Brasil 500 Anos: An Incredible Miscegenation in the Park

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Unlike 1992 in Spanish America, last year's commemorations of the quincentennial of Portugal's arrival at what today is called Brazil did not promote the publication of significant academic works in the field of Colonial studies. A first explanation for this may reside precisely in the fact that much had already been discussed and published in 1992, and to a lesser extent, in the years preceding and culminating with 1998, when Portugal commemorated the 500 years of Vasco da Gama's first voyage to India with numerous publications, sponsored by the "Comissão Nacional para os Descobrimentos Portugueses."

Among last year's publications, only a handful of new titles in Colonial studies are worth mentioning, such as Eduardo Bueno's best-selling introductory series Terra Brasilis, about the first Portuguese expeditions to the New World, or the book by veteran music critic José Ramos Tinhorão, entitled As Festas no Brasil Colonial (Ed. 34); but these books can hardly be described as academic. There were also a few reeditions of classic primary and secondary texts, which may promote Colonial studies in the near future: travel narratives, such as the several editions of Caminha's "Letter of Discovery," and the captivity narrative by Hans Standen, which also had a feature film and a CD-ROM based on it; or some seminal works on colonial history which had been out of print for several years, such as Capistrano de Abreu's O Descobrimento do Brasil. Perhaps the most important original contribution to the field was O Trato dos Viventes, by historian Jose Felipe de Alencastro--a study discussing the constitution of Brazilian society in the Atlantic trade between Bahia and Angola.

These works were not enough to reshape the field of Colonial studies, and seem to have been assimilated into the general spirit of the commemorations, synthesized under the slogan "Brasil 500 Anos." There were in fact a great number of publications associated with the 500 years, but mostly, they were concerned not with the colonial encounter in the sixteenth century, but with the necessity of a new encounter: that is, the encounter of Brazilians with Brazil. In other words, the general message was that Brazilians did not know Brazil, and therefore that Brazil had to be re-discovered. What is apparent in such a project is the notion that there is a division not only in the representation of Brazil (there is a true and a false, or hidden,

country), but also within Brazilians (there are those who know and those who do not know Brazil)--and that this division must be resolved.

The notion of re-discovery was present in a number of studies published or reissued in 2000, studies which focused on any period of Brazilian history. Several of them were quite explicit in proposing new interpretations for 500 years of Brazilian history as well as new definitions of Brazilian identity: Intérpretes do Brasil, for example, is a thirteen-volume collection organized by Silviano Santiago that deals with some of the canonical critics of Brazilian identity, such as Gilberto Freyre, Sérgio Buarque de Holanda and Euclides da Cunha (Ed. Nova Aguillar). Other titles include Viagem Incompleta, organized by Carlos Guilherme Motta (Senac), and Para Entender o Brasil, which contains interviews with economists, politicians, as well as journalists and rappers, about their own views and definitions of Brazil; other books were more specific, such as Revisão do Paraiso - Os Brasileiros e o Estado em 500 anos de Historia, by Mary del Priore, or A História do Brasil são outros 500, de Claudio Vieira (Record)--but they all reflect the same strategy of using the 500 years as way of rewriting Brazilian history and revealing to the general public a New World which had remained concealed. In the end, the slogan "Brasil 500 Anos" could be appropriated by any group that intended to discuss its own history and identity, as in the book A Descoberta do Brasil Gay (with a preface by João Silvério Trevisan), or in conferences such as one strangely called "500 years of Physical Education"!

This notion of re-discovering Brazil was most apparent in the largest event intended to commemorate the 500th anniversary, called precisely "Mostra do Re-descobrimento." The exhibit lasted from April 25th to September 10th, displayed 15,000 works, and was visited by almost 2 million people. It was a quite ambitious, and indeed impressive endeavor, which was documented in fourteen catalogues. It is now travelling around Brazil and will soon visit other museums outside the country, including the Guggenheim Museums in New York and Bilbao [1]. According to Edemar Cid Ferreira, the president of the organizing committee, the event was intended to show a trajectory of 30,000 years of history--of Brazilian history!

The Mostra was organized in three modules, housed in three buildings in the Ibirapuera Park, São Paulo. The first module displayed archeological pieces, such as pottery and the head of 11,000 year-old Luzia, supposedly the oldest skeleton in the Americas. It also showed some indigenous artifacts for the first time in Brazil, such as the Tupinamba cloak, taken by the Dutch to Europe in the early seventeenth century. The purpose of this module was, first, to restore

dignity to Indigenous cultures, and to prove that their art was more developed, or sophisticated, than what's been thought traditionally; even more importantly, however, it was intended to trace the origins of Brazil as far back as possible, thus legitimizing the occupation of the land and, at the same time, reducing the role of colonial history and the effects of colonization.

The second module was divided in three parts: "Arte Popular," "Negro de Corpo e Alma," and a whole section dedicated to the most important document reporting the Discovery of Brazil: the letter written by Pero Vaz de Caminha. The original document was brought from the Torre do Tombo in Portugal, and displayed with all the aura a manuscript can have. The third module was divided chronologically into Baroque, Afro-Brazilian Art, nineteenth century, Modern and Contemporary Art, a section on Brazil seen by foreigners and "Imagens do Insconsciente" (Artur Bispo do Rosario) that gathered the works of psychiatric patients. I do not intend to discuss in much detail the whole organization of the exhibit, but one can easily perceive some of the implications of, for example, making popular culture into an ahistorical category (except, perhaps, the section on Lampião and the cangaço), and in many instances, taking it from its social and historical contexts--in contrast to high art, which is clearly divided in periods and movements. And we cannot help being suspicious of a section that was labeled "Negro de Corpo e Alma," and the extent to which this reference to "soul" is able to counter the old racist discourse embodied in the expression "negro de alma branca;" not to mention its possible relation to the (Gilberto) Freyre-like notion that all Brazilians are African in their souls. As we know, this argument, which is the basis of the notion of Brazilian racial democracy, can be found throughout his book, in statements as the following: "Todo brasileiro, mesmo o alvo, de cabelo louro, traz na alma, quando não na alma e no corpo...a sombra, ou pelo menos a pinta, do indígena ou do Negro [2]."

Indeed, the intention of the exhibit is wholly Freyrean, and confirms the project of creating a unified, even though diverse, picture of Brazil, and turning that into the object of a rediscovery as well as of a self-discovery. It is aimed at depicting the "contributions" of different ethnic groups to the constitution of Brazilian society, characterized by "racial democracy" and "antagonismos em equilíbrio," to use two expressions created by Gilberto Freyre. This project is quite apparent in Edemar Cid Ferreira's (president of the Associação Brasil 500 anos) comment regarding the last day of the exhibit (November 9th, 2000): "Terminamos bem, com um dia lindo e uma miscigenacao incrível no parque" ["We ended well, with a beautiful day and an incredible miscegenation in the park"]. The obvious suggestion of his remark is

that the exhibit faithfully reflected Brazilian *mestizo* society and, moreover, that the true exhibit had not ended, since its objects are not confined to the museums, but they will live on, out in the streets of Brazil.

Of course, there were also cracks in the harmonious picture of Brazil proposed by the exhibit, such as the concern for and attention given to the foreign gaze in the constitution of Brazilian identity, or in the truly provocative section on the art of psychiatric patients. Yet, not only official discourse, but also important critics and academics emphasized, and indeed praised, the exhibit's synchronic and totalizing interpretation of Brazilian culture and identity. Concretist poet Haroldo de Campos, for example, translated the exhibit into a Tropicalist allegory, as he compared the seventeenth-century cloak of indigenous chiefs (*pajés*) to tropicalist *parangolés*--the 1960's costumes created by Hélio Oiticica (Folha, 7/10). The anthropologist Lilia Schwarz, who is one of the most respected writers on the history of race theories in Brazil, celebrated the fact that all "the different exhibits seemed orchestrated by one single melody," and summarizes her review of the catalogues (particularly, "Negro de Corpo e Alma," "Arte Popular," "Arte Afro-Brasileira," and "Imagens do Inconsciente") as follows:

> ... several languages repeating the continuous movement of remembering and idealizing a particular past, whose relationship with Africa have never been so present: in the colors, in the bodies, in the sensations. And as if, history having been abandoned, along the lines of synchronicity and by means of reiterations, a particular way of narrating "brasilidade" were taking shape. Against the grain of official discourse, the exhibits move as if they were letting the great sensibility of a people (povo) of so many colors speak, a people which, even without knowing, wanting or suspecting, makes art, and parade an explosive imagination. (Folha de S. Paulo, 12/08/00)

Schwarz's conclusions confirm the extent to which the "Mostra do Re-descobrimento" stressed integration and assimilation. In spite of herself, the anthropologist only reproduces official discourse and stereotypes: (1) by associating blacks with "bodies and sensations;" (2) by repeating the notion of an authentic "people" who produces art without being aware of it; and (3) by reiterating the narrative of a "brasilidade" that takes shape through African culture (or the African soul), but not necessarily through black citizens.

The colonial encounter is not absent from the Mostra, but constitutes only one among many elements in the mosaic of Brazilian identity which it is intended to display. One of the modules, in fact, does focus on the colonial encounter, and the year 1500 itself, and its central attraction is the exhibition of Pero Vaz de Caminha's "Letter of Discovery" as well as other pieces associated with the Portuguese early navigations to Brazil. Even though the Mostra displayed the Letter together with a number of pictorial commentaries by Portuguese and Brazilian contemporary artists, the attention was ultimately focused on the original manuscript itself, commonly known as Brazil's "birth certificate" (the expression is by Capistrano de Abreu). As we know, although the document was written in 1500, it was not published until 1817--five years before the independence. Since then, the document has had a particularly important symbolic role in narratives of Brazilian national identity. It was first published together with a number of other sixteenth and seventeenth-century documents and travel narratives related to Brazil, and it became particularly representative because, until then, the first account about Brazil was not found in the writings of a Portuguese writer, but in the texts of the Italian Americo Vespucci. The letter thus synthesized Brazilian identity through the first encounter of the Portuguese explorers with the Indigenous peoples of Brazil.

As we know, Caminha's letter, as well as a number of other documents published at the time, have repeatedly been appropriated by Brazilian writers and intellectuals who saw the Indigenous man (and sometimes woman) as the privileged symbol of Brazilian nationality. Romanticism, and particularly the works of José de Alencar, relied strongly on such a body of texts in order to create a specific mythology, from which slavery was excluded, and in which characters such as Iracema, or Guarani and Ubirajara constituted the best representation of Brazilian difference. For many years Brazilian literature continued to appropriate the image of the Indians--not just any, but specifically the Tupi Indians--and, at the same time, to dissociate this image from any particular reality; this gesture was present even when the image changed from the innocent or heroic native to the parodic and anti-European cannibal who, since Modernism, has represented a particular way of both incorporating and resisting foreign ideologies; or even when writers such as Oswald de Andrade posed the question "Tupi or not Tupi" in his Manifesto Antropofágico, or used exerpts of Caminha's Letter as a response to European hegemony. This canonical gesture of appropriating the Indian in order to convey Brazilian subjectivity was still present in some works of fiction published last year, such as Meu querido

Canibal, by Antonio Torres, and Memorias de um Antropófago Lisboense, by Domingos Vera Cruz.

Now, whereas both official and literary discourses continue to appropriate the Indian as a metaphor for the origins of Brazil, such a stable image has recently been shaken by the reality the Indigenous (as well as other subaltern) groups, a reality which can no longer be overlooked by the elite or by the media. During the opening ceremonies of the "Mostra do Redescobrimento" in São Paulo, for example (April 25th), Brazilian president Fernando Henrique Cardoso and Portuguese president Jorge Sampaio watched a performance by Xavante and Mehinaku Indians, after which Cardoso was handed a letter, a book, a video and a CD containing information about the present situation and demands of several indigenous groups in Brazil. In spite of the organizers' and the exhibit's attempt to show Brazil to Brazilians, it seems that there were also Brazilians, *including* indigenous peoples, who had their own version of Brazil which was not part of the official celebrations, a picture of Brazil which was strongly related to its colonial history. And indeed, in spite of many attempts to efface colonial history, "Brasil 500 Anos" was after all marked by a number of events that revealed antagonism and violence, rather than the image of a harmonious encounter of races.

The incident in the exhibit is only one example of responses to the commemorations of the 500 years. On April 22nd, the actual date of the anniversary of the Portuguese arrival in Brazil, a number of events had been organized in Porto Seguro, including the presence of Brazilian and Portuguese presidents. Even Pope John Paul II sent a telegram congratulating all Brazilians for their birthday. McDonald's opened its store number 500, with the theme "Descobrimento do Brasil," located in a colonial building designed to match Porto Seguro's original architecture. Almost 2 million dollars were spent in a replica of the Nau Capitânia--the ship used by Pedro Alvares Cabral in 1500--which was supposed to depart from Salvador to Porto Seguro and be used as a floating museum; ironically, the ship experienced technical problems and could not sail until a few months after the official events. This was the first sign that the re-discovery of Brazil was not going to take place without surprises, or in the way official authorities had planned it.

Indeed, the most significant event was not organized by the government, but, on the contrary, in opposition to it. A few hours before the official events started in Porto Seguro, four thousand *sem terras* were stopped from reaching the colonial town, where they were heading in order to take part in a protest. Yet, 2000 Indians, from 140 different ethnic groups protested outside of Porto Seguro; 141 activists

not only from indigenous organizations, but also from black and landless people organizations were arrested, and 30 were injured by police repression. Later on, Fernando Henrique Cardoso gave a speech, thanking the president of Portugal, whose presence, according to him, symbolized "tudo aquilo que Portugal representa para o Brasil e para os brasileiros... na origem histórica, na cultura, na língua e, mais que isso, nos laços indissolúveis de uma amizade que é única."

Antagonisms were also present a week after the official events of April 22nd, when Rede Globo aired the "Missa dos 500 Anos de Evangelizacao," from Porto Seguro, making it coincide with the 35th anniversary of the TV network. The Vatican had sent the Brazilian clergy explicit instructions against the politicization of the event, but they were caught by surprise as the ceremony was interrupted by a group of forty Indians, among which was the Pataxó Jerry Adriani Santos de Jesus. The Pataxó Indian read a speech, which closed with the following words of protest: "Quinhentos anos de sofrimento, de massacre, de exclusao, de preconceito, de exploracao, de exterminio de nossos parentes, de acultaramento, estupro de nossas mulheres, devastacao de nossas terras, de nossas matas, que nos tomaram com a invasao." The presence of Indians in the Brazilian media had been growing steadily in the prior few years, and the protest of the Pataxó Indian on national television could not be dissociated by what had happened exactly three years before the celebrations of the 500 years. On April 20th, 1997, Galdino Jesus dos Santos, from the Pataxó Hã-Hã-Hãe group (southern Bahia), was set on fire by five teenagers while he slept at a bus stop in Brasilia, and waited for next day's manifestations of national indigenous peoples' day. The whole incident was surrounded by a number of compensatory arguments: that the father of one of the kids was a judge, and that in the past he had ruled important decisions in favor of indigenous peoples in Brazil; that Galdino himself had set his own nephew on fire a few years before he died of the same cause; and that, according to the confession of the teenagers, they only wanted to play a prank, and that they thought the man was homeless, rather than an Indian.

The colonial encounter was thus being reenacted and rewritten, not in books or museums, but, among other places, in the streets of Brasilia and Porto Seguro. This new picture of the encounter was no longer harmonious, and the Indigenous peoples were no longer seen as passive--Brazil was hardly the undivided nation which official discourses attempted to portray, and neither national television nor the President could ignore this reality. It is true that, to some extent, Fernando Henrique Cardoso did try to account for such undeniable antagonisms in his speech. The president claimed to have learned

that, beneath the official history that was taught in schools when he was a child, he discovered that there "fluia e continua a fluir, como um vasto rio subterraneo, a historia de milhoes de homens e mulheres anonimos. Os destinos entrelacados desses homens e mulheres formam o tecido vivo daquele que e ao mesmo tempo o grande motor e o produto mais extraodinário destes 500 anos: o povo brasileiro." In a typical populist and mystifying move, the "people" is celebrated and described as both the origin and the product of the nation. Or, as Giorgio Agambem has acutely defined "[the people] is what always already is and yet must, nevertheless, be realized; it is the pure source of every identity, but must, however, continually be redefined and purified, through exclusion, language, blood, and land." Thus, Fernando Henrique attributes both the origins and the realization of the Brazilian nation to those who are excluded from the nation and, moreover, those who are not aware of their role. The promise here, as always, is the promise of inclusion through education:

> ... the Brazilian people, in the moment in which it awakens for citizenship and discovers itself, at the fifth centenary of the Discovery of Brazil, as the protagonist of history. To celebrate a historical heritage does not mean to idealize the past. Today in Brazil we have an accute awareness of the social plagues (chagas) that are part of the heritage of these 500 years...Other voices of protest and reivindication make themseves heard in this celebration. They are the echoes of a past of slavery, oligarchy and patriarchy which still weighs over Brazilian society and makes it one of the most unjust societies in the world...but I have expressed very clearly my disagreements with the antidemocratic vein of the discourse and the violent forms of action induced by some leaders of this movement (Movimento dos Sem Terra). But this does not devaluate in my eyes and in the eyes of the nation, the authenticity of the drama lived by these workers. Their presence here brings the bothersome, but necessary memory, that the concentration of land property continues to determine the exclusion of millions of Brazilians from the benefits of development, in spite of the considerable advances in land reform which we were able to make... But the most important message which the voices of the excluded ones bring does not concern the past, but the future. They announce that the moment has arrived to turn the page of exclusion in the History of Brazil... I ask all of you to make a toast with me, to the future. And this toast

> we will make with the most authentic of Brazilian drinks:
> our sugar cane alcohol, our cachaça!

What the events of the 500 years in Porto Seguro illustrate is that the Indigenous peoples of Brazil can no longer be seen as a past reality that has become a symbol of the future, the future of the Brazilian nation, bur rather that one Pataxó-Hã-Hã-Hãe Indian can be, today, the spokesperson for 350 thousand indigenous peoples from 227 ethnicities who speak 175 different languages. Perhaps there is still a good deal of mystification when the Indigenous person becomes representative of so many ethnicities and, moreover, a figure representing all the dispossesed in Brazil. Yet, the effects of colonialism are more evident than ever, and the national discourse of assimiliation and integration can hardly accommodate the demands of those emerging discourses. If in both academic and oficial contexts the colonial encounter was not the object of reflection, it is because there was never a true encounter, but rather a history of conflicts and antagonisms which myths of nationality can no longer conceal. On the one hand, exhibits such as the "Mostra do Redescobrimento" attempted to assimilate colonial history by absorbing it into a unified picture of the nation. On the other hand, some critics and academics, as well as activists from different political and ethnic groups, seem to have equated colonialism to the entire 500 years, that is the whole colonial history of Brazil.

Before I conclude, I would like to suggest that last year's commemorations of the 500 years present important questions regarding the status of Colonial studies in Brazil--as well as in the United States. It seems that institutionally, and for hiring purposes, colonial Latin America remains a temporal category, as opposed to, say, nineteenth-century or twentieth-century Latin America. This division poses two problems. On the one hand, it may exclude issues of colonialism after independence, such as the conflicts that ocurred in Porto Seguro, or the riots that took place in São Paulo on February 17, 2001. On the other hand, the classification by period may overdetermine the interpretation of texts produced prior to Brazilian political independence in 1822. The history and the literature of the eighteenth century, for example, are often caught in between issues that recently have become the focus of Colonial studies (issues of alterity, hybridity, etc.), and issues associated with nation building, which have been the central concern of nineteenth-century studies. In the case of Brazilian literature, for example, for a long time now, there has been hardly any work on the Enlightenment or Neoclassic literature, not to mention other eighteenth-century texts that do not easily fit in these categories.

Perhaps Colonial studies should be seen as a broader interdisciplinary field of research, analogous to, say, Ethnic studies, Gender, Queer, Diaspora studies, and so on. This field would be concerned with issues of colonialism or decolonization across temporal and geographical divides. If in the case of Brazil and Latin America it makes little sense to speak of Post-colonial studies, understood in terms of chronology, then we might argue that there is only Post-colonial studies, understood, as we generally do today, as the study of the *effects* of colonialism. (I will not discuss the already much debated problems with the use of the term "post-colonial" in relation to Latin America. But I must say that the term "Colonial studies" for our field and "colonialist" for our profession also makes me uncomfortable). Some scholars may want to emphasize the fact that studies on colonialism should constitute one among other oppositional practices, focused on the constitution of alternative knowledges and subjectivities; others would prefer to focus on issues regarding the dominant discourse, or how colonial discourses are constituted and how they operate. In both cases, however, what makes Colonial studies or studies of colonialism parallel to fields such as gender or ethnic studies is not its object, but its contestatory motivation.

And still, one cannot avoid some overlaps, since, institutionally, we also tend to divide the profession in more or less defined geographical categories: Brazilianists, Caribbeanists, Mexicanists, students of "Cono Sur," the Andes, etc. Each of these geographical areas have their own version of colonial history, which may be studied according to different projects. Finally, the institutional position, motivation, or even political agenda of the scholar may also define how the field is to be shaped; but in spite of increasing dialogues, I believe that, for institutional or socio-political reasons, there is still a remarkable distance between Colonial studies in Brazil (and probably Spanish America) and the United States.

I would say that, to a great extent, Colonial studies in Brazil has always been constituted by prophetic discourses. The quest for origins, which Colonial studies often represent, have always been tied to a promise of nationality and development: such prophetic discourses are present in the literature of Romanticism and Modernism, as well as in all the essays on nationality that originated in the 1930's (such as the canonical interpretations of Brazil by Gilberto Freyre, Sergio Buarque de Holanda, Caio Prado Jr.), and which constituted almost a field, or a genre, known in Brazil as "Formação": thus, we have "Formação da Família Patriarcal Brasileira" (Gilberto Freyre), "Formação Econômica do Brasil" (Caio Prado Jr.), "Formação da Literatura Brasileira" (Antonio Candido), and many other

"formações." Almost every important title of colonial historiography in Brazil contains the word "Formação" either in its title or in its subtitle.

Take, for example, the most important book on colonial history published last year, O Trato dos Viventes. The subtitle of this groundbreaking study by José Felipe de Alencastro is precisely "Formação do Brasil no Atlântico Sul." Its hypothesis, stated in the preface, is closely associated to one of the themes proposed for our meeting here today--the constitution of Brazilian society in the Atlantic. At the same time, the work "formação" in the title reflects a desire for explaining Brazilian difference, and the preface of the book makes this quite clear:

> Portuguese colonization, founded on slavery, made room for an economic and social space that is bipolar, which encompasses a zone of production based on slavery situated on the coast of South America, and a zone of slave reproduction centered in Angola. As early as the end of the sixteenthth century, there emerges an a-territorial space, a lusophone archipelago constituted by the ouposts in Portuguese America and the factories in Angola. It is from this zone that Brazil emerges in the eighteenth century... My purpose is to show how those two areas united by the ocean complete each other in one single system of colonial exploitation whose singularity still deeply defines Brazil.

Such histories, as they are intended to define Brazilian singularity, are also histories of a desire; in other words, they constitute the history of a promise which, ultimately, they continue to reiterate. The genre "Formação" is always an attempt to show the extent to which the study of origins can either indicate signs of redemption or, at least, reveal the solutions for the crises of present reality. Perhaps there is no way of escaping from this desire and this sense of urgency that has always characterized Colonial studies in Brazil. Yet, I do believe that a greater dialogue between Latin American and US scholars may be a way of finding the intersection in which studies concerning colonialism can respond to that sense of urgency posed by local and global realities and, at the same time, avoid mystifications resulting from nostalgia, on the one hand, and Messianisms, on the other.

Notes

1 Guggenheim, New York, September 23rd to January 20th. Bilbao, April 2002.

2 Casa Grande e Senzala. (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 1995, p. 283)