Florestan Fernandes, *The Negro in Brazilian Society* (New York, 1969), 32.

³⁰B. Florencio, 'Os pretos em São Paulo', *Getulino*, 5 October 1924, 1.

³¹For an in-depth discussion of these various strategies in the paulista black press, see Paulina L. Alberto, *Terms of Inclusion: Black Intellectuals in Twentieth-Century Brazil* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2011), chap. 1. Cf. Andrews, *Blacks and Whites*, *op. cit.*; Kim Butler, *Freedoms Given, Freedoms Won: Afro-Brazilians in Post-Abolition São Paulo and Salvador* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1998).

ground among a small group of white thinkers: celebrations of the uniquely Brazilian sentiment of cross-racial fraternity.

To activists of colour, fraternity was a useful concept both for its growing availability as a language of inclusion and for its political malleability. Since the early 1900s, writers in the black newspapers of the state and city of São Paulo had consistently seized upon the notion of fraternity to argue for their rightful belonging in the national community and, specifically, to characterize the proper relationship between white Brazilians and their black and brown co-nationals. In one kind of usage, fraternity, along with liberty and equality, reflected the extensive influence of the political ideas of the French Revolution in the rhetoric of Brazilian republicanism, and the special meaning these concepts held for people of colour. *Fraternidade*, in this sense, specifically stood for the end of slavery and the advent of a society in which people of colour would be citizens on an equal footing with whites.³²

Despite its resonance with the principles of republicanism (Liberty, Fraternity, Equality), for most black writers fraternity described a singularly Brazilian sentiment: the racial harmony that purportedly characterized their nation, particularly in contrast to a segregationist United States. In this sense, fraternity was a sensibility, a mode of social interaction among private citizens based on feelings of reciprocal affection and obligation. Fraternity could not be legislated into existence, yet without it the race-blind guarantees of citizenship in the constitution could be undermined at any time by informal racist attitudes and practices. Elevated to a shared national ideal, fraternity was, in other words, a powerful defence against the very real possibility that the discriminatory attitudes and actions of Brazilians and immigrants would turn Brazilians of colour into foreigners in their own lands. As one writer of colour put it in 1918, in Brazil, 'pretos and whites [were] made brothers [*irmanados*] by their same love for this land'; 'fraternity makes us indistinguishable from whites born under the gold and green flag'.³³ Whether in occasional complaints of the failures of fraternity or in their more frequent celebrations of it, writers in São Paulo's black press in the 1920s upheld Brazil's racial fraternity as the way Brazil *should* be, and based their demands upon this emerging shared ideal.

Black writers were not alone in attempting to harness ideas of racial fraternity for progressive ends. In 1921, to give an example that reverberated throughout the black press, Brazilian authorities heard of the plans by black North American 'colonization companies' to promote the mass migration of their members to Brazil, a land many of these would-be immigrants believed to be free of racial prejudice.³⁴ In July of that same year, two congressional deputies,

³²See, for example, Conde, '14 de julho', *Liberdade*, 3 August 1919, 1; F. Júnior, 'Um depoimento agradável', *Alfinete*, 4 January 1919, 2; unsigned, '13 de maio', *Kosmos*, 18 May 1923, 1; and M. Assumpção, 'Negros retintos no parlamento francês', *Getúlio*, 8 June 1924, 1.

³³J. d'Alencastro, 'Grave Erro!', *Bandeirante*, September 1918, 2–3. See also A. Oliveira, 'Aos nossos leitores', *Alfinete*, 22 September 1918, 1; A. Rodrigues, 'Preto e branco', *Kosmos*, 18 April 1923, 1.

³⁴On these immigration plans and on the Brazilian government's attempts to block them, see David Hellwig (ed.), *African-American Reflec-*

tions on Brazil's Racial Paradise (Philadelphia, 1992); Teresa Meade and Gregory Alonso Pirio, 'In search of the Afro-American "Eldorado": attempts by North American blacks to enter Brazil in the 1920s', *Luso-Brazilian Review*, xxv, 1 (1998), 85–110; Skidmore, *Black into White*, *op. cit.*, 193; Jeffrey Lesser, 'Are African-Americans African or American? Brazilian immigration policy in the 1920s', *Review of Latin American Studies*, iv, 1 (1991), 115–37; Tiago de Melo Gomes, 'Problemas no paraíso: Democracia racial brasileira frente à imigração afro-americana (1921)', *Estudos Afro-Asiáticos*, xxv, 2 (2003), 307–31; Seigel, *Uneven Encounters*, *op. cit.*, 192–8.

Andrade Bezerra (of Pernambuco) and Cincinato Braga (of São Paulo), put before the lower house of Congress a bill that would prohibit the entry to Brazil 'of human individuals of the black races'. Citing only these migrants' 'undesirability', Bezerra and Braga did not specify whether they feared US black immigrants for their political views (which, many Brazilians believed, contravened national ideals of racial harmony and mixture), or whether they saw them as posing a setback to the eugenic process of 'whitening'.³⁵ In any case, scholars have rightly cited Bezerra and Braga's proposed ban on black immigrants, together with their reticence to justify it in explicitly racial terms, as an example of the sort of cynical, racist deployment of ideas of Brazilian racial tolerance that would later be derided as 'myth'.³⁶

Yet these congressional debates also reveal an alternative political and intellectual history of ideas of racial fraternity – one that not only helps to explain black intellectuals' own enthusiasm for the concept, but also contributes to a more nuanced history of changing Brazilian racial ideologies. Significantly, opponents of the bill immediately took over the debate, arguing that it was beneath Congress's dignity even to consider the proposed legislation. Joaquim Osorio, the representative from Rio Grande do Sul, led this opposition, resorting once again to the concept of fraternity. Republican and Christian notions of fraternity underwrote the abolition of slavery, he and others claimed; the Republic ensured the brotherly equality of all men, regardless of race. But fraternity, to Osorio and other delegates in the opposition, did not just mean a commitment to the Republic's race-neutral legal language. Over the course of the debate, a group of congressmen repeatedly framed the proposed immigration ban as repellent to 'Brazilian sentiments, which do not distinguish or condemn men by the colour of their skin'. Throughout the discussion, the opposition defined fraternity as a sentiment of familial intimacy and of respect for human dignity that, these congressmen imagined, made up a particular kind of Brazilian sensibility. Several delegates entreated their fellow congressmen to remember the role the 'black race' had played and continued to play in the formation of the Brazilian nation and the Brazilian people, particularly highlighting 'the women of that race [who] served as nursemaids even, perhaps, to the majority of these congressmen!'³⁷ The opposition's arguments contributed to the bill's failure, at least in the short term.³⁸ But more importantly, they demonstrated the potential power of anti-racist uses of fraternity, which would dominate the black press for the rest of the decade.

The rhetorical power of fraternity was once again on display five years later, during *A Notícia's* campaign for the Mãe Preta monument. In their writings, a few contributors echoed congressional delegates' uses of sentiment and familial closeness to combat hateful scientific racism, and likewise invoked the inclusive possibilities of newer ideologies of mixture. The

³⁵Proceedings of 29 July 1921, in *Anais da Câmara dos Deputados* (Rio de Janeiro, 1923), 623–37.

³⁶Skidmore, *Black into White*, *op. cit.*; Lesser, 'Are African-Americans African or American?', *op. cit.*; Gomes, 'Problemas no paraíso', *op. cit.*

³⁷Proceedings of 29 July 1921, *Anais da Câmara dos Deputados* (1923), 623–37.

³⁸Some scholars have suggested that the bill was rendered moot by the actions of the Brazilian Foreign Ministry, which at the time quietly

instructed its US consulates to deny visas to African Americans seeking to travel to Brazil (Skidmore, *Black into White*, *op. cit.*, 192–8; Seigel, *Uneven Encounters*, *op. cit.*, 196). Yet the bill elicited sustained debate, and its frustrated supporters would propose a similar bill (also defeated) two years later. This suggests that opposition based on avowed anti-racism and at least rhetorical commitment to the sentiment of racial fraternity had the power to constrain those who would implement overtly discriminatory policies.

proposed monument, editor Cândido de Campos argued in one article, recognized 'superior sentiments' as the most notable black contribution to Brazilian national identity. In article after article, supporters of the monument agreed with this characterization, casting the Mãe Preta as the ideal embodiment of the so-called 'affective race'.³⁹ This emphasis on blacks' essential, feminized 'affective' qualities might strike us as yet another tactic to dismiss or disempower the black race by associating it with sentiment rather than reason – the very association that also kept women from exerting active citizenship in this period. Yet sentiment, in the context of the 1920s, carried a particular kind of positive value as well. The idea of the superiority of the 'affective' or black race stemmed from the later writings of Auguste Comte, the father of orthodox positivism whose thought was fundamental to Brazilian intellectuals and politicians in the founding years of the Republic. Although in his early writings Comte had embraced doctrinaire racist ideas about the inferiority of Africans, in the 1840s and 1850s he reformulated his ideas to privilege sentiment over reason, women over men, and Africans over Europeans. Sentiments like familial love, altruism and humanitarianism, he argued in the works that became most influential to nationalist Brazilian thinkers in the early twentieth century, were the glue that held societies together.⁴⁰ For many supporters of the Mãe Preta monument in *A Notícia* (several of whom directly or indirectly cited Comte),⁴¹ Brazilians had the 'black race' and particularly the Mãe Preta to thank for their sensitive national character, their prized collective generosity of soul. These characteristics stood in explicit contrast to the racism, individualism and materialism of the United States where, as one *A Notícia* contributor noted, 'an extreme caste spirit reigns'.⁴²

As these writers, along with many of their contemporaries elsewhere in Latin America, began to revise orthodox doctrines of European racial and cultural superiority, they posited the Mãe Preta as an icon of a proudly mixed national race. She was an emblem of fraternity, both in the sentimental sense of 'coming truly to love those who suffered the bitterness of our yoke', and in the biological sense of the 'fusion of bloods from which we, as a people, were born', the centuries-long 'transfusion of blood' that fed Brazilians' 'racial plasma'.⁴³ The idea of the Mãe Preta's 'transfusion' of 'black blood' to her Brazilian children, even as it denied direct parentage, relied on the language of biology to celebrate the contributions of Africans to a culture that *A Notícia's* contributors, as whites, proudly called their own. This stood in contrast to traditional ideologies of whitening, which not only aimed to erase black 'blood' in the population, but which also saw sexual mixture as a way of propagating European (rather than African) cultural traits among the general populace.

³⁹C. Campos, 'O Brasil deve glorificar a raça negra', *A Notícia*, 5 April 1926, 1. Nearly every pro-monument article reprinted by Campos mentioned blacks' 'affection'.

⁴⁰On the later Comte's influence on Republican thought, see José Murilo de Carvalho, *A formação das almas: O imaginário da república no Brasil* (São Paulo, 2006), 21–31. On Comte's mid-century ideological shift, see Mary Pickering, 'Angels and demons in the moral vision of Auguste Comte', *Journal of Women's History*, VIII, 2 (1996), 10–40.

⁴¹See the following in *A Notícia*: J. Santos, 'Uma idéia em marcha', 22 April 1926, 3; J. de O. Brasil,

'A "União da Aliança" abre uma subscrição entre os seus socios', 1 May 1926, 4; P. Calmon, 'Mãe Preta', 27 May 1926, 4; E. de Moraes, quoted in C. Campos, 'O applauso ardente do Dr Evaristo de Moraes à suggestão de "A Notícia"', 7 April 1926, 1. For a parallel example in São Paulo's black press, see S. de Navarro, '13 de Maio', *Clarim d'Alvorada*, 13 May 1927, 1.

⁴²J. de O. Brasil, 'A "União da Aliança"', *A Notícia*, 1 May 1926, 4.

⁴³Unsigned, 'Monumento à Mãe Preta', *A Notícia*, 15 April 1926, 4; A. de S., 'Uma idéa feliz', *A Notícia*, 15 May 1926, 3.

Those intellectuals who participated in this shift away from whitening ideologies and towards a proud embrace of Brazil's African heritage connected it to ever more vigorous pronouncements that Brazil was a nation uniquely free of racial hatred. In a few instances, discussions of the Mãe Preta lent themselves to outright rejections of 'scientific' verdicts of black inferiority. In his contribution, for instance, Simão de Laboreiro, a prominent Portuguese intellectual residing in Rio, refuted one by one a range of common theories about the origins of racial difference. In their stead, he provided a radical historical interpretation of the origins of racism: there were no superior or inferior races, but rather 'races debased by the domination of others', a situation reflecting an 'unjust' political order. All races, Laboreiro concluded, sounding the familiar note of Christian fraternity, were 'children of the same God'. Laboreiro's analysis of racial fraternity strongly resonated with black paulistas' interpretations of that concept by the mid-1920s, particularly in its treatment of the relationship between law and sentiment. The monument to the Mãe Preta, he argued, would supplement an already existing legal equality for people of colour with a sentimental component – feelings of respect, gratitude and equality – without which legal provisions had no meaning.⁴⁴

Read against this backdrop, in which writers of different backgrounds brandished 'Brazilian' ideas of racial fraternity to discredit 'foreign' forms of racism, paulista black writers' expressions of enthusiasm for *A Notícia's* monument campaign take on new meaning. Even in their invocation of what might appear to be the Mãe Preta's most socially conservative connotations, black writers in São Paulo, faced with the spectre of foreignness, worked to exploit the inclusive potentials of the racial fraternity she symbolized. When they wrote nostalgically about the 'sweet' and 'angelic' Mãe Preta, black male writers (for men they almost exclusively were) sought to affirm their belonging in a (male) citizenry among which there existed a shared memory of the Mãe Preta's tenderness. By invoking this memory, black writers, as literate Brazilian men, positioned themselves alongside the great white authors and statesmen who expressed love for their 'black mothers' in countless poems, essays and articles. Taking advantage of newer ideologies of mixture, they made the black mother, rather than just elite white women, into a symbol of republican motherhood – the progenitor of a new generation of free men of all colours. Similarly, when black writers reminisced about the Mãe Preta's bosom, they relied on the sentimentalized (and sexualized) breast of black women – a resource they evidently felt was theirs to proffer – to reaffirm bonds of masculinity with their white counterparts by alluding to shared experiences of intimacy with black women as both infants and adults.

In Rio de Janeiro itself, black writers, thinkers and community leaders responded with similar enthusiasm to elite-led celebrations of the Mãe Preta in 1926, yet they did so in a different political and institutional context. The national capital was a place in which African-descended Brazilians made up a larger and more visible part of the population than in São Paulo, and were comparatively better integrated into the city's public life and popular culture. By the 1920s, although literate black and brown *cariocas* (residents of Rio) contended with the same range of national ideologies of race as their counterparts in São Paulo, they did not share the particular experience of becoming an ever smaller and embattled minority in a city sharply divided between white and black. Even after decades of European immigration, pretos and

⁴⁴S. de Laboreiro, 'Mãe Preta', *A Notícia*, 3 June 1926, 3.

pardos together still made up about a third of the city of Rio's population in the 1920s.⁴⁵ Perhaps as a result, in the national capital people of colour generally participated in popular politics and public life through cross-racial, often class-based, spaces and institutions, rather than through the sorts of explicitly separate, race-based organizations that emerged in 1910–1920s São Paulo.⁴⁶ In particular, men of colour with intellectual or political aspirations in Rio appear to have had alternatives to independent race-based organizing and publishing. Since the nineteenth century, some of the city's people of colour, particularly lighter-skinned pardos, had access to a range of social and political institutions that were controlled by, but not limited to, white compatriots.⁴⁷ Several important figures of Rio's, and indeed national, public life in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, like journalist José do Patrocínio, novelist Joaquim M. Machado de Assis, engineer André Rebouças, and lawyer Evaristo de Moraes, were men of colour. By the 1920s, moreover, people of colour were becoming increasingly visible in the realm of carioca popular culture, particularly through samba music and carnival performances.⁴⁸ At a time when members of the paulista elite vigorously sought to project a regional image of whitened modernity, segments of Rio's elite turned sooner to newer ideas of racial mixture that made the city's black and brown inhabitants and their cultures into emblems of a proudly mixed national identity. The proposal for the Mãe Preta statue, projected as a national project in *A Notícia*, therefore in many ways reflected the specific interplay of racial ideologies, politics and social interactions of the city of Rio de Janeiro.

While it might be supposed, given the lesser prominence of explicitly race-based organizations and publications in Rio, that black and brown cariocas were more conciliatory in their public endorsements of the Mãe Preta, in fact quite the reverse was true. Black thinkers and community leaders in Rio were more explicit than their paulista counterparts in making

⁴⁵In 1940, pretos made up 11 per cent and pardos 17 per cent of the city's population. Pinto, *O negro no Rio de Janeiro*, *op. cit.*, 73.

⁴⁶See, for instance, the popular movements, alliances and organizations described in Teresa Meade, *'Civilizing' Rio: Reform and Resistance in a Brazilian City, 1889–1930* (University Park, PA, 1997); José Murilo de Carvalho, *Os bestializados: O Rio de Janeiro e a República que não foi* (São Paulo, 1987); Jeffrey Needell, "'The Revolta contra vacina of 1904': the revolt against "modernization" in Belle-Époque Rio de Janeiro', *Hispanic American Historical Review*, LXVII, 2 (1987), 233–69; Sidney Chalhoub, *Cidade febril: Cortiços e epidemias na corte imperial* (São Paulo, 1996); Álvaro P. do Nascimento, 'Um reduto negro: Cor e cidadania na Armada (1870–1910)' in Olívia Maria Gomes da Cunha and Flávio dos Santos Gomes (eds), *Quase-cidadão: Histórias e antropologias da pós-emancipação no Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro, 2007), 283–314; McPhee, "'A new 13th of May"', *op. cit.*; Maria Cecília Velasco e Cruz, 'Puzzling out slave origins in Rio de Janeiro port unionism: the 1906 strike and the Sociedade de Resistência dos Trabalhadores em Trapiche e Café', *Hispanic American Historical Review*, LXXXVI, 2 (2006), 205–45.

⁴⁷For example, the black and brown journalists described in Eduardo Coutinho, *Os cronistas de Momo: Imprensa e carnaval na Primeira República* (Rio de Janeiro, 2006), 89–141.

⁴⁸On the role of African-descended people in the development of Rio's samba and carnival, see Roberto Moura, *Tia Ciata e a pequena África no Rio de Janeiro* (Rio de Janeiro, 1983); Hermano Vianna, *The Mystery of Samba*, trans. John Chasteen (Chapel Hill, NC, 1999); Bryan McCann, *Hello, Hello Brazil: Popular Music in the Making of Modern Brazil* (Durham, NC, 2004); Carlos Sandroni, *Feitiço decente: Transformações do samba no Rio de Janeiro, 1917–1933* (Rio de Janeiro, 2001). On musical and theatrical precursors to the themes expressed in this period, see Abreu, 'Mulatas, crioulos, and morenas', *op. cit.*; Erminia Silva, *Circo-teatro: Benjamim de Oliveira e a teatralidade circense no Brasil* (São Paulo, 2007). On the tense yet extensive collaborations between whites and musicians of colour in Rio's nascent music industry, see Marc A. Hertzman, *Making Samba: Race, Music, Gender, and Intellectual Property in Brazil (1880s–1970s)* (Durham, NC, forthcoming).

the Mãe Preta a public reminder of the unfulfilled promises of citizenship. One of the most visible supporters of the Mãe Preta monument in Rio was Evaristo de Moraes, a famous lawyer and scholar, and a man of colour. A strong believer in the power of national discourses of racial fraternity to shape laws, politics and society in anti-racist ways, Moraes published two enthusiastic articles in *A Notícia* in support of editor Cândido de Campos's project. In his first article, Moraes hailed the Mãe Preta monument as a long-awaited antidote to Brazilian intellectuals' 'almost total forgetting of [blacks'] leading role in the formation of Brazilian nationality'. He then went on to retell Brazilian history, placing people of colour at its centre. The Mãe Preta, Moraes concurred with other disciples of the later Comte, was indeed an ideal symbol of the 'affective race'. Yet, in Moraes's view, affection was by no means a synonym for passivity. The affectionate nature blacks had bequeathed the Brazilian people was the source of many a transformation in Brazilian history – above all, the peaceful abolition of slavery. The 'black race', he argued, had thus been the agent of 'its own liberation'.⁴⁹

Other members of Rio's black community also sought to recast the Mãe Preta as a symbol of the agency and contribution of the black race, rather than simply as a complacent celebration of racial harmony in the present. Rio de Janeiro's *Federação dos Homens de Cor* (Federation of the Men of Colour, FHC), perhaps the only race-based social and mutual aid organization in that city, also professed its support to *A Notícia* in these terms.⁵⁰ Jayme Baptista de Camargo, the Federation's president, called the monument an act of 'just acknowledgement' of a history of black civic virtue and active participation in nation-building. The monument would honour 'the group of slaves, exiled from African soil, from their free *pátria* [motherland or fatherland], brought in chains to the inhospitable shores of America, where little by little, with unheard-of sacrifice, unspeakable suffering, they saw the rise of prosperous cities, where white children [*filhos*] were suckled by the "Mãe Preta"'.⁵¹ For others, the recognition of black sacrifices in the past served as a basis for demanding redress for discrimination in the present. Congratulatory letters to *A Notícia* from Olympio de Castro, a lawyer and the vicar of one of the city's leading black lay brotherhoods, redeployed ideas about Brazilian racial fraternity to make strikingly pointed demands. He referred to the monument as a '*prova*' ['proof', but also 'test'] of the sentiments of the Brazilian people'. Going further, Castro echoed his paulista counterparts on the relationship between legal equality and anti-racist sentiment. Though the 'black race had been integrated into the *pátria* by law, through full rights of citizenship, there remained one great work still to be accomplished – the work of redemption, that is, the extinction of prejudice, which is also a cruel fetter'.⁵² The dramatic claim that Brazil was *not yet* free of racism thus found its way into mainstream newspaper coverage that generally presented the Mãe Preta as a confirmation of Brazil's unique racial harmony.

⁴⁹E. de Moraes, in C. Campos, 'O aplauso ardente', *A Notícia*, 7 April 1926, 1. See also E. de Moraes, 'A propósito da raça negra', *A Notícia*, 27 May 1926, 4.

⁵⁰Mentions of a São Paulo chapter of the FHC appear in *Clarim d'Alvorada*, 22 June 1924, 1; *Menelik*, 17 October 1915, 3; and *Clarim d'Alvorada*, 27 October 1929, 4 [a 'Confederação dos Homens de Cor']. On Rio's FHC, see *Getulino*, 21

September 1924, 1; Seigel, *Uneven Encounters*, *op. cit.*, 227.

⁵¹J. B. de Camargo, quoted in C. Campos, 'Um officio da Federação dos Homens de Cor a "A Notícia"', *A Notícia*, 14 April 1926, 2.

⁵²O. de Castro, quoted in C. Campos, 'Palavras do cônego Olympio de Castro, vigário da igreja do Rosário e S. Benedicto dos Homens de Cor', *A Notícia*, 10 April 1926, 1.

Rio de Janeiro, in short, was a place where, in contrast to the increasingly bipolar racial dynamics of São Paulo, the idea of a mestiço or mixed national identity was beginning to take hold, grounded in part in the visible and active cultural and political presence of people of colour. On the one hand, this situation meant that when black thinkers and community leaders in Rio published their thoughts on the Mãe Preta, they did so filtered through and within a white-controlled mainstream press, rather than in their own newspapers. On the other hand, in a city in which a group of influential thinkers and politicians were increasingly elaborating ideas of a proudly mestiço national identity, the black cariocas who participated in the Mãe Preta campaign were able not just to endorse this discourse as a defence against more reactionary forms of racism, but to push it a step further, exhorting their compatriots to rise to its avowed anti-racist standards.

Despite expressions of support from many quarters, *A Notícia's* monument project lost momentum towards the end of 1926. The proposed monument was never built in Rio de Janeiro. Yet two years later, black writers in São Paulo picked up the torch. In 1928, José Correia Leite, co-editor and founder of *O Clarim d'Alvorada*, by then the leading black newspaper in São Paulo, launched a campaign to memorialize the figure of the Mãe Preta, this time by creating a holiday in her name. Leite chose 28 September as the proposed 'Day of the Mãe Preta', in honour of the date in 1871 when Brazil passed the Law of the Free Womb, a partial though decisive abolitionist measure that stipulated that all children born to slave mothers would thenceforth be free.⁵³

In 1926, during *A Notícia's* monument campaign in Rio, a few black writers in São Paulo had responded positively to the nostalgic messages of racial mixture and fraternity coming from white writers in Rio. Yet by 1928, writers in the paulista black press took on the more confrontational tone set by black thinkers and community leaders in Rio as they sought to re-energize, and redirect, the efforts of São Paulo's black institutions. In the intervening years, São Paulo's black press had become increasingly vocal in its denunciations of, and calls for action against, anti-black racism. Earlier in 1928, Leite and co-editor Jayme de Aguiar launched *O Clarim* on its 'second phase', hoping to shift the paper's focus from an earlier ideology of racial uplift to a new programme of 'action', 'combat' and 'struggle' against racism.⁵⁴ This new programme included, to be sure, a more openly critical tone towards the history of slavery and racism in Brazil, and featured progressively bolder demands for redress from 'our high and mighty aristocracy'.⁵⁵ But increasingly, writers in *O Clarim* blamed the persistence of anti-black racism not on their aristocratic co-nationals, but on European immigrants. The time was ripe to push this interpretation, which had in fact circulated in the black press since the early 1920s. Feelings of nativism were on the rise among many powerful paulistas – planters, factory owners and politicians – who had become disillusioned with the labour radicalism (and, in some cases, the fascist tendencies) of many of the European immigrants they had so eagerly courted. São Paulo State ended its long-standing policy of subsidized European immigration in

⁵³The law, however, allowed for masters to benefit from slave children's work until their legal majority.

⁵⁴Editors, 'Vida nova', *Clarim d'Alvorada*, 5 February 1928, 1.

⁵⁵Leite, 'A mocidade negra', *Clarim d'Alvorada*, 7 April 1929, 1. See Leite's articles (with the same

title) on the following dates in 1929: 3 March, 13 May, 9 June, 14 July, 18 August; see also A. V. dos Santos, 'Congresso da Mocidade Negra Brasileira', *Clarim d'Alvorada*, 9 June 1929, 1.

1927. Black paulista writers expressed hopes that this growing climate of intolerance against immigrants might help turn political tides once again in favour of native black workers.⁵⁶

In this new context, black paulista writers resurrected the Mãe Preta as a symbol of the sentiments of justice and humanity presumably shared by Brazilians of all racial backgrounds, but like their black counterparts in Rio a few years earlier, they made her a vehicle for ever sharper denunciations of the shortcomings of those ideals. They also did something new. *Clarim* transformed the celebration of the Mãe Preta into a black-led project of reclamation based on claims to racial distinctiveness. Most black paulista writers who supported Leite's campaign in 1928 and 1929 saw the Mãe Preta as mother to two distinct but equally Brazilian races, whose members had worked side by side to build Brazil's greatness. In part, this interpretation continued an earlier trend in São Paulo's black press of 'blackening' the population of colour, and of portraying that city, and indeed Brazil as a whole, as places divided exclusively between the binary poles of black and white – a trend vividly illustrated by a *Clarim* article from the late 1920s that referred to whites as members of the 'raça oposta', or opposite race.⁵⁷ But it also responded to the specific political stance of paulista black thinkers, who increasingly rejected an emerging view of national culture, projected from Rio, in which blackness and Africanness were key ingredients in a blended Brazilian identity.

Perhaps the most striking example of how the Mãe Preta could be deployed to affirm the historical and contemporary presence of a productive but aggrieved black race was the drawing Leite chose for the front page of *Clarim* when he announced his holiday campaign in September 1928 (see Figure 1). The drawing portrayed a young black woman holding a white infant in her arms. The shoulder of the young woman's dress has fallen loosely around the crook of her bent elbow, exposing the top of her dark bosom, upon which the child places his hand in a gesture of possession. Below and behind the young woman, almost entirely obscured by shadows save for the whiteness of his clothing, stands a small black boy, presumably the wet nurse's own son. This drawing of a slave nursemaid with her white charge fits within a genre of wet-nurse images common to Brazil and other Atlantic slave societies.⁵⁸ The particular drawing Leite chose for the cover of his paper in 1928, in fact, appears to be based on a nineteenth-century oil painting that hangs in Brazil's Imperial Museum, until recently thought to depict the young emperor Dom Pedro II in the arms of his (unnamed) black nursemaid.⁵⁹

⁵⁶On the black press's perception of this shift of opinion among the paulista elite, see Andrews, *Blacks and Whites*, *op. cit.*, 87–8.

⁵⁷Unsigned, 'Idea errônea da raça oposta', *Clarim d'Alvorada*, 18 August 1929, 4.

⁵⁸For examples in art, see Carlos Eugênio Marcondes de Moura, *A travessia da calunga grande: Três séculos de imagens sobre o negro no Brasil (1637–1899)* (São Paulo, 2000), 350, 363, 382, 383, 387. On the genre of wet-nurse photographs, see Sofia Olszewski Filha, *A fotografia e o negro na cidade do Salvador* (Salvador, Bahia, 1989), 71. For examples, see Moura, *A travessia da calunga grande*, *op. cit.*, 627, 636; George Ermakoff, *O negro na fotografia brasileira do século XIX* (Rio de Janeiro, 2004), 98–103.

⁵⁹On debates surrounding this painting's provenance and the identity of its subjects, see Lilia Moritz Schwarcz, *The Emperor's Beard: Dom Pedro II and his Tropical Monarchy in Brazil*, trans. John Gledson (New York, 2004), 26. Historian Roderick Barman suggests that whether or not the painting is actually of Pedro II, it would have been widely understood as such in the 1920s (Barman, personal communication, 11 January 2008). Members of São Paulo's black press at the time of the holiday campaign certainly saw it this way; see the reprint of this portrait, and its description as 'Pedro II in the arms of his *babá* [nanny]' in G. de Moraes, 'Mãe Preta', *Auriverde*, 13 May 1928, 2.



Figure 1. From the front cover of *O Clarim d'Alvorada*, 28 September 1928. Courtesy of Princeton University Library.

This original portrait, however, like nearly all depictions of the Mãe Preta in Brazilian art, does not include the mother's own black son (see Figure 2).

Clarim's decision to reference familiar iconography in its own front-page illustration was consistent with the black press's frequent citations of literary and folkloric representations of the Mãe Preta. Both the older oil painting and the newer drawing were at the time understood to depict Pedro II, a towering and beloved figure of Brazilian history.⁶⁰ The allusion to the

⁶⁰For an example of the emperor's popularity in this period, see J. C. Alves de Lima, *Recordações de*

homens e cousas do meu tempo (Rio de Janeiro, 1925). I am grateful to Roderick Barman for this reference.



Figure 2. 'Ama com criança ao colo' ('Nursemaid with child in arms'), artist unknown, 1800s. Courtesy Museu Imperial/IBRAM/MINC.

popular nineteenth-century Brazilian ruler helped associate the figure of the Mãe Preta with the heroes of national history. Yet by adding the figure of the wet nurse's black son to their portrait, *Clarim's* editors dramatically unsettled traditional wet-nurse iconography, as well as dominant white interpretations of the Mãe Preta. In *Clarim's* expanded drawing (quite possibly commissioned by the paper's editors, like many of their illustrations), the black mother who holds the white child close to her chest is simultaneously turning her back on her own child. This striking image set the tone for a commemoration of the Mãe Preta that, while celebrating the fraternity between the wet nurse's black and white sons, also highlighted the remembered grievances of the sons that she bore (and, less frequently, of the enslaved woman herself).

Several writers confirmed this message, reading the symbol of the Mãe Preta as an explicit condemnation of slavery and its consequences for black families. The Black Mother 'fed and caressed, on her black breast, the whites who stole from blacks the very drop of milk that

represented the vitality, the primordial element of their existence'.⁶¹ 'Our grandmothers', David Rodolpho de Castro of *Progresso* lamented, 'were never able to breastfeed, let alone raise their sons [filhos], for they were forced (under pain of the whip) to deny their rounded breasts to the fruits of their love. . . . This prohibition had a sad end: mothers would abandon their sons for those of the masters, who as adults would repay such dedication with the lash.' These authors showed that the love white men shared with the Mãe Preta, so amply celebrated in the earlier monument campaign, came at a price for the children born of her womb. Black sons did not experience the 'pleasure of receiving maternal caresses', or the luxury of suckling from the Mother's 'rounded breasts'; all they received was 'bean broth, corn meal mush and water'. Unlike more common celebrations of the Mãe Preta's expansive maternal love, Castro stressed the unnatural burden of dual motherhood, and the resentment this generated in the abandoned child: 'A mother of another's sons, who remains in perpetual abandonment of her legitimate sons, is like a flower without its scent.'⁶²

The use by these writers of the Mãe Preta as a symbol of abandoned black sons helped make her an emblem of a wronged race imagined principally as masculine. The Mãe Preta, in several male writers' formulations, symbolized a 'strong and virile' black race, 'which contributed the most toward the formation of our nationality'.⁶³ Remembering physical labour in primarily male terms gave little thought to the Mãe Preta's own painful labours of childbirth and childrearing, or to the fact that women were also among the Brazilian slaves who laboured from sunrise to sundown in Brazil's fields. This focus on men is not surprising, given that nearly all writers in São Paulo's black press were male, and that they were keenly aware of manhood as a prerequisite for active citizenship. An extremely rare inclusion of female perspectives in one issue of *Clarim*, however, gives us insight into what the Mãe Preta could mean for women when they were given the chance to speak publicly on the subject. On 28 September 1929, the small paulista town of Botucatu held its own celebration of the Mãe Preta, organized by their *Clarim* representative (a woman named Alexandrina Ferreira) and hosted by the Guarany Recreational Society. After a series of speeches by town worthies, organizers yielded the floor to a group of young women who delivered their own speeches and poems in praise of the Mãe Preta. The article does not make clear the women's racial identities, but their speeches, ending in phrases like 'Long live the Mãe Preta! Long live the *raça Negra!*', suggest that they were probably *negras* themselves. For these women, the Mãe Preta's sufferings as a mother – perhaps even more than her sons' suffering – was a metaphor for the horrors of slavery more broadly. For Diva de Campos, the Mãe Preta's martyrdom made her the emblem of a race 'from which was stolen the right to live'. For Yolanda de Camargo, the Mãe Preta was the 'mother of Brazilians, who shared her blood with the little white masters (*sinhozinhos*), often sacrificing her own sons'. For this writer, the sharing of blood was not a metaphor for cultural transfusion (as for many white Mãe Preta supporters), but rather a symbol of a physical sacrifice even more taxing than shared breast milk.⁶⁴

⁶¹Vagalume, 'E o monumento?', *Clarim d'Alvorada*, 28 September 1929, 1.

⁶²D. R. de Castro, 'Mãe Negra', *Progresso*, 19 August 1928, 1–2.

⁶³Unsigned (Leite?), 'A Bahia assistiu no dia 28 de setembro, uma manifestação inédita no Brasil',

Clarim d'Alvorada, 24 November 1929, 4; see also M. Cintra [J. de Aguiar], 'A Mãe Preta', *Clarim d'Alvorada*, 25 April 1926, 1.

⁶⁴Y. de Camargo and D. de Campos, in 'O Dia da Mãe Preta em Botucatu', *Clarim d'Alvorada*, 27 October 1929, 3.

As an emblem of distinctly black contributions to the nation (through breastfeeding, or as male writers also showed, through manly pursuits like soldiering or agricultural labour), the Mãe Preta allowed black paulista writers in the late 1920s to combat older, 'scientific' racist notions of black inferiority, as well as newer strategies of black erasure through 'whitening'. Moreover, reminding readers of the power of distinctly black contributions in nation-building was particularly important in São Paulo, where immigrants had so sharply displaced black and brown people as workers and, symbolically, as desirable citizens. Even those few writers in São Paulo who portrayed the Mãe Preta as an emblem of racial mixture took care to highlight her role in transmitting, and helping to preserve, distinctly African cultural traits among Brazilians of all racial backgrounds. Mixture, for the relatively few paulista writers of colour who embraced it, was not a 'whitening' process, but an 'Africanizing' one.⁶⁵ If for black cariocas, celebrations of the Mãe Preta provided an opportunity to highlight the historical debts and ongoing injustices that made racial fraternity a still-unfulfilled ideal, in the hands of black paulistas by the late 1920s the Mãe Preta became a powerful symbol of nativist nationalism, an attempt to claim sentiments of inter-racial fraternity as the true national essence, and to recast racism, rather than blackness, as the true stigma of foreignness.

If, as Guimarães has convincingly argued, 'racial democracy' was an artefact of the post-Second World War moment, perhaps the most compelling metaphor of racial inclusion in the period of the First Republic was 'racial fraternity'. During the Republic, the particular class and gender biases of the nation's colour-blind legal provisions, together with widespread 'scientific' racist views and eugenic immigration projects, excluded Brazilians of colour from full citizenship. In this context, black thinkers in different parts of Brazil turned to the idea of inter-racial fraternity to make a range of claims for their rightful inclusion, though they did so in slightly different ways. Construed as a uniquely Brazilian 'sentiment', fraternity allowed black thinkers – writing in the black press of São Paulo or speaking through the mainstream press of Rio – to bypass a weak state and to amend what its laws could not by claiming brotherhood directly with their white counterparts. These episodes show that black thinkers in both cities saw dominant ideas of fraternity and sentiment as useful alternatives to older, blatantly racist social and political arrangements, and as opportunities for enacting their belonging as rightful Brazilians.

'MODERN SCIENTIFIC PRINCIPLES' AND THE 'RIGHT TO RIGHTS' (1945–55)

With the fall of the Republic and the sudden rise of nationalist president Getúlio Vargas in 1930, the Mãe Preta gradually faded from black political discourse as black thinkers turned their energies elsewhere.⁶⁶ In 1937, as Vargas's regime entered an increasingly authoritarian phase, explicitly political black organizations and publications temporarily ceased their activities. Yet in 1945, popular opposition within Brazil helped to bring down Vargas's dictatorship, inaugurating a democratic Second Republic (1946–64) that deepened and expanded Brazil's historically weak institutions. Democracy, and how it should be defined,

⁶⁵See, for instance, Ivan, 'Monumento simbólico à Mãe Preta', *Getulino*, 13 May 1926, 3; and the following articles in *Clarim d'Alvorada*: (Unsigned, Leite?), 'Do passado consciência...', 21 October 1928, 1; Leite, 'A nossa raça é uma raça mestiça superior', November 1928, 2;

Raul, 'Há negros no Brasil, sim', 6 January 1929, 2.

⁶⁶For a discussion of black politics (and waning enthusiasm for the Mãe Preta) during the Vargas years (1930–45), see Alberto, *Terms of Inclusion*, *op. cit.*, chap. 3 (especially 138–9).

became a central issue of national politics. Internationally, the Allied victory in the Second World War brought the end of totalitarian regimes across Europe, a rising tide of enthusiasm for democracy around the world, and a new concern among many in the international community with combating racism. As international organizations like the United Nations enlisted social scientists to analyse racism and propose possible solutions, Brazil received new worldwide visibility as a society with extensive racial mixture and without institutionalized discrimination. Restating an older idea of Brazilian racial harmony in a new context and language, Brazilian and foreign intellectuals began to refer to Brazil as a 'racial democracy', a beacon of hope in a traumatized post-war world.⁶⁷ Prominent black sociologist Alberto Guerreiro Ramos voiced the sentiments of many of his activist colleagues when he claimed in 1950 that 'Brazil should assume a leadership role in teaching the world the politics of racial democracy. Because it is the only country on earth that offers a satisfactory solution to the racial problem.'⁶⁸ In this climate of re-democratization and avowed anti-racism, the Mãe Preta would appear once again in black thinkers' debates, and in national public life. Indeed, it was in this period that a statue to the Mãe Preta would finally see the light of day. Yet the new political and intellectual context changed her meanings and her desirability among black thinkers as a symbol of racial justice.

In both São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, old and new black organizations rallied around the return of democracy and the promises of racial democracy. In São Paulo, veteran black activists like José Correia Leite joined younger thinkers and writers in reviving the black newspapers and associations that had been closed down in 1937. Newspaper titles alone reflect the prevailing mood of hope and renewal: *Alvorada* (Dawn), *Novo Horizonte* (New Horizon), *Mundo Novo* (New World). In Rio de Janeiro, several explicitly race-based organizations and newspapers also appeared where almost none had existed during the First Republic. In the intervening years, under Vargas, residents of Rio de Janeiro had become the beneficiaries of educational policies which raised literacy levels in that city far beyond the national average. This included people of colour, who achieved literacy rates higher than their counterparts elsewhere in the country, and higher even than whites in some regions.⁶⁹ At the same time, however, it was becoming evident that for all its growing fame as the cradle of a mestiço national culture, by the post-war period the national capital embodied perhaps better than any other city the overlapping race and class inequalities that divided Brazilian society. By the mid-1940s Rio had become a largely segregated city, with a non-white, poor majority – expanded by the influx of hundreds of thousands of immigrants from northeastern Brazil – inhabiting either the city's infamous hillside slums or the Northern Zone's working-class *subúrbios*, while the well-to-do settled in newer neighbourhoods along the southern beachfront.⁷⁰ The growing ranks of educated people of colour in Rio de Janeiro, the reopening of civil society,

⁶⁷Guimarães, *Classes, raças e democracia*, *op. cit.*, chap. 5.

⁶⁸Alberto Guerreiro Ramos, 'Apresentação da negritude', *Quilombo*, June/July 1950, 11. References to this publication are from Abdias do Nascimento and Elisa Larkin Nascimento (eds), *Quilombo: Vida, problemas, e aspirações do negro (Facsimile edition of the newspaper led by Abdias do Nascimento, Rio de Janeiro, December 1948–July 1950, nos 1–10)* (São Paulo, 2003).

⁶⁹Literacy rates in Rio de Janeiro State were for Brazilians over the age of five: pretos, 59 per cent

for men and 44 per cent for women; pardos, 76 per cent for men and 64 per cent for women. Figures from 'Alfabetização em relação à cor, nos estados', cited in Jerry Dávila, *Diploma of Whiteness: Race and Social Policy in Brazil, 1917–1945* (Durham, NC, 2003), 73. The national average in 1940 for pretos was 15.8 per cent, for pardos, 21.5 per cent, and for whites, 39.5 per cent. Census of 1940, cited in Andrews, *Blacks and Whites*, *op. cit.*, 255.

⁷⁰As Luiz A. Costa Pinto explains, in this period, social distance (along the lines of class and

and the increasingly visible patterns of spatial and social discrimination in that city – together with new opportunities for contact with black thinkers in São Paulo and other south-eastern cities – helps explain the emergence of race-based organizations and publications in Rio by the mid-1940s.⁷¹ The most famous of these organizations – the *Teatro Experimental do Negro* (Black Experimental Theatre) and its magazine *Quilombo* – were founded by Abdias do Nascimento, a black actor and activist with roots in the paulista black politics of an earlier era.⁷²

For black thinkers in both cities, ‘racial democracy’ carried specific possibilities and meanings informed by ascendant ideas of democracy and anti-racism. They saw these transformations as heralds of a ‘Second Abolition’ – a new opportunity to break with a history of exclusion and to press for fuller black citizenship. Like racial fraternity in an earlier period, the power of racial democracy as a discourse of black inclusion lay in its widespread acceptance within Brazil itself, and in its political flexibility. Mid-century activists not only helped to make the idea of racial democracy normative; also, like their 1920s counterparts, they then sought to make racial democracy the basis of claims for inclusion and citizenship rights. To do so, paulista and carioca activists took advantage of both of the term’s component parts: ideas about democracy and ideas about race.

In their attempts to use the principles and concrete channels of political democracy to shape their claims for racial equality, activists frequently turned to the language of rights. In the opening editorial of the first issue of *Quilombo* (1948), Abdias do Nascimento argued: ‘It is a transparent historical truth that the black man won his liberty not through the philanthropy or kindness of whites, but by his own struggle and by the unsustainability of the slave system. . . . The black man rejects humiliating pity and philanthropy, and fights for his right to Rights [*direito ao Direito*].’ In the original Portuguese, ‘direito’ means not just ‘rights’ but also the law more broadly. For Nascimento, legal rights, earned through a history of active participation, replaced an older logic of black citizenship based on pity or patronizing sentiments like benevolence. Yet Nascimento clarified that having a ‘right to Rights’ or a ‘right to the Law’ did not just mean giving blacks ‘theoretical and codified rights’. After all, he noted, the Republic had already ‘theoretically’ given blacks (as Brazilian citizens) equality under the law; what was missing was ‘the active exercise of these rights’.⁷³ It was in this period that Nascimento and others worked to include anti-racist clauses in the constitution and, when that failed, agitated for what became the Afonso Arinos anti-discrimination law of 1951.⁷⁴

race) became clearly mapped on to spatial distance. Pinto, *O negro no Rio de Janeiro*, *op. cit.*, 125–49. Cf. Fischer, *A Poverty of Rights*, *op. cit.*

⁷¹For instance, the Convenção Nacional do Negro Brasileiro, held in São Paulo in November 1945, drew black thinkers and activists from São Paulo, Rio, Campinas and other nearby cities. On the convention and its demands, see Nascimento, *O negro revoltado*, *op. cit.*, 111–12. A month later, the magazine *Senzala*, with contributors hailing from the same group of cities, began its (short-lived) run.

⁷²Nascimento, born in the state of São Paulo, joined the *Frente Negra Brasileira* (Brazilian Black Front, a black political party of the 1930s) of the city of São Paulo in the 1930s. After he moved

to Rio de Janeiro in the mid-1930s, he remained closely linked to black activists in São Paulo and Campinas, participating in several of their congresses and demonstrations; see Éle Semog and Abdias do Nascimento, *Abdias Nascimento: O griot e as muralhas* (Rio de Janeiro, 2006), 78.

⁷³Abdias do Nascimento, ‘Nós’, *Quilombo*, December 1948, 1.

⁷⁴For a fuller account of these events, see Nascimento, *O negro revoltado*, *op. cit.*, 71–2; Andrews, *Blacks and Whites*, *op. cit.*, 184–6. I highlight black activists’ key roles in these processes (and trace the black press’s extensive coverage of these events) in Alberto, *Terms of Inclusion*, *op. cit.*, chap. 4.

They drew on a rising international rhetoric of universal human rights to make their case as well. In 1950, a writer in *Quilombo* captured the spirit of the moment when he spoke of ‘our right – a right assured by the Constitution and by the eternal principles of human rights – to seek a place in the heart of the Brazilian collectivity’.⁷⁵

In the context of these claims to racial equality through the language of rights, the Mãe Preta – once a cherished symbol for black thinkers seeking to use ‘sentiment’ to affirm their role as builders of the nation – waned as a political and cultural symbol of inclusion. Though Leite’s *Alvorada* (the post-war incarnation of *O Clarim d’Alvorada*) continued to celebrate the Mãe Preta every 28 September, she appeared less and less frequently in other activists’ writings. The handful of writers who did keep her memory alive were generally from an earlier generation, like Leite himself, or like veteran poet Lino Guedes, who continued to write poetry about the Mãe Preta as a symbol of the desired fraternity among blacks and whites.⁷⁶ In a very few cases, younger writers experimented with updating the symbol of the Mãe Preta for contemporary political claims. Where she once embodied claims for integration based on a uniquely Brazilian history, these writers newly broadened her significance to a universal level. They proclaimed her ‘a symbol of universal redemption’, or, in the case of a female contributor, Sofia Teixeira, highlighted her motherly love as ‘an existence dedicated to the good of humanity’.⁷⁷ Reflecting the spirit of the times, in which activists and thinkers of colour repeatedly called for the promises of abolition to be fulfilled, Sofia Teixeira also used the Mãe Preta to criticize the Law of the Free Womb. Although black thinkers in 1920s São Paulo had chosen this law as the symbolic foundation for the Mãe Preta holiday, and had touted it as the foundational moment of black citizenship, Teixeira boldly criticized the law’s failure to bring about social change. Similarly, one writer who invoked the Mãe Preta through older tropes of black males’ soldiering and labour none the less replaced an earlier generation’s emphasis on sentiment with a boldness of demand and a language of rights that reflected the activism of his own time: ‘When we remember that our glorious motherland is splattered with the brave and heroic blood of black people; when we know that the national economy always rested on the strong shoulders of the sons of the Mãe Preta, it makes us want to scream at the top of our lungs, “Give us what belongs to us. Our rights are equal.”’⁷⁸ In this sense, democracy marked a substantive as well as a semantic shift in the ways that activists framed black citizenship. Unlike the metaphor of fraternity, which relied on interpersonal relationships and sentiment to argue for blacks’ inclusion, democracy entailed a set of impartial institutions and rights that activists could newly use to push for concrete gains in a reorganized polity.

⁷⁵(Unsigned), ‘Despertar na consciência nacional’, *Quilombo*, June/July 1950, 3. See also ‘A Declaração dos Direitos do Homem’, *Quilombo*, June 1949, 9; ‘Democracia Racial’ in *Quilombo*, June 1949, 7; ‘União dos homens de côr do Rio de Janeiro’, *Novo Horizonte*, October 1954, 1; W. Machado, ‘Desapareceu o vermelho da folhinha’, *Novo Horizonte*, June 1947, 1.

⁷⁶The poem ‘Qual dos dois?’ by Lino Guedes, for example, tells of the Mãe Preta’s dilemma upon being asked to choose which child she loved better, the black or the white. In Guedes’s traditional rendition, she answers that she loves

both. See *Novo Horizonte*, September 1946, 1. Similarly, Leite reprinted a famous quote by Senator Jorgino Avelino (from the Mãe Preta campaigns of the 1920s), in which Avelino declared the Mãe to have ‘suffered doubly for her two motherhoods’. See *Alvorada*, September 1945, 1.

⁷⁷Unsigned (Leite?), ‘28 de Setembro – Dia da Mãe Negra’, *Alvorada*, September 1946, 1; Sofia Campos Teixeira, ‘28 de Setembro’, *Alvorada*, October 1947, 3.

⁷⁸A. de Camargo, ‘Negro, você é importante!’, *Novo Horizonte*, July 1947, 1.

The widespread idea of Brazil as a racial democracy after 1945 stemmed not just from the return of political democracy across the West and in Brazil, but also from a shift in national and international academic production about race. In the wake of the Holocaust, as many scholars struggled to come to terms with the ravages of institutionalized racism, developments in the social sciences and sociology in particular seemed to offer new paths towards debunking the scientific validity of race, exposing racial inequalities and promoting racial justice. In the late 1940s, social scientists at UNESCO famously identified Brazil as a promising ‘laboratory’ of mixture and non-existent racial discrimination.⁷⁹ A series of UNESCO-sponsored studies by Brazilian and foreign scholars in the early 1950s helped both to complicate and to confirm this impression. On the one hand, the studies revealed that people of colour in Brazil were still disproportionately disadvantaged more than half a century after abolition.⁸⁰ On the other hand, most of these studies identified class, and not race, as the principal obstacle to social equality in Brazil, thereby perpetuating the impression – and perhaps, among some, the hope – that Brazil was indeed a colour-blind society.⁸¹

Beyond their avowed anti-racism, the new sociological studies that affirmed Brazil’s commitment to racial democracy were important for the more specific ways they transformed the shape and visibility of national discussions about people of colour. In Brazil, in terms of the study of African-descended people in particular, the rise of what Peter Wade calls a ‘sociological tradition’ marked a move away from the anthropological and folkloric models that had dominated the field since the late nineteenth century.⁸² This earlier anthropological focus on African survivals in Brazil, based on work conducted largely in Bahia or other heavily African regions of Brazil’s north-east, contrasted sharply with the ensuing sociological attention to race relations, conceived as part of a broader complex of economic and social factors governing the transition from slave labour to a modern class society.⁸³ For many mid-century black activists, sociological works – from Gilberto Freyre’s writings in the 1930s through the UNESCO studies of the 1950s – reinforced the principles of black agency that accompanied their own calls for a ‘right to

⁷⁹Maio, ‘UNESCO and the study of race relations in Brazil’, *op. cit.*, 122–4.

⁸⁰For this reason, in the long run, these studies sparked critical work that would contribute to eroding the idea of Brazil’s racial democracy (for this interpretation, see Edward Telles, *Race in Another America: The Significance of Skin Colour in Brazil* (Princeton, NJ, 2004), 42–4; Maio, ‘UNESCO and the study of race relations in Brazil’, *op. cit.*; Viotti da Costa, ‘The myth of racial democracy’, *op. cit.*; Peter Wade, *Blackness and Race Mixture: The Dynamics of Racial Identity in Colombia* (Baltimore, 1993), chap. 2; George Reid Andrews, ‘Brazilian racial democracy, 1900–90: an American counterpoint’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, xxxi, 3 (1996).

⁸¹For this interpretation, see Roberto Motta, ‘Paradigms in the study of race relations in Brazil’, *International Sociology*, xv, 4 (2000), 665–82;

Jefferson Bacelar, *A hierarquia das raças: Negros e brancos em Salvador* (Rio de Janeiro, 2001), chap. 3. Studies that ultimately emphasized the role of class over race in social inequality include: Fernandes, *A integração do negro*, *op. cit.*; Pinto, *O negro no Rio de Janeiro*, *op. cit.*; Charles Wagley, *Race and Class in Rural Brazil* (Paris, 1952); Thales de Azevedo, *Les élites de couleur dans une ville brésilienne* (Paris, 1953).

⁸²Wade, *Blackness and Race Mixture*, *op. cit.*, 38.

⁸³On these transformations, see Guimarães, *Classes, raças e democracia*, *op. cit.*; Antonio Sérgio Alfredo Guimarães, *Racismo e anti-racismo no Brasil* (São Paulo, 1999); Maio, ‘UNESCO and the study of race relations in Brazil’, *op. cit.*; Alfred Métraux, ‘UNESCO and the racial problem’, *International Social Science Bulletin*, II, 3 (1950), 384–90; Motta, ‘Paradigms in the study of race relations in Brazil’, *op. cit.*

Rights' as part of a political and racial democracy. As Abdias do Nascimento explained in an editorial for *Quilombo*, these sociological works helped shift the terms in which academics depicted black Brazilians: from passive 'raw materials' or 'museum pieces' for ethnographers and folklorists, to actors in the drama of Brazil's modernizing society.⁸⁴ This idea that the cultural Africanisms of the north-east (especially the Afro-Brazilian religion Candomblé) were no more than fodder for passive, primitive and ultimately harmful academic representations of blacks highlights the ways in which region, politics and modernity were linked for black thinkers in Rio and São Paulo. The new sociological literature reoriented academic attention away from African culture in places like Bahia, and towards the dynamic black organizations and race-based politics of the cities of the south-east. For black writers in Rio and São Paulo, then, the 'sociological turn' in studies of race that accompanied the international 'discovery' of Brazil's racial democracy not only helped to ensure the inclusion of people of colour in the nation, but also delineated the contours of their inclusion as modern, urban political actors.

To many activists in the 1940s and 1950s, the anti-racist, democratic bent of leading scholars in the social and natural sciences appeared to provide new, stronger arguments for their cause than the sentiment of an earlier era. As *Alvorada's* Raul J. do Amaral put it, recent 'serious' social scientific studies would result in a recognition and an assistance to blacks that 'will not be granted, in the name of saccharine sentimentalism; but *conquered* by tenacious effort, by [the black man's] persistence in making himself an economic, political, and social force to be reckoned with'.⁸⁵ Amaral's appropriation of the sociological turn in the literature on black Brazilians to highlight black subjecthood and agency resonates with broader efforts in the contemporary black press to move the bases of activism away from what Leite called 'the sentimentalism ... of dilettantes who sing the praises of black Brazilians', and towards universalist demands for concrete rights.⁸⁶

In this effort to promote black agency and action over older appeals to equality based on sentiment, a few writers specifically singled out the failures of earlier strategies centred on the Mãe Preta. As one journalist put it after witnessing blacks being barred from a restaurant in Rio, 'The [symbol of the] Mãe Preta, as we see in the case of this restaurant, begins to lose strength. ... Tenderness for the Mãe Preta has not yet resolved the black question.' It fell to sociology, the author argued, to provide the objective, scientific understanding that would dispel tenacious racism: 'Where sentiments fail, the rigor of a sociological principle will indicate the solution.'⁸⁷ That same newspaper also reprinted an article by prominent (white) intellectual Austregésilo de Athayde, who argued for racial equality in the following terms: 'I do not want to invoke the principle of gratitude that white Brazilians should have for their "nannies" and Mães Pretas. They would only appeal to those with well-trained hearts, whose emotions have not been desensitized by stupid pride. I prefer political reasons, drawn from the fact that three races contributed to the

⁸⁴'O 1º Congresso do Negro Brasileiro', *Quilombo*, January 1950, 1.

⁸⁵R. J. do Amaral, 'Apêlo ao bom senso', *Alvorada*, April 1946, 1 (emphasis mine).

⁸⁶J. C. Leite, 'As duas etapas da liberdade', *Novo Horizonte*, November/December 1954, 1. See also

Ruth Guimarães, 'Nós, os negros', *Novo Horizonte*, March 1948, 4.

⁸⁷Costa Rego, 'Venha uma segunda abolição', *Novo Horizonte*, March 1948, 4 (from *A Tribuna de Santos*, 19 March 1948).

formation of the Brazilian people, and [that] each has merits that we must recognize and respect.⁸⁸

Writers from the 1920s black press might have pointed out that the ‘political’ idea that three races participated in the ‘formation of the Brazilian people’ was exactly the point they had been trying to make with the Mãe Preta. Indeed, in their time, they had used appeals to sentiment to counteract racist ideas supported by purportedly objective, irrefutable science. But by the 1940s and 1950s, paulista and carioca activists felt that the political valence of the sciences – particularly the social sciences – had shifted in their favour. For Athayde, as for the *Novo Horizonte* editors who reprinted his article, it was recent scholarly production on black Brazilians that should provide the new source of authority for the struggle against racism: ‘Those who have studied this issue maturely and at length stand ready to proclaim the veracity of the black man’s co-operation towards the success of Brazilian culture and what little originality it may have.’ In this way, academic studies of black Brazilians – built upon what one writer upheld as anti-racist ‘modern scientific principles’⁸⁹ – displaced the Mãe Preta as a symbol of inclusion. An emergent social science consensus about the illegitimacy of racial distinctions and discrimination cast her as a relic of a past in which, as writers perceived it, the narrowed horizons of national politics had forced black thinkers to rely as supplicants on the benevolence of patriarchal elites. By mid-century, black thinkers in both Rio and São Paulo saw themselves instead as active political subjects, pursuing their legal rights through impartial democratic channels that ennobled rather than debased them.

In the mid-1950s, a monument to the Mãe Preta was finally built (see Figure 3). After the project died a quiet death in late 1920s Rio, it was revived in the post-war years by members of the Clube 220, a black social club in São Paulo, who proposed to build the monument in their city instead. Under the leadership of Frederico Penteadó Júnior, the Clube 220’s monument commission was able to usher the project through the São Paulo city legislature in 1953. By 1955, following a public contest, the winning design for the long-desired Mãe Preta monument was unveiled in the Largo do Paissandu, a small square that also housed São Paulo’s oldest historically black religious brotherhood, Nossa Senhora do Rosário dos Homens Pretos.⁹⁰ Penteadó even managed to obtain official recognition for the monument unveiling as part of São Paulo’s ongoing, year-long celebrations of the city’s quadricentennial.⁹¹

We might expect José Correia Leite, of all people, to have greeted this development with joy. Yet the statue, a central goal for black thinkers in earlier decades, failed to impress Leite and his fellow paulista black thinkers in the mid-1950s. Perhaps this was because, as Leite recalled in his memoirs, the monument portrayed the Mãe Preta in an exaggerated realist idiom (blunt, squarish features, oversized hands and feet), which he found insulting to black Brazilians: ‘If she had been white, they would never have permitted an artist to create a figure as deformed as that. . . . Why design such a grotesque *negra*, when everyone knows that a *negra*

⁸⁸Austregésilo de Athayde, ‘Homens como nós’, *Novo Horizonte*, July 1947, 4 (from *O Cruzeiro*, 8 March 1947).

⁸⁹Geraldo Campos, ‘Que virá depois’, *Novo Horizonte*, June 1946, 1.

⁹⁰Luiz [Cutí] Silva and José Correia Leite, *E disse o velho militante José Correia Leite* (São Paulo, 1992), 99.

⁹¹Barbara Weinstein, ‘Celebrating modernity: São Paulo’s quadricentennial and the historical construction of regional identity’, paper presented at the David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies Colloquium, Harvard University, 8 May 2002, 19–22.



Figure 3. Statue of Mãe Preta, Largo do Paissandu, São Paulo (photo by the author).

like that, with such big feet, would never have been selected to suckle the child of the master?’⁹² Beyond these aesthetic considerations, the fact that the monument failed to garner the sympathies (indeed, apparently, the notice) of writers in the black press illustrates how much had changed in the strategies and priorities of black writers since the 1920s. The statue represented an older political strategy celebrating an idealized and sentimentalized racial fraternity, which, Leite and others now believed, made blacks into supplicants rather than agents of change. To thinkers like Leite, Penteado and the men of the Clube 220 were a lamentable reminder of this outdated sort of politics and of the divisions that still plagued the city’s black movement. The Clube 220 spent its energies on social events like beauty pageants or 13 May (abolition day) celebrations, at a time when writers in São Paulo’s black press were calling for political engagement and formulating ever sharper denunciations of the failures of abolition and the shortcomings of official histories. (Leite recalled that Clube 220 members, for their part, derisively called him and his colleagues communists.)⁹³

But more than this change in political strategies, the disappointment in the Mãe Preta statue expressed by Leite, and the silence in the broader black press, might be seen to reflect a

⁹²Silva and Leite, *E disse o velho militante José Correia Leite*, *op. cit.*, 99.

⁹³On the Clube 220, see Andrews, *Blacks and Whites*, *op. cit.*, 215; Silva and Leite, *E disse o velho*

militante José Correia Leite, *op. cit.*, 170. For examples of Penteado’s relatively conservative discourse on the Mãe Preta, see Weinstein, ‘Celebrating modernity’, *op. cit.*, 19–22.

growing disillusionment on the part of black thinkers with the directions that discourses of racial democracy appeared to be taking by the mid-1950s. Over the course of the 1950s and the early 1960s, as more and more Brazilians from across the political spectrum subscribed to the consensus that Brazil was a society uniquely graced by racial equality – an image partially buttressed by the deepening social democracy of the Second Republic – black intellectuals in Rio and São Paulo increasingly encountered public formulations of racial democracy that placed limits on black politics, especially politics based on claims to cultural or racial difference. A 1948 article by Gilberto Freyre in the black carioca magazine *Quilombo* spelled out what many white Brazilian thinkers and politicians in subsequent years would come to see as the rightful price of belonging in a racial democracy. Freyre granted that Brazilians of different ethnic backgrounds ‘might, and even should, preserve, from their mother culture or “race” values that can be useful to the whole’. But he warned Brazilians to be ‘vigilant’ against any divisions along racial or ethnic lines, to avoid behaving ‘as if the descendant of the African [were] a neo-African surrounded by enemies, and the descendant of Europeans . . . a civilized neo-European surrounded by savages’. Brazilians, Freyre urged, ‘should behave as Brazilians’, subordinating any racial or ethnic affiliations to ‘the mestiço, plural and complex culture of Brazil’.⁹⁴ Even as Freyre issued his warning, black organizations in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo came under attack from some conservative commentators for sowing ‘seeds of hatred’ or fomenting ‘preto racism’.⁹⁵

Ironically, the same social transformations that had allowed black thinkers to use both democracy and anti-racism to sharpen their race-based demands in the second half of the 1940s made it increasingly difficult for them, in subsequent years, to discuss racial inequality, organize around distinct racial identities, or call into question their fellow citizens’ much-vaunted racial tolerance. Claiming difference, or exposing differential treatment, became a tricky proposition in a purportedly post-racial society. These constraints, however, did not make racial democracy simply an oppressive myth, any more than black thinkers’ initial enthusiasm for racial democracy had made it a reality. Black intellectuals in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro in the 1950s found different ways to continue making use of widespread anti-racist rhetoric in Brazilian public life, while asserting their rights to independent organizing and to ideas of racial or cultural difference from what Freyre called the ‘mestiço’ whole.

In both Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, leaders of race-based organizations and publications held on to the hope that a broad anti-racist consensus would ultimately help their cause, even as they worked to expose the hypocrisies of dominant notions of racial democracy, and to define their own ideal version more closely. Yet, as in earlier years, black politics took on slightly different casts in each city. In Rio, thinkers like Abdias do Nascimento largely pursued a strategy of non-confrontation, emphasizing dominant ideals of mixture and harmony while portraying their organizations as compatible with these national ideals. This strategy made sense in a city where race-based organizations were still quite new and relatively uncommon. ‘In our country,’ Nascimento argued in 1950, ‘everything has the indelible mark of that happy melding of races, and the black man has no interest in disturbing the natural march of our

⁹⁴G. Freyre, ‘A atitude brasileira’, *Quilombo*, December 1948, 8.

⁹⁵F. Sabino, ‘Semente de ódio’, *Diário Carioca*, 16 July 1949; ‘Racismo, no Brasil!’, *Quilombo*, May

1950, 5 (from *Globo*, 13 April 1950). See also sociologist Paulo Duarte’s articles in *O Estado de São Paulo*, 16 and 17 April 1947, accusing black activist organizations of being aggressively anti-white.

mestiçagem of blood, culture, religion, art, and civilization.’ Race-based organizations, he indignantly clarified, were ‘simply complementary measures, and it is neither just nor honest that the balanced movement of black affirmation, inspired in the ideas of co-operation, unity, and of increasingly perfect integration of blacks and whites, be defamed or disrespected’.⁹⁶ Nascimento’s paulista colleagues adopted different styles and strategies when defending their right to organize from white co-nationals’ accusations of preto racism. In São Paulo, where the colour line was by all accounts sharper, black thinkers began to defend themselves against charges of reverse racism even earlier, and in more confrontational language that openly challenged dominant ideas of a harmonious mestiço Brazil. Raul Joviano do Amaral, writing for São Paulo’s *Alvorada* in October 1945, did not hesitate to call out accusations of reverse racism for what they were: repressive uses of racial democracy intended to deny racism and silence black claims for redress. ‘Each time that blacks begin to escape their somnolence, the most absurd and outlandish invectives are raised against them. And – as in earlier days – the well-worn arguments rear their heads: “blacks don’t have a problem”, “we are a people who do not have racial prejudices”, “we do not have barriers based on colour”’.⁹⁷ In August 1947, another article in *Alvorada* denounced allegations of reverse racism as ‘a ridiculous concept’ that emerged as a direct response to the revival of black activism in São Paulo after 1945. ‘All other groups have a right to deal with their problems. Except for blacks. When the black man lifts his head, he is immediately singled out as aggressive.’⁹⁸ By 1954, an article by veteran activist José Correia Leite lamented the effectiveness of such accusations in cowering some black leaders (perhaps even his rivals at the Clube 220) into inaction: ‘With the escape valve of not being racist’, he wrote, some black leaders ‘preach inertia [and] cowardice’.⁹⁹

The Mãe Preta statue was built in São Paulo in the mid-1950s, at the height of black thinkers’ anxiety that powerful ideas of racial democracy could derail from what until then had seemed a potentially promising track. Indeed, the statue was built as part of quadricentennial celebrations in São Paulo that otherwise ignored the contributions of black paulistas, emphasizing instead a whitened vision of regional identity.¹⁰⁰ Perhaps the silence of the black press on this remarkable achievement, then, ultimately reveals writers’ growing awareness of the dangers of stressing continuity rather than change in Brazilian ideologies of racial inclusion. To build a statue to the Mãe Preta – an established symbol of affective inter-racial fraternity – at a time when black thinkers espoused the (in their view) significantly different ideal of racial democracy was, in effect, to flatten out the historically specific textures that gave discourses of racial inclusiveness their power as instruments of social negotiation. Uninflected by the changing times, these discourses ran the risk of becoming ossified into truisms – dangerous declarations of the full achievement of racial harmony in Brazil – that could be used to silence further race-based demands. The events of the next few decades proved that such concerns would not have been unfounded.

⁹⁶A. Nascimento, ‘Convite ao encontro’, *Qui-lombo*, May 1950, 5 (from *A Folha do Rio*, 6 May 1950). See also A. de O. Camargo, ‘Diretrizes da Convenção do Negro Brasileiro’, *Senzala*, January 1946, 11; and F. Lucrécio, ‘Partido Político’, *Senzala*, February 1946, 14.

⁹⁷R. J. do Amaral, ‘Basta de Explorações’, *Alvorada*, October 1945, 1.

⁹⁸Unsigned, ‘Um Ponto de vista’, *Alvorada*, August 1947, 3. See also R. Magalhães Júnior, ‘Os

negros brasileiros e as suas aspirações’, *Senzala*, February 1946, 19; and W. Machado, ‘Desapareceu o vermelho da folhinha’, *Novo Horizonte*, June 1947, 1.

⁹⁹J. C. Leite, ‘As duas etapas da liberdade’, *Novo Horizonte*, November/December 1954, 1.

¹⁰⁰See Weinstein, ‘Celebrating modernity’, *op. cit.*, 19–22; and Alberto, *Terms of Inclusion*, *op. cit.*, chap. 5.

'AN AFFECTIVE AND FOLKLORIC VISION': THE MÃE PRETA IN THE ERA OF MYTH (1970–80)

Until 1964, most black thinkers remained committed to turning the dominant idea of racial democracy to their advantage, refining and contesting its meanings in a democratic public sphere. This situation changed drastically after the military staged a coup in late March of that year. The coup put an end to the democratic Second Republic and inaugurated a succession of authoritarian governments that repressed black thinkers and organizations, along with unions, student groups, and leftists, as subversive threats to national security. By the end of the 1960s, most race-based organizations in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo disbanded, and the black press fell silent.

The military officers who took power after 1964 adopted racial democracy as an official state ideology. But their vision of racial democracy, adapted to the needs of a right-wing nationalist regime, was a far cry from the one that had inspired black thinkers and activists at mid-century. Representatives of the authoritarian state used the idea that Brazil was a racial democracy to shut down public discussions about racial discrimination and to justify state suppression of race-based organizing.¹⁰¹ Architects of the regimes' cultural policies leaned on selected aspects of Brazil's African heritage – particularly those deemed folkloric and unthreatening – to illustrate Brazil's racial harmony, even as the state produced this apparent absence of racial grievances through censorship and police intimidation.¹⁰² In official discourse, in short, racial democracy emerged entirely as a description of reality, rather than as a collective ideal to which Brazilians were exhorted to rise.

To black thinkers who had sought to make racial democracy a vehicle for social change in the emerging political democracy of the Second Republic, the dictatorship governments' cynical and disempowering deployment of racial democracy drained the idea of its earlier attractions. By the mid-1970s, as the dictatorship entered a phase of decompression that allowed for the gradual re-emergence of political and social movements, veteran black thinkers, together with a new generation of college-educated people of colour, announced a transformed black politics. Racial democracy was not a path towards inclusion, they contended, but a 'myth' – an insidious mirage disguising a bleak and violent landscape of racism. In a famous paper titled 'Racial democracy: myth or reality?', veteran black activist Abdias do Nascimento (who had left Brazil for exile in the United States in the late 1960s) announced the emerging black movement's new stance. He radically reframed long-standing values central to ideas of racial fraternity and racial democracy – especially racial and cultural *mestiçagem* – as elite-orchestrated strategies of genocide, rape and the political disempowerment of black people.¹⁰³ At a time when they could no longer recognize and own public

¹⁰¹On this legislation, see Thales de Azevedo, *Democracia racial: Ideologia e realidade* (Petrópolis, 1975), 53, fn 27. See also Nascimento, 'O genocídio do negro brasileiro', *op. cit.*, 124–5. For examples of state censorship of dissenting views on race relations, see Thomas Skidmore, 'Race and class in Brazil: historical perspectives' in Pierre-Michel Fontaine (ed.), *Race, Class, and Power in Brazil* (Los Angeles, 1985), 16; Telles, *Race in Another America*, *op. cit.*, 40–2.

¹⁰²Renato Ortiz, *Cultura brasileira e identidade nacional* (São Paulo, 1985), 90–106; Guimarães, *Classes, raças e democracia*, *op. cit.*, 158.

¹⁰³The original paper was reprinted in the leftist magazine *Versus* (São Paulo), in three instalments: November 1977, 40; December/January 1977–8, 40–1; and February 1978, 41. I trace Nascimento's links with an emerging black movement in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo in Alberto, *Terms of Inclusion*, *op. cit.*, chap. 6.

formulations of 'racial democracy', black activists sought to save the integrity of an earlier vision by disowning its current incarnation. That they did so in the most extreme terms imaginable suggests the feelings of betrayal behind this disavowal.

The Mãe Preta re-emerged in this context as a highly contested symbol. For a new generation of black thinkers and activists, the Mãe Preta, with her romanticized representation of deeply violent and unequal relationships among the races, not only embodied the dangerous 'myth' of racial democracy but also recalled many black thinkers' misguided participation, both past and present, in the circulation of these ideologies. Yet for other people of colour not linked to the new racial politics – from members of black social clubs, to members of black lay religious brotherhoods, to followers of Afro-Brazilian religions – the Mãe Preta continued to resonate as a symbol of black inclusion.

In late 1970s São Paulo, shortly after activists in that city created an influential new black political organization, the Movimento Negro Unificado (Unified Black Movement, MNU), the Mãe Preta statue in the city's downtown became the site of a conflict between the new generation of black thinkers and those they viewed as relics of an outdated racial politics. In this period, the Clube 220, the black social club responsible for successfully reviving the monument proposal in the 1950s, continued to honour the Mãe Preta yearly, as did other traditional black clubs like São Paulo's Associação dos Homens de Cor. They had made the statue a site for commemorating the abolition of slavery (13 May) and the Day of the Mãe Preta (28 September).¹⁰⁴ Indeed, in 1968, Frederico Penteado, president of the Clube 220 (and the man behind the project to build the statue in the mid-1950s), succeeded in fulfilling another goal dear to black thinkers in the 1920s: obtaining a state law officially declaring 28 September a 'Day of Gratitude to the Mãe Preta', a holiday commemorating 'she who, in captivity ... raised the children of others, contributing towards the formation of Brazilians since the time of slavery'.¹⁰⁵ Joining the Clube 220 at its yearly 13 May and 28 September celebrations were members of several of the city's *candomblés* (houses of worship of the Afro-Brazilian Candomblé religion), who began using the statue as an important devotional site shortly after its inauguration in the 1950s.¹⁰⁶ In so doing, Candomblé devotees in São Paulo echoed the practices of their counterparts in Bahia (the heartland of Candomblé) where, over the course of the twentieth century, the figure of the Mãe Preta had become intimately associated with the *mães de santo* or priestesses of this religion.¹⁰⁷ The public use by these groups of the Mãe Preta statue in downtown São Paulo – the many offerings of votives and flowers that frequently surrounded the statue's pedestal – illustrates the growing strength and visibility of Afro-Brazilian religions in that city following decades of immigration from Brazil's north-east.

Although founded in São Paulo, the MNU was intended to have a national scope, and it quickly drew members from different parts of the country. Part of the power, and the

¹⁰⁴ Andrews, *Blacks and Whites*, *op. cit.*, 215–16.

¹⁰⁵ F. Penteado, Programme of the 104th anniversary of the Law of the Free Womb, cited in J. Minka and N. M. Pereira, '28 de Setembro', *Versus*, September 1977, 28.

¹⁰⁶ Andrews, *Blacks and Whites*, *op. cit.*, 215–16.

¹⁰⁷ In 1965, for instance, Mãe Senhora – one of Bahia's most prominent *mães de santo* – was crowned 'Mãe Preta of Brazil'. Cida Nóbrega and

José Félix dos Santos, *Mãe Senhora: Saudade e memória* (Salvador, 2000), 136, 142–3. On positive representations of the Mãe Preta in Candomblé, see J. Lorand Matory, *Black Atlantic Religion: Tradition, Transnationalism, and Matriarchy in the Afro-Brazilian Candomblé* (Princeton, NJ, 2005), 200–3; Michel Agier, 'As Mães Pretas do Ilê Aiyê: Notas sobre o espaço mediano da cultura', *Afro-Ásia*, xviii (1996), 189–203.

challenge, of creating a national-level racial movement for young black paulistas in this period lay in learning how to reach out to people of colour whose ideas about race, culture and politics differed significantly from their own. Drawing on a long regional tradition of race-based activism that rejected any claims to ethnic difference, and inspired, more recently, by radical models of leftist revolution, many paulista activists in the 1970s shunned traditional forms of Afro-Brazilian culture as hopelessly co-opted by elites and the state. Through contact with young activists and thinkers from other parts of Brazil in this period (especially Rio de Janeiro), the São Paulo-based MNU was increasingly forced to recognize the political potential of black cultural forms, like the samba music of Rio or Bahian Candomblé. But this learning process was slow, and not without hiccups.¹⁰⁸

In 1979, activists associated with the MNU planned an anti-racist protest at the Mãe Preta statue in downtown São Paulo, identifying the site as a fruitful place to reach out to different kinds of black organizations in their city. The protest was timed to coincide with one of the 13 May celebrations sponsored by the Clube 220, and attended by many practitioners of Candomblé. The intention of the MNU activists was to sensitize these more 'traditional' race-based groups to the problems of racism and ideological domination, and, specifically, to challenge their ongoing use of 13 May and of the Mãe Preta as symbols of racial progress. Two black writers from the paulista leftist magazine *Versus* summarized young black activists' views of these earlier sorts of politics: 'Penteado's intention is positive, in terms of its concern with registering the participation of black women in society, but it has become increasingly limited to an affective and folkloric vision. A vision that is shackled to the cult of "achievements" obtained since the time of slavery, and which is distant from the aspirations of the "new black" [*novo negro*].'¹⁰⁹ For young members of the MNU, steeped in the criticism of racial democracy as a myth, black politics that continued to rely on ideas of racial fraternity or cordiality (like the Mãe Preta), or which recalled the benevolence of white elites (the celebration of 13 May), were not just hopelessly outdated, but dangerously blinded by dominant ideologies. Yet for Clube 220 members who saw the symbols of the Mãe Preta and of 13 May as evidence of black Brazilians' great progress throughout the centuries, the young MNU members appeared as radical malcontents. One MNU member recalled that he had never been physically harassed at a black movement rally until he attended this demonstration at the Mãe Preta statue – when he was attacked not by authorities, but by members of rival black organizations.¹¹⁰ This incident foreshadows the challenges that members of Brazil's relatively small black movement would continue (even to this day) to face in reaching out to their desired constituencies.

CONCLUSION

The conflict at the Mãe Preta statue, like the Mãe Preta's rise and fall in the history of Brazilian black politics, presents a challenge of historical interpretation. It is difficult not to embrace the

¹⁰⁸I discuss further the struggle black paulista activists in this period faced in reconciling racial politics and Afro-Brazilian culture (as well as the regional implications of this struggle) in Alberto, *Terms of Inclusion*, *op. cit.*, chap. 6.

¹⁰⁹J. Minka and N. M. Pereira, '28 de Setembro', *Versus*, September 1977, 28. See also Hamilton

Cardoso, 'Branco e sem mácula', *Isto É*, 26 September 1979.

¹¹⁰Interview with Ivair Alves dos Santos, in Verena Alberti and Amílcar Araújo Pereira, *Histórias do Movimento Negro no Brasil: Depoimentos ao CPDOC* (Rio de Janeiro, 2007), 201.

perspective of the newer generation of black activists, with their conviction that they – unlike earlier generations of black thinkers – were finally coming to true consciousness and taking a radical stand against racial oppression. Yet compelling as its claims to clear-sighted historical critique may be, the black politics of the dictatorship era do not stand above or apart from an earlier history of black thought. The stark break these actors narrated when they equated ‘myth’ with falsehood should not be taken at face value, but as evidence of deep investment in an earlier project to make racial fraternity and democracy into national goals. Only by taking a longer view of the history of black thought and politics can we understand why, when an authoritarian regime flagrantly betrayed long-standing ideals of racial inclusiveness, black thinkers turned so sharply against them.

In the 1920s, when medical and social sciences undergirded dominant racist ideologies, black writers sought inclusion as Brazilians by appealing primarily to what they perceived as science’s alternative: sentiment. They defined belonging through metaphors of family and racial fraternity, most clearly elaborated in the campaign to honour the slave wet nurses who had historically breastfed both white and black children. In a decentralized and clientelistic First Republic, in which black thinkers’ political participation was heavily restricted, these men (and a few women) relied on a symbol of interpersonal relations to ensure the implementation of legal guarantees that otherwise seemed abstract or vulnerable. By the mid-1940s, as dominant discourses of race and citizenship in Brazil (and the world) changed, so did black writers’ strategies. Tapping into the post-war consensus on democracy and anti-racism (a position newly backed by the social sciences), black writers shifted their metaphors of inclusion from racial fraternity to racial democracy. In so doing, they explicitly rejected what they saw as passive appeals to sentiment in favour of active appeals based on legal rights, political institutions and sociological enquiry. Despite the efforts of a few activists in this period to update the Mãe Preta’s significance, she entered a decline as a symbol of racial and political transformation. By the 1970s, for a new generation of black thinkers, the Mãe Preta came to embody the much-derided ‘myth’ of Brazil’s racial harmony. At the same time, she also functioned as an index of the distance between this new activist vanguard and the people they hoped to represent.

These changes in the Mãe Preta’s fortunes to some extent reflect black thinkers’ and activists’ critiques of their changing society and of their own past strategies – a necessary practice in political activism. Yet in rejecting the Mãe Preta as a symbol of limited or even benighted political tactics, mid-century thinkers were perhaps too hard on their predecessors, as were later activists who criticized mid-century writers’ endorsement of racial democracy as ‘excesses of tolerance toward [Brazil’s] racists’.¹¹¹ What changed from generation to generation was not activists’ level of political consciousness, sophistication or enlightenment, but the dominant discourses governing ideas about race, racism and citizenship in Brazil, which in turn necessitated new political approaches. Before they famously equated ‘myth’ with ‘falsehood’ in response to a repressive and racist dictatorship, black thinkers across Brazil endorsed fraternity and later democracy as guiding myths – a common grammar of social values whose progressive

¹¹¹These were often self-criticisms – the quote is from Abdias do Nascimento, ‘Prefácio à 2a edição’ in Nascimento, *O negro revoltado*, *op. cit.*, 9–10. In 2002, Nascimento revised this position, acknowl-

edging the power of racial democracy for black activism at mid-century. See Nascimento and Nascimento (eds), *Quilombo*, *op. cit.*, 7–8.

potentials they hoped to amplify and realize. Yet in both of these periods, it is crucial to realize, endorsements of the potentials of racial inclusiveness went hand in hand with the sorts of explicit denunciations of its failures that we typically attribute to the activism of the 1970s. Indeed, the story of black activism in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro in the first half of the twentieth century is the story of black thinkers' struggles to find ways, suited to their particular circumstances of time and place, of reconciling claims for inclusion in a multi-racial Brazil with demands for recognition of racial specificity and difference. Recognizing these moments as distinctive chapters in the history of Brazilian racial ideologies – and reconstructing the dignity and innovativeness of the black thinkers who lived through them – is crucial to resisting the hold that totalizing views of 'racial democracy' still hold over our own accounts of the past.

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