

RELIGION AND RACIAL IDENTITY IN THE  
MOVIMENTO NEGRO  
OF THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH IN BRAZIL

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Finally, a word of thanks to my wife. She was a constant inspiration and help in getting this project done and since the protocol of my program did not allow a dedication in the original I would also like to correct that at this time. To Kathy for all she has meant to me in my academic career and more importantly, in simply the living of life each day.

Alan Myatt - January, 2002

RELIGION AND RACIAL IDENTITY IN THE *MOVIMENTO NEGRO*  
OF THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH IN BRAZIL

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A Dissertation

Presented to

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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by

Alan Doyle Myatt

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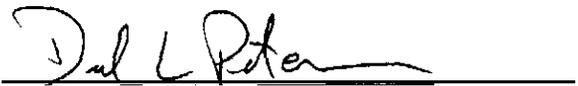
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## CHAPTER 1

### RELIGION, RACIAL IDENTITY AND THE *MOVIMENTO NEGRO*:

#### THEORY AND METHOD

The struggle for social justice has been the dominant theme of the various theologies of liberation originating in Latin America and now spread throughout the world. While liberation theology has traditionally focused on issues of economic justice defined in terms of class conflict, more recently liberation theology has been influential in the rise of feminist and black theologies in North America. This trend has also become apparent in Latin America where in 1984 a conference called "Conference on Black Culture and Theology in Latin America" was held by the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (ASETT). The proceedings were published under the title *Identidade Negra e Religião: Consulta sobre Cultura Negra e Teologia na América Latina* (Black Identity and Religion: Conference on Black Culture and Theology in Latin America- ASETT 1986). The conference and book provide an example of the activity of black theologians and lay people wrestling with the racial situation in Latin America and the implications of liberation theology when this situation is considered.

The Conference on Black Culture and Theology in Latin America was held in São Paulo with about two-thirds of the participants being Brazilian (ASETT 1986, 13, 79-80). This was a natural location as São Paulo serves as the center of the *movimento negro* (black movement) that has developed in the Roman Catholic Church of Brazil since the

late 1970s. This study will focus on the *movimento negro* in the Roman Catholic Church of Brazil, documenting its origins and discussing its struggle to sustain an agenda for black liberation.

The title of the conference proceedings, Black Identity and Religion, indicates that one of the key problems in the discussion of a black liberation theology in Latin America is the issue of racial identity. It has been well documented that among most Brazilians of African descent, there is a marked reluctance to identify themselves as black (Moura 1988; IBGE 1993; Hanchard 1994). Designations such as burned yellow, reddish, white reddish, blue, marine blue, white reddish, pale white, bronze, dark, coffee with milk, light brown, medium brown, and many others have been used instead of black in order to describe racial identity (Moura 1988, 62-63). In the face of what appears as a lack of a clearly defined black identity among Brazil's people of African descent, how does a movement desiring to promote a black liberation theology gain support and members? How does it mobilize those with no black identity into a movement for black liberation? What does it mean to be black? What exactly is a black person? What is black racial identity in Latin America? In the absence of a clear definition of black racial identity, one must be constructed. This is the major challenge faced by the *movimento negro* in the Roman Catholic Church in Brazil, and hence, the major problem to be analyzed in studying this movement.

An important question that surfaces in the study of the Brazilian *movimento negro* concerns the absence in Brazil of wide spread public racial conflict and a large scale black civil rights movement such as found in South Africa and the United States. The *movimento negro* in Brazil has not been able to successfully mobilize blacks for such purposes. Michael George Hanchard (1994) has argued that the ambiguity of racial identity seriously undermines the possibility of such mass mobilization.

An interesting observation that arises from reading Hanchard's work is that the *movimento negro* is presented as primarily a secular phenomenon. In discussing 43 years of the movement's history he devotes very little space to the movement's religious wing (Hanchard 1994, 131-132). One reason for Hanchard's omission is that, while religion has played a formidable role in black history in Brazil, the *movimento negro* of the twentieth century has shown little interest in religion until the late 1970s. Since then, the growing black movement has been actively working within the Roman Catholic Church to do what the secular black movement has failed to accomplish. It is seeking to address the fundamental problems of race relations in Brazil by using religious and cultural resources to construct a black racial identity and to encourage the widespread acceptance of that identity by Brazilian mulattoes. The goal is to mobilize blacks into a viable movement that can mount a successful challenge to the established racial order.

The case of the *movimento negro* in the Brazilian Catholic Church, and liberation theology in general, illustrate the continuing power of religion to influence and motivate social activism and change as the twentieth century draws to a close. In this instance religion will be shown to be a critical aspect of the construction of a black racial identity in the multiracial polity of Brazilian Catholicism. Working from the perspective that the notions of religion, race, racial identity, ethnicity and ethnic group are socially constructed systems of meaning, this chapter will discuss the various theoretical and methodological issues that have guided this study.<sup>1</sup> In the course of this discussion the

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<sup>1</sup>Studies on the social construction of race and ethnicity include Burgess 1978, Blu 1980, Roosens 1990, and Hanchard 1994.

basic theoretical orientation will be considered, key concepts will be defined, and the methodology used for conducting the field research will be described.

### Race and Social Ethos

Clifford Geertz describes the ethos of a people as "the underlying attitude towards themselves and their world that life reflects" (1973, 127). World view is distinct from ethos in that a people's world view is composed of the way they view things actually to be, including notions of self, society and nature. The ethos expresses the world view by representing the way of life it implies. For Geertz the world view focuses more on the rational while the ethos is oriented toward the affective. While this distinction may be useful for analytic purposes, it can also artificially separate elements that must be considered together in order to be correctly understood. Any discussion of the ethos of a culture must include content as well as mood.

In discussing the mood of a society, Geertz points out that the moral mood of a society is a primary aspect of its ethos (Geertz 1973, 127). Christian ethicist Max Stackhouse develops the notion of ethos further in this direction. In his analysis of the operating ethical norms of urban society, he also includes the elements of a society's world view that Geertz neglects. Stackhouse's investigation into the *ethical ethos* of societies in his comparative study of eastern, western, and Marxian conceptions of human rights reveals helpful insights into the understanding of the meaning of human rights in the mood and world view of these societies (Stackhouse 1972, 1984). Since human rights is a fundamental concern in the discussion of race and racial relations in Brazil, it follows that Stackhouse's conception of ethical ethos is an appropriate avenue for defining the racial values embedded in the multi-racial polity of Brazil.

In defining the notion of ethos, Stackhouse includes rational as well as affective elements. I will follow his definition of an ethos of a society as "the subtle web of values, meanings, purposes, expectations, obligations, and legitimations that constitute the operating norms of a culture in relationship to a social entity" that includes "the network of norms that obtain in a sociocultural setting" (Stackhouse 1972, 5). While Stackhouse takes a more comprehensive approach in discussing the ethical ethos of societies, one could also examine the ethical ethos in relation to a particular social structure such as race.

An outline of the ethical ethos of race relations in Brazil will provide an essential context for understanding the *movimento negro* in Brazilian Catholicism. An exposition of this ethos will be given in chapter two. Meanwhile the two central aspects of this ethos, "racial democracy" and "whitening," must be introduced here as a necessary prelude to the theoretical and methodological considerations that form the bulk of this chapter.

Racial democracy is the notion that Brazilian society is relatively free from the racial prejudice, discrimination, and tension found historically in the United States, South Africa, and other western nations. Supporters of this view indicate as evidence in its favor Brazil's alleged peaceful abolition of slavery, the supposed lack of racial violence, the prominence of blacks in Brazilian historical and literary works, the absence of "Jim Crow" or apartheid laws, and the pervasive miscegenation of Brazilian society (Freyre 1986, 1963a; Degler 1986; Freire-Maia 1987; Fiola 1990).

The presence of widespread miscegenation is itself fundamental to the notion of *branqueamento* or "whitening" (Marcos Silva 1990, 60ff; Skidmore 1993; Fiola 1990). It is alleged that through the mixing of the various peoples of Brazil, the population as a whole is becoming more white and so being "purified" (Skidmore 1985, 13-14). Beyond

the idea of biological change in the composition of Brazilian society there are also notions of social whitening. In the social sense it is said that being white is more valued than being black, leading people to adopt white values and attempt to marry lighter skinned partners (Fiola 1990).

Numerous challenges to the racial democracy and whitening theses have been raised in recent years. As will be shown in a subsequent discussion, these notions can no longer be sustained under scholarly critique. However, black activists go a step further in contending that racial democracy and whitening theories have been deliberately perpetrated by Brazilian elites in order to preserve white superiority. I will argue that racial democracy and whitening are ideologies that are widespread in Brazil and may be said to form a socially constructed ethos of race relations that is still largely accepted by many Brazilians. This ethos forms the critical aspect of the context in which the black movement in Brazil has arisen.

### Racial Identity as a Social Construction

The issue of racial identity continually surfaces as primary among the concerns of black activists. Indeed, one of the central problems confronting the movement is the high degree of ambiguity over racial identity in Brazil and the role this plays in perpetuating the status quo of racial inequality. While the North American assumption that there exists a clear line between the races might lead one to see the majority of Brazilians as black, we have seen that the average Brazilian does not share this perspective. Census data as well as surveys, both informal and formal, consistently show that only a small percentage of Brazilians identify themselves as black.

Consistent with the contention that the ambiguity of racial identity in Brazil has been an efficient means of preventing Brazilians of African descent from mobilizing into a

viable civil rights movement (Fiola 1990, 15; Hanchard 1994), informants interviewed for this study indicated that the movement sees the development of a sense of black identity among Brazilians of African descent as crucial for this task and thus central to its mission. Informants discussed the unwillingness of blacks to consciously adopt such an identity as a major problem. Much of the movement's activities are centered around consciousness raising designed to convince mulattoes that they are black. Beginning with the assumption that race is a socially constructed category of meaning I will show that central to the movement's praxis is the attempt to construct a black Brazilian racial identity over against the predominant ethos represented by the notions of racial democracy and whitening.

Studies of ethnicity have proposed both *non-rational* and *rational* models of ethnic identity. Non-rational models present essentialist notions of ethnic identity as innate characteristics of groups that are relatively unchangeable. Ethnic identity would in this understanding be an involuntary given of one's location in a specific ethnically defined social group (Geertz 1973, Burgess 1978, 266). Rational theories hold the opposing perspective that ethnic identity is situational and may change according to the social pressures and the perceptions of group members (Patterson 1975, 1977, Wilson 1976, Hechter 1982). Ethnicity is viewed as a voluntary choice based on the rational interests of the social actors involved (Burgess 1978, 267; See and Wilson 1988, 228-229). In the past few years studies have shown that ethnic identity is often fluid and may be rapidly redefined by the groups and individuals in question. Changing social situations can precipitate changes in ethnic self perception and in choice of identity (Blu 1980; Roosens 1989). In other words, ethnicity and ethnic identity are socially constructed definitions of specific social groups and the individuals comprising them.

Burgess (1978) notes that the idea of a rational -- non-rational continuum has gained acceptance among many scholars. This perspective accounts for both the strong sense of identity created by socialization into a particular group and the flexibility that has been shown empirically to exist in the switching and construction of identities. This type of a model would recognize the presence of both rational and non-rational elements in greater or lesser degrees with variations according to differing circumstances. It accounts for both the creation of identity through socialization and the creativity of human beings as they reconstruct their own social identity and context.

#### The Dialectic of Social Construction

If we accept the notion that ethnic identity is socially constructed and that there are both rational and non-rational elements involved, it then becomes possible to see an approach grounded in the sociology of knowledge as a viable means of analyzing the process of ethnic identity construction. Berger and Luckmann (1967) describe the social construction of reality as a dialectical process. If we place the non-rational and rational ends of the ethnicity continuum on opposite sides of the dialectic, Berger and Luckmann's theory generates possibilities for the interpretation of ethnicity that I will argue are particularly appropriate for the analysis of the dynamics of race relations in Brazil.

All knowledge, according to Berger and Luckmann, is socially constructed. That is, all that passes for knowledge is a human product that develops out of the interaction of human social relations. The focus of sociology of knowledge for Berger and Luckmann is everyday common sense reality. Everyday reality is the stuff of what people "know" and define as "reality." It is the knowledge shared with others in the routines of daily life. It is the taken for granted reality that is simply there. "It is precisely this 'knowledge' that constitutes the fabric of meanings without which no society could exist" (Berger and

Luckmann 1967, 15). In this study I am concerned with the everyday reality of race relations in Brazil and what Brazilians "know" to be true concerning these relations.

Everyday reality is a shared reality. It takes place in relationship with others. That is to say, everyday reality is a *social* reality involving various social relationships from the intimate to the distant and anonymous. These relationships take place via "typificatory schemes" through which people interpret and classify one another and determine how they shall act in relation to each other. Typifications might lead one to classify another as "male," "American," "rich," "snob," and could also include racial and ethnic designations such as "Irish," "black," or "Afro-Brazilian."

Such typifications may at first appear to social actors as objective categories that exist independently of human interaction. However, Berger and Luckmann contend that they are human creations that are developed as people interact with each other. Typifications are based on the observation of habitually repeated actions as interpreted by those doing the typifying. They are expressed in interpretive categories such as those given in the previous paragraph. An example of typification is the portrayal of blacks that have been documented in Brazilian primary education. Blacks are often portrayed as aggressive, sexually promiscuous and inferior in comparison to whites. They are also more likely to be portrayed in positions of lower social and economic status (Hanchard 1994, 60). The interpretive aspect of typification also becomes clear in the typifications of blacks in Brazil. They have been stereotyped as aggressive, lazy and indolent. This reflects a white typification of slave behavior that can also be attributed to black resistance by means of rebellion, work slow downs, and insubordination to oppressive control.

That such typifications appear to have independent ontological status and yet are human constructions seems to be paradoxical, but in Berger and Luckmann's scheme this serves to point out the dialectical nature of the process of reality construction as it is carried out in its social context. Berger's summary of this process captures its essential elements.

The fundamental dialectic process of society consists of three moments, or steps. These are externalization, objectivation, and internalization... Externalization is the ongoing outpouring of human being into the world, both in the physical and the mental activity of men. Objectivation is the attainment by the products of this activity (again both physical and mental) of a reality that confronts its original producers as a facticity external to and other than themselves. Internalization is the reappropriation by men of this same reality, transforming it once again from structures of the objective world into structures of the subjective consciousness. It is through externalization that society is a human product. It is through objectivation that society becomes a reality *sui generis*. It is through internalization that man is a product of society (Berger 1969, 4).

Externalization is the process through which human activity creates the social institutions that form the social world. The process of typification takes place reciprocally until typified actions are habitual (Berger and Luckmann 1967, 54). As time passes these habitualizations become social institutions. Whatever reason may have existed for initiating a behavior or a pattern of social relations it soon begins to be accepted simply because "this is how we do things here." To use Berger and Luckmann's terms, the institutional world "thickens" until it is not readily amenable to change (Berger and Luckmann 1967, 59). In other words, social institutions become objectivated. That is, they tend to take on a quality of objectivity over against the human beings who now encounter them. This is especially true in the experience of subsequent generations who encounter them during the process of socialization (Berger and Luckmann, 1967, 59-60).

Institutions such as the family, education, and religion are apprehended originally as pre-existing, objectively real structures that demand predefined manners of behavior and interaction from the persons encountering them. They are not experienced, at least initially, as human creations that could have been different. Hence, any deviation from the order prescribed by the institutions is seen as a departure from reality itself (Berger and Luckmann 1967, 67). Institutions form the social structures that establish the patterns of behavior for a society. Through institutions human activity and behavior become subject to social control.

The behaviors imposed on actors within institutions are roles. While roles themselves are humanly created typifications of behaviors within institutions, they also stand as objectivated structures that tell individuals their place within the institution (Berger and Luckman 1967, 74). Racial relations are institutionalized in the ethos of multi-racial societies, demanding particular roles of individuals according to their racial classification. As we proceed we shall see that the Brazilian ethos of race presents itself as an objectivated structure that defines permissible roles for blacks. This is one of the major challenges facing the *movimento negro*.

Objectivated institutions, such as a society's ethos of race relations, are initially experienced in such a way that the reality they represent is the only reality that there could be. If institutionalization could be carried to perfection the order thus represented would never be questioned. The Afro-Brazilian successfully socialized into the dominant racial ethos would be in no danger of questioning his or her socially assigned racial identity, much less seeking to assume a new one. However, the process of institutionalization is not perfect. We shall see that the inconsistencies in the Brazilian

racial ethos provide space for doubt that is sufficient to give rise to alternative interpretations of Brazilian race relations.

An important aspect of objectivation is the symbol making activity engaged in by human beings as they externalize and create a social world. Human products, such as the drums and dress used in Afro-Brazilian religious rites, become objectivated by their capacity to carry subjective meanings of human intentions. They become symbols of meanings that go beyond what they originally implied. Thus, the drums symbolize more than just the capacity for music making. They symbolize human contact with the holy. The production of symbols allows the specific communication of subjective meanings to others (Berger and Luckman 1967, 35).<sup>2</sup> When black Brazilians attempt to use their drums in worship in the Roman Catholic Church, they are communicating that they are bringing in their own notions of spirituality.

With the most important form of symbol making, the production of language, comes the ability to communicate abstract meaning systems that transcend the reality of everyday life and connect different spheres of reality. Berger and Luckmann define a symbol as "any significative theme that thus spans spheres of reality" (Berger and Luckmann 1967, 40). Symbols refer to spheres outside the realm of everyday experience (Berger and Luckmann 1967, 95).

Through symbolism language may be used to construct "immense edifices of symbolic representations" (Berger and Luckmann 1967, 40) that overshadow everyday reality. Religion, science, art, and philosophy are noted as the most important of such

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<sup>2</sup>I am avoiding the use of the term "signification" that Berger and Luckmann use to describe this process so as not to confuse it with Charles Long's use of the same term which shall be discussed momentarily.

symbol systems. These symbol systems themselves become institutionalized, taking on a character of objective reality.

A higher level of symbol making concerns the creation of symbolic universes. Symbolic universes grow out of the necessity for institutions to be legitimated. As new generations are socialized the institutional order of society must be explained and justified to them (Berger and Luckmann 1967, 63-64). Theoretical knowledge is constructed to explain why things are the way they are. Beyond the development of pure theory in specific areas, symbolic universes cover the entire institutional order in a "symbolic totality" (Berger and Luckmann 1967:95).

The symbolic universe is conceived of as the matrix of all socially objectivated and subjectively real meanings; the entire historic society and the entire biography of the individual are seen as events taking place within this universe. (Berger and Luckmann 1967, 96).

The Portuguese-Catholic society of colonial Brazil functioned as a symbolic universe that provided legitimations for the enslavement of Africans until its disintegration in the first half of the nineteenth century. The end of colonialism along with pressures from the rise of industrialism in Europe displaced this universe and, by 1888, slavery as well.

Individuals find their roles in society affirmed by the symbolic universe (Berger and Luckman 1967, 92). Since a person's role in society includes his or her social status in society, then it follows that the system of social stratification existing in the various social institutions is also legitimated by the symbolic universe. Those in power may deliberately appropriate the knowledge generated by theoreticians in order to bolster their own claims to authority. A clear example of this process occurred in Brazil after the abolition of slavery in 1888. Current theories of scientific racism were adopted by the

white elite and forged into a system that served to legitimate the continued system of social stratification that placed blacks in the lower rungs of society (Skidmore 1993). These theories thus became a key feature of the symbolic universe of republican Brazil.

Once a social world is objectivated it must be preserved and passed on through the process of internalization. In this third phase of the dialectic the humanly constructed social world acts back upon the members of society so that they are also a product of that social world (Berger and Luckman 1967, 130). Internalization is carried out through the process of socialization. Berger and Luckmann distinguish between primary and secondary socialization. Primary socialization inducts the child into the basic symbolic universe of the social world in which it finds itself. Secondary socialization then takes it further into more specialized roles by locating it in specific institutions and sub-universes of the larger society (Berger and Luckmann 1967, 130).

In the process of internalization the individual develops an identity (Berger and Luckman 1967, 133). Central to understanding the *movimento negro* in the Brazilian Roman Catholic context is the notion of racial identity. We will be looking at the process of identity construction within the movement in some detail. For now it is relevant to note that an important aspect of internalization and socialization in Brazil is the previously mentioned socialization of black Brazilian children into a negative image of being black. The internalization of these previously objectivated negative images contributes to the ambiguity of racial identity. Since being black is viewed as something bad, black identity is consciously rejected by the majority of Brazilians of African descent. Instead they opt for one of the many designations used to identify mulattoes in Brazil.

Berger and Luckmann describe the formation of an identity as a part of the dialectical process of society. An individual forms an identity in the process of

socialization into a symbolic universe. This identity is defined by and gains its legitimacy from its location within the social world (Berger and Luckmann 1967, 130-132). In primary socialization the child creates a self identity in terms of the identity given it by significant others. The social world presented by significant others becomes the world of the child as it internalizes the attitudes, values, and knowledge of its institutions (Berger and Luckman 1967, 132-137). Brazilian children of African descent whose parents do not identify themselves as black will naturally fail to do so as well. In secondary socialization the identity takes on more specific roles and becomes identified with sub-universes within the larger symbolic universe (Berger and Luckman 1967, 138-147). Racial stereotypes and roles modeled in the school system, for example, contribute to the child's finding its race appropriate place in the Brazilian social system.

Self identity is postulated to be always somewhat precarious. Berger and Luckmann argue that the process of socialization is never complete and must be constantly supported (Berger and Luckman 1967, 147). It is crucial at this point to be aware that the dialectical process does not occur in a set temporal order. Each of the three moments of the process are constantly engaged. Human beings are therefore not merely passive participants in an inexorable deterministic process. They continue to act back on society as they create their own social reality in the context of the objectivated reality into which they are being continually socialized. Indeed, the power of human beings to recreate their own reality must not be under emphasized. Human beings constantly create new realities that may challenge the established order.

This basic overview of Berger and Luckmann's sociology of knowledge has so far presented a somewhat idealized view of societies and symbolic universes. The precariousness of identity points to the inherent precarious nature of the symbolic

universe itself. Late-modern and post-modern Western societies are no longer characterized by an all encompassing symbolic universe. In the context of pluralism, competing symbolic universes often hold the allegiance of large segments of a single society. The availability of alternative symbolic universes, as well as the possibility of competing sub-universes, offering different interpretations of the larger social world adds to the precariousness of identity. This presents special problems that must be addressed if a particular symbolic universe is to continue to maintain its credibility.

In order for a person's identity and social world to continue to provide him or her a quality of objective reality, both the identity and the social world must continue to be subjectively plausible. They must offer acceptable interpretations of daily experience. The mechanisms for accomplishing this are plausibility structures. A plausibility structure is a social base or structure that maintains a continuing conversation supporting and affirming the reality of the symbolic universe (Berger and Luckmann 1967, 154-155; Berger 1967, 45-46) and by implication, the identity of the person. An example in the Brazilian context is the CEB (*Comunidade Eclesial de Base* - Christian Base Community) movement that has provided a social structure where participants have been able to successfully adopt and maintain a radical social stance over against the larger symbolic universe of conservative Catholicism.

The example of the CEBs points out the practical problem of competing viewpoints. When liberation theology developed as an alternative interpretation of social relations in the symbolic universe of Brazilian society, the problem of how to prevent the faithful from defecting to this new vision arose. Berger and Luckmann note that compliance must be enforced if a symbolic universe is to be sustained (Berger and Luckmann 1967, 62, 155). Both the Church hierarchy and the Brazilian government used negative sanctions to

repress dissent. In addition, accommodation and absorption of the new movement while redefining it in a way as to make it less threatening to the status quo has been attempted.

The occurrence of competing visions of reality may be found in two scenarios that are important for the discussion of the *movimento negro*. The first involves the presence of competing symbolic universes. The contact of African, European, and native Brazilian cultures involved the sudden confrontation by members of each group with a radically different symbolic universe. In each case responses were made attempting to conserve each universe and explain the others. The Luso-Catholic symbolic universe of the Portuguese was used to interpret the Africans as a heathen people in need of salvation. The Portuguese proceeded to justify their enslavement of blacks in part with the notion that they were saving black souls by making them into Roman Catholics. Blacks responded by using their own symbolic universes of the various African religious traditions to develop ways of resisting and surviving their captivity. Out of these relationships of power, domination and resistance new socially constructed realities emerged. Among them is the well known syncretism of African and Roman Catholic religious traditions.

The second situation occurs when competing visions of reality exist within the same basic universe. Berger and Luckmann use the term ideology to describe particular interpretations of the same universe as those interpretations are connected to concrete power interests (Berger and Luckmann 1967, 123). Both power elites and the dominated construct their own visions of reality which may be said to form sub-universes of meaning under the shared symbolic universe. As resistance increases, the sub-universe of the dominated may develop into a symbolic universe in full opposition to that of the elite. It may do this by drawing upon resources from other available symbolic universes. We will

see that there are at least two distinct interpretations of race relations in Brazil linked to definite power interests and that it is in the arena of power struggles in society that much of the social construction of reality takes place.

In a pluralistic environment socialization may be weakened by exposure to various symbol systems, interpretations, and symbolic universes. A pluralistic social context exacerbates the already precarious nature of self-identity, making it more likely that one may give up one symbolic universe for one of its competitors. It was noted previously that methods of social control such as negative sanctions and coopting the opposing view are common means of preventing defection to competing symbolic universes. The limitations of such devices are evident in that persons experience conversions. They do switch allegiances to other symbolic universes, at times even when it is very costly to do so. It is not uncommon for individuals to convert in spite of serious social pressure to the contrary.

One aspect of conversion is the reconstruction of one's identity in terms of the new symbolic universe. The construction of self-identity and symbolic universe building are mutually supportive and mutually necessary processes, if a symbolic universe is to succeed in holding its adherents. It is no surprise then, that in a context of competing symbolic universes self-identity becomes a key point of contention between the interests representing opposing viewpoints. In the dynamics of power relations between blacks in the *movimento negro* and whites in Brazil, racial identity is hotly contested. For black activists the construction of a viable black identity is the critical problem they face.

The process of symbolic universe construction and maintenance described by Berger and Luckmann provides us with some basic tools to be used in the analysis of the following chapters. However, there are limitations to this approach that necessitate the

introduction of additional theoretical tools. Already I have suggested that the social construction of reality takes place in the context of power relations of dominance. I will argue that the Brazilian context cannot be correctly understood otherwise. While providing a framework for the introduction of such relations, this aspect of social dynamics does not figure largely in Berger and Luckmann.

#### Power Relations and the Social Construction of Race

A sociology of knowledge approach to the analysis of power relations between the symbolic universes in the polity of Brazilian race relations immediately raises theoretical questions concerning ideological hegemony, false consciousness, and the resistance of the dominated. Do subordinate peoples simply accept and internalize the socially defined definitions of their identity and station in life that are imposed upon them by their society? That is to say, do elites succeed in externalizing their own social constructions of reality in such a way that the objectivity of the dominant institutions in society is accepted as a natural part of the order of things by the dominated? Is there really such a thing as ideological hegemony and if so, does it necessarily entail some type of false consciousness among the oppressed? What do the dominated externalize and what kind of institutions develop out of this? When and where do they resist?

As was previously noted, black activists have charged that the racial democracy theory is a device of elites to mask and thus preserve the racial inequalities in Brazilian society. Hanchard (1994) argues that the idea of Brazilian racial democracy serves as a form of ideological hegemony that effectively inhibits organized black resistance by creating the illusion of equality where it does not exist. At the same time the ideology of whitening leads blacks to identify themselves by means of a diversity of racial identities, effectively dividing the black population such that the organization of a viable black civil

rights movement becomes highly improbable. Hence, contends Hanchard, the lack of such a movement in Brazil.

Without disputing the notion that racial democracy and whitening theories serve the interests of the white elite, the limitations of the notion of ideological hegemony will be readily seen in its inability to cope with much of the data concerning resistance found among oppressed peoples. Resistance to domination by whites has existed among Afro-Brazilians from the earliest days of slavery until the present. Any theory of ideological hegemony, if it is to be preserved, will have to account for this.

Recently James Scott (1985, 1990) has offered a critique of notions of ideological hegemony and false consciousness arguing that resistance is inherent in any situation of dominance. Scott seeks to uncover hidden resistance in order to understand the dynamics of power relations. In so doing he reveals a variety of methods used by the dominated to maintain a sense of dignity and strike back against the hegemony of elites, even when on the surface no resistance is readily visible. This background becomes important to understand as a precursor to overt resistance.

A brief survey of Scott's notion of hidden and public transcripts will provide a valuable perspective for understanding the social construction of the ethos of race in Brazil. It will also contribute to our understanding of the preservation of African culture and identity in Brazil and illuminate the current efforts of the *movimento negro* in the Catholic Church to reconstruct black identity.

For Scott, social relations are power relations between dominants and subordinates. Inherent in relations of domination are relations of resistance (Scott 1990, 45). Scott argues that subordinate peoples are not generally fooled by the rationalizations of elites concerning the order of society. That is, they are not deceived by

the false consciousness of ideological hegemony. Rather, they are unable to express resistance openly (Scott 1990, 102). In such a context the public dialogue between the classes takes on the language of the dominant (Scott 1990, 30). This dialogue is the *public transcript*, where *public* refers to action done openly towards the other in the relationship and *transcript* signifies a complete record of communication whether verbal or otherwise (Scott 1990, 2).

The public transcript represents social reality as interpreted by the dominant in their own interests. It presents the portrait of reality that the dominant want the subordinate to see. This is the case even if it is well known that violations exist (Scott 1990, 51). It is important that the appearance, at least, of unanimity be maintained in order to legitimate the power of elites. To this end the public transcript is institutionalized in public ceremonies and euphemistic language is used to mask the more unpleasant fact of domination (Scott 1990, 53-54). Any public dissent must be repressed as it would tend to weaken the plausibility structures supporting the elite's construction of reality. Scott argues, however, that such dissent continues to exist even though subordinates may make a great show of respect, reverence and agreement with the system (Scott 1985, 278-289; 1990, 93). The participation of the subordinate is not due to false consciousness, but is a means to other ends such as avoiding retaliation.

The public transcript often plants the seeds of dissent in its portrayal of the benevolence of the elite and the benefits gained by the people under their power. The articulation of obvious but unspoken discrepancies and the demand that elites deliver the goods can effectively unmask the pretense (Scott 1990, 54). Subordinates do not internalize the view of elites. Their view is developed, expressed, and sustained out of the sight of elites.

In the context of domination there are four types of political discourse. The first essentially agrees with the public transcript, at least in appearance. Scott argues that the compliance offered by the subordinates does not indicate their agreement with the state of affairs represented in the public transcript. Instead they use deference and flattery to achieve their own goals (Scott 1990, 34).

The inability to strike back against domination creates the second type of political discourse which Scott calls the hidden transcript. This is the discourse that takes place offstage, out of the sight of the dominant (Scott 1990, 4). In this arena the subversive desires and thoughts of the dominated are expressed much more freely. The compulsory nature of the subordinate's participation in the public transcript produces a reaction of negation. That is, the public transcript creates the hidden (Scott 1990, 28, 115).

Revolutionary thought is common although its open expression may be rare (Scott 1990, 102).

The hidden transcript requires adequate social space if it is to develop. This occurs when there is a safe place for it to be expressed and when this space is occupied by persons who share in the experience of being dominated. There must also be the time available for the discourse to develop. That elites often invest great energy in attempting to control or eliminate the social space where the hidden transcript is developed indicates its importance (Scott 1990, 123, 124). Scott notes that the preservation of these social sites is itself an "achievement of resistance; they are won and defended in the teeth of power" (Scott 1990, 119).

Between the hidden transcript and the public transcript exists a third type of political dialogue that represents the veiled articulation of the hidden transcript into the public discourse (Scott 1990, 19, 137ff). Defiance of elites exists in a concealed and

coded fashion. Through the use of anonymous forms of communication such as gossip and rumor, subversive ideas may be articulated with limited risk. Messages of dissent may be cloaked in euphemistic language. Jokes, folk tales such as the trickster stories of many cultures, and other elements of folk culture often carry the message of defiance. Verbal grumbling and passive-aggressive forms of resistance such as work slow downs may also effectively express the resistance of the subordinate. Scott even suggests that religious phenomena such as trance and possession states offer possibilities for the overt verbalization of the hidden transcript. Religious and social rituals may also be the locus for the expression of resistance. What each of these elements has in common is that they are close enough to the permissible form of the public discourse that the accusation of subversion may be credibly evaded (Scott 1990, 137-182).

The fourth and final form of political discourse occurs when subordinates overtly express their feelings in public. This represents a direct, revolutionary challenge to authority and redefines the situation, even if it is successfully repressed. Often it occurs when the power of the dominant is already weakened. It may very well be the precursor to the mobilization of the subordinate for outright rebellion (Scott 1990, 202ff).

Hegemony or Self Interest?

While one may interpret Berger and Luckmann's (1967) sociology of knowledge in a way that is at odds with Scott (1990) this conclusion is not necessary. Instead, insights from Scott may be drawn upon to show that within the framework of the dialectic described by Berger and Luckmann, the process of social construction must be seen as taking place in the context of power relations between the dominant and the subordinate. The dialectical nature of this power relation means that the objectivated social reality is not simply a creation of elites that is subsequently internalized unquestioningly by

subordinates. The externalized and objectivated social reality is produced out of both the public *and* private transcripts so that it is a product of both elites and the dominated. In addition, the precariousness of socially constructed symbolic universes and self-identity assures that space will exist for the emergence of dissent and the development of resistance as seen in hidden transcripts.

On the other hand, the internalization of objectivated reality does imply that the degree of dissonance between the subordinate and the perspective of the elite may vary. Perhaps a form of ideological hegemony that does not rely on notions of false consciousness need not be ruled out. The fact that an elite ideology has hegemony on a practical level does not need to imply that there is no dissent or that those subordinates who adhere to the ideology do not do so for reasons that they perceive are in their own self-interest. Subordinates may express affirmation of the elite's viewpoint even as they show varying degrees of recognition of the inconsistencies it involves.

In this sense ideological hegemony would be essentially redefined to mean that the elite ideology provides legitimation for elite dominance in that it serves as the recognized and approved definition of the social situation and is articulated in the public transcript as such. It is then given differing degrees of support by subordinates as reflecting "the way things are." The validity and utility of such a weak definition of ideological hegemony is a theoretical question that will have to be tested.

In the context of the *movimento negro* in Brazil the debate over hegemony, false consciousness, and resistance is taken up by Hanchard (1994) who argues that racial democracy does indeed constitute ideological hegemony in that white elites have used it to neutralize ethnic and racial identification among non-whites to the point that they are unlikely to create a significantly large movement around Afro-Brazilian identity.

Hanchard attacks Scott's argument against ideological hegemony as being reductionistic and superficial.<sup>3</sup> He argues that Gramsci's notion of hegemony cannot be equated with false consciousness. Rather the dominant ideology contains its own contradictions that produce tension and competing visions within itself and allow for the expression of resistance.

However, Hanchard seems to affirm with Raymond Williams (1977) that in this broader view of hegemony there is a sense of absolute reality which most subordinates are not able to transcend. In spite of its modifications this still has the appearance of a theory of false consciousness, albeit weakened slightly. It is also similar to an interpretation of Berger and Luckmann that sees the internalization of symbolic universes in a more absolute sense without accounting for the fullness of the dialectic of socially constructing reality. While allowing for the existence of dissent, it does not explain satisfactorily the level of resistance documented in hidden transcripts as well as the more overt resistance that breaks forth.

In arguing against Scott's (1990) critique of the dominant ideology thesis, Hanchard attempts to formulate a notion of ideological hegemony that accounts for the existence of resistance by asserting that hegemony is exercised through complementary ideologies forming clusters of beliefs rather than one dominant ideology. These clusters of beliefs may be dominant at one moment and the source of competing views that produce tensions in other instances, thus forming a contradictory consciousness. They involve social practices that embody both resistance and acquiescence to hegemony (Hanchard 1994, 22-23). Hence, the presence of contradictions such as the simultaneous

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<sup>3</sup>See the extended footnote, number 17 on pages 170-171. My complaints against Hanchard should not be taken as a dismissal of his valuable study. However, I feel that his lack of attention to religion in Afro-Brazilian culture and in the *movimento negro* has perhaps led him to miss the key locus of the hidden transcript that Scott postulates and hence to miss much of the resistance that is there.

expression of racist notions and the denial of being racially prejudiced that one often encounters among white Brazilians (Hanchard 1994, 23).

Another example of such contradictory consciousness would be the "expressed belief by members of a subordinate group of the superiority of a more powerful one" (Hanchard 1994, 23). Such a belief would involve contradictory consciousness because it would be expressed in the context of unequal relations between the two. Hanchard argues that for many of the subordinate there is no hidden transcript of resistance (Hanchard 1994, 71). They affirm and participate in the system in such a way as to evidence agreement with the dominant definition of the social situation. If it is true that there is *no* transcript of resistance among many of the dominated, presumably because they neither articulate a desire for power nor resist, then they either agree that the unequal distribution of power reflects how things should be, or they are unaware of it. Once again, it is difficult to see how this avoids being a theory of false consciousness, regardless of Hanchard's protests to the contrary.

On the other hand, Hanchard's notion of contradictory consciousness can be utilized as a useful construct for understanding the dialectic between the symbolic universe of the dominant and the counter universe of the subordinate. In this case it is not necessary to place it in such stark opposition to Scott's notion of hidden and public transcripts. Hanchard characterizes the notion of a hidden transcript as entailing a full blown agenda of resistance, while Scott himself indicates that at times it may only consist of the imagined reversal of roles between the dominated and dominant (Scott 1990) indicating that there are degrees of awareness of social inequities.

In the process of the dialectic proposed by Berger and Luckmann (1967) various interpretations of the social situation by subordinates may exist, depending upon the strength of their socialization into the various symbolic universes available to them. In addition, the symbolic universes themselves would contain various inconsistencies. Persons socialized in a setting of multiple or competing universes would naturally internalize and express varying degrees of contradictory understandings. Socialization into the viewpoint of the dominant would never be complete, but in some cases it might be strong enough that the subordinate would express both a genuine degree of concurrence in one context, and resistance in another. Thus understood, contradictory consciousness includes room for the resistance indicated by Scott's hidden transcripts while affirming Hanchard's observation that not all of the subordinate's agreement with the dominated is feigned. In this sense, Scott's observation of the inevitability of resistance to domination must be contextualized. This will be well illustrated as we discuss the tensions and contradictions between conformity and resistance that appear as Brazilians of African descent deal with the construction of their racial identity.

The issue of the construction of racial identity brings up the question of non-rational versus rational interest theories of how such an identity is acquired. Hanchard falls, by default, on the non-rational end of the continuum by subsuming the question under a Gramscian conception of ideological hegemony. He fails to discuss rational choice theories of ethnicity and how they might apply to the Brazilian scene. I will argue that inclusion of a rational choice model of ethnicity will enhance our understanding of racial identity in Brazil and offer illumination of both the hidden and public transcripts of

the Brazilian symbolic universe of racial democracy. This will be important for understanding how Brazilians in the *movimento negro* of the Catholic Church in Brazil are attempting to reconstruct black identity.

### Signification

In treating the black religious experience in North America Charles Long (1986) develops the concept of signification. In the colonial experience of contact between whites and peoples of color, color became a symbol used by whites to name those who were being conquered. Signification involves the objectivation of the concepts and categories used by the powerful to describe the reality of the subordinate. In Berger and Luckmann's terms, we may understand signification as the objectivation of the typifications made by the powerful elite about those whom they dominate. Hence, when the typification of blacks as lazy and immoral becomes objectivated to the point that it becomes the assumed reality, then blacks have been signified. The process is power laden and is said to create the cultures of the non-Europeans who were conquered (Long 1986, 4-5). The whitening ideology, with its systematic denial of black racial identity to the majority of Afro-Brazilians, may be viewed as a white tool for signifying Afro-Brazilians as non-blacks thus creating a culture in which black identity is largely negated.

According to Long, to be signified means that the dominant cultural language about one's group is created by those on the outside. Those typifications created by the subordinate group are not able to define how it is represented in the dominant symbolic universe. The typifications of the elite prevail. Signification is arbitrary in that it serves the interests of the powerful. Its purpose is to keep the dominated in their place. However, it does provoke responses, both of terror and protest as subordinates attempt to come to terms with the language created about them (Long 1986, 2, 7-8).

The ethos of race in Brazil provides an opportunity to explore how the process of signification contributes to the objectification of the symbolic universe of racial democracy, in a setting quite different from that addressed by Long. It also permits the concept of signification to be understood and refined in terms of the Brazilian religious and racial milieu. In particular, the Brazilian context reveals how the terror and protest provoked by signification emerge as forms of resistance that limit the ability of the signifiers to create the culture of the dominated.

The question of whether subordinates are blinded by ideological hegemony or whether domination produces resistance involves the consideration of just to what extent the attempted signification of subordinates is internalized. The Brazilian experience of race relations will provide useful data for clarifying and refining these theoretical questions.

#### Race and Ethnicity

Studies of race and ethnicity over the past two and a half decades have shifted social theory away from the expectation that the processes of modernity would lead to greater assimilation of groups into larger collectivities with the corresponding loss of ethnic identity and diversity. Sociologists have recognized that ethnic diversity is here to stay and that the resurgence of old ethnic divisions or the creation of new ones will likely remain an enduring aspect of social reality (Burgess 1978). However, the consensus regarding the importance of ethnicity as a social category does not translate into a consensus regarding the nature of ethnicity, ethnic groups, and ethnic identity and their relation to contemporary social processes. Previously I have mentioned that ethnic identity and racial identity are understood both in terms of non-rational and rational

choice models or as a continuum of the two. In this section these theories of ethnicity will be examined in more detail as attention is given to defining race and ethnicity.

### Ethnicity

A satisfactory definition of ethnicity must account for both cultural elements of ethnic groups and the subjective sense of ethnic identity. Cultural elements include symbolic markers that are used in the boundary construction essential for the maintenance of a distinctive ethnic identity (Burgess 1978). These symbols may be objective such as in the case of a common language, land, or biological relation. Such symbols may also be appropriated from another culture or simply invented and applied to a group that essentially creates its own ethnicity, apparently *ex-nihilo*, as in the case of the Lumbee of North Carolina (Blu 1980) or the Hurons of Quebec (Roosens 1989).

Subjective definitions of ethnicity involve social-psychological and affective aspects of how groups and individuals identify themselves and are identified by others. Ethnicity is defined as a felt identity (Burgess 1978, 27). Recent scholarship places more emphasis on the self-identification of ethnicity as a factor that is often changed and redefined in terms of what is considered to be the most socially and economically advantageous (Roosens 1989, 13). Patterson (1975) argues this point and further adds that if a choice has to be made between ethnic and class allegiance, then loyalty to class allegiance will be selected. Roosens, in contrast, asserts that ethnic identity can create a type of self-valorization that cannot be attained by class identification for those on the lower rungs of social stratification (1989, 14). The data concerning the *movimento negro* will shed light on this point and on the nature of the flexibility in ethnic identity.

Roosens points out that ethnic identity can become very strong, even militant, despite the fact that ethnic identities may be changed. The experience of belonging

causes the member to equate his or her ethnic identity with his or her own being (Roosens 1989, 18). If this is the case one would expect the process of switching identities to involve more than the pragmatic economic choice indicated by Patterson. Indeed, See and Wilson (1988) have pointed out that rational choice models of ethnicity are complicated by the fact that often a given social situation involves competing rationalities. What may be rational from an economic perspective may be irrational institutionally (See and Wilson 1988, 229). It will be shown that racial identity in the *movimento negro* in the Roman Catholic Church in Brazil cannot be adequately explained in terms of economically determined rational choice alone. Other rationalities are at work in the Brazilian ethos.

The strength of ethnic identity would indicate that objective, non-rational elements of ethnicity cannot be ignored. Individuals first encounter their own ethnicity as a part of the objectivated reality of the symbolic universe into which they are initially socialized. Even allowing for the contradictory nature of being simultaneously socialized into the hidden as well as the public transcripts of this universe, it still follows that this initial socialization would have enough force on the formation of the personality such that the strength of one's ethnic identity would largely correspond to the thickness of ethnic boundaries as defined by that universe. The positing of a non-rational, non-chosen basis for ethnic identity is valid if one sees this not as coming from some kind of primordial or instinctive sense of clan, but rather as the result of internalizing the already existing objectified symbolic universe. The continuing dialectic of the social construction of reality would then go on to predict that this identity could be changed even as it would predict that new ethnic identities and allegiances would be created and externalized. Thus, in this model both rational and non-rational means of ethnic identity are in operation.

Out of her survey of theories of ethnicity Burgess (1978) delineates five operational properties that consistently emerge as fundamental.

- (1) ethnic group membership;
- (2) ethnic identity;
- (3) consciousness of belonging and/or of group differences;
- (4) affective attachments or bonds based on a real or putative shared past and perceived ethnic aims or interests;
- (5) ties elaborated or differentiated symbolically by 'markers,' tradition, emblems, beliefs (cultural, territorial, biological) (Burgess 1978, 270).

In my treatment of the *movimento negro* each of these will be seen to be points of controversy with which the movement is grappling. These controversies have theoretical implications for our understanding of the nature of ethnicity.

Of particular interest is the third point which states that ethnicity involves a consciousness of belonging to a specific ethnic group as well as an awareness of differences between those who are in one's group and those who are not. Patterson holds that ethnic groups do not exist unless persons consciously identify themselves with such groups (Patterson 1975, 309). Roosens asserts that this consciousness increases with the intensity of contact with other groups (Roosens 1989, 12). However, he follows LeVine and Campbell (1972) in noting that tribes and ethnic groups have often been invented by outsiders such as colonial administrators and ethnologists, who desire to divide them up for their own purposes. This indicates that conceptions of ethnicity embraced and experienced by groups sometimes have their origins in the signification of those who hold power over them. If this is so, one must then ask if it is possible for such signification to create a scenario in which the signified are assigned a certain social space and role on the basis of being perceived by the powerful as an ethnic group, even if those in the group do not admit to their membership in it? What if the signifiers are also denying that the signification is taking place? I will argue that this is exactly the case in Brazil and that

this comprises one of the major dilemmas faced by the *movimento negro* in the Roman Catholic Church. On a theoretical level this means that the data from Brazil may require a rethinking of how consciousness of belonging fits into the notion of ethnicity.

Meanwhile, I propose that ethnicity has the qualities of a distinct subculture in a society whose boundaries are symbolized by an alleged common history, tradition, heritage, and other cultural markers, and that has an on-going common interest or social situation that allows for, necessitates or perpetuates continued boundary maintenance.

### Race

Defining the term 'race' is risky at the outset of an investigation of the *movimento negro* in Brazil because the definition itself is one of the issues in contention. This becomes clear to the North American researcher who immediately is confused in attempting to understand Brazil in terms of taken for granted racial categories from his or her own cultural background. Even more precisely articulated scientific definitions have North American cultural baggage that are not necessarily adequate for Brazilian social reality.

An additional problem of defining race is whether or not it can be discussed separately from ethnicity. It seems necessary to distinguish the two, yet, we shall see that the language of the *movimento negro* tends to use the term "race" in preference to "ethnic" in describing self-identity, while including categories that North American social researchers usually think of in terms of ethnicity. Ethnic distinctions are not viewed by the movement outside of racial categories. However dubious the task may be it is nevertheless necessary to at least begin with a working definition of race that will provide consistency to the usage of the term in this study. This will provide us a starting point for discovering the meaning of race for Brazilian Catholics in the *movimento negro*.

Race may be defined in a biological sense as consisting of shared inherited phenotypical traits derived from common ancestry. This is the objectivist view of race. Its legacy includes theories of scientific racism, some of which have been influential upon the Brazilian ethos (Skidmore, 1974; Fiola 1990, 3). However, the ambiguity surrounding which biological markers count as defining a particular race points to the subjective element involved. In order for a racial group to exist these traits must be subjectively perceived as common (Weber 1968, 385). They must form a boundary that the group, or those outsiders doing the signifying, perceives to distinguish it from others. Without this common perception no racially distinct groups can be said to exist. The differences of phenotype between individuals carry no inherent meaning beyond that which is socially constructed and attributed to them, either by themselves or others.

On the other hand, the fact that race is not objective in a biological sense does not mean that race does not operate as a reality *sui generis* in a sociological sense. Liberation theologians have, until recently, overlooked this. Without going so far as to assert that the idea of race is a form of false consciousness, many liberation theologians have discussed the problems of poverty and social stratification in Brazil as the result of purely economic factors with no recognition of race as a part of the equation. It is partly in response to this failure that the *movimento negro* in the Roman Catholic Church is developing its stance.

It follows that a definition of race must, as Omi and Winant (1986) argue, take a path between the views of race as objective and race as an illusory form of false consciousness. As an alternative they propose racial formation theory. Winant (1992) offers the theory as a model for interpreting the Brazilian situation and as such it warrants briefly summarizing here.

According to Omi and Winant (1985), the meaning of race cannot be adequately captured by theories of ethnicity because race is a distinct, independent construct. Blacks arrived in the New World from ethnic backgrounds as diverse as those of their European conquerors (Omi and Winant 1985, 23). Therefore, while notions of ethnic identity are useful for understanding the process of racial identity formation, racial identity is distinct from ethnic identity. Race is, "*...an unstable and 'decentered' complex of social meanings constantly being transformed by political struggle*" (Omi and Winant 1985, 68 emphasis theirs). The meaning of race, according to racial formation theory, is to be found both in social structure and collective identities as well as individual psyches and relationships. Race is socially and historically constructed by means of "*...political contestation over racial meanings*" (Omi and Winant 1985, 69 emphasis theirs). Through processes of racial signification, racial meanings are determined and racial identities are assigned. Various interpretations of race exist at any given time and these are involved in power relations among various groups of elites and subordinates expressed in their *racial projects*. Racial projects consist of an interpretation of racial dynamics and constitute an attempt to change the social structure of race relations (Winant 1992, 183, 184).

Drawing on Omi and Winant, I will define race as a social structure consisting of a symbol system based on phenotypical characteristics that form socially constructed boundary markers for distinguishing groups who use these symbols to define themselves and others, and to contest with other racially defined groups in the context of power relations. Different persons in the same society may define the same persons in different racial terms according to the symbolic universe that forms their frame of reference. These different definitions reflect the power interests of those involved.

Before concluding the discussion of race and ethnicity it is important to clarify the relationship between these two concepts. See and Wilson present race as a subcategory of ethnicity where race refers to common ancestry (See and Wilson 1988, 224). This seems to me to be inadequate in that it does not account for the manner in which race alone comes to symbolize and define the power struggles between groups. Other aspects of ethnicity do not seem to acquire such independent status. On the other hand, racial projects employ cultural symbolism of the groups contesting for power that goes far beyond phenotype. Thus the complete elimination of the notion of ethnicity from that of race seems to be inappropriate. It will be seen that in the *movimento negro* race is defined in terms of a distinct Afro-Brazilian culture, religion, and history all of which contribute to the meaning of being black. However, the *movimento negro* seldom if ever frames this in terms of ethnicity. It speaks of racial identity alone. I will show that in reference to blacks, the distinction between race and ethnicity is not so clear in the Brazilian mind and that the assumption of a black identity means assuming a comprehensive ethnic identity. Consequently, my usage of the term racial identity in reference to black Brazilians will be understood to include this.

### Thesis

The racial project of the *movimento negro* in the Roman Catholic Church of Brazil involves its struggle against racism and discrimination and its struggle for basic civil rights. Given the multi-ethnic racial polity of Brazilian society this project necessarily includes the construction of a racial identity and a supporting symbolic universe over against the dominant racial democracy and whitening ideologies found in the ethos of Brazilian race relations.

The power relations between the symbolic universe of blacks and the universe of whites extends through Brazilian history where the symbolic universe of blacks, preserved and constantly recreated in black religion, provided a source of resistance and survival in the face of that of the white elites. I will support the thesis that this history of resistance in the hidden transcript is being brought forward into the public arena by the *movimento negro* in the Roman Catholic Church in an attempt to construct a new Afro-Brazilian racial identity and hence to challenge and reconstruct the symbolic universe represented by the ethos of race relations in Brazilian society. This reconstruction is being carried out by drawing upon the symbols and tools of liberation theology, traditional Roman Catholicism, and Afro-Brazilian religions.

The rise of the *movimento negro* in Brazilian Catholicism may be viewed as one of the most recent aspects of the continuing dialectical relationship between Roman Catholicism and African religions active in Brazil since the first African slaves arrived in the sixteenth century. It also demonstrates both the historical and contemporary relevance of religion as a locus of resistance and source of empowerment in the face of oppression. As such, I will argue that the data from Brazil are contrary to the traditional secularization thesis that posits the growing irrelevancy of religion to political and public life with the progression of modernity. The notion of secularization, inherited from the work of the classic theorists in sociology of religion (Durkheim 1965, Weber 1964, 1976) was assumed almost without question in the social theory of the first two-thirds of the twentieth century to the point that it took on almost sacred status (Hadden 1989). I am joining those who have brought the traditional formulation of secularization under increasing criticism for its inability to adequately explain the continued power of religion to not only animate individual lives, but to act as a force in social and political movements

and institutions (Stark and Bainbridge 1985, Lyon 1987, Swatos 1989, Hadden 1989).

Religion served as a key location for the hidden transcript of resistance to racial oppression in Brazil and continues as a vital force in animating Brazilian social movements such as the *movimento negro* in Brazil's Roman Catholic Church.

If my basic thesis is correct then support will be found in the data for the hypothesis that the discourse of the *movimento negro* in the Roman Catholic Church of Brazil will feature the prominent appeal to and usage of the hidden transcript of resistance in Brazil's history. It is out of this hidden transcript that much of the fuel for contemporary resistance is being derived.

The notions of racial democracy and whitening are widely adhered to in Brazil and may be said to form a socially constructed ethos of race relations that is still largely accepted by Brazilians. The details of this ethos of race will be elaborated in chapter two. This ethos of race relations is an important aspect of the symbolic universe of Brazilian elites and is supported by important plausibility structures within that universe such as the Brazilian educational system, traditional Brazilian Roman Catholicism, and the Brazilian media. These plausibility structures reinforce the Brazilian racial ethos by means of socializing Brazilians into the accepted interpretation of Brazilian race relations found in that ethos.

Scott's theory of resistance to domination leads, however, to the hypothesis that the socialization of Afro-Brazilians into the dominant racial ethos will be incomplete at best. It can be plausibly argued that many Afro-Brazilians comply with the elite definition of racial reality for the purposes of their own advancement, rather than because they accept it as valid. In addition, socialization into the elite definition of social reality produces resistance. I am hypothesizing that this resistance will be manifested, not only in the

previously discussed hidden transcripts, but also in the form of alternate plausibility structures designed to support a counter symbolic universe that challenges the validity of the universe of the dominant. This will involve at least three levels of construction. The first is the contesting of the control of existing plausibility structures that currently support the predominant ethos of race. The second is the recovery of previously existing plausibility structures that have either been lost or buried in the hidden transcript. Finally there is the construction of new plausibility structures to support the community that comprises the movement. In each case the counter universe will attempt to challenge and redefine the usage and meaning of symbols related to race as they are found in the dominant universe. It will be seen that the effects of recent challenges to the ethos of race relations are already being felt in Brazilian society. While the impact of this should not be over estimated, neither should it be ignored. The racial project at work in the *movimento negro* of the Roman Catholic Church of Brazil has a significant enough presence to have gained national attention.

The reconstruction of racial identity in Brazil is the critical issue faced by the *movimento negro* in the Roman Catholic Church of Brazil in light of the ethos of race that it confronts. The variety and ambiguity involved in racial identity in Brazil is well documented. However, theories of ideological hegemony, with or without a strong view of false consciousness, seem inadequate to account for the situation. In light of Scott's (1985, 1990) exposition of the process of resistance to domination, a more adequate hypothesis could be constructed in terms of a dialectical relationship involving non-rational and rational interest notions of racial identity formation based on the dialectic between the internalization and externalization of symbolic universes. Hence, I am proposing that the initially internalized racial identity will not be maintained simply on

the basis of ideological hegemony, but rather that the perceived rational interest of the individual will play a significant role in determining whether or not he or she identifies him or herself as black.

When identity switching occurs it involves the reconstruction of one's identity in terms of a new symbolic universe. I am hypothesizing that identity switching and identifying oneself with the movement may be interpreted as a conversion experience. This experience has religious dimensions which will be elaborated in my discussion. I will also argue that this identity switching strongly supports the notion that rational interest in ethnic identity may include rationalities such as religious and moral values that transcend and even contradict immediate socioeconomic concerns.

The *movimento negro* in the Roman Catholic Church of Brazil raises interesting questions about the process of signification as defined by Charles Long (1986). To what extent is the process of signification able to define the reality and culture of the dominated? Can signification have different, even contradictory meanings for the elite and the subordinate? I will discuss data that indicates that even though they may not identify themselves as black, the majority of Brazilians of African descent are discriminated against as if they were black. This indicates a type of signification by the white elite that succeeds in identifying people as blacks for the purposes of economic and social discrimination while denying officially that these same persons *are* black and creating a situation in which they choose to not identify themselves as such. On the other hand, the presence of resistance indicates that the power of signification to actually create the culture of the signified has limitations. These considerations suggest the possibility of a form of ethnicity or racial signification that places a group in a racially defined social

stratum without the persons involved being aware that they carry that ethnic or racial identity. Does this constitute a form of false consciousness? Not necessarily.

The limitations of the power of signification are found in that signification provokes a reaction. Signification attempts to appropriate the symbols in a discourse and use them as a means of defining the reality of the other. Given Scott's theory of resistance one would predict that signification would result in a contestation of the meaning and usage of the prominent symbols used to define social reality. As I previously mentioned, I will contend that in the process of identity construction in the *movimento negro* in the Brazilian Roman Catholic Church will be found the attempt to redefine symbols that have been used by elites to signify Afro-Brazilians.

These are some of the implications, questions, and hypotheses that derive from the thesis and from the encounter with the *movimento negro* in Brazilian Roman Catholicism. The next section discusses specific research methods used for addressing these issues.

### Methodology

In order to investigate the *movimento negro* in the Roman Catholic Church of Brazil a variety of research strategies were employed. In addition to the study of the movement itself, these strategies were designed to allow the study of its historical and social context. Field work was conducted in Brazil during June to August 1991, August to September 1992, and June to September 1993. The field work was carried out in the southeastern urban areas of Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, and Belo Horizonte, as well as in Salvador, Bahia on the eastern coast. The small town of Itaúna in Minas Gerais served as a valuable research site, as well.

The *movimento negro* is represented in the Roman Catholic Church in Brazil primarily through an organization of lay people and clergy, *Agentes de Pastoral Negros*,

referred to as the APNs by members. As will be detailed subsequently, other organizations exist that have a more specialized focus. However, APN serves as the unifying force for the movement and as such it became the focus of the research.

In order to investigate the questions of racial identity as related to religion in the *movimento negro* the primary research methodologies employed were qualitative. These methods included interviews with movement participants, participant observation in group meetings and activities, and the observation of religious services. Additional data was derived from social artifacts such as written and video materials produced by the movement. Information was taken from outside observers, including the Brazilian national and local news and entertainment media and opponents of the movement in order to better understand the social context. There were also many hours of informal discussion with a variety of Brazilians both black and white. Records of such discussions were included in my field notes as further elucidation of racial attitudes in Brazil. The primary units of observation and analysis for the study consisted of individual movement participants who were interviewed. Other units of analysis included events attended, including Afro-Brazilian Masses and movement meetings and conferences, as well as individual artifacts such as books, pamphlets, photocopy sheets, and individual events and documentaries on video.

Interviews were constructed according to the format of the long interview (McCraken, 1988). Analytical categories and cultural categories were identified through theoretical considerations derived from the literature review, the researcher's personal background and experience, and preliminary interaction with the movement (McCraken 1988, 31-32). The examination of my own attitudes and assumptions towards race relations and racial issues as a white North American was helpful in identifying potential

sources of bias as well as pointing to specific questions that should be addressed in the study. Operationalization involved the location of specific concepts within the analytic and cultural categories. These concepts became the basis for the thesis and the hypotheses of the study. Indicators were constructed for these concepts from which specific questions were then derived (Babbie 1989, 108-111; McCracken 1988, 34).<sup>4</sup> In order to foster reliability a structured guide was produced consisting of a standard series of questions focusing on three areas of experience. These were, the subject's experience and feelings towards racial relations in Brazil, the subject's religious beliefs and practice, and the subject's political opinions and activism.

The interviewing process was open ended and allowed for the exploration of a variety of other relevant issues if they arose, while at the same time the guide insured consistency. However, it is important to note that there was variation among the interviewees in terms of the focus of the interviews. While each interview attempted to cover the issues in the interview guide, the order in which the issues were presented varied accordingly. At times the information on a particular issue was deemed to be of such depth and significance that the interviewee was allowed considerable latitude. This resulted in the eliciting of additional, often unanticipated information about the *movimento negro* which could then be incorporated into new questions that could be asked of subsequent subjects. Interviews were typically from one to two hours in length.

The interviews were conducted by me in Portuguese based on my proficiency in the language acquired through formal study as well as living among Brazilians. In order to assure cross-cultural validity the questionnaire was critiqued by a Brazilian with

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<sup>4</sup>An English translation of the questions included in the interview guide as it evolved may be found in appendix 1.

experience teaching university level Portuguese who also assisted with translation from English. An additional check on cross-cultural validity was the presence of Brazilian research assistants who, with the permission of my informants, accompanied me on some of the interviews, especially during my initial contacts with the movement. These assistants spoke both English and Portuguese and served to confirm the validity of the translation of the interview questions as well as that of my understanding of the responses. Finally, throughout the period of field research, problems or questions that arose related to Brazilian culture and cross-cultural communication were discussed with North American colleagues and friends in Brazil who had numerous years of experience living and working in Brazil.

In choosing the subjects to be interviewed I decided to deviate from McCracken's recommendation that no more than eight subjects be interviewed for the long interview format (McCracken 1988, 37). Lofland and Lofland indicate that qualitative studies typically include at least 20 interviews (Lofland and Lofland 1984, 62). On this basis I decided to seek as many interviews as could be arranged within the constraints of time and availability of subjects. I conducted long interviews with 25 subjects who are active in the *movimento negro* in the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>5</sup> An additional interview with the APN secretary at the movement headquarters was conducted for the purpose of gathering information on the history and organization of the movement. Long interviews conducted with subjects identified as movement leaders also included questions concerning the history and organization of the movement.

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<sup>5</sup>Demographic information on the subjects will be discussed in chapter 4.

Initial contact was established with the movement in August 1992 upon arriving in São Paulo to begin field work. The phone number of the national headquarters, known as the *Quilombo Central*, of *Agentes de Pastoral Negro* was discovered by contacting the office of the Archdiocese of São Paulo. The secretary at APN provided initial contacts with movement leaders and activists in the São Paulo area as well as phone numbers for and names of contacts for APN groups in Belo Horizonte and São João de Meriti. Contacts with other activists in the Rio area were made with the help of the staff of *Instituto de Estudos da Religião* (ISER) in Rio de Janeiro.

In the early stages of the study potential subjects for interviews were recommended by movement leaders with whom I made initial contact. Other potential subjects were identified through snowball sampling and through personal contact at movement meetings I attended. Most potential subjects were interviewed if they indicated willingness to participate. However, in the absence of the possibility of random sampling I made a deliberate effort to include subjects with varying degrees of time in the movement, as well as both leaders and non-leader participants with different levels of weekly involvement in movement activities. The sample ranged from participants of less than six months to founding members. Also, interviews were conducted with activists of varying ages with ample representation of both genders. Ages of individuals interviewed ranged from 18 to 56 years, with 12 female subjects and 13 male subjects.

The interviews were recorded on audio-cassettes and were transcribed into written Portuguese by Brazilian seminary students. The transcriptions were identified only by the number of the subject which corresponded to the number on the release form each subject signed. The transcriptions were analyzed in accordance with the five step analytical scheme suggested by McCracken (1988, 41-46). In the first stage each

statement was taken independently as an opening into its underlying assumptions.

Observations were developed as the statements were compared with the categories of the literature and cultural reviews for a preliminary indication of their meaning (McCraken 1988, 44-45). These observations were written in the margins of the interview transcriptions. In the second stage, as the implications of each observation were drawn out, they were then related back to other observations in the interview in order to view fully their relationship to each other (McCraken 1988, 45). Marginal notes began to cluster around specific passages in the interviews. As the observations were related to each other the third stage began, where general patterns and themes began to emerge (McCraken 1988, 45). In this stage general themes were more fully developed from the marginal notes. As these themes became clearly identified, the fourth stage began. The themes within each interview were organized so as to both remove redundancies and to establish which issues were of primary significance. The fifth stage involved the relation of the observations and themes from the various interviews together and correlating these themes to the hypotheses and thesis of the study.

The social artifacts included a number of written materials, published and unpublished, which circulate within the movement. These included everything from xeroxes of informal outlines and unpublished papers, to masters theses and books written by movement members. The three masters theses consulted were treated as primary source materials as they were consciously written by movement members for the purpose of contributing to its goals. These were important sources since the movement has yet to produce an extensive published literature setting forth its theology and social program. The analysis of these materials was carried out in a manner similar to that of the interview texts. Categories and concepts were used to determine the basic assumptions

of the documents and to determine the general themes in relation to the questions raised by the hypotheses and the thesis of this study.

The use of videos as a source became possible with the discovery that the movement regularly video tapes its conferences and ceremonies. This was valuable as a supplement to the data obtained through direct observation in that many of the services and ceremonies are not held on a regular basis. The availability of tapes of an Afro-Brazilian wedding Mass, for example, somewhat made up for the lack of opportunity to attend such a ceremony. Due to the indirect nature of the observations derived from video and the scope of this study, however, the analysis was restricted to a more supplementary and secondary role. No doubt future research could amplify the analysis of this material profitably.

Other, more detailed aspects of the field research and analysis process will be discussed as they become relevant to specific parts of the discussion that follows. The methodology employed provided a rich stream of data for the purposes of this study.

### Conclusion

The *movimento negro* in the Roman Catholic Church in Brazil has arisen in the context of a racial ethos that largely negates a black racial identity for the majority of individuals who, based on phenotype alone, would be considered black by most other western societies. This same racial ethos also negates the need for such an identity on the premise that racism is not a significant social problem in Brazil. However, the social context is one in which racial inequities are still significant. It is this social context that defines the primary problem faced by the movement as well as the primary problem to be grappled with in studying the movement. This problem is, how is a black racial identity constructed in the midst of a racial ethos that denies that such an identity exists or is even

necessary? What resources are used to create such an identity and how is it sustained and communicated to others? Given the widely held belief in the secularization of modern societies, what is the role of religion in this process of identity construction and resistance?

Berger and Luckmann's (1967) theory of sociology of knowledge, along with James Scott's (1985, 1990) notion of the resistance of subordinate peoples to domination, together provide a theoretical framework for exploring the process of racial identity construction in the *movimento negro*. Within this theoretical framework the symbolic universes of both the dominant and the subordinate may be explored and related together in order to understand the dialectic of the process of identity construction and resistance to domination. The role of religion as a source of plausibility structures and a locus of resistance emerges as an important category for analysis as we examine the *movimento negro* in the Brazilian Roman Catholic Church.

Field work conducted in Brazil provided the data for carrying out the exploration of the social processes involved in the efforts of the *movimento negro* to carry out its program of identity construction and resistance. Information was gathered through a variety of contacts with the movement and its participants. In addition, research into the historical and social context of the movement provided important material for understanding the Brazilian ethos of race and the social sources of the movement itself. In the next chapter the historical background of the Brazilian ethos of race will be discussed in order to provide the context for the analysis of the movement that follows.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL CONTEXT OF THE *MOVIMENTO NEGRO*: DEFINING THE BRAZILIAN RACIAL ETHOS

Historian E. Bradford Burns sets the context for the discussion of the *movimento negro* (black movement) in the Roman Catholic Church in Brazil with his remarks on Brazilian race relations in the introduction to the latest edition of his *A History of Brazil* (1993). Burns states that,

Although not free of racial tensions and inequities, Brazil nonetheless serves as one of the best examples of extensive miscegenation and racial harmony. It would seem to have much to teach the rest of the world on the difficult topic of racial relations (Burns 1993, 4).

That Burns rejects the racial democracy thesis is evident in his assertion that racial prejudice and discrimination are realities in Brazilian society. On the other hand, he does argue that there probably is less racial tension and prejudice in Brazil than any other society (Burns 1993, 322). That a well known scholar of Brazilian history could advance such an argument as recently as 1993 demonstrates that the debate over Brazilian racial exceptionalism is still active in the academic community. Regardless of the revisionist research since the 1950s, Brazil's status as either a racial democracy, or as racially exceptional, continues to generate scholarly discussion. Burns' argument supports the notion of Brazilian racial exceptionalism.

While the notion of Brazilian racial exceptionalism remains important in academia, the stronger idea of racial democracy still is very prominent in Brazilian

society. Racial democracy and "whitening" can be said to form the basic ethos of race relations in Brazil. Yet, the racial situation is more complex than such an assertion might seem to imply on the surface. The notion of racial democracy provides the framework in which Brazilians interpret race relations, while at the same time the inconsistencies between the theory and reality occasion an uneasy tension in the minds of many who accept this framework. The racial ethos, therefore, includes the predominant interpretation of racial democracy along with its inconsistencies, rationalizations, and doubts. These will be elucidated as the discussion of the Brazilian racial ethos unfolds in this chapter, as well as in the interview data to be presented in chapter four.

Hanchard (1994) proposes the notion of racial exceptionalism as a description of how Brazilians understand race relations in Brazil. Racial exceptionalism would then be the context for understanding the inconsistencies and tensions found in Brazilian society over the racial democracy ideal. Racial democracy becomes, in this view, a phase in a larger racial project maintained by Brazilian elites. This larger project, racial exceptionalism, acknowledges the existence of prejudice in Brazil more readily, but continues to maintain that Brazil is different from other countries. Racial prejudice is admitted to exist on a personal level, but it is not perceived to have any significant impact on race relations institutionally. There is no acknowledgement of the continuing oppression of blacks in Brazil (Hanchard 1994, 56). Racism is not accepted by Brazilian elites as an explanation of social stratification.

In Hanchard's conceptualization, racial exceptionalism arose in the nineteenth century as the precursor to the racial democracy ideology. He argues that the racial democracy theory that grew out of this context has recently lost credibility among Brazilians. In its place the notion of racial exceptionalism continues to provide the basis

for racial hegemony in Brazil (Hanchard 1994, 44-56). I will discuss racial exceptionalism as we examine the development of the Brazilian racial ethos.

As indicated in the previous chapter, the character, goals and struggle of the *movimento negro* in the Brazilian Catholic Church are largely a response to the predominant ethos of race relations in Brazilian society. In order to adequately treat the values, meanings, purposes, expectations, and legitimations that compose the ethos of Brazilian race relations it is necessary to discuss the history from which it developed. A survey of the history of Brazilian race relations will also provide an occasion to discuss both the public and hidden transcripts involved in this history. This will be of great importance as the reinterpretation of the history of Brazilian race relations and the recovery of the hidden transcripts are central to the *movimento negro* in its task of identity construction.

The history of race relations in Brazil can be said to involve to a significant degree a struggle between the symbolic universe(s) of dominated Africans and the Luso-Catholic symbolic universe of the dominant Portuguese whites. Religion plays an important role in each universe. Although the enslaved blacks represented various African traditions, they were consistent in their response of adopting the symbols of the Portuguese Catholic symbolic universe and reinterpreting them in terms of their own.

The Portuguese symbolic universe was essentially represented in the view of the elites and had as its primary concern the maintenance of the power of the crown over the Brazilian colony. In this respect the Roman Catholic religion was mainly a tool to legitimate the crown's power and to establish its control. Thomas Bruneau (1982) notes that the colonization of Brazil was a project conducted jointly by the Portuguese crown and the Roman Catholic Church (Bruneau 1982, 11). Due to favor gained in the struggle

against the Moors, the Pope conceded virtually complete control of the Roman Catholic Church in Brazil to the Portuguese crown. The crown, in turn, guaranteed that Brazil would be Roman Catholic, but in the interest of maintaining its own hegemony it greatly restricted the development of the Church (Bruneau 1982, 13). The symbolic universe of the Portuguese affirmed their right to rule over and enslave blacks. It supported the notion that they were the civilized guardians of the one true religion over against the pagan and culturally inferior Africans (Cintra 1985, 92-104).

The state required everyone, whites, black slaves, and Indians, to convert. However, the influence of Rome and the Counter-Reformation never reached the Church in Brazil. The ability of the crown to censor communication from Rome along with the largely decentralized political structure of colonial Brazil made such influence highly untenable. As a result the Catholicism of the Brazilian people was largely the medieval system of popular Catholicism. It emphasized the devotion to the saints and communication with the dead with little regard for the sacraments and orthodoxy (Bruneau 1982, 24). The Roman Catholic faith served to justify the power of the elite on one level, but on the popular level it took a form that was readily adaptable to the needs of the black slaves as they arrived from Africa.

The symbolic universe of many of the Africans brought to Brazil as slaves had to adapt to the new situation that arose as a result of the social dislocation and the oppression involved in the slave trade. The religion of the Africans became a means of keeping alive the connection to Africa and the native cultures of the slaves. African beliefs in communication with the dead and the devotion to the spirits, known as *orixás*, was similar enough to popular Catholicism to allow the African traditions to readily adapt. The *orixás* took on the name of the Roman Catholic saints as African religion and

culture were preserved and mingled with popular Catholicism (Bastide 1978). Thus, the symbolic universe of the black slaves was able to adapt to and incorporate that of popular Roman Catholicism. The conflict between symbolic universes was primarily, then, between that of the black slaves and the Catholicism of the white elite. Brazilian popular religion tended to accommodate African beliefs. While popular religion and social thought in Brazil have accommodated the African religions, we shall see that the predominant definitions of racial identity have come to be defined by the symbolic universe of the white elite.

This struggle between symbolic universes took place, and is still taking place, not as an abstraction, but as an ongoing contestation of the identity of the individuals and groups involved. At the heart of this struggle is the attempt of whites to support their position of dominance by the signification of blacks in terms of their own universe of discourse. The actions of the white elite can be understood, consistent with Long's (1986) argument, as an attempt to create the culture of the dominated Africans. The intent was to effectively eradicate the universe of the dominated. On the other hand, black resistance is also central to the confrontation between Africans and the Portuguese. The consistent resistance to enslavement by Africans was supported by their own symbolic universe. Africans redefined the Portuguese universe that was forced upon them in such a way as to preserve their own symbolic universe. The two universes came into abrupt contact and began a course of interaction, development, and modification which still continues in the ongoing social construction of Brazilian race relations.

The construction of racial identity in the *movimento negro* among Brazilian Roman Catholics draws heavily upon the history of resistance among Afro-Brazilians, especially during the centuries of slavery. This history provides a major source of symbols,

inspiration, and direction for the movement's continuing development. Resistance took many forms, at times overt, but often located in the hidden transcripts, out of the sight of the white elite. On the other hand, this history has been obscured by the racial democracy theory, whose adherents have portrayed slaves in Brazil as loyal and submissive servants that were cared for by paternalistic masters. Both the history of resistance and the racial democracy theory are crucial aspects of the context giving rise to the *movimento negro*.

Domination and Resistance in  
The History of Brazilian Slavery  
The Slave Trade

The first black slaves arrived in Brazil early in the 16th century and constituted the beginning of a steady stream of imported persons that only ceased when the British began to stringently enforce a ban on the slave trade in the mid 1800s. The conditions of Brazilian slavery engendered an inordinately low fertility rate and short life span for the slaves, requiring a steady supply of new captives to replace the dead. Various sources have estimated a slave mortality rate of about ten percent per year with an average life span of 12 years in the early-eighteenth-century and about 18 years shortly before abolition (Conrad 1986, 15-24).

The numbers of women imported were much lower than of men and when they became pregnant they were forced to continue working such that the children were denied the care necessary for normal development. Death was very often the result (Teuscher 1853 cited in Conrad 1983, 88; Ottoni 1871). The reason for this treatment was stated rather graphically by Brazilian Senator Cristiano Benedito Ottoni in 1871.

In all the discussions among the planters this kind of calculation was heard: "Your (sic) buy a black for 300\$00. In a year he harvests 100 *arrobas* {about 3,200 pounds} of coffee, which at least produces his cost clear. From then on everything is profit. There is no advantage in tolerating the *crias* who will be capable of similar labor only after sixteen years" (Ottoni 1871).

The cost of getting new slaves was sufficiently low that it was cheaper to buy new ones than to provide for the longevity and reproduction of those already on hand.

It is not known with certainty how many African slaves were forcibly imported into Brazil during the years of the slave trade. Various estimates have been made based on surviving records. These estimates range from 3.6 million to over 5 million, with sociologist Clovis Moura suggesting as that as many as 10 million Africans were brought to Brazil as slaves (Conrad 1986, 25-26; Moura 1989a, 9). Moura attempts to support his unusually high number with the observation that many estimates have been deliberately lowered in an attempt to whiten the Brazilian population. While this may seem plausible in light of the desire of Brazilian elites to create an impression of a white Brazil, there is not the empirical support available to support this charge. However, Moura's observation does illustrates the difficulty of abstracting the discussion of simple historical "facts" from the polemics of the debate over the Brazilian racial ethos. Meanwhile, Conrad's figure of more than five million presents a realistic picture of the Brazilian slave trade. This figure is broken down to reflect one-hundred thousand slaves imported in the sixteenth century, two million in the seventeenth century, another two million in the eighteenth century and about one-and-a-half million in the nineteenth century (Conrad 1986, 34). In spite of the debate over the exact numbers it is clear that the nature of Brazilian slavery was such that new slaves were constantly required.

There are two immediate implications to be derived from the volume of slaves imported and the high mortality rate of those who survived to reach Brazil. Firstly, one may infer that, contrary to the arguments of Freyre (1986, 1963a, 1963b), Tannenbaum (1946), and others, Brazilian slavery was just as devastatingly cruel as slavery in North America or any other part of the new world. Specific examples in support of this will be discussed in this chapter. Meanwhile it should be noted that this undercuts one of the major supporting arguments of the racial democracy theory and, as shall be seen, constitutes a major issue for the *movimento negro* in its disputing of the theory. The second implication is that the memory of Africa was always fresh in the black mind (Brown 1986, 27-28). The constant influx of fresh African influence profoundly shaped the development of Brazilian culture. Additionally, it was a constant source of fuel for black resistance.

Clovis Moura's judgment that the slave system was determinative for the development of Brazil and the context of ethnic relations is clearly on target (Moura 1983, 15). This is readily seen in that the economy of colonial Brazil was utterly dependent upon slavery. From the beginning Brazil was viewed in terms of its capacity to enrich Portugal through the production of agricultural products and raw materials. Under the terms of the Treaty of Methuen of 1703, Portugal agreed to buy manufactured goods from England, effectively prohibiting the development of industry in Brazil until well after independence in 1822 (Chiavenato 1980). The Brazilian economy developed around large plantations, first growing sugar cane and later coffee. Subsequently, the discovery of gold and precious jewels led to an explosion of the mining industry. All of these required a heavy volume of slave labor to do the difficult work. Beyond this, the slave trade itself became a significant portion of the Brazilian economy.

Pervasive throughout colonial Brazil, the social structure of the slave system, along with the interpenetration of African and Portuguese cultures, thus became fundamentally formative for the culture of modern Brazil. This being the case, the debate over race relations in contemporary Brazil must be addressed by first looking at the nature of race relations under the slave system.

#### Black Resistance to the Slave System

According to the supporters of racial democracy the alleged present day lack of racial discrimination and tensions in Brazilian society are directly related to the more or less peaceful relations that existed between master and slave in pre-republican Brazil.

Tannenbaum (1946) presents a Brazil in which well treated slaves had ample opportunities for gaining their freedom and assuming full citizenship. While Freyre (1986, 1963a) discusses the suffering of the slaves, he continues to argue that they were relatively well treated compared to slaves in other countries. In addition, they did not respond by resistance and rebellion but rather were much more passive about accepting their situation (Freyre 1963b, 76). Moura refers to this as the *ideology of the good master (o bom senhor)*. The basic idea was that slavery in Brazil was benign because, being good Christians, the masters were kind, treating their slaves as if they were their own children (Moura 1983, 11).

No doubt the fact that in many cases the slaves were really the children of their masters has lent some superficial aura of credibility to this notion. The miscegenation so prevalent in Brazil gave rise to a large mulatto class that in time came to assume a racial identity distinct from that of both blacks and whites. The presence of this class was defined by the whitening thesis, especially after abolition, to be evidence of the good relations between the races in Brazil.

In light of ample evidence demonstrating that Brazilian slavery was very harsh, (Conrad 1983, 359) alternative interpretations of miscegenation and slave reactions to their circumstances are in order. Following Scott's (1985, 1990) interpretation of dominance and repression we would expect to find in Brazil evidence of resistance, both public and private. This evidence does exist, showing a steady stream of black resistance to white dominance throughout the history of Brazilian slavery. This has led some Brazilian writers to make the observation that "*o negro foi bom trabalhador porém mau escravo*" (the black was a good worker but a bad slave) (Macedo 1974, 83).

Public, overt forms of resistance included violent uprisings, individual acts of violence against masters, running away, and even suicide. While violent resistance was not entirely uncommon, by far the usual tactic was what Karasch classifies as resistance by withdrawal (Karasch 1987, 304). This included those slaves who escaped and formed their own communities in the forests and those who committed suicide.

Black resistance in Brazil was often linked very closely with African religion both in the public and hidden arenas. One of the first evidences of this would frequently occur very early in the process of enslavement as it was not uncommon for Africans to commit suicide rather than submit to slavery (Karasch 1987, 316). This was as much an act of faith as it was an act of despair at not being able to escape. According to African religious beliefs their spirits would be immediately returned to Africa after death (Karasch 1987, 318-319). Some would simply jump overboard from the slave ships, a practice that unfortunately worsened conditions for the slaves as the captains soon learned to not allow them to come up on deck to get relief from the cramped space below (Macedo 1974, 30). Others would commit suicide some time later, after arriving in Brazil and

finding no other means of escape (Ewbank 1856 cited in Conrad 1983, 124; Karasch 1987, 316-320).

Most slaves who determined not to remain in bondage did not opt for escaping from slavery by means of suicide. Instead they pursued freedom by leaving their masters. That large numbers of Africans were unwilling to accept slavery is indicated by the numerous incidents of runaway slaves in Brazil. While the number of fugitive slaves is unknown there is sufficient documentary evidence to suggest that it was a constant problem for slave owners.

The major source of information on runaway slaves are the many newspaper advertisements describing them and offering rewards for their capture. The newspapers of the time were filled with such advertisements (Conrad 1983, 362; Karasch 1987, 304). In addition to the advertisements, the existence of the *capitães do mato*, professional slave catchers, and the severity of the punishment given to offenders attests to the priority given to the problem. In the eighteenth century the practice of branding the letter "F" (*fugido*-run away) on the forehead was instituted. Punishment for running away a second time, besides the usual public flogging, consisted of the cutting off of one ear (Moura 1989, 20). In sum, a great deal of resources and energy were allocated to addressing the problem of runaways (Conrad 1983, 362). Contrary to later claims of the relative lack of resistance by Africans to enslavement in Brazil, the evidence reveals that not only was resistance by means of flight common, it was also well publicized. The problem of non-cooperative slaves fleeing captivity was common knowledge in Brazilian society until the propagation of the whitening ideal created a different impression (Freitas 1981, 9-10).

Karasch shows that in Rio de Janeiro the majority of runaways were captured and returned to their owners (Karasch 1972, 363). However, many slaves also found their way to temporary and in some cases permanent freedom in one of the hundreds of slave communities called *quilombos* that were to be found in the Brazilian forests. *Quilombos* existed in all of the colonized areas of Brazil throughout the time of slavery and were the target of constant attacks by the Portuguese and Brazilian governments, who viewed them as a serious threat to the established order (Moura 1989, 13-15).

*Quilombos* varied greatly in size and organization. Many were simply small bands of Africans who survived by pillaging farms and travellers while others became well organized settlements with their own economic and political systems. The greatest of the *quilombos*, the northeastern collective of villages and cities known as Palmares, achieved the status of an independent and free state for a significant portion of the seventeenth century (Macedo 1974, 83-98).

The social organization of the *quilombos* was dictated by the necessities of survival in a hostile environment. Many of the smaller ones were very loosely organized bands that survived by any means possible, including robbery and raids. Other *quilombos* subsisted by means of agriculture and trade (Karasch 1987, 313). The constant assaults and resulting danger of being recaptured made the need for defense one of the key considerations. A portion of the population of Palmares was permanently assigned to military duties while the creation and procurement of weapons was significant for the economy. Supplies and women, always in shortage, were often acquired through raids conducted on white settlements or plantations. Relations were not always entirely hostile with the outside world. Trade relations were also maintained with whites who were either sympathetic or perhaps more often, saw an opportunity to make a profit (Conrad

1983, 368). On the other hand, such trade relations tended to escalate the conflict with the white government as they were usually conducted outside of approved channels and hence deprived it of tax revenue.

Those who were considered the bravest and wisest, qualities critical for military leadership, were often chosen as leaders. Such leaders would be essential in a situation of constant threat of attack. They were established as kings and often legitimated their claim to authority with the claim that they had been kings in Africa (Conrad 1983, 368).

*Quilombos* existed in untamed areas out of necessity and organized defense systems on this basis. Traditional African methods of defense were used along with new traditions that developed, such as the form of martial arts that eventually became modern *capoeira*<sup>1</sup> (Conrad 1983, 368; Areias 1983).

Besides defense, the economy was the other determinative factor in the social structure of the *quilombos*. Economic organization varied according to the location with both geography and local influences playing an important role. Agriculture was the major activity. Various crops and livestock were raised for the nurturing of the community as well as for trade or sale on the outside (Conrad 1983, 368; Moura 1989b, 35). Palmares was noteworthy for its collective economy, with all land and goods being held in common and distributed to all in the community (Moura 1989b, 54). This fact has contributed greatly to the use of Palmares as a symbol of the aspirations of the *movimento negro* and its desire for reform along socialist lines.

*Quilombos* provided an important social space for the survival of African culture in Brazil. African religious traditions and African forms of political and economic life

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<sup>1</sup>A discussion of *capoeira* may be found in chapter four.

became normative for these communities although Roman Catholic and European influences were also strong in each of these areas (Conrad 1983, 367-368). It was not uncommon to find popular Catholic traditions combined with African beliefs and practices as in contemporary Afro-Brazilian religions. In Palmares there was no priestly hierarchy. Rites were performed more on a communal basis with various persons being chosen to participate (Moura 1989b, 59-61).

With all of their diversity there was one common purpose to be found in each *quilombo*. They all existed for the purpose of resisting the slave system imposed on Africans by the Portuguese. They rejected the socio-economic system from which they had escaped and attempted to provide for themselves a greater measure of freedom and dignity (Moura 1989b, 32). In the process they preserved much of the native African culture and created a tradition of struggle and resistance that survives to this day.

Armed uprisings, though not nearly so common as running away, were nonetheless an important form of slave resistance. The Palmares *quilombo* itself was formed by a band of slaves who initially fled into the forests after rebelling against their master and taking possession of his plantation by force (Freitas 1981, 13). After its leaders negotiated the 1678 treaty with the Portuguese government acknowledging its right to exist, many of the people of Palmares desired to continue their resistance to the Portuguese slave system. They rejected the treaty out of distrust for the Portuguese and rallied to a new leader, Zumbi, who became the king of Palmares. Zumbi refused to make peace with the slave holders and a continual state of war ensued (S. Silva 1990). In 1694 the Portuguese mounted a successful assault that destroyed Palmares (Chiavenato 1980, 161). Zumbi continued to lead bands of African resisters until he was betrayed and killed

by the former leader of one of his bands on November 20, 1695 (S. Silva 1990, 24). Today Zumbi is one of the most important symbols of African resistance.<sup>2</sup>

Armed assaults of whites by blacks were sufficiently common in colonial Brazil that whites often lived in fear of being attacked (Malheiro 1944 cited by Conrad 1983, 241). Some of the harsh conditions of Brazilian slavery may be explained in part by this fear (Ott 1957 cited by Conrad 1983, 404). Whites intended to keep blacks in a state of subjection, but ironically it was this harsh treatment that often provoked resistance. At other times slaves rebelled for religious reasons or simply because they preferred death to slavery.

An example of religious influence on slave revolt is found in the most celebrated slave uprising in Brazil. This revolt occurred in Bahia in 1835. For about thirty years slave unrest in Salvador da Bahia set the scene for a major uprising that could have had drastic results if not for the leaking of the plot shortly before it was to be carried out. Brazilian authorities were able to respond in time to contain the rebellion, although the street fighting in the city produced casualties on both sides (Ott 1944 cited in Conrad 1983, 406-411). The most interesting aspect of this revolt was that it seems to have drawn much of its energy from the Islamic faith of the slaves involved. After the revolt, secret documents written in Arabic were found among the slaves. The revolt had been carefully plotted with a view to escaping from slavery and possibly establishing a Moslem state (Chiavenato 1980, 154-157).

While resistance to slavery through withdrawal or revolt such as discussed here was common, it was not the method of resistance that Africans most often employed.

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<sup>2</sup> November 20 is widely celebrated in the *movimento negro* as a day of black solidarity and freedom.

Most of those who initially escaped were recaptured and remained in slavery for the rest of their lives along with those who had never escaped. However, the fact that most of those who were enslaved were destined to eventually die as slaves should not be construed as support for the passivity of captive Africans in Brazil. Resistance was prominent, mostly in the hidden or private transcript. While little remains in terms of a direct record of this resistance, there is ample evidence to suggest that it existed as a permanent protest to black oppression.

A significant pointer to hidden transcripts and the threat they pose to elites may be found in legislation that attempts to control the social spaces where hidden transcripts develop. Brazilian colonial and monarchical law is replete with examples of such efforts. Significantly, much of the effort to regulate hidden social spaces was focused on attempts to control Afro-Brazilian religion. Restrictions and sometimes bans were enacted on African religious meetings and celebrations as it was often thought that slaves used these meetings to plot revolt (Conrad 1983, 255). In 1886 legislation was enacted in Rio de Janeiro outlawing *candomblé*. Similar laws against Afro-Brazilian religious meetings were enacted in Santa Catarina and Minas Gerais (Conrad 1983, 260, 262).

Further evidence of the hidden transcript is found in the subtle forms of protest that were often injected into the public arena, just as Scott (1990) suggests. Stereotypical characterizations of blacks as lazy and indolent were common (Azevedo 1975, 20). These may be seen as attempts at signifying blacks, but they are also likely based on some level of truth, though completely misconstrued by white slave owners. The truth behind the stereotype is most probably the intentional slowing down of work as a form of protest against enslavement (Karasch 1987, 332).

A pamphlet published in the late eighteenth century depicts a typical example of resistance by work slow-down in the case of a slave owned by a miner. The miner had promised the slave his freedom and in return the slave was working very diligently, until he began to perceive that his master had no intention at all of setting him free. Immediately the slave began to perform his tasks in such a manner as to enrage his owner (Boxer 1964 cited in Conrad 1983, 208).

The opinion that punishment was necessary in order to extract labor from slaves appears to have been common. An example of such belief appears in the defense in the trial of a coffee planter who was accused of brutality to his slaves. The record indicated that all witnesses considered physical punishment a necessity for without it there was no hope of forcing the slaves to work. While this was accounted for through further signification of the slave as not having any aspirations and ambitions (Rodrigues 1879 cited in Conrad 1983, 312), I would suggest that it provides strong evidence that the slaves did possess aspirations and ambitions. These aspirations were for freedom and resistance of their enslavement and were readily expressed in the hidden transcript. The refusal to work apart from coercion was the natural expression of this hidden transcript in the public arena.

A manual on agriculture published in 1839 further establishes this aspect of the hidden transcript with its portrayal of the diligence required by the *feitores*, the foremen who supervised the slaves, in forcing the slaves to work. It was stated that only fear motivates a slave to work and that this is achieved by constant supervision and the applying of immediate and certain punishment. Military discipline was advised with the *feitores* being admonished to not let the slaves out of their sight for even a minute (Taubay 1839 cited in Conrad 1983, 298). The handbook continues with suggestions for

specific punishments. Further signification of Africans is found in the characterization of those who continued to resist as "incorrigible," "lazy," "mutinous," "of bad character," and "in need of reform." Any activities of resistance were classified as criminal (Taunay 1839 cited in Conrad 1983, 298-301).

Much of the time resistance did take place by means of illegal activities. One of the most common of these was the theft of property or, more frequently, food from white slave owners. As slaves in Brazil were notoriously underfed and malnourished, the slaves could hardly have considered this to be unjustified. However, it was often done at great risk as is shown by the constant complaints of whites who signified blacks as thieving and dishonest and punished them severely when they were caught. An example of this type of theft was noted by a traveller who visited a plantation during the nineteenth century and discovered that the healthiest of the slaves also happened to be the one who was assigned the duty of keeping the cows. He managed to do the milking out of the sight of any supervision, thus taking advantage of the opportunity to keep back some of the milk for himself (Toussaint-Samson 1891 cited in Conrad 1983, 84).

The hidden transcript was also indicated in the work routine of slaves. Slaves were known to sing while they were working. At times their songs, in a mixture of Portuguese and African dialects would express their suffering (Macedo 1974, 45-46).

Perhaps the most critical social space created that allowed for black resistance, the preservation of African culture, and the development of the hidden transcript, was in the area of religion. Blacks were always very religious in Brazil and, with the exception of a minority of activists in the twentieth century, typically found religion to be an essential aspect of resistance. This took place both within the context of the officially sanctioned

Roman Catholic faith, African traditions, and most commonly in the syncretism of the two that has developed into the various Afro-Brazilian religions of the present (Bastide 1978).

Within the structure of the Roman Catholic Church the development of the black lay brotherhoods (*irmandades*) provided a critical avenue for the social organization of blacks and the subtle insertion of the hidden transcript of resistance into the public arena. Within the brotherhoods a black version of Roman Catholicism developed preserving much African tradition and achieving a degree of legitimacy that enabled black resistance to make some important gains against the slave system (Mulvey 1976).

Black lay brotherhoods were officially sanctioned and hence subject to the control of the white elite in the Church, but in spite of this they accomplished much. The brotherhoods were originally created because blacks were not allowed to join white brotherhoods, an ironic twist that resulted in the empowerment of blacks (Macedo 1974, 97). The brotherhoods were important in the states of Bahia, Pernambuco, and Rio de Janeiro, but achieved their greatest size and influence in the mining districts of Minas Gerais, where they still are active today.

Among the activities of the brotherhoods were the devotion to the various patron saints of blacks such as, *São Benedito* (Saint Benedict) and *Nossa Senhora do Rosario* (Our Lady of the Rosary). Saint Benedict was one of the first blacks to be canonized by the church and was thus an obvious choice. Our Lady of the Rosary, however, has been typically depicted as a black virgin and viewed as a special intercessor on behalf of blacks. As such she became the most favored symbol of the black brotherhoods (Mulvey 1976).

Membership in the brotherhoods was composed of both free blacks and slaves and provided opportunities for social advancement and prestige that were unavailable in the rest of Brazilian society (Mulvey 1976). Slaves were able to find a measure of legal

protection from the arbitrary abuse of whites by appealing to the support of the Church via the brotherhoods (Boxer 1964 cited in Conrad 1983, 208). One of the important functions of the brotherhoods was, in fact, to help blacks escape from slavery through funds set up by their free members for the purposes of purchasing the freedom of slaves. Slaves sometimes were able to contribute to such funds themselves through money they were able to earn. Brotherhoods often functioned in this regard as banks for the procurement of freedom. While the number of slaves freed through this route was not great, the brotherhoods provided opportunities for the building of hope in the pursuit of freedom (Scarano 1978, 86).

Other services provided by the brotherhoods included opportunities for leadership and status in the black community, assistance in illness, aid to the dependents of deceased members, religious services such as Masses for dead members, and the opportunity to participate in religious rituals and festivals (Mulvey 1976, 1).

The preservation of African religion was also an important aspect of the brotherhoods. As the practice of African religions was frequently outlawed, the legitimacy afforded by the brotherhoods allowed blacks to practice their religion under the guise of Roman Catholicism. Often blacks adopted Roman Catholicism and reflected sincere devotion to Catholic traditions in the brotherhoods. It was also the case that what appeared to whites as devotion to the saints was in reality the worship of African deities (Bastide 1978, 125). The practice of African rituals and the use of African music was not uncommon as well.

The most significant religious festivals of the brotherhoods were the yearly *congados*. These festivals would sometimes last for days in honor of the patron saint of the brotherhood. They were particularly important in Minas Gerais for the brotherhood

of Our Lady of the Rosary. The festival would include much celebrating through the use of dance, music, elaborate costumes, and food, all with the distinctive markings and influence of African culture (Bastide 1978, 120-125; Centro de Exstensão, Universidade Católica de Minas Gerais 1974). The *congado* is still an important celebration in Minas Gerais and, as we shall see, is a potentially important avenue for the expression of the *movimento negro* in the Church in Minas Gerais. The celebration has become an example for other states as well.

Afro-Brazilian syncretism was, of course, not limited to the Roman Catholic lay brotherhoods. It appeared everywhere there were blacks in Brazil. The sounds of African rituals were commonly heard coming from the slave huts at night. While the official stance of the Church towards African religions was negative, the predominance of popular folk Catholicism made this basically irrelevant. There were many slave owners on the plantations who were inclined to ignore the religious practices of slaves as long as they did their work. If the slaves clothed their rituals in the trappings of Catholic symbols so much the better (Bastide 1978).

Revisionist writers such as Clovis Moura (1989a, 1989b) as well as *movimento negro* activists Neto (1986) and Rocha (1993) present Afro-Brazilian syncretism as a more or less deliberately feigned attempt to preserve African religion and culture while deceiving the white masters into believing that the slaves had been successfully converted to Roman Catholicism. Moura goes so far as to argue that the syncretism was a one way syncretism in which the Roman Catholic religion was imposed from the top down in an attempt to penetrate and break up the symbolic universe of African religion so that it would ultimately disappear (Moura 1989a, 34). Syncretism from the African side was not the accommodation of their religious universe to that of the Portuguese, but rather a

subtle means of camouflaging it in order that it might be preserved in the face of the imposition of Roman Catholicism (Moura 1989a, 35). This argument brings out a critical point. African religion did hide behind the symbols of Roman Catholicism and it functioned as a major avenue for preserving African culture. It served as a key location of the transcript of resistance in this respect. However, to imply that Afro-Brazilian syncretism was a ruse is to overstate the case. That the clandestine practice of African religions was used as a means of resistance does not preclude the fact that many slaves sincerely accepted much of the symbolism and teachings of Roman Catholicism. More often than not, Africans simply failed to see the incompatibility of African and Christian traditions insisted upon by the white clergy. They freely combined elements of both, interpreting the Roman Catholic faith in terms of their previous African paradigm (Bastide 1978).

Whites responded to Afro-Brazilian syncretism in different ways. The official hierarchy of the Church had never pronounced its blessing on this phenomenon and had expended a great deal of energy attempting to suppress it. Orthodox Roman Catholicism held to an exclusivism that categorized African religions and their Brazilian derivatives as pagan. Adherents of these religions were assumed to be in need of salvation which could only be achieved through conversion to Roman Catholicism. In practice this became an important rationalization for enslaving Africans during the colonial period (Cintra 1985, 92-104). The earthly suffering of blacks in slavery could be excused because all slaves were baptized into the Roman Catholic Church. This was viewed as a great service performed on their behalf (Neto 1986, 9). Their patient endurance of slavery as good Catholics would assure their eternal happiness in the next life. Slavery was the price paid for salvation.

As Afro-Brazilian religion became associated with revolt and resistance, white slave owners felt the need to support the Church's efforts to suppress it. One means of doing this was through legal restrictions (Frisotti 1992, 19-21). African religion was also signified as being inferior and demonic (Neto 1986, 24-25; Frisotti 1988, 17). Finally, whites attempted to counteract the empowering effect of the black religion by signifying it as being merely a form of black folklore. Whites hence trivialized black religion as something quaint and therefore basically harmless (Neto 1986, 34). As such, black religion as expressed by the black lay brotherhoods was marginalized, although its role in preserving black culture and values remained. This form of signification is still prevalent today where the black brotherhoods continue their festivals.

The history of slavery in Brazil shows both the cruelty of oppression as well as the determination of blacks to resist. As whites used physical coercion and also the mental coercion of signification to define black reality and hence maintain control, blacks were able to resist in a variety of ways. Blacks refused to simply accept either coercion or white attempts to define black identity and found means of resistance that at times gained them their freedom, but more often, allowed them to survive an intolerable situation. Most importantly, they were able to preserve their heritage for future generations of blacks to draw upon in their own resistance to white oppression. However, as it became evident that the days of slavery were soon to end, a significant shift in the white approach to race raised new challenges for blacks.

#### Abolitionist Pressures and Racial Exceptionalism

Pressure from the rise of industrialism in Europe and North America and the corresponding abolitionist movements in Britain and the United States began to have an impact on Brazil in the mid-nineteenth century. Under pressure from England the slave

trade was officially outlawed in Brazil in 1850. Given the heavy dependence of Brazil's agricultural economy upon slave labor and the short longevity of their slaves, Brazilian elites feared a serious economic crisis. By making Brazilian slavery appear less harsh than other countries, the doctrine of racial exceptionalism became one vehicle that Brazilians used to defend themselves from abolitionist pressures emanating from abroad. Hence, abolition could be delayed (Hanchard 1994, 47).

Racial exceptionalism in Brazil is related to the larger notion of Iberian exceptionalism that affirms that Africans enslaved by the Spanish and Portuguese received more humane treatment than those taken to North America. The overt racial conflict present in the United States was contrasted with the allegedly harmonious relations between blacks and whites existing throughout Latin America (Hanchard 1994, 45). In this case, the North American version of slavery was perceived as an exception to the less difficult situation that most slaves in Latin America experienced.

The basic assumptions of Iberian exceptionalism are also found in Brazilian exceptionalism. According to Brazilian exceptionalism, Brazil cannot be considered a racist nation due to the difference between race relations there and in the United States (Hanchard 1994, 46). Again, Brazilian slavery was supposedly much less cruel. The contrast was initially made at a time when abolitionist sentiments were raging in Britain and the United States, with the United States on the brink of a bloody war. In the face of pressure to bring its own slave system to an end, racial exceptionalism was developed in Brazil by elites seeking to deflect such criticism (Hanchard 1994, 47-48).

By the mid-nineteenth century a widespread impression of the benevolence of Brazilian slavery had been spread abroad. While the evidence I have discussed in the previous section calls such a notion into serious question, the belief in Brazilian racial

exceptionalism was, nevertheless, implanted in the minds of many in England (Conrad 1983, xxi). The propagation of racial exceptionalism was continued throughout the period prior to abolition in 1888 and beyond, laying a foundation in Brazilian social thought for the theory of racial democracy.

#### Post-abolition Race Relations

During the period that saw the development of Brazilian racial exceptionalism, the European theories of scientific racism, that were later to bear bitter fruit in Germany, had a great influence upon Brazil. However, the cultural setting of Brazil produced a quite different result. Brazilians sought an alternative to the implication of scientific racism that mixed societies such as Brazil were societies of "impure blood" and inferior to pure white societies (Hanchard 1994, 49). Brazilian elites turned the implications of scientific racism upside down. The assumed superiority of the whites, combined with the presence of a large mulatto class, was used to develop the notion of the improvement of the Brazilian race by means of whitening. Though the ideas of scientific racism have been largely discredited, whitening remains a prominent feature of the racial democracy theory supported by whites in Brazil (Skidmore 1993).

According to the whitening ideal, miscegenation is thought to lead inevitably to the upgrading of the black population as the superior qualities of the white Portuguese eventually assimilate and subdue the qualities of the less civilized black peoples (Skidmore 1985, 13-14). This widely held belief among Brazilians, particularly those in the elite, is of course itself a racist concept and serves as evidence against the racial democracy myth. Nevertheless, it functions as a controlling presupposition in Brazilian race relations.

In the late nineteenth century, elites felt the need to assist the whitening process and guarantee a plentiful supply of cheap labor by opening up the doors to widespread European immigration (Andrews 1988, 88-89). With blacks being considered inferior and unsuitable for the task of free labor in a capitalist economy, white plantation owners preferred replacing their newly freed slaves with white immigrants. In any case many blacks left the plantations immediately after abolition in search of a better life in the cities. Whether they migrated to urban areas or remained behind on the plantations they found themselves discriminated against and unable to compete with the white immigrants. Black workers were often hired for the least desirable jobs or when white workers were not sufficiently available (Andrews 1988).

Andrews (1988) describes how during the 40 years after abolition blacks were systematically excluded from mass participation in the developing industrial and agricultural center of the state of São Paulo. Immigrants were favored by employers both for racial reasons as well as for the fact that they were more willing to accept working conditions, such as the employment of wives and children, that blacks would not. Having been freed from slavery, blacks expected more than their former masters were willing to give (Andrews 1988, 112). The result of abolition was a freedom that was accompanied by the widespread displacement of black labor from the labor market and the resulting impoverishment of blacks. This helped to solidify blacks at the bottom of the social hierarchy and guaranteed that the dominance of white elites was not threatened by abolition (Hasenbalg 1978). For this reason black activists in the *movimento negro* refuse to celebrate the anniversary of abolition on the 13th of May. It is instead a day of protest against the "false abolition" that they contend has left them enslaved to an unjust system.

In the midst of this situation the whitening ideal was propagated widely. It is here that we first begin to see the already large mulatto class begin to distance itself from black identity. In order to support the whitening thesis it was necessary for elites to define mulattoes officially as non-black. In light of the clear social and economic disadvantage connected with being black it should come as no surprise that mulattoes began to seek upward social mobility by identifying themselves as close to white as possible.

An interesting development that took place in the 1920s was the birth of *umbanda*, a new form of Afro-Brazilian religion. Diana Brown (1986) has argued that umbanda was created as an alternative to both the French spiritism of Allan Kardec, practiced by Brazilian elites, and the Afro-Brazilian religion of *candomblé* which was viewed with disdain as a more base, lower class, and primitive form of spiritism. The new religion was founded by whites and mulattos who were dissatisfied with the more intellectualized version of spiritism that had come from Europe and had found the spiritism of Africa to be more exciting and to provide greater potential for supernatural healing of illness. However, under the influence of the whitening ideal they were unwilling to be identified with a religion of openly African origin. The solution was to create a new religion, a whitened version of the African traditions that also incorporated elements of Kardecism. Brown documents the efforts made during the First Congress of the Spiritism of Umbanda, held in Rio in 1941, to purge all traces of Africa from the movement's history (Brown 1986, 38-46). While umbanda has subsequently become more diverse, including overtly African elements (Brown 1986, 46-51), initially the founding of umbanda was a concession to the whitening ideal.

During the twentieth century developments in Brazilian race relations followed the basic course of racial discrimination and social marginalization set forth immediately after abolition. Blacks were discriminated against consistently in all areas of Brazilian life while the elite looked forward to the imminent disappearance of blacks from Brazil by means of the whitening process. Mulattoes tried to distance themselves from black identity and sought social elevation through unions with those of lighter skin.

Meanwhile, Afro-Brazilian religions experienced rapid growth, in spite the continuance of both fierce opposition from the Roman Catholic Church and legal restrictions (Brown 1986).<sup>3</sup> They remained an important carrier of African culture. This was particularly the case during the dictatorships of the 1930s, 1940s, 1960s, and 1970s, when severe limitations were placed upon the ability of blacks to organize in order to promote civil rights. The importance of black religion as a locus of resistance to white domination and the loss of black cultural identity is seen in the importance it is now playing in the vitality of current black protest.

An issue of contention in the interpretation of the black response to whitening is whether or not the apparent acceptance of whitening by mulattoes and the abandonment of black identity has been due to the efficacy of the elite's use of the whitening idea in creating a kind of false consciousness among blacks, or whether there may be other explanations. We have already mentioned Hanchard's (1994) argument that whitening and racial democracy form a type of ideological hegemony that obfuscates the identity of mulattoes and hence divides blacks and prevents them from mobilizing to form a viable

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<sup>3</sup>Brown reminds her readers that previous researchers, such as Bastide (1959) and Rodrigues (1945) have found police records to be a rich source of data on Afro-Brazilian religious practices.

movement. Among the difficulties with his presentation of this theory is the notion that three centuries of firm black resistance to oppression could suddenly evaporate in a few short years through the ability of the white elite to mystify the black majority with the dubious notions of racial democracy and the inevitable evolution of a white race.<sup>4</sup> The suffering of blacks and their resistance, while neglected in the official histories, were not forgotten in the oral traditions passed through black and mulatto families and in Afro-Brazilian religious groups.

An alternative explanation suggested by rational choice theories of ethnicity is that mulattoes pursue an identity on the white end of the racial continuum in order to maximize their own social and economic opportunities (Fiola 1990, 13). Racial formation theory would further imply that the racial project of elites as articulated in the whitening and racial democracy theories is accepted by mulattoes, but for their own self-serving reasons. They co-opt the white program and turn it into their own racial project as a means of personal and familial advancement. The recreation of racial identity along these lines would tend to be fortified over a period of time leading to the strong denials of black identity often found among mulattoes today. Yet this could occur through a process that does not imply that black Brazilians simply internalize the elite definition of Brazilian racial reality. This interpretation has the advantage of being consistent with Scott's notion that subordinate classes often accept the dominant definition of things as articulated in the public transcript, but that they do so for their own reasons when they perceive it is to their advantage to do so (Scott 1990, 34). Thus the apparent acceptance of the elite definition of things becomes a form of subtle protest. It also is more consistent with the

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<sup>4</sup>Recall the discussion in chapter one where I argue that Hanchard's position, in spite of his denials, still has the appearance of a theory of false consciousness.

breaking forth of the tradition of resistance into the consciousness of blacks who are currently involved in the black movement. While they are diligently attempting to recover this tradition, it is not a tradition that ceased to exist. Rather, it is one that has always been present in the black community, though at times buried in the hidden transcript.

If we reject the notion of a false consciousness or mystification of racial identity, while still accepting that within the current racial ethos, Brazilians of African descent overwhelmingly seek to whiten their identities, is this not still to accept the idea that whites have established racial hegemony over black Brazilians? I shall address this question as I proceed with the discussion on the Brazilian racial ethos.

#### THE BRAZILIAN RACIAL ETHOS

It is appropriate to begin the discussion of the Brazilian racial ethos by recalling the concept of ethos as defined by Max Stackhouse that is adopted here. The ethos of a culture is "the subtle web of values, meanings, purposes, expectations, obligations, and legitimations that constitute the operating norms of a culture in relationship to a social entity" or "the network of norms that obtain in a sociocultural setting" (Stackhouse 1972, 5). I will discuss two aspects of the Brazilian ethos of race that together form the cultural web described by Stackhouse. The first is that aspect of the ethos centering around the notions of racial democracy, whitening and racial exceptionalism. The second is that aspect of the ethos involving the practice of prejudice, discrimination and the tacit recognition of both in Brazilian society. In the second aspect of the Brazilian racial ethos the signification of blacks by whites will be discussed as well. These two aspects are related to the publicly articulated values as well as the often assumed, but unarticulated expectations, meanings and obligations that compose the operating norms in relation to the social entity of race in Brazil. Within the two main aspects of the Brazilian racial

ethos distinct racial projects may be discerned as different racial groups attempt to define themselves as well as others in contesting for power and social status in Brazil.

### Racial Democracy and Whitening

The first aspect of the Brazilian racial ethos may be summarized as the Brazilian "prejudice of the non-existence of prejudice" which constitutes the notion of racial democracy (Azevedo 1975, 8; Hanchard 1994, 66). Azevedo remarks that the absence of racial prejudice and tension in Brazilian society is the greatest source of national pride in Brazil. It is constantly and emphatically appealed to in this respect (Azevedo 1975, 7). In order to capture something of the depth of the sentiment surrounding racial democracy, Azevedo's description is worthy of repetition here.

It (racial democracy) constitutes probably the most sensitive moral ideal in Brazil, cultivated with insistence and with intransigency. To doubt the factors and the values which are set forth in this institution is the same as to negate a substantial element of the mode of being of our people. From this perspective racial democracy would even be an expression, not only of a historical reality but of a virtue itself, perhaps innate and exclusive to Brazilians, that in no other part of the world is reproduced with the same characteristics and spontaneity (Azevedo 1975, 7-8).

This attitude was consistently expressed by whites with whom I spoke during field work.<sup>5</sup> When asked if Brazil has a race problem and if there is racial discrimination and prejudice in Brazil, the responses were predictable in their affirmation of racial democracy.

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<sup>5</sup>These conversations were carried on informally throughout the period of my fieldwork. While they do not constitute formal interviews from a scientifically chosen sample, they do serve to illustrate various aspects of the Brazilian racial ethos that have been documented by others (Skidmore 1974; Azevedo 1975; Hasenbalg 1978; Fontaine 1985; Moura 1988; Fiola 1990; Silva and Hasenbalg 1992; Skidmore 1992; Hanchard 1994).

Proponents of racial democracy affirm that racism is not a major problem in Brazil. Whites with whom I spoke suggested that if racism exists at all in Brazil, it exists only on a personal level and is found mainly in a few jokes about blacks. They alleged that whatever prejudice exists in Brazil is very weak and not nearly so bad as in the United States. The Rodney King incident and the subsequent Los Angeles race riots had been publicized in Brazil on the major television networks and these were appealed to in order to highlight the contrast between the United States and Brazil. The lack of racial violence in Brazil was given as proof in favor of Brazilian racial democracy.

Additionally it was argued that since most Brazilians have at least some degree of African ancestry, then it stands to reason that there could not be much of a race problem in Brazil. One individual asserted that the Portuguese loved black women, who were said to have a reputation for being good bed partners, and therefore the races became thoroughly mixed. As a result of this racial mixing blacks are allegedly accepted at all levels of society and are able to inter-marry with whites as they please. Any examples of prejudice were said to be due to social class rather than race. It was admitted that the poor were discriminated against, but the fact that the majority of them are black is merely incidental. Discrimination has nothing to do with race. Blacks might have more difficulty getting a job only because being poor, they would have less education and be less qualified. A person might cross over to the other side of the street at night in order to avoid walking past a black person, but this was not so much a sign of racial prejudice as a reflection of the reality that most assaultants are black. It was said that, therefore, Brazilians have this preconception and fear for a rational reason.

The views reflected in these informal conversations resonate with the work of scholars, both Brazilian and others, who have, either willingly or not, contributed to the

racial democracy theory. Fiola (1990) surveys the development of racial democracy and whitening as an ideology among scholars writing since 1900. Her survey shows that under the influence of theories of scientific racism that became popular in the nineteenth century (Skidmore 1993), Brazilian scholars such as Vianna (1938) and Nina Rodrigues (1935) provided academic support for the whitening theory. The state adopted the results of these studies as a part of its official ideology and became optimistic that a white Brazil was only a few generations away (Fiola 1990, 4; Skidmore 1993).<sup>6</sup>

Meanwhile, the fifty years following abolition saw the maturation of racial exceptionalism into the full fledged racial democracy ideology. Racial exceptionalism as an apologetic for Brazilian slavery was neither relevant nor adequate for the new social situation that began to develop. During the slave era in Brazil the elites controlled social mobility through a system of clientele and patronage (Costa 1985, 243). Having the ability to limit the rise of blacks by this means freed the white elite from the necessity of employing racism and a legal system of discrimination comparable to the Jim Crow system in the United States. The end of slavery signaled the end of the clientele and patronage system. Later, as industrialization took hold in Brazil it allowed for the possibility of social mobility of both blacks and poor whites apart from the paternalistic sponsorship of members of the white elite for the first time in Brazilian society (Costa 1985, 243-244). Brazil was becoming more urban and industrial, particularly in the south, creating a situation of social change in comparison with the centuries of stability prior to industrialization.

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<sup>6</sup>I was struck by an incidental indication of state support for the position of Rodrigues when I noticed that the copy of *Os Africanos no Brasil* that I had checked out from the Heard Library at Vanderbilt had been donated to the university by the Brazilian embassy.

The interpretation of how the racial democracy theory grew out of this situation and became popularized has varied. Costa (1985) notes three interpretations. First is the theory that Brazil traditionally was not racist and thus the writings of Freyre(1986), Vianna (1923, 1934) and Rodrigues (1935) were correct. Discrimination later developed due to social change accompanying the industrialization and urbanization of Brazil in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Costa 1985, 237). A second interpretation is that whites had been racist all along but the possibility of social mobility for blacks led the white elite to begin practicing the discrimination that was not needed under the system of clientele and patronage. Racial democracy was then manufactured as a means of covering up this domination and oppression so that blacks might be kept from challenging whites for power (Costa 1985, 237). This conspiracy theory was supported by *movimento negro* activists interviewed for this study. The third theory is the notion that the racial democracy myth and the whitening ideal were developed as a means of accommodating the theories of scientific racism that came to Brazil from Europe in the 19th century. Elites proposed the whitening theory as a means of showing that the racial mixing in Brazil was good rather than shameful because it would lead to the purification of the black race through whitening. Thus, rather than a policy of segregation and discrimination the idea of racial democracy was offered as a means of assimilation of the black population (Costa 1985, 237).

In evaluating these three interpretations it is clear that they are each insufficient. The idea that white Brazilians who had not been racist suddenly became so, is easily refuted by the documentation of the harsh treatment of black slaves in Brazil that I have cited (Conrad 1983, 1986). Costa argues that the conspiracy theory of racial democracy is reductionistic and the influence of scientific racism alone is inadequate as an

explanation for the pervasiveness of the doctrines of racial democracy and whitening (Costa 1985, 240). In the case of the former, the possibility that racial democracy served to disguise the reality of Brazilian racial discrimination does not prove that the elites deliberately created it for this purpose. In addition, this interpretation falls back on the untenable notion of racial democracy as a form of false consciousness. However, while it may not have hidden the reality of Brazilian racism, the racial democracy theory has served as a legitimization of the status quo in Brazil. The latter argument concerning the influence of scientific racism has been shown by Skidmore (1993) to have been an important element in the production of the racial democracy and whitening theories. Nevertheless, it does not offer a complete explanation as to why these theories became so widely accepted in the dominant racial ethos.

The cultural situation of Brazil during the period following abolition offered fertile ground for the racial democracy and whitening theories to become dominant in Brazil. The rapid industrialization of Brazil and the emerging working and middle classes offered a challenge to the established elites (Burns 1993, 361). As new forms of competitive social relations between blacks and whites became more common, overt racial discrimination surfaced as a means to limit the social mobility of blacks (Costa 1985, 244). The racial democracy and whitening theories, which had their birth in the desire to justify Brazilian slavery and the theories of scientific racism respectively, were available as symbols of stability and order during this time of intense social change. They legitimated the status quo and the position of traditional Brazilian elites, while at the same time offering to blacks and mulattoes the promise of assimilation and advancement through whitening.

The success of the racial democracy and whitening ideologies became apparent in the early part of the century. Hanchard notes that by the 1920s the influence of racial democracy had spread sufficiently to have already made an impression on North American blacks (Hanchard 1994, 51). North American black leaders gave a positive portrayal of black life in Brazil. This impression later gained more credence in the United States through Frank Tannenbaum's presentation of racial democracy (Tannenbaum 1947). The racial democracy thesis became firmly entrenched among American and Brazilian scholars as well as in popular Brazilian culture.

One of the key sources of the entrenchment of racial democracy ideology in Brazil was Brazilian sociologist Gilberto Freyre. The theory of whitening along with the notion of racial exceptionalism was refined into the racial democracy thesis by Freyre in his classic work *Casa-Grande e Senzala* first published in Brazil in 1933 and translated in English as *The Masters and the Slaves* (1986). Freyre has been interpreted as an opponent of scientific racism and whitening in that he credits the alleged backwardness of blacks to social causes and argues that miscegenation is the strength of Brazilian culture (Fiola 1990, 5-6). However, in a paradoxical turn of events Freyre's work strengthened the whitening theory by supporting the idea of racial assimilation in contrast to a clear division between the races (Skidmore 1992, 8).

Freyre's most important and celebrated contribution to the ethos of race in Brazil is the codification of the ideology of racial democracy in the two-fold myth of the good master (*o bom senhor*) and soft slavery (*escravidão suave*). Building upon the theory of racial exceptionalism Freyre argued the now well known thesis that slavery in Brazil was relatively less harsh when compared to that of North America and other slave holding societies. This is not to say that he did not portray some of the difficulties of the slave

system. Indeed, his depiction of race relations under Brazilian slavery, especially the sexual usage of black women by Portuguese men, sufficiently reveals the depravity of the system that it came as a shock to many of his initial readers (Maybury-Lewis 1986, lxxxv; Freyre 1986, 454ff). However, Freyre did not attribute these admittedly involuntary sexual relations to the desire to dominate, but rather to the lack of prejudice among the Portuguese and their simple attraction to African women (Fiola 1990, 7).

Freyre defended the notion of Brazilian racial democracy by asserting that in Brazil the racial prejudices that exist are weak and thus unable to create the segregation evident in other societies. While Brazil was admitted to be less than perfect, Freyre also asserted that Brazil is "quite advanced" in its treatment of race (Freyre 1963b, 4). The basic meaning of the Brazilian experience is its example of how racial integration is able to avoid both assimilation and domination of one culture by another. Rather it involves the formation of a new culture through interpenetration and the exchange of values (Freyre 1963b, 6). This occurs vertically as well as horizontally as there are no rigid class distinctions in Brazil according to Freyre (1963b, 4-6). The vision Freyre presents of Brazil is that of a relatively homogeneous and fluid society where the problems typically associated with race relations are minimized.

The picture of Brazil as a racially peaceful and tranquil nation made it an ideal choice as a model for the solution to the problems of racism that shook the world during the 1940s. The revelations of World War II led UNESCO to fund a series of studies on Brazilian race relations in order to uncover the secret of Brazil's racial harmony. Skidmore (1992) and Fiola (1990) document how the results of these studies turned out to challenge the racial democracy thesis, while at the same time reinforcing key aspects of the Brazilian racial ethos. For example, studies showed that black Brazilians are

stereotyped as being ignorant and inferior to whites. However, they concurred with the popular notion that such prejudice is not translated into systematic social discrimination against blacks (Fiola 1990,8).

The most well known of the UNESCO scholars is Florestan Fernandes, who mounted a severe critique of racial democracy, labeling it as a myth intended to hide the reality of Brazilian racism (Fernandes 1989, 13). His two volume work, *A Integração do negro na Sociedade de Classes*,<sup>7</sup> appeared in 1965 and argued at length against the racial democracy thesis. Nevertheless, Fernandes did not treat race as an independent variable. Blacks were said to be disadvantaged due to the legacy of slavery. Coming from a Marxian perspective he argued that Brazilian social stratification, with blacks at the lowest social levels, was a class problem rather than a race problem (Fiola 1990, 13).

Fernandes and his colleagues at the University of São Paulo attracted sufficient attention with their exposition of Brazilian racism to get them in trouble with the military regime during the 1960s. The commitment of the government to the official line of racial democracy was illustrated by the removal of Fernandes along with sociologists Octavio Ianni and Fernando Henrique Cardoso from the university in 1968. The government continued to suppress research on race during the late 1960s and early 1970s. It even omitted race altogether from the 1970 census, since race was assumed to be an insignificant issue in Brazil (Skidmore 1992, 9-10). It was not coincidental that the removal of these critics of racial democracy and the omission of race from the census occurred during the harshest years of repression under the military regime that had installed itself in 1964. With an apparent economic boom in place this would have been a

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<sup>7</sup>*The Negro In Brazilian Society* (Fernandes, 1969).

very inconvenient time to have uncomfortable questions raised about the racial situation in Brazil. Accordingly, the removal of racial dissidents and the ignoring of the issue in the census appeared to be an expedient measure to take.

The failure to collect census data on race also reflected the continued commitment to the assimilationist doctrine of whitening. Officially, the whitening theory had promised that blacks would eventually disappear from Brazil. Census data could be seen as either a threat to the official position, or as simply irrelevant to Brazilian reality from the vantage point of the elite. If the census data did not support whitening this would give credibility to the dissidents and damage the legitimacy of the military government. Beyond this, since it was a known "fact" that whitening was taking place, collecting data on race was irrelevant. Over the next decade the *abertura* reduced the government's ability to control dissident voices. When the government attempted to continue to ignore race in the 1980 census it was not able to suppress the outcry from academics, black activists, and demographers. It responded by including questions about race (Skidmore 1992, 8). This data became an important source of evidence against racial democracy.

The strength of the government's commitment to the image of Brazil as a racial democracy is further evidenced in its use of the law as a symbol of racial democracy to both Brazilians and foreigners. This symbolism is found in the making of racism a crime in Brazil. In response to a well publicized incident in which the black American ballerina and celebrity, Katherine Dunham, was denied a room in a hotel in São Paulo, the first Brazilian anti-racism law was passed. Known as the Afonso Arinos law, for its author, it prohibited the denial of lodging, school registration, and entry into public places for anyone due to color or race (Fiola 1990, 17). The charge by activists that the law is merely symbolic seems to be supported by the fact that no one was ever sentenced to jail

for violating it. The same continues to be the case, even though the new constitution of 1988 gives the appearance of strengthening the penalties against racism by making it a crime both unbailable and with no statute of limitation (Skidmore 1992, 11). In spite of the appearance created by the existence of such a law, activists charge that bringing an accusation of racism against a white person is more likely to result in the black being condemned for slander, as occurred in the case of black attorney Algaete Nunes Martins in 1993. The end result of her bringing charges of racism against a white attorney was that she herself was sentenced to three months in confinement (*O Journal do Dia*, June 5, 1993). While the law may symbolize the ideal of the Brazilian racial democracy it seems that the ideal itself has the potential for undermining the force of the law. It is difficult to demonstrate the reality of racism to those who have already decided that by definition Brazil is not racist.

Within the Brazilian racial ethos, the protests of blacks are typically turned back upon them. After denying that a serious race problem exists in Brazil, whites responded that any racial problem that does exist must be attributed to the racism of black militants, who create division and conflict by means of activism with their black movements.<sup>8</sup> This is a reflection of the collapsing of the definition of a "race problem" into overt racial conflict, such as protest and violence. If protest and violence are necessary for there to be a race problem then, so long as blacks do not engage in such activity, by definition no race problem exists. Racial conflict is therefore viewed as arising as a result of black militancy, not unjust race relations. Since blacks are perceived as the instigators of this

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<sup>8</sup>That this is a common accusation against the movement is verified not only by informal conversation with whites, but by movement activists, who stated that it was frequently necessary to defend themselves against the charges of racism and divisiveness.

conflict then they are also viewed as the instigators of a race problem. In the view of racial democracy there is no racial discrimination to explain the black movement's activities.

Therefore, it is said that blacks are blaming racism for difficulties arising from social and class problems.

The denial of racial discrimination is thus supported by a two-fold rationalization. First, it is assumed that significant racial discrimination does not exist in Brazil, because if it did, one would be unable to explain the absence of a race problem, that is, the absence of overt racial conflict. On the other hand, when overt conflict arises it must be the fault of blacks, since by definition Brazil has no race problem. That serious racial discrimination does exist and that in the absence of open racial conflict it might constitute a race problem appear to be ideas that are not seriously entertained, at least not by whites.

The whitening theory has flourished in Brazil along with racial democracy and together they form the Brazilian racial ethos as it has been typically admitted in the public transcript by Brazilian elites. While reference has already been made to the general thesis that through racial mixing Brazil is becoming more and more white in its racial makeup, a full understanding of the Brazilian racial ethos demands a fuller definition of whitening. Fiola (1990) identifies four different types of whitening in Brazilian society. We shall discuss each of these.

The first type of whitening is that understood by the original proponents of the theory, namely the genetic whitening of the Brazilian population (Fiola 1990, 11). It was partly in the hopes of accomplishing this that early proponents favored the heavy influx of European immigrants into Brazil. The belief in white supremacy as articulated by the scientific racism of the nineteenth century was converted into the notion that the superior

qualities of whites in Brazil's racially mixed society would in time overwhelm the genetically inferior black elements of the population.

In addition to the notion of genetic whitening there are three categories of social whitening. Each of these involves a degree of assimilation and socialization into the world of the white elite. Blacks who overcome the odds and achieve financial success are said to be whitened by their money (Fiola 1990,12). The perception is that if they have money, then blacks are accepted in society on the same level as whites. The underlying implication is, once again, that it is economic class that determines stratification, not race.

The possibility of whitening one's family line by marriage to a lighter skinned partner is a third category of whitening that is not uncommon in Brazil (Fiola 1990, 12). This is a somewhat paradoxical aspect of the theory because it betrays an underlying denial of racial democracy. Whitening by marriage is motivated by the belief that discrimination does exist in Brazil and that it can be avoided for one's children and grandchildren if they are born with lighter skin. Black women interviewed for this study told of strong resistance from their families for dating men who were as dark or darker than themselves. The reason for this that was most often given was that the parents did not want their grandchildren to be born black and thus suffer the same discrimination that they had suffered.

The fourth category of whitening involves the overall acceptance and accommodation to white culture and society. It entails the acceptance of the symbolic universe of whites as articulated in the public transcript. Fiola notes that it means the acceptance of white values, attitudes, and behaviors (Fiola 1990, 12). While this represents an avenue of social mobility for a very few, such as famous black athletes and musicians, blacks who take this route are often looked upon with disdain by other blacks.

To the latter, blacks who assimilate to white culture have sold-out and have become "blacks with a white soul." Those blacks fortunate enough to make it to the upper echelons of Brazilian society are obligated to give support for whitening and racial democracy with themselves as examples of how well the system works. Pelé, the well known soccer player, was just one instance of a black person who was widely appealed to by Brazilian elites as evidence favoring racial democracy. For his part, Pelé never challenged the system, instead choosing to adapt himself to it (Fiola 1990, 12).

The official census data from the government agency *Fundação Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística* (IBGE) is collected in such a way as to suggest the validity of the whitening theory. In 1980 no more than six percent of respondents identified themselves as black (Fontaine in Fontaine, 1985:58). By 1990 data from IBGE shows a *decrease* in the percentage of Brazilians declaring their race as black. Of a total population of 147,305,524 only 7,264, 317 gave black as their race while 81,407,395 declared white and 57,821,981 listed mulatto (IBGE 1993, 2-43).<sup>9</sup> This translates into 55.3% white, 39.3% mulatto, and 4.9% black. While such data confirms to elites the validity of the whitening thesis, it may be understood as an indication that whitening permeates the consciousness of Brazilians. This is apparent in the manner in which the majority of Brazilians of African descent identified themselves.

One of the most striking results of the whitening ideal is the division of Brazilians of African descent into a large number of intermediate racial categories designed to distance them from being identified as black. The census data published in 1980

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<sup>9</sup>IBGE, in its publication of this data, notes that this survey does not included data from the rural zone of Rondônia, Acre, Amazonas, Roraima, Pará, and Amapá. However, it includes the majority of the Brazilian population and serves to indicate the way in which most Brazilians identify themselves racially.

indicated at least 136 types of responses given to the question concerning race (Moura 1988, 62-63). The implication of this state of affairs is that in the Brazilian ethos of race there is a very divided sense of racial identity among Brazilians of African descent. This is the case to the point that one may safely assert that, with the exception of a minority of blacks, there is no unified black or Afro-Brazilian racial identity. For its purposes, the census simplified matters by dividing Afro-Brazilians into two categories. It listed as blacks those who so identified themselves, and the rest of the various non-white racial identifications were grouped together under the classification of brown (*parda*). It is important to keep in mind, therefore, that the mulatto category does not represent a unified group with a shared identity. It is simply the demographers' grouping of the multitude of intermediate labels together. In regard to the identity of the mulattoes, Thales de Azevedo had previously claimed that there are more than 300 words used in Brazil to describe the various racial categories (Azevedo 1975, 28). These various names are arranged to suggest varying shades between black and white.

The meaning of this divided racial identity among Brazilians with an African heritage has been interpreted both as a result of the ideological hegemony proposed by Hanchard (1994) and as an attempt to escape from the consequences of discrimination that are clearly perceived and felt (Fiola 1990, 13). Moura offers a Marxian interpretation in his argument that whites have successfully alienated blacks from their true identity and imposed upon them fundamental white values. He also recognizes the variety of non-black racial identities as symbolic realities into which non-whites attempt to escape from the inferiority conferred upon them by a society organized into a social hierarchy based on race (Moura 1988, 63).

In a comparative study of U.S. and Brazilian race relations Degler (1971) advanced the thesis that the key difference between the two societies is that the ambiguity of racial identity in Brazil provided a "mulatto escape hatch" that allowed racially mixed Brazilians to avoid some of the consequences of racial discrimination that fell upon blacks (Degler 1971, 223-225). He supported the notion that mulattoes were able to achieve a degree of social mobility generally unavailable to blacks. This amounted to essentially an agreement with the notion of social whitening that served as a motivation for the tendency of Afro-Brazilians to deny black identity. While denying racial democracy in the classic sense, Degler presented a Brazil that conformed to the traditional elite conception of Brazil in respect to whitening. Degler's thesis has been hotly debated as the racial democracy theory has come under increasing attack since the 1970s.

The debate over the interpretation of racial democracy and whitening relates closely to the theoretical issues discussed in chapter one. Is the lack of a definite black identity a result of ideological hegemony in the Gramscian sense or is it more adequately interpreted in terms of rational choice and other theories of racial identity? The discussion of racial identity formation in the *movimento negro* of the Roman Catholic Church of Brazil will shed light on this question.

Meanwhile, the contradictions inherent in the simultaneous affirmation of a Brazilian racial democracy and the flight from black identity demonstrate that there are aspects of the Brazilian racial ethos in operation that are not accounted for by the elite vision of racial democracy and whitening. In order to adequately treat the ethos of race in Brazil it is necessary to examine the reality of race relations as they are played out in Brazilian society.

### Racial Discrimination and Signification

The reality of racial discrimination, prejudice, and the signification of blacks and mulattoes by whites represents the second major aspect of the ethos of race in Brazil. The various responses of Brazilians of African descent form a critical part of this as well. Recent scholarship on Brazilian race relations has challenged the racial democracy idea with persuasive documentation of systemic social stratification in Brazil based on race.<sup>10</sup> The notion that racial discrimination plays little or no role in the continued socially disadvantaged position of blacks is contradicted by empirical data as well as the intuition that causes blacks to seek to whiten themselves. Furthermore, the data strongly suggests that in spite of the attempt to define the majority of Brazilians as non-black, mulattoes have always been included with blacks in the discriminatory structure of Brazilian society. The existence of a mulatto escape hatch appears to be as much a myth as racial democracy (Silva 1985).

A discussion of the empirical data on race in Brazil launches the researcher into the heart of the contested meanings that comprise this aspect of the Brazilian racial ethos. While the official census depicts a Brazil with a less than 5% black population, in keeping with the elite aspirations for a white Brazil, activists in APN rely upon data from UNESCO to argue that blacks make up more than 70% of Brazil's population (Comissão Regional dos Agentes de Pastoral Negros, n.d.). These varying depictions of the racial composition of Brazilian society reflect the interests of the two groups in vying for a position as the majority.

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<sup>10</sup>Such studies include Azevedo 1975, Hasenbalg 1978, Ianni 1980, Fontaine 1985, Moura 1988, Fiola 1990, and Silva and Hasenbalg 1992.

Regardless of the percentages of the total, the official census data collected by IBGE shows clearly that blacks are at a disadvantage at all levels of Brazilian society.<sup>11</sup> Statistics concerning education in Brazil serve to illustrate this point. The statistics from the 1980 census reveal that blacks are much more likely to be illiterate as whites, with rates of 40% and 20% respectively. A full 48.8% of mulattoes and 47.7% of blacks were reported as having less than one year of education compared to 25.0% of whites. 14% of whites achieved over nine years of education while only 4.6% of mulattoes and 3.0% of blacks did so (Fiola 1990, 23-24). Carlos Hasenbalg (1992) uses data from 1982 *Pesquisa Nacional por Amostra de Domicílio* (PNAD) survey and finds similar results. The anti-black bias in education extends to the university level where only 1.6% of blacks and 2.8% of mulattoes are able to matriculate, while 13.6% of whites succeed in doing so (Hasenbalg, 1992, 83).

Even when blacks are able to gain a higher level of education this does not translate into equality with whites. Regardless of the level of education whites have more access to better jobs and receive a higher income. As educational levels increase, blacks fall further behind, indicating that discrimination is more at work in those areas in which blacks would be most likely to associate on an equal level with whites. This seems to confirm the statement often heard among *movimento negro* activists that, "there is no discrimination in Brazil because the black knows his place." Once blacks begin leaving their place, discrimination intensifies. Among those Brazilians who are illiterate the income of Brazilians of African descent is 67.7% of the income of whites. The income of

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<sup>11</sup>These findings indicate why it was in the interest of the military government to suppress such data in 1970 by omitting it from the census. Activists would have certainly used it to undermine the Brazilian racial democracy theory and thus the credibility of the military regime which supported it.

college educated Brazilians of African descent is 62.4% of their white counterparts, indicating that education increases the gap between black and white (Hasenbalg 1985; data from PNAD 1976). Fiola provides data from São Paulo that generally confirms this. While illiterate blacks in São Paulo have very close to the same level of earnings as illiterate whites, black high school graduates only earn 59.5% of the salary of whites (Fiola 1990, 26; data from SEADE 1985). These differences in earning by color among blacks marshals further evidence against Degler's (1972) notion of a mulatto escape hatch. If anything, the advancement of blacks and mulattoes appears to result in an increase of discrimination. Silva argues that it does no violence to Brazilian social reality to simply consider blacks and mulattoes as one "non-white" group. They are discriminated against as if that were the case (Silva 1985, 43). Beyond this, he suggests that in some circumstances blacks are even less discriminated against than mulattoes (Silva 1985, 51). This flatly contradicts the whitening theory.

Beyond the statistical evidence demonstrating the reality of discrimination in Brazil, there is ample confirmation of racial prejudice among Brazilians. Subjects interviewed for this study frequently cited sayings of a racist nature that are so well known in Brazil that, as Fiola points out, if one says the first half of the saying most Brazilians could automatically complete the sentence (Fiola 1990, 22). Statements such as "*branco correndo é atleta, negro correndo é ladrão*" (a white running is an athlete, a black running is a thief) and "*negro quando não suja na entrada, suja na saída*" (if a black doesn't mess on the way in, he messes on the way out) are two examples that are seen as particularly offensive. The pervasiveness of such statements indicates the presence of strong negative stereotypes associated with blacks.

The process of learning that white is good and black is bad begins at a young age in the socialization of Brazilian children. The most popular children's show in Brazil, featuring Xuxa, serves as an example of how the media presents the whitening ideal to children in a powerful way. The show consists of cartoons and contests between children in the studio and is hosted by Xuxa, a light complected blonde and former Playboy model, who has all of the appearances of the whitening ideal desired by Brazilian elites. Xuxa has starred in several movies, sold millions of copies of her recordings, and is wildly popular among Brazilian children.

The racially loaded message that Xuxa represents was revealed graphically in a Brazilian television commercial.<sup>12</sup> The commercial was promoting "Xuxa slippers" for little girls. After the mother gave the slippers to the already somewhat blonde daughter she said, "You're going to have a face just like Xuxa." The mother turned to walk away and then looked back to discover that the daughter had indeed turned into Xuxa! The final scene showed the dark haired mother desperately attempting to get her foot into the undersized slipper. The advertisement was clearly an attempt to promote the sale of Xuxa slippers by appealing to sentiments related to the whitening ideal. The message was just one of the many daily ways in which the elite view is taught to Brazil's young.

Brazilian media is constantly the target of criticism for its presentation of the relative roles of blacks and whites. Blacks typically find roles on television as subordinate characters such as maids and laborers or else as persons of low morals (Fiola 1990, 35). While black culture is widely celebrated in Brazil, black activists charge that it is largely folklorized or else co-opted by whites. It is not taken seriously as a valued contribution of

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<sup>12</sup>I viewed this commercial on television while relaxing from the demands of field work in 1993.

blacks to Brazilian society (Fiola 1990, 35). We shall see that this represents a major issue for black activists whose racial project involves reclaiming and valuing elements of black culture.

A more formal setting for the learning of the high value of being white as opposed to the negative value of being black is Brazil's school system. Black children suffer from lower rates of school enrollment than whites. Fiola cites research by Fúlvia Rosemberg who argues that black children are alienated by the lack of attention given to the importance of blacks in Brazilian history (Fiola 1990, 25). Beyond this, studies of children's textbooks reveal that they present blacks in a negative light. Blacks are often portrayed as ugly, stupid, incompetent, and poor (Fiola 1990, 25). This was confirmed repeatedly by black activists interviewed and is a problem that is receiving significant attention in the *movimento negro*.

The factors cited above are said by movement activists to lead to a sense of low self-esteem among blacks. Afro-Brazilians are taught to devalue their black heritage and to attempt to flee from it. The negative stereotypes also reinforce the reality of discrimination which, in spite of the fervency with which racial democracy is held, Brazilians know exists.

Racial discrimination is a daily reality according to the activists interviewed for this study. It is well known in Brazil that in the apartments and hotels in the wealthy sections of the major cities, blacks are generally expected to use service entrances and elevators under the assumption that they are maids or laborers and not residents. Blacks may easily find themselves excluded from expensive clubs, even if they have the resources to become members. In addition, regardless of the laws against racism, blacks report that they are subjected to more suspicion than whites and are more likely to be searched and

harassed by the police. They also report being the victims of verbal abuse. Names such as "monkey" or "vulture" are not uncommon as derogatory labels pinned on blacks. Blacks are expected to, and usually do, respond to this abuse publicly by accepting it and not answering back. In all, there are clear expectations in Brazilian society about the proper place of blacks and that place is invariably at the bottom of the social ladder.

In 1988 the centennial of abolition was celebrated in Brazil. The celebration turned into an occasion for protest by black activists as well as for the wholesale conscientization of Brazilians to the reality of racism in Brazil. This was carried out by means of two campaigns initiated in the Roman Catholic Church and implemented in various parishes and CEBs across Brazil as well as through television programs and other media reports. Hanchard has argued that in the wake of this widespread discussion of the reality of racial discrimination in Brazil it is no longer tenable to say that Brazilians hold to the theory of racial democracy. Rather he argues that Brazil has returned to a form of racial exceptionalism that accepts the reality of racial discrimination, but continues to hold that it is much milder in Brazil than elsewhere (Hanchard 1994). Data collected for this study suggests that this assessment is premature. Even though admissions of racial discrimination occasionally appear in television and newspapers, the elite assumption of racial democracy was widely reflected in my conversations with Brazilians, a full five years after the 1988 centennial of abolition. Fiola (1990) and Fernandes (1989) concur that racial democracy is still the operating assumption of Brazilian elites.

Nevertheless, if racial democracy is still adhered to publicly, many Brazilians are willing privately to admit to the reality of discrimination in Brazil. Data reported by *Instituto Brasileiro de Análises Sociais e Econômicas* (IBASE) indicates that as many as 90% of respondents answer positively when asked if they believe that prejudice and

discrimination exist in Brazil (Heringer, et al 1989, 36-37). However, only 40% of blacks and 26% of mulattoes admitted to having actually experienced racial discrimination themselves (Heringer, et al 1989, 38). These percentages should be sufficient to show that a large part of Brazil's African population is aware of the reality of racism in Brazil.

The reality portrayed in the second aspect of the Brazilian racial ethos is one of consistent and pervasive systemic social stratification based on the practice of racial discrimination. Within this discriminatory system Afro-Brazilians are surrounded by an official ideology that denies the reality of racially motivated discrimination. Hence, strategies such as whitening, originally proposed by white elites in order to minimize the black influence in Brazil, have been coopted by blacks as a means to attempt to escape the results of Brazil's racist polity. Yet, the results show that this attempt has been a failure. While individual cases of upward social mobility may have occurred, on a systemic level whitening has done little to address Brazil's racial problem. Afro-Brazilians remain effectively excluded from the higher levels of Brazilian social and economic life.

### Conclusion

We may now summarize the Brazilian racial ethos in terms of Stackhouse's definition of ethos as "the subtle web of values, meanings, purposes, expectations, obligations, and legitimations that constitute the operating norms of a culture in relationship to a social entity" (Stackhouse 1972, 5). The ethos of race relations in Brazil is composed of two distinct, but intertwined layers of values, meanings, purposes, expectations, obligations, and legitimations. From the elite stand point the white phenotype, culture and compartment are valued as the ideal for which Brazil must continue to strive. White symbolizes what is good, while black symbolizes either the quaintness of folklore from Brazil's history, or else the outright inferiority and immorality

associated with negative stereotypes about blacks. The effect of the system of racial democracy and whitening are quite contrary to its central thesis of equality and advancement. Instead the effect has been, as Hasenbalg captures it in his dissertation title, "the smooth preservation of racial inequalities" (Hasenbalg, 1979). Within this system everyone is expected to stay in his or her proper place as designated by skin color. These expectations translate into obligations to maintain the appearance of racial democracy. Those blacks who succeed against the odds in becoming successful in Brazil are thus appealed to in legitimization of the notion that racial democracy is real. Other legitimations are found in the attempts to place the blame for the condition of black Brazilians either on purely economic factors, or else on blacks themselves. Blacks are signified in a negative stereotype so that their low social and economic status is credited to laziness, ignorance, dishonesty, and immorality on their part.

The second layer in the Brazilian racial ethos reflects the black response and interaction with the first layer. Blacks have apparently internalized many of the positive values associated with being white and do suffer from low self-esteem as being black. Nevertheless, in Afro-Brazilian religious traditions such as *candomblé* and the *congados*, African culture has been preserved and passed along to blacks as something of value. The meaning of white culture may be related to economic and social advancement in Brazilian society, but the meaning of black culture has remained positive for many blacks due to their religious activities. In addition, blacks adapt themselves to the whitening ideal for their own purposes. Attempted social whitening through marriage, as well as the adoption of aspects of white culture are seen as vehicles to exploit the system in their own favor, although such attempts are generally not fruitful. Blacks often live with the contradictory expectations of advancement by means of playing along with the whitening

ideal and the reality of having to accept abuse and discrimination with no real recourse. In order to make gains for themselves within the system blacks must assimilate and accept the elite definition of things.

Blacks in Brazil are obligated to express black culture through black religious traditions or at carnival, when they do not pose an overt threat to the white system. These social spaces have, however, provided powerful legitimations to the continuing vitality of black heritage. It is here that being black has been valued and that the traditions of the ancestors of black Brazilians have been preserved, in spite of the attempt of whites to suppress them or to coopt and turn these traditions into folklore. They have also provided the source of an important challenge to the racial polity of Brazilian society in the form of the *movimento negro* in the Roman Catholic Church of Brazil. In the next chapter we will examine the rise of this new movement.

CHAPTER 3  
THE *MOVIMENTO NEGRO* IN THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH  
ORIGINS AND ORGANIZATION

In the decade and a half since its inception, the *movimento negro* in the Roman Catholic Church of Brazil has grown from a small study group to a movement composed of several loosely related organizations having a presence in most regions of Brazil. Despite its still relatively small numbers the movement has succeeded in drawing national attention and generating controversy for its innovations and challenges to traditional Brazilian Catholicism. While conservative Catholics focus on the seemingly abrupt appearance of the *movimento negro* with its radical proposals, the movement may be understood as the fruit of other developments. Changes within Roman Catholicism and events within Brazilian politics and the black community set the stage for the appearance of the *movimento negro* in the Church. In the previous chapter we traced the social and historical context of the Brazilian ethos of race to which the movement is responding. This chapter will focus on the origins and growth of the *movimento negro* in the Brazilian Roman Catholic Church itself. First we will consider the social and the historical circumstances that gave rise to the movement with a view to understanding the various streams of influence that have come together to shape it.

The immediate social context giving rise to the *movimento negro* in the Roman Catholic Church was formed by two significant events occurring in the 1960s. The

convening of Vatican II (1962) and the commencement of a new military dictatorship in Brazil (1964) both contributed to the social and religious climate of the 1970s that gave birth to the movement. While the black movement in the Roman Catholic Church in Brazil is part of a recent reappearance of black activism in a country where it had long been subdued, the roots of the movement go further back than this immediate context. (Winant, 1992:173, 187). The recent resurgence of black activism is, in fact, the inevitable breaking forth of resistance which has always existed among Brazilians of African descent, although this resistance has been complicated by the ambiguities inherent in Brazilian racial relations.

In discussing the origins and development of the *movimento negro* in the Roman Catholic Church, primary sources such as interviews with movement activists and documents produced by the movement are utilized along with theses and books published by movement participants. These sources contain both information concerning the formation and origins of the movement as well as the presentation of this history as movement activists would like it to be understood. This does not necessarily mitigate against the validity of the historical information and analysis found in these sources. It does, however, indicate that these documents and interviews provide data about the movement's history as well as how its history is interpreted and used by the movement to advocate its own position. My construction of the movement's origins and development will take this into consideration as it attempts to understand both the influences and forces giving the movement its present form and how the movement's understanding of its history contributes to its task of identity construction.

### The *Movimento Negro* in the Twentieth Century

The emergence of the *movimento negro* in the Brazilian Roman Catholic Church was preceded by the efforts of other black activists and their movements. Maues (1988) outlines three distinct phases of the black movement in Brazil. In the first phase, which lasted through the 1930s, black Brazilians attempted a strategy of social advancement based on an acceptance of the whitening ideal. The second phase, encompassing the 1940s and 1950s, began a transition in that it set forth the need to value black culture. However, it still accepted the basic racial democracy thesis and attempted to elevate blacks within that context. The third stage, launched during the 1960s and continuing to the present, broke with any attempt to adhere to white values. Instead, by means of the notion of *negritude*, it affirms black values. Furthermore, in this phase white values are contested as "anti-values" (Maues 1988, 29-30). A brief survey of the *movimento negro* as it developed in Brazilian secular society will allow a clear view of these stages.

#### Phase 1: Accommodation

An important precursor to black resistance movements appeared in São Paulo in the form of the *imprensa negra* (black press). According to sociologist Clóvis Moura, from 1915 to 1963 a variety of black newspapers flourished that had a significant influence upon the formation of a black ideology of ethnicity in São Paulo (Moura 1989a, 70). The *imprensa negra* was not overtly political but it discussed problems of the black community and helped create an awareness of discrimination. Moura notes that the *imprensa negra* during the early period supported the integration of black Brazilians into society through culture, education, good manners, and good behavior. Education would improve culture and lead to good manners and behavior. This would then lead to social

recognition by whites (Moura 1988, 210). Hanchard (1994, 105) observes that this was essentially an acceptance of whitening by blacks.

This milieu gave birth to the *Frente Negra Brasileira* (FNB) in 1931. The FNB grew to have national influence. By 1936 it had begun to organize itself into a black political party. This was, however, brought to an abrupt halt when President Getulio Vargas dissolved all opposition parties in 1937 and installed himself as dictator (Moura 1983, 57). The Vargas government actively promoted the racial democracy ideology. The FNB shared the tendency towards accommodation expressed in the *imprensa negra*, although the overt political organization of blacks was an advance towards a more oppositional stance (Hanchard 1994, 105).

With the end of the Vargas regime in 1945 the *imprensa negra* took on a more political tone. Whereas previously it had mostly ignored political events, it was now reporting them and taking positions. The attitude taken by the press during this time was not very radical. It supported the idea that blacks could achieve individual advancement along the lines approved by white Brazilian society. That is, it promoted accommodation as the road to social and economic mobility (Hanchard 1994, 106).

#### Phase 2: Valuing Blackness

The second phase in the development of the *movimento negro* was marked by a period of relative openness in Brazil. From 1945 to 1960 this openness allowed for new black organizations to appear and prosper. Significant among these was the *Teatro Experimental do Negro* (TEN) founded in 1944 in Rio de Janeiro and led by Brazilian artist and activist Abdias do Nascimento. Hanchard (1994, 106) points out that what was founded as a theatrical company quickly began to encompass other cultural and political functions. The notion of negritude was promoted through the programs and activities of

TEN including its newspaper *Quilombo*. While TEN provided a forum for black intellectuals of the time, they were never able to overcome the dominant ideology of the Brazilian racial ethos in their own thought. However, they did lay a foundation of cultural valuation that later groups would build on (Hanchard 1994, 107-108).

Movement activist Laudelino José Neto notes that the TEN led by Nascimento advanced the cause of blacks by challenging stereotypical negative roles of blacks that were typically expressed in Brazilian theater and by challenging the notion that African values are merely a quaint form of folklore (Neto 1986, 107). Nascimento is also credited by Neto with the development of *quilombismo*, the setting forth of the *quilombos* as models of negritude movements. The *quilombo* symbolizes a society based on democratic egalitarianism, constructed from a position of solidarity. It represents an utopian ideal that is to be realized gradually through each struggle (Neto 1986, 108).

In the years prior to 1964 there had been many other black groups as well as the *escolas de samba*, and the various Afro-Brazilian religious organizations that attempted to articulate a black consciousness. The consciousness expressed by the *movimento negro* during this era continued to be framed within the traditional understanding of Brazilian race relations. However, with the trauma of the repression of the 1960s this would change.

### Phase 3: Repression and *Abertura*

An abrupt end came to black activist groups and indeed practically all activist movements in Brazil with the military coup of 1964. The regime systematically suppressed all dissent, imprisoning or exiling those who resisted openly. The torture and murder of dissidents were not uncommon (Arquidiocese de São Paulo 1990). As a result,

the radical elements of the *movimento negro* that had formerly been marginalized eventually came to the forefront.

It would not be until the 1970s that the military regime would begin to allow the gradually increased political freedom known as the *abertura* (opening). Even though repression was still an ever present danger and often a reality, the *abertura* allowed for the emergence of new oppositional and activist groups. While it appears that leftist influence was not a significant presence in Brazil during the 1950s (Wesson and Fleischer, 1983), activist groups arising during the 1970s showed definite influences from leftist sources. This movement indicates, ironically, that the anti-communist fanaticism of the military regime may have resulted in propelling such dissident groups in the political direction from which the military claimed to be saving Brazil in the first place.

Hanchard's (1994) discussion of the resurgent *movimento negro* of the 1970s portrays a network of groups that became increasingly politicized. While some blacks had flirted with leftist politics on the margins of the movement in previous phases, in this stage they focused on issues of class from a leftist perspective. Yet they refused to subsume racial issues under those of class. The ideas of social mobility and accommodation were given up in favor of an oppositional stance to white society (Hanchard 1994, 109). This new attitude was exemplified in the public protests that erupted over the torture and murder of a black taxi driver by São Paulo police in 1978. The politicization of the *movimento negro* became more apparent in the 1980s with the creation of Afro-Brazilian groups within several of Brazil's political parties (Hanchard 1994, 123-129).

During this same phase, negritude became an explicit category of discourse as the *movimento negro* assumed a militant posture. Black activists determined that the real

problem in Brazil was not that blacks were denied social mobility due to lack of education or economic resources. They were denied adequate education and economic resources, and hence upward mobility, because they were black. The theories of whitening and racial democracy would have to be attacked outright (Hanchard 1994, 109).

It is difficult to portray with great precision the exact social location of the activists involved in the *movimento negro* during the period described here. Given the nature of the program and actions of black activists it would seem that Hanchard's (1994, 100) characterization of the *movimento negro* as a movement that "sprang from the academy, as opposed to the suburbio or favela" is essentially correct. Although he points out that many of these black intellectuals were only one generation removed from poverty, it appears that the *movimento negro* was a product of the black elite. The continuing struggle over black identity in Brazil indicates that masses of blacks have remained under the influence of racial democracy and whitening.

While it is not apparent that activists in the *movimento negro* of the Roman Catholic Church in Brazil, such as Neto, would admit to elitism in the contemporary *movimento negro*, Neto himself does trace elitism to the early negritude movement. He argues that this elitism remained apparent with the development of the *Frente Negra Brasileira* and the TEN. The efforts made at organizing blacks and creating a black consciousness were unable to connect with the popular level of black society (Neto 1986, 104-105). In Neto's criticism of the early *movimento negro* one can see the contrasting concern for being connected to the base or the popular level of black society that is apparent in the *movimento negro* in the Roman Catholic Church of Brazil. He notes that a

"great abyss" existed between the theory represented by the movement of intellectuals and the practice of marginalized blacks.

### Negritude

As the *movimento negro* was emerging in the 1930s in Brazil, African intellectuals who were studying in France and England began to develop the notion of Negritude<sup>1</sup> (Neto 1986; Manunga 1988; Bernd 1988). During the 1930s in Paris the term Negritude was coined by Aimé Césaire. Together he and Léopold Sédar Senghor gave the term a two-fold meaning. Césaire emphasized it as denoting the recognition that one is black and the willingness to accept that. Senghor emphasized Negritude as an objective quality such as he assumed to be found in black culture. It was the essence of being African or black and involved "the sum total of the qualities possessed by all black men everywhere" (Vaillant 1990, 244).

Senghor went on to develop his theory of Negritude in a more elaborate way that identified the essence of the African as being qualitatively different from that of the European. He contended that the African is emotional and intuitive, seeing things in their wholeness and connectedness with the rest of the world. The European is logical and analytical, tending to divide and separate things from their place in the world (Vaillant 1990, 251-253). This interpretation of Negritude was disseminated by black writers, poets and intellectuals who developed it around two basic parameters, the mythical and the ideological.

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<sup>1</sup>Negritude with a capital "N" is used here to refer specifically to Senghor's essentialist notion of Negritude. The lower case negritude refers to the more general category as found in the discourse of the *movimento negro* in Brazil.

In terms of its mythical quality Negritude looked to an idealized past as a model for the future. Negritude also became an ideology of resistance and action against white oppression. Within these parameters, various perspectives arose. Negritude was seen as biological, encompassing all Africans. It was also viewed as psychological, involving specific behaviors and emotional capacities. Additionally, it was seen as cultural, focusing on the unifying aspects of the diverse African societies (Manunga 1988, 50-55).

Negritude came under sharp criticism by black intellectuals who saw it as harmful to the black cause. Those promoting Negritude were characterized as elites whose ideas were largely irrelevant to the masses of blacks struggling with white oppression. Some reacted against the essentialism of Senghor's version, claiming that it was just another capitulation to white dominance. The notion that blacks were not analytical in their thinking process appeared as an admission that blacks really are not able to function in the modern world of technology. These critics argued that history shows that Africans, like all peoples, have engaged in producing technology. Senghor's notion of the black race was dismissed as a myth (Manunga 1988, 71-73). Little evidence exists to suggest that Senghor's expression of Negritude finds widespread acceptance among contemporary black activists (Moura 1983, 100-105). However, as a category in the racial discourse of Brazil, the term negritude is still widely used.

Neto attributes the introduction of Negritude into Brazil to the influence of black intellectuals and European students who were influenced by the Negritude movement. According to Neto, the notion of Negritude as it arrived in Brazil from the outside demonstrated no understanding of the reality of black Brazilians. It remained confined to the black elite (Neto 1986, 104). However, more recently Brazilians have attempted to connect it to the situation of the masses. Manunga (1988, 60) attempts to rehabilitate the

notion of negritude as "the combination of the cultural features common to the hundreds of societies of sub-Saharan Africa." In addition, all Africans share the common effects of the experience of white oppression, whether through colonization or enslavement (Manunga 1988, 57). Each of these factors serve as points of solidarity.

Contemporary black Brazilians have invested the term negritude with meanings suitable to their own purposes in identity construction. The creation of solidarity is a recurrent theme and often the expression of negritude resonates more with Césaire than with Senghor. In the words of activist Marios Ivette Nunes Ennes,

Here negritude means to energetically assume an identity or to declare one's self as black, in this racial democracy, that marginalizes and exploits us.

Negritude is to demand the union of all blacks, organized in a conscientization and a knowledge of our values awakening in each one a sentiment of dignity which slavery denied us.

In order to overcome the pressure of white values that are introjected and imposed on us since the moment in which we open our eyes to the realities of the world, a greatly elevated self-esteem is yet necessary (Ennes 1991, 9).

Neto notes that the term expresses the discontent felt by blacks against the position imposed on them by whites as well as the protest against being considered an inferior race (Neto 1986, 102-3). In spite of the lack of contact with the struggles of everyday life among blacks, the notion of negritude at least represents an attempt to unite Africans around a common black identity encompassing the totality of African values (Neto 1986, 105).

Perhaps what is most important about negritude for the *movimento negro* in the Roman Catholic Church is not so much the content of the idea as originally developed or in its various mutations, but rather the function it serves as a category for self-signifying by blacks in the process of identity construction. We will see that negritude is a category

quite commonly expressed by those in the movement as they seek to define the meaning of being black in Brazil.

In sum, by the end of the 1970s the *movimento negro* was sufficiently developed in black Brazilian society to provide the elements of black consciousness necessary for the creation of a black movement within the Roman Catholic Church. The valorization of being black and the introduction of negritude as a category for expressing this valorization through a return to African cultural values developed in the first two phases of the *movimento negro*. The politicization of black activism that began in the second phase continued as the third phase of opposition and a generally leftist orientation came about in response to the repression of the right wing military regime. As we shall see this paralleled in some important respects what took place in the Brazilian Roman Catholic Church after Vatican II. As we look at these developments it should become clear that the emergence of something like APN was inevitable.

#### The *Abertura* in the Church

In the previous chapter we have seen that the Roman Catholic Church of Brazil attempted to suppress African religion. José Geraldo da Rocha, a movement activist in Rio de Janeiro, argues in his master's thesis that the forced conversion of black slaves to Roman Catholicism served purposes beyond the purported salvation of African souls. It was a deliberate means of thwarting black resistance by destroying black culture and identity (Rocha 1993, 8). Activists claim that white elites followed this course to preserve the unity of the Brazilian colony (Frisotti 1988, 17). The discussion of white suppression of slave religion given in the previous chapter supports such a notion.

The antagonism of the Roman Catholic Church towards African religions remained intact after abolition as did the complicity of the Church in the racial system

supported by white elites. This made the development of a movement such as APN highly unlikely if not impossible. In 1960 it would have been unthinkable to have bishops openly promoting the incorporation into public worship of an Afro-Brazilian Mass with a liturgy filled with symbols drawn from African religions. In this section I will discuss the changes in the theological and social climate of the Church that allowed for this to occur. I will argue that during the past 50 years, social, political, and religious changes have created an opening that has allowed the formerly hidden transcript of black resistance in the context of black religion to become not only tolerated, but even embraced as a legitimate part of the Brazilian Catholic Church's life by at least some of its more progressive leaders and members.

### The Progressive Church

During the years following Vatican II a significant portion of the Brazilian Roman Catholic Church was transformed from its traditional conservative position to a more liberal and socially critical stance. This movement, known as the progressive church, became a feature of Roman Catholicism throughout Latin America (Mainwaring and Wilde 1989). Brazilian theologians, such as Leonardo Boff, became some of the most prolific and influential of the liberation theologians in the progressive Church. Since the history of this new movement has been developed more fully elsewhere<sup>2</sup> only a brief sketch will be given here.

Scholars have differed in their interpretations of the factors giving rise to the progressive Church in Brazil. Hewitt (1991) outlines three important approaches in recent scholarship. Liberation theologians such as Gutiérrez (1981b), Dussel (1981),

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<sup>2</sup>Bruneau 1974, 1982; Adriance 1986; Mainwaring 1986; Mainwaring and Wilde 1989; Della Cava 1989; Hewitt 1991; Smith 1991.

Maduro (1982), and Boff (1981) portray the changes in the Church as being largely the result of grass-root activism, taking a modified Marxist interpretation (Hewitt 1991, 21-22).

Bruneau (1982, 1985) and Della Cava (1989) argue that the changes in the Roman Catholic Church were instituted by the elites in response to various social pressures that have challenged its influence and hegemony over the spiritual lives of Brazilians (Hewitt 1991, 19-20). This interpretation holds that change has come from the top down as a "highly controlled and regulated elite strategy" (Hewitt 1991, 24). An intermediate view, supported by Mainwaring (1986) and Adriance (1986), is that both factors have been important. Change in the Church was instituted by elites who did so in response to popular pressure as well as political and social pressure from other sources (Hewitt 1991, 23).

Hewitt favors the institutional position supported by Bruneau and Della Cava, arguing that the other positions lack empirical support (Hewitt 1991, 24). While it does seem apparent that the bishops, in the final analysis, do set the direction of the institutional Church, it is not clear that the Church will have the power to drastically curtail or modify the activity it has unleashed as Hewitt implies (Hewitt 1991, 108). If Scott (1986) is correct, then one would expect to find that the hidden transcript is always exerting pressure and waiting for the opportunity to find public space for expression. Once such space is granted it will not be given up easily.

Since the 1940s the hierarchy of the Brazilian Roman Catholic Church has shifted from its longstanding alliance with Brazilian elites in the direction of the well-known "preferential option for the poor" (Adriance 1986). This is not to say that the Church became dominated by the left. Conservative influences remained significant as well. It is to say, however, that a fundamental shift in the orientation of the hierarchy along with

parallel developments among clergy and laity created an attitude in the Church towards confronting the social problems of the poor masses through political activity. For the first time a large segment of the Brazilian Roman Catholic Church sided with the masses rather than the elites. The progressive Church developed a general sympathy with the left in opposition to the right-wing Brazilian state (Della Cava 1989).

### The Background of Catholic Social Doctrine

One aspect of the movement's attempt to legitimate itself to other Brazilian Catholics is the effort to show that it is within the flow of the history of the Roman Catholic Church's social doctrine (Neto 1986). While one must recognize the apologetic nature of this approach, it is appropriate to note that the turn of the Brazilian Roman Catholic Church towards a more activist stance in relation to social issues was not without precedence. Since the nineteenth century a series of papal pronouncements had been published indicating a concern for basic human rights that paved the way for the development of socially oriented movements such as that represented by liberation theology (Smith 1991, 84-86).

Hollenbach argues that the groundwork for modern Roman Catholic theories of human rights are based in Pope Leo XIII's (1878-1903) understanding of human dignity. Leo set the direction in his encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, which affirmed the principle that the state exists to serve human beings rather than humans existing to serve the needs of the state (Hollenbach 1979, 43-44). It was this encyclical which also first responded to the conditions of the working class in nineteenth century industrial capitalism, which he saw as being used in service of the greed of the wealthy (Hollenbach 1979, 47). Leo XIII affirmed the right of private property and rejected socialism. However, *Rerum Novarum* was notable in its attack on the abuses of liberal capitalism as Leo XIII argued for the

rights of workers to organize and to receive a just wage. In language that liberation theologians later echoed, Leo XIII argued that the poor have the right to expect special protection from governments (Smith 1991, 84-85).

The two predecessors of Pope John XXIII, Pius XI and Pius XII, continued to develop the notion of social justice based on the priority of human dignity in response to the economic domination of individuals. Pius XI responded to the challenges of the Great Depression, Russian Communism, and Nazi Fascism by arguing that human dignity dictates that social institutions be structured according to the demands of social justice (Hollenbach 1979, 55). In *Quadragesimo Anno*, issued in celebration of the fortieth anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*, Pius XI introduced the notion of sin as a structural reality and called for social-structural changes to address it. In addition, Pius XI opened the door to the acceptance of a moderate form of socialism among Roman Catholics as a possible model for change (Smith 1991, 85).

Pius XII made the theme of human dignity explicit during his pontificate, contending that it is the basis of order in society (Hollenbach 1979, 57). He affirmed the right of private property but stated that this right is secondary to the right of all members of society to benefit from an equitable distribution of wealth (Smith 1991, 85). In keeping with Pius XI he presented views of human rights that stood in condemnation of the abuses of both political totalitarianism and the economic domination of the poor (Hollenbach 1979, 56-61). That these were both epitomized in the social structure of Latin America could not be overlooked by the clergy in those predominantly Catholic nations.

When John XXIII ascended to the papacy in 1958 he decided that the challenges of modernity demanded that the Church reassess its role in society. He continued his

predecessors' development of the notion of human dignity as a part of the social context and in *Pacem in Terris* articulated what Hollenbach calls "the most complete and systematic list of ... human rights in the modern Catholic tradition (Hollenbach 1979, 66). He included rights that are important in both the tradition of liberal democracy and in socialism. While he drew heavily on his predecessors it is clear that by the time Vatican II convened the groundwork had been laid that would open the door to radical new developments in the Catholic Church.

#### Ecumenical Influences

Neto argues that the Vatican II council set the stage for the necessary developments in the Brazilian Roman Catholic Church that made the emergence of the *movimento negro* possible (Neto 1986). However, even as the popes were developing their notion of human rights in the years prior to Vatican II, there were other events whose influence would be felt later in the *movimento negro*. Neto goes as far back as the founding of the World Council of Churches in 1948 to find the beginnings of the ecumenical theology that would later inform liberation theology and would eventually be an important aspect of the theology of the *movimento negro*.

Neto argues that beginning with the formation of the World Council of Churches in 1948 and continuing through the Vatican II, Medellín, and Puebla councils, the crucial "*sitz in leben*" that would allow for the creation of a Black Pastoral in the Church developed. While the question of blacks was not initially addressed in these settings, they are seen as watershed events for creating an ecclesiological environment that would allow for the issue of the place of blacks in the Church and society to be entertained (Neto 1986, 66).

The protestant ecumenical movement that began among the mainline churches is credited by Neto with creating a theological climate of openness that eventually was carried over into Roman Catholicism. Other activists writing about the emerging *movimento negro* in the Roman Catholic Church also emphasize the importance of ecumenism as a critical element in the development of the *movimento negro* in the Church (Frisotti 1992; Rocha 1993, 70). With the ecumenical movement came a shift in theology away from the exclusivist attitude long held by the Church. All religions were now seen as having truth.

The theological changes that developed in Europe during the 1940s and 1950s became influential in Brazil during Vatican II (Smith 1991, 86). Also Brazilian theologians, such as Leonardo Boff, earned European doctorates and brought ecumenical theology to Brazil through their teaching and writing.

Neto discusses the importance of the World Council of Churches in terms of its development of concern for the domination of the third world by developed nations. He recounts the WWC's treatment of racial issues in its assemblies, beginning with the treatment of the Jews in Germany during the war and continuing with the development of a position of support for third world peoples and racial struggles such as in South Africa. The establishment of a program against racism by the WCC in 1970 led to a support for the position of including multiracial participation in the churches. The actions of the WCC are taken as fundamental in opening the doors for blacks to participate fully in the Church with their own expressions and memories without having to become "blacks with white souls" (Neto 1986, 92).

The concern for the poor and for inter-religious dialogue that came from the ecumenical movement are critical aspects of the *movimento negro* in the Roman Catholic

Church of Brazil. They were also necessary elements in the growth of the progressive Church as it shifted from a confrontational model of encounter with other religions to a model of dialogue.

#### CNBB and CELAM

The beginnings of the progressive elements of the Brazilian Roman Catholic Church may be specifically found in the period prior to Vatican II. These elements had begun moving in the direction of the reforms of Vatican II well before the council was convened (Bruneau 1982, Mainwaring and Wilde 1989). The founding of the *Conferência Nacional dos Bispos do Brasil* (National Conference of Brazilian Bishops - CNBB) in 1952 marked the beginning of the institutional groundwork that would allow for the emergence of the progressive church. CNBB greatly enhanced the effectiveness of the Brazilian Church's work in dealing with problems in a coordinated manner. Whereas each diocese in the Brazilian Church had previously reported directly to the Vatican, CNBB allowed the bishops to relate to one another in a more direct and officially organized capacity (Smith 1991, 81-82). CNBB provided an institutional setting in which the bishops of Brazil could meet and issue statements expressing their position on various issues as a body (Mainwaring and Wilde 1989, 11). Finding strength in numbers, the bishops made more radical pronouncements as a group than they would have done individually, thus helping to advance the Church in a more progressive direction (Smith 1991, 82-83).

The founding of CNBB was followed by the creation of Latin American Bishops' Conference (CELAM) in 1955. While CELAM was not very strong prior to Vatican II, it provided a pre-existing structure for the Bishops of Latin America to work out their response to Vatican II once its pronouncements were available. CELAM eventually

became the institutional organ that helped to legitimate liberation theology in spite of a conservative backlash in the 1970s (Smith 1991, 83).

The primary innovation of the Brazilian Roman Catholic Church during the pre-Vatican II period was a change in its view of how to influence society. "...elements in the church came to believe that society must be transformed before it could provide conditions in which people could feel fully human; at such a time, and only then, would religious influence make sense" (Bruneau 1982, 50). The church began to support the notion that social transformation in order to improve the situation of the poor was a legitimate area of Church influence. This was realized in the implementation of concrete social projects such as radio schools, literacy training, and unions. While there was significant opposition from conservatives (Bruneau 1982, 50) the new approach opened the doors for what was to come.

#### Vatican II

Scholars studying the progressive Church in Brazil are in agreement that the convening of the second Vatican Council in 1962 was critical for the massive reshaping of the Roman Catholic Church that has taken place in Latin America (Smith 1991, 94). In relation to the future appearance of the *movimento negro* among Brazilian Roman Catholics, the new attitude of the Church brought several significant changes that made it possible.

Vatican II's more open attitude towards the world (Abbott 1966, 238), and especially for non-Catholic faiths (Abbott 1966, 355-366, 660-668), created space that eventually allowed for the discussion of the contributions to be made to Catholic faith and worship by the African religious traditions. Also significant was Vatican II's recognition of the laity as the People of God (Abbott 1966, 24-37) and participants in the "priestly,

prophetic, and royal office of Christ" (Abbott 1966, 491). This opened the door for a much more active role for the laity that would become familiar in the Ecclesial Base Communities (CEBs).

In addition, the termination of the Latin Mass signaled a concern for the active participation of the laity in worship. The impact of the change in liturgy precipitated by Vatican II was to give popular religion an avenue for official expression in the life of the church. Beyond creating a liturgy more relevant to the lives of the poor, the door was opened to "liturgical inculturation" such that black identity could find expression not only on the margins, but within the liturgy of the church (Neto 1986, 84).

#### The Church and the Military Repression

The second Vatican Council legitimated the reforms occurring in Brazil just as Brazilian society, including the Roman Catholic Church in Brazil, was taking a much more conservative turn (Adriance 1986, 91). Since the second World War, concern over the influence of Communism had raised fears among conservatives in Brazil. The success of the revolution in Cuba exacerbated these fears both within and outside of the Church (Mainwaring 1986, 41, 45). A growing sense of economic and social instability and the inability of President Jânio Quadros to maintain a stable government reached crises proportions in 1961. Quadros resigned in frustration leaving the presidency to João Goulart, whose flirtations with the left were more than either the military or the Church could stand (Skidmore 1967). He was removed from power in 1964 and the military regime which would rule Brazil for the next two decades began.

At the outset of the military dictatorship the Church had taken a conservative turn and offered no opposition to military rule. The return of stability to Brazil created a sense of relief among many Brazilians (Adriance 1986, 94). The CNBB became focused on

internal matters rather than social issues after a group of conservatives were elected to leadership positions later in the same year (Mainwaring 1986, 83). Beyond this, progressive influence in the Church waned because many progressives were forced to flee Brazil due to the repression instituted by the new government (Smith 1991, 115).

Mainwaring and Wilde argue persuasively that both the reforms of Vatican II and the repression of the military regime were necessary conditions giving rise to the progressive church (1989, 14). The new military government quickly established a policy of interrogating, torturing, imprisoning, and at times murdering anyone perceived as a threat. The severe and arbitrary nature of the political repression of those who were suspected of oppositional or leftist leanings soon provoked Brazilian bishops to come to the defense of the persecuted (Smith 1991, 115-118; Mainwaring and Wilde 1988, 13-14). While this at times proved dangerous, the Church nevertheless emerged as the only consistent voice against repression that the government could not extinguish.

The theological opening created by Vatican II, with its concern for social justice, became a natural point of departure for the social response to the violence and repression that characterized the period of the late sixties. By the time that CELAM met at Medellín in 1968 the repression in Brazil and other Latin American nations had already assured that the results would reflect a more radical interpretation of Vatican II. The violence of the right wing regime in Brazil influenced the Church to move towards the left (Mainwaring and Wilde 1989). The emphasis on social justice and political involvement in the Medellín documents opened the door for the nascent theology of liberation that would soon emerge as the ideological center of the progressive church.

## Medellín

Neto's (1986) discussion of Medellín seeks to emphasize the role of the conference as a vehicle for putting in action in the Latin American context the decisions of Vatican II. This interpretation maximizes the continuity of Medellín, and the subsequent theology of liberation, with the mainstream of Church social doctrine. That is not to say, however, that such continuity is merely a creation of the movement, regardless of conservative protests to the contrary. The evolution of Catholic social doctrine up to Medellín provided a critical opening for the radical interpretation taken up by Latin American theologians. The context of military repression with its arbitrary and brutal rule helped determine that what was merely a possible direction of development in Latin American Roman Catholic theology, became the reality.

Neto follows Gustavo Gutiérrez in locating the originality of Medellín in its perspective of the poor (Neto 1986, 74; cf. Gutiérrez 1981a). He argues that this was derived from the Pope's challenge during Vatican II to consider the problem of poverty in the contemporary world. Medellín viewed the problem of poverty in Latin America from the perceived failure of the policies of development which seemed to have resulted in more dependency upon the developed nations rather than the hoped for prosperity and autonomy. Surrounded by vivid poverty, the bishops acted to give concrete expression to what they saw as the imperative of Vatican II. Neto sees a correspondence between the longings expressed by the Church at Medellín and the demands found in the movements for negritude. This created an opportunity for greater engagement between the Church and blacks (Neto 1986, 72-78).

In the wake of Medellín several developments are given as critical for the development of the *movimiento negro* in the Church. The beginning of structural changes

and the growing solidarity of the Church with the poor, particularly in its role of speaking out as the voice of the people against repression, made possible the expression of popular movements, including black movements. Among the pastoral initiatives that were significant Neto notes the CEBs, the development of liberation theology, liturgical renovation, the release of *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, and the II Conference of Latin American Bishops at Puebla (Neto 1986, 79).

### Ecclesial Base Communities

The political *abertura* of the 1970s that allowed for the re-emergence of the *movimento negro* also allowed the recently formed Ecclesial Base Communities (CEBs) to flourish and engage in political and social consciousness raising. The CEBs were formed in response to a critical shortage of clergy that was becoming apparent by the late 1950s, as well as the growing social consciousness of the progressives in the Church (Smith 1991, 106). Vatican II's call for more active lay involvement in the life of the Church provided further impetus and legitimation for the groups (Adriance 1986, 107). These communities, although usually founded by clergy or religious workers, were often lay led and normally consisted of groups of 10 to 30 (Adriance 1986, 107). Participation spanned all social classes in Brazil, although lower income working-class Brazilians constituted the majority (Hewitt 1991, 67). While the size and short term influence of these groups is generally overestimated in the literature (Hewitt 1991, 7-8), they served an important function of providing social space for the consciousness raising and the expression of dissent during the military repression (Mainwaring 1989, 172; Adriance 1986, 109). As such the CEBs were an important location of the hidden transcript that would break forth during the 1970s in the many popular movements that opposed the military government.

According to movement activists, the CEBs were crucial for the development of the *movimento negro* in the Church (Neto 1986, Rocha 1993). They contend that the identification of the Church with the poor that was pronounced by Church leaders became a practical reality in the CEBs. Accordingly, the CEBs became places where the demands of the gospel such as justice, brotherhood, love, and service could be lived in spite of the adverse circumstances of injustice and exploitation experienced by the poor (Neto 1986, 80). They formed the basic social structure from which the cry of the poor was, and still is, expressed (Rocha 1993, 21).

Activist José Geraldo da Rocha (1993) contends that the CEBs have been very important for the conscientization of *movimento negro* activists in the Roman Catholic Church. He argues that the CEBs have succeeded in involving large numbers of blacks at all levels of participation. He states that without the presence of blacks many CEBs would cease to exist (Rocha 1993, 30).<sup>3</sup>

Whether or not large numbers of blacks have been involved in CEBs, the interviews conducted for this study suggest that CEBs have been influential for blacks involved in the movement. As one subject expressed, "... I work in an ecclesial base community ... There we began to see the situation of the community has a lot to do with the black cause." Specifically, Rocha notes that CEBs have contributed to the rise of the *movimento negro* in the Roman Catholic Church in creating an awareness that they have

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<sup>3</sup>It is unfortunate that Hewitt's (1991) otherwise excellent empirical study of CEBs failed to collect data concerning the racial composition of the groups. Given the finding that CEB membership crosses all social and economic stratas in Brazil, it would be interesting to see if the racial demographics of CEBs actually support Rocha's assertions. The notion that blacks comprise a very significant portion of the CEBs seems to be intuitively plausible, but empirical support is required to clarify the relationship between blacks and CEBs.

basic rights of citizenship such as education and access to health care (Rocha 1993, 2). In each of these settings lay people were given leadership opportunities and were empowered to think and act in ways that would allow active participation in creating and facilitating social change. The theology of liberation was widely dispersed on the popular level through these groups. The groups, in turn, became the locus for the praxis that liberation theology demanded.

### Liberation Theology

Liberation theology developed the logic of the teachings of Medellín towards the left so as to support a radical social agenda. According to Neto's interpretation, at Medellín faith rediscovered "its experiential dimension in history and assumed aspects connected to socio-economic-political reality" (Neto 1986, 82). With its generally Marxian analysis of social class in Latin America, liberation theology called for revolutionary systemic change. During the 1970s and 1980s Brazilian theologians such as Leonardo and Clodovis Boff would make Brazil one of the leading sources of this new way of doing theology. Neto (1986), Rocha (1993), and Silva (1990) agree in their assessment that liberation theology is foundational for the *movimento negro* in the Roman Catholic Church of Brazil. Subjects interviewed also indicated that they were strongly influenced by liberation theology. My discussion of the movement's theology in chapter five will cover both the use of liberation theology by blacks and their criticism of it. For now, however, it is important to note that liberation theology has been a formative force in the development of the thought of movement activists.

### Conservative Backlash

Conservative reaction to the new social radicalism and the theology of liberation was strong. The Brazilian Church was not at all of one mind on the subject, even if it seemed that the progressive church was dominant. When the Vatican began to warn bishops against liberation theology in 1972, conservatives saw the opportunity to reassert themselves (Smith 1991, 186). When CELAM met at Sucre, Bolivia in that same year conservatives were able to elect a conservative bishop as secretary-general (Smith 1991, 188). He succeeded in placing others of like mind in key positions, essentially purging liberationists from the organization (Della Cava 1989, 153; Smith 1991, 188).

The conservative resurgence was not successful in turning back liberation theology during the 1970s. Even the election of the conservative John Paul II to the papacy and continued pressure from Rome was not effective. During the 1970s liberation theologians were able to organize their own institutions that enabled them to continue to teach and write (Smith 1991, 204-209). In any case, by this time liberation theology was too well rooted on the popular level (Smith 1991, 201-203). It was too late to stop it. *Movimento negro* activists trace the first beginnings of the awareness for the need to specifically address black issues in the context of the Roman Church to these years.

### Puebla

With the call for a second CELAM conference in Puebla, Mexico, the conservative bishops conceived a strategy to exclude the progressive element and reverse the inroads of liberation theology. The strategy was simple. It called for the exclusion of progressives from the meetings. Only a few progressive bishops were invited, giving the conservatives a decisive majority. Undeterred by this, many progressives resolved to attend Puebla anyway and do their work in local hotels. Their ability to respond to the conservative

agenda resulted in a final document that most observers have likened to a "draw" (Della Cava, 1989). Most importantly it did not repudiate the "option for the poor."

The interpretation given by Neto (1986) of Puebla is consistent with the way the document was used by liberation theologians. There is no trace of acknowledgement that Puebla was anything but an affirmation and continuation of the liberationist themes developed out of Medellín. Puebla has been celebrated in the *movimento negro* because of its explicit mention of Afro-Americans as being "the poorest of the poor" (Eagleson and Scharper 1979, 128 [Puebla paragraph 34]).

Neto points to five aspects of Puebla that express the openness of the Church to the poor and thus made the rise of the black pastoral possible. 1) the recognition of the cry for justice coming from the poor and marginalized. 2) The view of the Church as the people of God. 3) The primacy of evangelism as the mission of the Church. 4) The process of human liberation presented as full and encompassing all of life. 5) The deepening of the preferential option for the poor (Neto 1986, 86).

With the convening of the Puebla conference all of the elements were in place that would allow the *movimento negro* to be expressed within the Brazilian Roman Catholic Church. There was a progressive wing of the Church that allowed social space for the movement to exist. This social space was found in the CEBs and other Church organizations such as the pastoral for youth. In liberation theology the progressive Church had essentially created a new symbolic universe. While it was grounded on the Church's social teachings and retained important elements of traditional Roman Catholic faith and praxis, it contained a revolutionary concern for social issues and an ecumenical stance towards other faiths. This symbolic universe was now available to be built upon and expanded to include the construction of a new black identity. In Brazilian society the

grip of the military government had relaxed sufficiently so as to allow oppositional and radical social movements to organize and express themselves publicly. All that remained was a catalyst to bring the movement together. It was during the preparations for the Puebla conference that progressives first decided to study the question of Latin America's black population, thus providing the needed catalyst.

### Origins and Development

The *movimento negro* in the Roman Catholic Church of Brazil began to form in the late 1970s and early 1980s. In these early years the movement coalesced into specific organized groups that today form the core of the movement. Two of these groups have held a central place in the movement; *Agentes de Pastoral Negro* (Agentes of the Black Pastoral - APN) and *Grupo de União e Consciência Negra* (Black Union and Conscience Group - GRUCON). Other groups that have formed in order to meet the needs of more specialized constituencies will be noted in the following discussion. In this section a brief discussion of the history and organizational structure of the movement will be given. Key areas in its development will be presented in order to provide a framework for the discussion of data drawn from interviews and other sources in the following chapter.

The *movimento negro* in the Roman Catholic Church of Brazil traces its origins to the study groups that were convened in order to prepare for Puebla. One of the subjects interviewed recalled that the document that CNBB had prepared with its concerns to be raised at Puebla fell into the hands of a group of priests and lay people. They found the document to give an excellent description of the poor in Brazil, but to be lacking in the one point that the *movimento negro* would take up as its main criticism of liberation theology. The subject, a founding member of APN, related that "at no time did the document speak of the face, it did not make a reference to what is the face of these

poor."<sup>4</sup> From the vantage point of these black Roman Catholics who had come into possession of the document, it did not recognize the identity of the poor as black. The group questioned the CNBB leadership who agreed that they would consider the matter of the condition of blacks in the Church.

CNBB responded by organizing a group to study the question. The study group was also asked to discuss Afro-Brazilian religions and present its recommendations for consideration. The group, known as *Grupo Tarefa da Conferência Nacional dos Bispos Brasileiros* (Task Group of CNBB) came together on September 1, 1978 (Silva 1990, 189; Executiva Estadual GRUCON R.J. n.d.). It was made up of "some priests, religious workers, intellectuals, practitioners of *candomblé* and lay people" who met to "reflect on the question" (APN 1993, 3). After two days of study the group had arrived at the following conclusions.

1. What was important was not to see the black as an individual who practices a non-Catholic form of worship.
2. It was not now all that important to seek ways to bring blacks into the Church (Proselytism).
3. What was important was to see the global reality of the black Brazilian, as a social, political, economic, and religious group.
4. What was also important was to know the historical antecedents of the present reality of blacks. (Mendes n.d., APN 1993, 3).

The study group concluded that the face of the poor was "markedly indigenous and markedly black" (interview).

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<sup>4</sup>The use of the Portuguese *rosto* (face) is very common within the movement to express the notion of bringing abstract language about the poor into the concrete level of daily life. It is a response to the question of who these poor people are and what do they look like. The answer given by the *movimento negro* is that the face of the poor in Brazil is predominantly black. The underlying assumption is that one cannot adequately address the causes of their poverty without recognizing who they are.

With the introduction of race as a variable in the discourse of the Brazilian Roman Catholic Church we can begin to see the convergence of the various streams of influence that have defined the movement. The de-emphasizing of proselytism reflects the influence from the ecumenism that can be traced back to the World Council of Churches. The emphasis on the "global" reality of blacks and its historical antecedents echoes the concern of liberation theology for social analysis leading to praxis. What was new and different was the isolation of race as a significant variable in explaining the plight of the poor. In this regard, the influence of the secular *movimento negro* began to play an important role.

The experience of one of the subjects interviewed suggests that such influence was already having an impact in the Church by the mid 1970s. The subject relates how he found himself classified as a black by his fellow seminarians. His initial reaction was so strongly negative that he resolved to leave the seminary. However, he relates that a white superior at the seminary began to show him that he reacted this way because he had been victimized by the ideology of whitening. Persuaded by his superior to consider the question, the subject concluded that this was indeed the case and made the decision to assume his negritude. As a result of his conscientization he decided to dedicate himself to the struggle for justice for blacks.

At the September 1978 meeting the Task Group that had been appointed for Puebla decided to continue to study the situation of blacks in the church in a meeting of priests and religious to be held in December of the same year (*Encontro de Agentes de Pastoral Negros* 1980, 189). In this meeting the decision was made to pursue the study within the context of CNBB's pastoral project on Missionary Action. Thus, in what the

APN document calls an historic moment, the incipient movement received a degree of legitimation from CNBB (APN 1993, 3).

A subsequent meeting of the Task Group was held in December of 1979. At this meeting a decision was made to hold a conference open to the laity as well as the clergy. The following February approximately 25 people met together in what was described as a climate of sincerity and optimism (*Encontro de Agentes de Pastoral Negros* 1980, 189).

During the February 1980 conference key themes that would become central in the movement were articulated. The group began by attempting to ascertain the reality that blacks faced in the Brazilian Roman Catholic Church and society along with facts related to that reality. They affirmed that there is almost no space where blacks are able to feel like both blacks and Christians in the Church. They also noted that in contrast to the masses of Afro-Brazilians in Brazil, there are very few blacks in the hierarchy of the Brazilian Church. These inequalities were said to be institutionalized in the Church (*Encontro de Agentes de Pastoral Negros* 1980, 190).

It was also affirmed that there was an awakening of a critical conscience about the problem of blacks in the Church. Blacks were becoming interested in pursuing their historical roots and coming into a deeper knowledge of the culture of their ancestors. They discussed and supported the necessity of assuming a black identity and rejecting the whitening ideology. This was accompanied by "an ardent proposal to cooperate actively in the Church and society, in the transformation of this racist mentality, that separates us from our culture and makes us ashamed of our identity as blacks" (*Encontro de Agentes de Pastoral Negros* 1980, 190).

When it came time to make concrete proposals, the Task Group began by considering its interpretation of the social and historical context of blacks in Brazil. They

affirmed that the situation of blacks in the Brazilian Church and society was a result of four centuries of deliberate marginalization that encompassed all of Brazil's social institutions. Furthermore, they observed that the Catholic Church had provided no support or education for blacks and that it had only recently opened up the possibility that blacks could enter the Church's schools, seminaries, and religious orders. In spite of this new openness, discrimination still existed. As a result of this historical and social context, the blacks in Brazil remained undeveloped. They had little access to education, health care, work, and housing. Because of the whitening ideology they were also afraid to value their own culture. However, the Task Group recognized that the desire had arisen among blacks to unite and raise the consciousness of others and to plan actions, along with non-blacks, to build a just society that would show respect to the people and their culture (*Encontro de Agentes de Pastoral Negros* 1980, 191).

Finally, the meeting concluded with some concrete proposals that were given in order to provide for the continuation of the work. The first order of business was to establish other groups to continue the work that was begun. These consisted not only of a central group to coordinate activities, but also black study groups to be established in the various states. In addition, plans were made to contact other black cultural, political and religious groups that already existed. Beyond this, plans were made to make contact with Africans living in Brazil and to generally seek to know and make known black culture. The meeting concluded, once again, with plans for a future conference (*Encontro de Agentes de Pastoral Negros* 1980, 192).

## GRUCON

The next meeting of the Puebla Task Group was held in Brasilia from September 5-7, 1981. Sixty people from fourteen of Brazil's states participated representing regions from the south to the northeast. The participants represented at least thirty different black groups from across Brazil. While exact figures were not given concerning the makeup of all of these groups, the numbers that were reported indicated at least one with only three participants while others had numbers in the teens. Some groups were described as weak while others were more stable. None of the groups had existed earlier than 1980 with one having only been founded two months previously (*Encontro Nacional do "Grupo de União e Consciência Negra"* 1981, 194-201).

These organizations were mostly independent groups that had been founded by those concerned with studying the problems of blacks in Brazil. As small groups they operated on a local level. Some maintained contacts with other entities in the black movement while others reported links with Afro-Brazilian religions. Some were apolitical while others were politically active. In sum, a wide diversity of groups and activists had come together. They shared a common concern for developing a program that would help address the problems of blacks in the Brazilian Church and society.

The presence of these various groups indicates that by the early 1980s sufficient numbers of black Brazilians in the Roman Catholic Church were willing to begin moving against the tide of the dominant Brazilian racial ethos and begin the spontaneous formation of groups to discuss black issues. Interviews suggested that this activity may be connected to the prior activism of CEBs. When they began to meet to form black groups, the people already had the experience of CEBs as a model for *conscientização* and action. What they lacked was organizational unity and the official recognition of the Church.

Opposition was reported by some of the groups from the beginning. Activists in the groups felt threatened from both Church representatives and other blacks. There were reports that repression was instigated by many priests and nuns who felt threatened by the black groups. One group noted that it was denied the usage of meeting space in the Church on the grounds that its promotion of the black cause was divisive. Activists concluded that this opposition was due to the fact that within the black community many were unwilling to accept themselves as blacks and felt it necessary to oppose the groups (*Encontro Nacional do "Grupo de União e Consciência Negra"* 1981, 194-201). The divisions among Afro-Brazilians required a larger response than what activists had previously been able to sustain. By the time the 1981 conference met there was a widely felt need for support and unity on a national level. At this meeting the group decided to formally establish an organization that would operate on a permanent basis (*Encontro Nacional do "Grupo de União e Consciência Negra"* 1981, 194).

Up to this time the participants in the Task Group had referred to themselves provisionally as *Agentes de Pastoral Negro*, even though there was no such pastoral established in the Roman Catholic Church of Brazil on a formal level. However, after discussion, the group voted to adopt the name *Grupo de União e Consciência Negra* as its official title. Even with its initial relationship to CNBB, it was not officially linked to the Church (*Encontro Nacional do "Grupo de União e Consciência Negra"* 1981, 202).

Guiding principles for GRUCON were set forth that included as the main objective "the union of blacks and their conscientization" (*Encontro Nacional do "Grupo de União e Consciência Negra"* 1981, 205). Other principles established that the various base groups would be formed only on the basis of dealing with racial issues without a specific creed or

political ideology. GRUCON would seek to maintain contact with Afro-Brazilian groups and work against the tendency for these groups to be treated as a form of popular folklore. GRUCON also expressed a concern to link with other popular movement groups, CEBs, and unions. Groups linked directly to the Church were encouraged to continue along those lines, but to also broaden their contacts to other groups (*Encontro Nacional do "Grupo de União e Consciência Negra"* 1981, 206).

GRUCON made plans for activities related to the task of the construction of a black identity in the Brazilian context. The recovery of the history of black oppression and resistance along with the tenets of the whitening ideology were key topics put forward for study in the groups. Plans were made for the publication of booklets and a newsletter that would address these concerns and be useful for study in base groups (*Encontro Nacional do "Grupo de União e Consciência Negra"* 1981, 204).

Plans were also made for the support of introducing an Afro-Brazilian liturgy into the Church with the use of African music, dance and instruments. Specific plans were made to celebrate November 20, the anniversary of the death of Zumbi, king of the Palmares *quilombo*, at the hands of the Portuguese. A work group was created to develop an appropriate liturgy for such a celebration (*Encontro Nacional do "Grupo de União e Consciência Negra"* 1981, 205).

GRUCON also committed its member groups to the study and pursuit of solutions for contemporary problems such as violence against blacks, the teaching of black children to value their identity, and instruction of blacks on how to be politically active. Beyond this it was resolved that the group would be independent of the Church. It would seek to

clarify and continue its relationship to CNBB at a subsequent meeting (*Encontro Nacional do "Grupo de União e Consciência Negra"* 1981, 204 -209).

The meeting was considered a success by those who were there. However, one of the concerns expressed reveals something of the background of the participants. The language of the conference was noted as being very intellectual and elevated. It was not the everyday language of the people (*Encontro Nacional do "Grupo de União e Consciência Negra"* 1981, 212). This fact, no doubt, reflects something that I found repeatedly during my field research. Namely, positions of leadership in the movement are occupied by blacks with advanced education. That there were complaints about this use of language as a problem shows the concern of movement activists for communicating their message on a popular level. Nevertheless, if we accept the data that shows that only 1.6% of the black population and 2.8% of the mulatto population achieved twelve or more years of education (Silva and Hasenbalg 1992, 82), the movement appears to have been initially the product of the black elite.

In November of 1982 GRUCON met with the Task Group and representatives of CNBB's Pastoral for Missions to discuss their relationship. GRUCON continued on a course that would emphasize its independence. When the Church representatives suggested that GRUCON carry on its work from the angle of culture rather than race, which would be divisive, there was a strong negative reaction. To do so would reduce black culture to the level of folklore, rendering it easily dismissed by whites. GRUCON called for the Church to respect and support its goals and to allow for it to continue to have representation on the Task Group while maintaining independence, so that it could work in areas beyond the Church. This seemed agreeable to all (*Relatório da Reunião Conjunta do Grupo de União Consciência Negra, Grupo Tarefa Afro-Brasileiro e Linha II da*

*CNBB* 1982, 213-218). Developments during the next years led GRUCON farther from the original purpose of the Task Group of working within the sphere of the relations between blacks and the Church. Beset by financial difficulties and disagreements between different group leaders, GRUCON split in 1985 (Silva 1990, 78-86). A dispute ensued over who should use the name GRUCON after each group incorporated, one in Brasilia and one in São Paulo using the same name. As of January 1995 both groups remained in existence. According to Frei David Raimundo Santos, a national leader in APN, GRUCON is still struggling to overcome its problems (*Articulação Nacional dos Padres e Bispos Negros - Brasil*, n.d., 3; personal letter from Frei David, Jan. 5, 1995).

Interviews and attendance at a group meeting revealed that GRUCON currently does not have any official relationship with the Church. This is due to a deliberate decision to act primarily in the sphere of political and social issues rather than in attempting to change the Church. Nevertheless, close relations are maintained with the Roman Catholic Church as there is some overlap of membership in GRUCON and APN. However, GRUCON activists make it clear that they see their role and objectives as distinct from specifically Church related groups.

Activists described GRUCON as being weak due to financial difficulties, even though it is active in eleven states with various groups, called nuclei, in each state. Since the mid-1980s GRUCON has shifted away from its once preeminent position in the movement. As this shift was happening another organization, *Agentes de Pastoral Negro*, arose to fill the need for an activist group with a more direct connection to the Church.

## APN

## Origins and Early Growth

During the first year of its existence GRUCON experienced disagreements among those who had been involved in the Puebla Task Force. Some of the members felt that GRUCON had strayed too far from the original agenda that had been given to the Task Group at Puebla by beginning to embrace a more secular agenda. In addition, many groups had not been able to participate in the early meetings of GRUCON. By 1983 those who were not satisfied with GRUCON decided to form a new organization that would take up the priorities and proposals set forth by the Task Group in its work for Puebla (APN 1993, 4). This group became *Agentes de Pastoral Negro* (Agentes of the Black Pastoral - APN).

Various small groups consisting of priests from São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro along with religious and laity from various states began to meet in order to make plans for a national assembly. Marcos Silva has summarized the objectives of the meetings of the national assembly in two key points:

1. To be a space created by priests, religious, pastors of other confessions, seminarians and lay blacks, to reflect on their organization as such.
2. To have the character to sensitize all of the pastoral of the church, concerning the practice, many times discriminatory, which the black community suffers. (Marcos Silva 1987, 83).

The first national meeting of APN was held in March of 1983 in São Paulo. APN began with a theme that would establish its primary concerns as dealing with the problems of blacks in the context of religion. The theme of the first meeting was "The reality lived by blacks and their participation in the Churches of Brazil" (Marcos Silva 1987, 84).

It is important to note that "churches" was given in the plural in this first meeting. The "profoundly ecumenical" character of APN is noted by Silva as its distinguishing contribution to a "renewed Pastoral" in the Church (Marcos Silva, 1987). The meaning of this becomes clear as the notion of accepting and valuing blacks is closely linked by APN to the acceptance of the validity of black expressions of faith such as found in the African religious traditions.

The first meeting was attended by seventy persons and consisted of two sections. The first section focused on discussing the situation of blacks in the Church, while the second discussed the theme of "Church, power, and negritude" (Marcos Silva 1990, 91). In the first discussion, Father Antonio Aparacedo da Silva (Padre Toninho) touched on a variety of points that were to become the staples of APNs' case against the Brazilian racial ethos of racial democracy and whitening, and the Roman Catholic Church's complicity in supporting it. Among the points discussed were the historical context of the Church's relation to blacks, the question of the Church's support of the whitening doctrine within its own ranks, and religious and anthropological ideologies that attempt to make blacks inferior to whites. Themes from liberation theology were introduced with a critique of the colonial and capitalist roots of black oppression. Discrimination faced by blacks in the Church itself was also addressed with specific attention given to the lack of blacks in leadership.

Padre Toninho also responded to a criticism leveled against the movement that has since become a standard of movement opponents. Movement critics charge that the movement's speaking of the history of the Church's relations with blacks is divisive and based on a desire for revenge. Padre Toninho countered that in reality speaking out

about the oppression of blacks serves to help the Church to become better able to assume its proper task of liberating the people (Marcos Silva 1987, 84).

In the second section, Padre Mauro Batista used the biblical Exodus story as an analogy for blacks, encouraging them to become aware of their Egypt and begin their exodus in order to celebrate the passover. In this analogy the Egypt of blacks refers to the assertion that blacks in Brazil still live in slavery. Padre Batista asserted that this slavery exists concretely on four levels. Firstly, blacks *have not* (*não ter*), meaning that they are economically marginalized. Secondly they *can not* (*não poder*) in that they are politically marginalized. Thirdly, blacks *know not* (*não saber*) because they are culturally and educationally marginalized. Finally, blacks *are not* (*não ser*) because they have no history. Recognizing that no one else will liberate blacks, Padre Batista called on the Church to show solidarity with blacks in order that they might liberate themselves. This would be done by challenging and changing the hierarchical society of Brazil. While it would be very difficult, it should not be impossible, he concluded (Marcos Silva 1987, 85).

APN decided to carry on its work following the methods of the CEBs that had been so effective. APN would concentrate on forming base groups for the conscientization of blacks and for action. In practice these groups would not develop into full fledged base communities, but rather they would function along with the CEBs as more specialized groups. Their actions were to include denouncing discrimination and raising the awareness of whites as to the racism in Brazil. The groups were also given the task of educating blacks, especially children, to assume their negritude. The assembly concluded with the decision to hold other assemblies twice yearly in order to carry the work forward (Marcos Silva 1987, 86).

The second assembly was held in September of 1983 and was marked by the presence of Cardinal Archbishop of São Paulo, D. Paulo Evaristo Arns. The archbishop proclaimed his solidarity with the cause of the blacks and encouraged them to form groups across Brazil in order to pursue their liberation. This show of support gave the group badly needed legitimation and was noted as a high point of the meetings (Marcos Silva 1987, 89).

The second conference convened with over 100 persons in attendance. The controversial subject of African religion, specifically the Afro-Brazilian *candomblé* was a major issue for discussion. The conference affirmed that in order to proceed with the black cause of creating a truly democratic community in the Church, it would be necessary to blacken the Church. This could be accomplished, in part, by replacing the white European liturgy with a liturgy built on elements of black religion and culture. In order to succeed in this, it would be indispensable to return to the religious roots of Africa.

As the discussion began, the initial question put forward was whether or not a black person could even be a Christian, perhaps because some wonder if negritude would mean converting to *candomblé*. While this final notion was rejected, the group decided to encourage dialogue with the Afro-Brazilian religions and recognized them as valid expressions of faith. APN took a position against any kind of discrimination against Afro-Brazilian religions. The group also decided to promote the use of an Afro-Brazilian liturgy in Catholic Mass (Marcos Silva 1987, 90).

In considering how new groups might be started, APN again emphasized that the work was to be carried out on the "base" level. By this the group meant that it was intended that the movement be a grass roots movement working on the popular level.

Charges of elitism against the movement seem to have been already present since the discussion turned to defending the APNs from the claim they were imposing their ideas on the people. Such a notion seemed absurd from the viewpoint of the APNs since they assumed that all blacks have the desire to escape the consequences of the racist system. That they do not seek alternatives was attributed to the fact that the initiative to do so is suffocated by the ideology of racial democracy (Marcos Silva 1987, 89). Therefore organizing base groups was seen as part of the liberating activity of APNs.

During the first year of its existence APN formulated the major problems it would attack in its reaction to the Brazilian racial ethos. It also began to formulate approaches to creating a black identity through the recovery of Afro-Brazilian history and religious symbolism. APN began with the recognition that only a small number of Brazilians identify themselves as black and that the process of conscientization used so successfully in the CEBs would have to be extended to the issue of race.

Subsequent national meetings continued to treat and elaborate the themes that were set forth in the first year. The third national assembly held the first Eucharist based on an African liturgy. It also focused on the problem of the socialization of black children into the racial democracy and whitening ideologies in Brazilian schools (Marcos Silva 1990, 96-97).

The fourth assembly discussed problems related to black youth and also black women (Marcos Silva 1987, 92). During this meeting the group also approved the creation of a *Curso de Formação* (formation course), open only to those who had been in previous conferences, in order to develop some of the themes of the meetings in more detail. In keeping with this goal the course dealt with social, political, economic, and cultural issues related to religion. This involved the question of the role of religion in

maintenance of domination versus religion as a form of resistance. Other issues included further treatment of Afro-Brazilian religion and negritude as well as Afro-Brazilian liturgy (Marcos Silva 1987, 92-93).

#### The Brotherhood Campaign of 1988

By the time of the fifth and sixth national assemblies of APN in 1985, the meetings had experienced steady growth. With 300 people attending the sixth meeting, the group was beginning to view itself as being national in its scope (Marcos Silva 1990, 101; APN 1993, 5). APN reports that during this period interest and support from the Church hierarchy grew, as base nucleus groups grew among the common people (APN 1993, 5).

In 1986 discussions began within the movement concerning the upcoming celebration of the centennial of the abolition of slavery in Brazil that would be realized in 1988 (Damasceno 1990a). Rocha notes that because of the consciousness they had achieved in the previous years, black groups could not conceive of celebrating 1988 as if slaves had really been set free (Rocha 1993, 37). They viewed the abolition as a false abolition that had left blacks marginalized and impoverished. It was their intent to use the centennial celebration as an opportunity to tell their side of the black story to the rest of Brazil. Hence, the movement took advantage of the centennial of the abolition of slavery to bring the racial question to the attention of the entire Roman Catholic Church in Brazil .

The Brazilian government planned a year long commemoration of the abolition of Brazilian slavery with special events for the anniversary of the freeing of the slaves on May 13th and on the birthday of Zumbi on November 20th. From the government's view, May 13th was the most important of these days, in contrast to the emphasis placed upon November 20th by black activists (Hanchard 1994, 1945). This difference was symbolic

of the different understanding of the meaning of 1888 between black activists and most other Brazilians. Activists from various Brazilian black movements, both secular and religious, viewed the commemoration as an opportunity for protest and confrontation.

The commemoration was noteworthy in that for the first time, public challenges to the racial democracy and whitening theories were widely promoted in the Brazilian national media. The government's planning of the public events and ceremonies of the commemoration were still largely informed by the notion of racial democracy, even though a more critical attitude emerged. Hanchard notes that this critical attitude was focused mostly on the plight of blacks in Brazil's past at the expense of an examination of the present. Nevertheless, the contradictions inherent in Brazilian racial polity emerged for all to see (Hanchard 1994, 142-154). This also occurred within the context of the Roman Catholic Church.

The avenue for protesting the commemoration that was selected by movement activists was the yearly *Campanha da Fraternidade* (CF - Brotherhood Campaign) that had been carried out in the Brazilian Roman Catholic Church since 1984. In keeping with the emphasis on social justice outlines in papal pronouncements as well as at Vatican II and later at Medellín, a yearly study was conducted on a theme related to a selected social issue (Damasceno 1990, 44-45). These studies are carried out in parishes and CEBs all across Brazil. Movement activists decided that CF-88 would be an appropriate venue for widespread conscientization. They proceeded with plans and efforts to convince the Church to take up this subject (Rocha 1993, 37).

Persuading the Church leadership to focus CF-88 on the situation of blacks in Brazil was much simpler than working out the details of how the campaign would be carried out. While the theme "Brotherhood and the Black" was agreed upon, controversy

arose immediately in the discussion of what the official slogan of the campaign would be. CNBB proposed the title of "Many Races, One People" (Damasceno 1990, 86). Meanwhile, APN activists had selected the theme of "Black, a Cry for Justice" which was promptly rejected by CNBB (Rocha 1993, 39). The controversy continued as various alternatives were offered, but CNBB would not agree to include the word "*negro*" as a part of the slogan. Activists proposed the title of "I Heard the cry of this *black* people!" CNBB accepted this with the provision that "*negro*" be dropped. Thus the title of the official text for the campaign as published by CNBB was "*Ouvi o Clamor deste Povo*" (I Heard the Cry of this People, CNBB 1988). Rather than accept this, the Commission of Black Religious, Seminarians, and Fathers of Rio de Janeiro countered by publishing its own text with the full title "*Ouvi o Clamor deste Povo...Negro!*" Meanwhile the conservatives in the Church hierarchy could tolerate neither the radicalism represented by the *movimento negro* nor the progressives in CNBB. They published their own text in the archdiocese of Rio de Janeiro entitled "Various Races, One People" (Rocha 1993, 41). The CF-88 thus became the first brotherhood campaign to provoke divisions in the Church. This should not be surprising, however. It was, after all, a reflection of what was happening in Brazilian society at large over the celebration of the centennial.

The conservative text continued to promote the views of the white elite as it fostered the themes of racial democracy and whitening, while down playing the brutality of Brazilian slavery. However, APNs in Rio de Janeiro found that it was not without utility. They studied the text as an example of how not to approach the subject of race relations in Brazil (Rocha 1993, 41).

In spite of the reluctance to specifically reference blacks in the title, the text produced by CNBB succeeded in addressing the concerns that were typically expressed by

movement activists. Both the whitening and racial democracy theories were challenged with documentation of the systematic discrimination against blacks in Brazilian society. Areas such as work, education, and the media were addressed, along with a discussion of the suffering of blacks under Brazilian slavery. Included was an acknowledgement of the Church's sin in supporting slavery, but also noted were instances in which the Church spoke out in defense of blacks (CNBB 1988, 30-31). The text continued by applying the story of the biblical Exodus to the situation of black Brazilians and thus providing a link to liberation theology (CNBB 1988, 35-40). Liberationist themes continued in the treatment of New Testament accounts of Jesus and the apostolic church (CNBB 1988, 41-48).

The third text was the text of choice among APNs. It began by retelling the history of blacks in Brazil, showing the priority the movement placed upon establishing a positive reference for self-worth among black Brazilians. This was followed by a presentation of the reality of racial discrimination and then with a direct assault upon the whitening and racial democracy ideologies. The *movimento negro* was then introduced as a conclusion to the study. The goal of conscientization of blacks and the creation of a sense of black identity is evident throughout the text (*Comissão dos Religiosos, Seminaristas, e Padres Negros Rio de Janeiro* 1988).

Beyond simply organizing study groups, APN and other *movimento negro* groups planned a series of social protests to be carried out in the course of the celebrations surrounding abolition. The group, *Movimento Negro do Rio de Janeiro*, staged the *Marcha Contra a Farsa da Abolição "1888-1988 Nada Mudou, Vamos Mudar"* (March Against the Farce of Abolition, "1888-1988 Nothing Changed, We Are Going to Change") on May 11, two days before the centennial of abolition (Herninger, et. al. 1989, 54). This created conflict with the government when it was rumored that the intention of the movement

was to show disrespect to the monument and statue of the *Duque de Caixas*, considered a traditional Brazilian hero, but a persecutor of blacks by the *movimento negro*. The military responded by allowing the march to go on with severe restrictions. For its part, APN staged a protest for May 13th in which numerous groups across Brazil participated in a ceremonial burning of Brazilian history books at eight in the evening. The simultaneous events were conceived as symbolic burnings of the official Brazilian historiography of blacks in Brazil.

Subjects interviewed for this study reported that CF-88 produced a great deal of interest in the movement. Attendance at group meetings increased as it became somewhat stylish to be involved. Burdick (1993) who was doing field work in Brazil during 1988, reports that the reception of CF-88 was mixed. Many did not understand it and stayed away from it deliberately (Burdick 1993, 156-160). Whatever the reception at the time, activists did admit that many of those involved in the movement in 1988 had since dropped out. However, CF-88 did serve to create space for the discussion of Brazil's racial issues in the Church that had not existed previously. It gave the movement a higher degree of visibility and legitimacy than it had achieved up to that time.

#### Summary: The First Ten years

Since the mid-1980s the national assemblies of APN have included themes and issues that are common to many of the groups that make up the popular or grass roots movements in Brazil. Issues such as the problem of land reform, political participation of the poor, gender issues, and economic issues have all been discussed as APN has sought to address the problems of blacks in Brazil. As the movement has grown there has been a serious attempt to grapple with the complexity of Brazilian social problems through education, reflection, and social action.

In 1993 APN was celebrating its tenth year of existence. In looking back over those years various accomplishments and limitations have been noted by the group. The growth of numerous groups carrying on theological reflection from the black perspective, the organization of women's groups, work in both public and private schools, involvement in popular celebrations of religious brotherhoods, and even the mere fact of survival for ten years in the face of conservative opposition are listed as "advances and conquests" of the movement (APN 1993, 14-15). Among the limitations encountered are those related to the lack of resources, both in terms of finances and time commitments, that militants are able to give to the movement. The other major difficulty has been the inability to resolve key internal conflicts within the APN that have at times led to division (APN 1990, 15).

In interviews with group activists I discovered two key differences that have arisen within the organization during its first ten years that have created serious difficulties. The disagreements essentially are over what the relationship of APN should be to the Roman Catholic Church. One side in the dispute supports the idea of APN as an official pastoral. This would be a formal relationship in which APN would essentially be a branch of official Church activity. The other side views this type of an arrangement as a threat to the autonomy of the movement. Those taking this view desire APN to operate more independently and with more freedom. They argue that as an official Pastoral of the Church, APN would be under the direct control of the bishops. In addition to suffering from the inconveniences of control by bureaucracy there is the fear that conservative bishops would be able to effectively eliminate the impact of any APN nucleus groups under their authority. So far, those opposing any kind of official union with the Church have prevailed. However, in some locations, good relations with a local bishop have

created a much closer link with the official Church structure, as in Belo Horizonte, where APN enjoys office space in the office of the archdiocese. The present relation of APN with the Church seems to be stable and is unlikely to change.

A second dispute has arisen over the development of an Afro-Brazilian liturgy. While APN has largely pursued this course, some in the *movimento negro* view the usage of symbols from African religions in Catholic Mass as a trivialization of African religions. The disagreement on this issue has caused a serious division between some of the movement's leaders. In chapter four this disagreement will be elaborated as we discuss interview data from activists on both sides of the discussion. It appears at the present that those in favor of the Afro-Brazilian liturgy are winning popular support.

#### APN Organization and Structure

The name Agents of the Black Pastoral can be taken as a collective term, referring to the group and it is often used in this manner. However, its most fundamental meaning for members is as referent to each individual in the movement. That is, each individual activist is considered an agent of the black pastoral and is called an APN. Hence, there is a concern for both community as well as the value of the individual in the context of the movement.

In explaining the identity of APN the document *Agentes de Pastoral Negros: Origem, história e organização* chooses the individual as the starting point.<sup>5</sup> An agent is identified as a person who is engaged in the struggle with the black community, working in base groups for social transformation. Group activists commonly referred to themselves as APNs. This is quite significant in the context of a group that has as one of

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<sup>5</sup>An excerpt from the document is given in appendix 2.

its primary goals the empowerment of individuals to assume a positive racial identity and to believe that they can achieve their goals. We shall see how, in this respect, the group provides a plausibility structure that helps to create and sustain this identity.

The collective use of the name APN is clearly secondary. The base groups are not usually referred to as a collective as such. Instead they are presented as the place where agents meet in order to assume their identity as blacks. The document also pictures the base groups as the source of the proposals to be discussed at the state and national meetings. APN thus presents itself as a movement that functions from the bottom up. This identification with the poor appears to be an important part of its self-legitimation.

APN is organized into four regional divisions. Each region is called a *quilombo*, after the communities of escaped slaves established during the colonial period. The north/northeast *quilombo* includes the states of Acre, Amazonas, Maranhão, Bahia, Pernambuco, and Ceará. The central-west includes the Federal District with the capital city, Brasilia, along with the states of Goiás, Mato Grosso, and Mato Grosso do Sul. The south *quilombo* has three states, Paraná, Santa Catarina, and Rio Grande do Sul, while the most influential region, the southeast, contains the states of Minas Gerais, Espírito Santo, Rio de Janeiro, and São Paulo. There are regional differences in organization that are often dependent upon the quality of the relationship of the base and regional groups with local priests and bishops. Some are organized according to diocese while others are organized by cities, neighborhoods, or other geographic zones (APN 1993, 8).

Each base group is related to a Regional Commission. The regional commission of Rio de Janeiro, for example is related to three base groups. The Regional Commissions are linked directly to a State Commission that holds regular conferences for the state APNs. The State Commission is responsible to carry out the directives of the state

conferences and also to send proposals to the National Commission. The National Commission is made up of five representatives, one from each of the four regions except the southeast which has two. It meets every two months and is responsible for putting in practice the directives of the National Assembly. An Executive Commission of three members exists along side the national committee in order to facilitate this process and to deal with minor questions. Finally, the National Assembly meets yearly in São Paulo to entertain proposals and set the direction of APN.

Day to day administrative responsibilities are carried out in the *Quilombo Central* located in São Paulo. The office sits in the far back room of the second floor of an older building on a side street near the *Catedral da Sé* in the center of the city. Its appearance is neat, yet the setting reflects the lack of financial resources that has always been a problem for APN. It is staffed by a full time secretary as well as full time volunteers.

Besides carrying on routine administrative tasks, the *Quilombo Central* functions as a hub linking together various other entities in the *movimento negro* in the Roman Catholic Church in Brazil. These other organizations exist to serve specific constituencies within the movement, allowing them to address their own unique concerns to which the National Assembly is unable to devote adequate attention. Among these are *Comissão de Religiosos, Seminaristas e Padres Negros* (Commission of Black Religious, Seminarians and Fathers), *Articulação Nacional dos Padres e Bispos Negros* (National Articulation of Black Fathers and Bishops), *Comissão de Mulheres Negras APNs* (Commission of Black Women APNs), *Curso de Teologia Negra* (Course in Black Theology), *Comissão de Advogados Negros* (Commission of Black Lawyers) and *Formandos e Formandas Negras* (black students nearing the end of their university studies). In addition, independent organizations such

as *Instituto de Estudos da Religião* (ISER - Institute for the Study of Religion) relate to APN through the office in São Paulo.

The various sub-organizations related to APN each have their own assemblies that meet following the pattern of APN. National conferences and assemblies are held for bishops, students, and the other specific groups, such that a variety of contexts exist for the development of the objectives and programs of APN. In the discussion of the field data in the next chapter specific programs and activities of APN will be considered.

### Conclusion

The nature of the various APN sub-groups provides some insight into the social make-up of the *movimento negro* in the Roman Catholic Church. Almost all of them presuppose that the participants are involved in or have completed some form of higher education such as university or seminary studies. We saw previously that less than 3% of mulattoes and 2% of blacks ever attain to such levels of education, indicating that APN may be composed to a large extent of a black elite. The majority of subjects interviewed for this study had access to higher education, though they generally did not come from elite backgrounds. Precise demographic detail of APN was unavailable for this study, but preliminary indications are that the *movimento negro* is similar to the rest of the progressive Church in that it is largely a movement initiated by those with extraordinary resources in comparison to the people the movement claims to represent. This does not necessarily imply that the movement is being imposed from the top down on those with no concern for racial issues in Brazil. When movement activists identify themselves with the poor they are often reflecting on their own past experience or that of their families. Beyond that, racial discrimination is a constant reality in Brazil for middle and upper class blacks as it is for poor blacks. There is nothing disingenuous about the claims made by

activists and movement leaders concerning their personal suffering under the Brazilian racial ethos. However, it is important to note that social class does have a bearing on who is able to mobilize for social activism in the Brazilian context.

In the *movimento negro* as it currently exists in the Roman Catholic Church of Brazil, APN is the foremost organization. GRUCON has continued to move from its original orientation to the point that currently, according to activists interviewed, it operates almost wholly within the field of political and social issues with little consideration for working within the context of the Church. GRUCON generally maintains positive relations with the Church and with APN but it has left the religious field to others. For that reason, a study of the *movimento negro* in the Roman Catholic Church must focus primarily on APN. In the next chapter an examination of data from the field will provide the materials for understanding how activists in APN and its related groups attempt to construct a black identity in response to the Brazilian racial ethos.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE DAILY STRUGGLE: PERSPECTIVES FROM WITHIN THE *MOVIMENTO*

The *movimento negro* in the Roman Catholic Church in Brazil is made up of individuals as well as the various groups whose history and context was outlined in the previous chapters. These individuals are men and women who, as priests, religious, and lay people, are actively engaged in the day to day struggle for the achievement of the movement's goals. These goals are not just institutional however. From the perspective of movement activists, they concern the daily task of these individuals trying to create a better life for themselves and their children. Through the experience of such individuals we may gain insight into the life of the movement.

In this chapter we will enter into the world of the movement through interviews with movement activists and written materials, also produced by various movement activists.<sup>1</sup> Observations from meetings and religious ceremonies attended and viewed on video will be added. The presentation will focus on various themes that became prominent in the analysis of the interviews and movement documents. While I shall not be discussing individual interviews in detail, I will draw on specific ones when it is necessary. This will provide illustrations of the issues discussed as well as point out divergence from over all themes. It is important to keep in mind that what is being

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<sup>1</sup>In the following sections the statements made about the movement were based on the interview data unless there is a specific reference to a written text, document or other source.

reported in this section is not intended to give an objective description of the racial situation in Brazil. Rather, it is intended to reveal how activists in the *movimento negro* in Brazil's Roman Catholic Church perceive and understand that racial situation and how they proceed to respond to it.

### Movement Demographics

A tension exists in the *movimento negro*, as in many of Brazil's popular movements, over the question of who is actually represented in the movement and who it purports to represent. We noted in the previous chapter that many of the various subgroups in the *movimento negro* in the Roman Catholic Church in Brazil cater to the more educated among Brazilian blacks. However, given the movement's stated commitment to working at the "base" or popular level, it is legitimate to begin our discussion of the data from interviews and the group's printed materials by at least raising the question as to who is actually involved. Unfortunately, a scientific sample of the group's active participants is not yet available. In spite of the limitations imposed by this lack of information, it is possible to make some comments on the movement's membership based on interviews, observation, and other material provided by the movement.

The geographic distribution of the 25 subjects interviewed was 2 in São Paulo, 4 in Rio de Janeiro, 7 in São João de Meriti, 6 in Belo Horizonte, 3 in Itaúna, and 3 in Salvador da Bahia. Ages of those interviewed ranged from 18 to 56. Based on observations at base group meetings there is a much more prominent presence of younger members than older ones with an estimated age being in the mid to late twenties. Younger participants were not uncommon. Among those who frequented the São João de Meriti group, for example, were *colégio* (high school) student indicating, in this setting, that the Catholic Youth group was serving as an entry point into APN. Observation of

Afro-Brazilian Masses reveal a greater number of older participants than in base group meetings.

Among those interviewed there were ten who had university level educations and another six who had completed high school. While this may give the appearance of a highly elite population in comparison to most black Brazilians, other considerations help to put this impression in perspective. Most of those with high levels of education were not working in high income/status professional occupations. One of the movement leaders held a professional position. Among the others with university education four were employed as teachers, two as Catholic clergy, one as an administrator, with one graduate student and one unemployed. Most of these individuals would not fall into an income level that would raise them above lower to mid-middle class. In addition, among those interviewed who reported their parent's occupations, all of them indicated that they had held lower income jobs such as maids and manual labor positions.

I requested demographic data on APN and its related groups from movement leaders in Rio de Janeiro, São João de Meriti, and Belo Horizonte only to discover that no such data is available. I sent surveys for them to distribute at group meetings and also asked the leaders to respond personally to the question of whether or not the *movimento negro* in the Roman Catholic Church in Brazil is composed of an elite among blacks. While the surveys were not distributed to a scientifically selected sample, their results, as well as the responses of leaders to my question, are of sufficient interest to note here.

Of thirty respondents, 7 indicated that they had completed university studies and 11 had completed high school. Most of those completing university studies who were employed worked in lower paying professions, such as teaching. The general profile of

this group was similar to that of the interview group. In addition, the subjects typically came from families where the parents or parent worked in manual labor occupations.

The tentative conclusion suggested by this profile of the *movimento negro* is that while many of the activists had achieved levels of education that are represented in less than 3% of Brazilian mulattoes and blacks, they originally came from backgrounds representing the working class among Brazil's urban poor. Seen in light of this, the notion that the *movimento negro* in the Roman Catholic Church is a product of an elite may be answered with a qualified yes and no. It was exactly this approach that was taken by the two movement leaders who responded to this same question. They acknowledged that among black Brazilians, those in the movement, especially the leaders, tended to be the ones with the most education and resources. However, they pointed out that among the APNs there are people with all levels of education and that the movement's claim to be a popular, grassroots movement is credible.

An incident at a base group meeting I attended indicates the practical nature of the question of educated black in leadership roles in the movement. In this particular meeting one activist interrupted the discussion to complain that some participants were using vocabulary that was too difficult to understand. She argued that the group's discussion should not be carried out in the language of the elite but rather in the language of the people. The tension between elite and popular elements is a living reality in the APN base groups.

The presence of the educated among the leaders is explained by movement activists as a necessity in view of the demands placed on them by the challenge of the racial situation in Brazil. They are the ones with the skills, time, and resources to assume the leadership responsibilities necessary for the movement to function. On the other

hand, it was pointed out that these "elite" blacks are still the victims of discrimination. They may enter the universities but they are not treated equal to whites there. While they could be considered elite among blacks, they do not achieve the status of the elite in Brazilian society.

It is important to mention that there are whites who are in sympathy with the movement and its goals and who both participate and at times exercise some leadership roles. The leadership roles usually fall to white clergy, who due to their position as parish priests or bishops are able to provide an environment in which groups such as APN are able to operate. A local clergyman may be a serious hinderance or help to an APN group, because of his control over material resources and ability create either a negative or favorable image of APN in the community. Sympathetic whites are said by activists to be in solidarity with the movement and are generally received quite warmly as co-belligerents in the cause.

The demographic composition of the movement and its leaders raises an interesting question concerning the racial project of the *movimento negro* in the Roman Catholic Church in Brazil. To what extent can it be said that this project has arisen spontaneously from the bottom up when it requires a highly educated leadership to articulate its mission and carry it out? This question has also been raised in respect to liberation theology and the CEBs in general. It will probably continue to be debated in the future. Meanwhile, in order to understand the movement and its racial project we must now turn to a consideration of the data.

### Handling Racism: Responses to Racial Democracy and Whitening

The perception of life in Brazil by movement activists is summarized very well in the title of a booklet used for study in base groups: *A Violência Nossa de Cada Dia (Our Everyday Violence*, Rodrigues, n.d.). The booklet sets forth, in comic book style, a depiction of the violence against black Brazilians under slavery and then links it to the current situation of black Brazilians who live in the *favelas* and rural areas in conditions of malnutrition, discrimination, and persecution. In a brief space of a few pages, the book presents to its readers an overview of how the *movimento negro* perceives Brazilian racism along with an attack on the racial democracy and whitening ideals. The quest of the *movimento negro* in the Roman Catholic Church in Brazil for a black racial identity begins with its encounter with the daily reality of life in the Brazilian racial ethos. This reality presents a two-fold challenge for the *movimento negro*, the problem of the reality of Brazilian race relations and the problem of conscientization in a society where both the dominant and the subordinate officially deny that there *is* a problem.

### Prejudice and Discrimination in Day to Day Experience

Movement participants interviewed consistently defined the main problem of blacks in Brazil as being the struggle to face racism and discrimination in a society that minimizes and denies that it is racist. While they pointed to racism and discrimination as the primary social evils to be conquered, subjects interviewed identified the pervasive acceptance of racial democracy and whitening by Brazilians as the primary impediment to this goal. Thus, the primary struggle for the movement was represented as the task of conscientizing blacks to the reality of the Brazilian racial ethos and persuading them to assume a black identity.

Subjects showed an awareness of the movements for civil rights in South Africa and the United States, but they stated that the struggle they face in Brazil was different in a fundamental way. They asserted that racism in Brazil is worse than that of these other countries, precisely because it is hidden. The fact that no one admits that it exists makes it much more difficult to confront. One respondent noted that with the apartheid laws of South Africa it was easy to tell who was the enemy while in Brazil one never knew. Respondents often pointed out that even though the Brazilian constitution classifies racism as a crime, no one has ever been convicted of it. The consensus was that racial democracy creates a racism that is "hidden" and "masked" making it very difficult to get either the authorities or society in general to admit that it exists and take measures to end it.

Subjects viewed racism and racial discrimination in Brazil as being everywhere. While they described them as being subtle much of the time, they also gave blatant examples. Almost every subject reported specific instances of being victimized by prejudice and discrimination. Personal experience was most often appealed to as a refutation of the racial democracy ideology. Beyond this, the subjects also asserted that Brazilian racism is systemic. This is in direct contrast to the commonly accepted notion that while there is some prejudice in Brazil, it only exists on a personal level. In this view, discrimination is not a part of the social structures of Brazil and does not cause systematic discrimination. Movement activists rejected this major tenant of the racial democracy thesis. Most had been conscientized by the movement and had come to accept its interpretation of Brazilian society. A minority had already reached this conclusion prior to joining the movement and had found in it others of like mind. In each case the interviews revealed a generally uniform understanding of Brazilian race relations.

In speaking of racism and prejudice, movement activists often referred to stereotypes of blacks that are perpetuated in Brazil. Media stereotypes were the object of frequent complaints as well as the treatment of blacks in children's school books.

Among the most popular items on the major Brazilian television networks are the *novelas* or soap operas that run in the evenings. Each one usually runs for four or five nights weekly until the series is finished. The *novelas* are widely followed by the Brazilian public. Activists said that blacks are typically portrayed in these programs in subservient roles such as maids, butlers, gardeners, and chauffeurs. If blacks have any kind of role in the story it is invariably a second class role. Usually this role is related to some religious aspect of black culture. One subject remarked that the *novelas* would portray a black man beating a black or white woman and thus contribute to a negative stereotype about blacks. However, they would not show detailed love scenes between a black man and a white woman because the public would not stand for it.

Media representations of black religion are another source of negative stereotypes. Afro-Brazilian religion is exploited by television for its shock value, according to activists interviewed. Television programs focus on elements of Afro-Brazilian religion that repulse and frighten the people. Activists believe that this creates a negative preconception that causes people to not want to associate with Afro-Brazilian religion.

Activists in the *movimento negro* perceive negative stereotypes in social life as well as in the mass media. These stereotypes are linked to incidents of discrimination and racist persecution that are said to be pervasive in Brazilian society. Stereotypes cast blacks in roles that, according to subjects interviewed, relegate them to marginal employment. Blacks are typecast as being strong and suited for hard labor. Thus, certain types of work are viewed as "black" work. Street vendors, repair people, street sweepers,

and other low income occupations are said to be the appropriate jobs for blacks. Among the "black" jobs mentioned, domestic maids were frequently noted as a class of people universally subjected to low wages and treatment as inferiors. One subject who had worked as a maid told how her employer was shocked to discover that she (the subject) was studying beyond the level of elementary school. Maids are not supposed to reach such levels according to the stereotype. Subjects expressed being offended by white friends who would tell them that they were looking for a girl to work in their house and then ask for the name of a relative. They believed that they had been asked only because they were black. Their white friends would never ask another white person for such a recommendation.

Subjects experienced discrimination in the area of employment that extended beyond marginalization into stereotypically acceptable jobs. Those who worked in office settings described the necessity of having to adjust to white culture. This included conformity to white patterns of dress and hair style, as well as the expectation of accepting white values in order to rise in the white world. In seeking jobs, stereotypes are important. Advertisements for jobs requiring the worker to interact with the public often request someone who looks good (*boa aparência*). Movement activists understand this as code language that would better be translated as "blacks need not apply."

The cultural standards of beauty that are expressed by the phrase *boa aparência* are white standards according to the interview subjects. These standards are reflective of the fact that culture in Brazil is equated with white culture. Whites negate the culture of blacks by classifying it as a subculture. Furthermore, they reduce it to something that need not be taken seriously by declaring black religion and cultural traditions to be a

form of folklore. One subject reported that whites ridicule the religious celebrations of blacks in the churches.

The equation of white with the good and superior, and black with the evil and inferior, extends to the use of the terms "black" and "white" as symbols in everyday language. One activist described how the label black had been applied to describe the open ditches filled with sewage that ran through some of the slums as an example of the way whites attach negative imagery to the color black. Other subjects concurred that the use of the word black often carried a negative connotation. Subjects believed that the bombarding of the minds of blacks with constant negative images such as these contributes to low self-esteem among blacks and causes them to want to identify with whites.

In addition to discussing racism in Brazilian society the subjects were very clear in their assertions that racism and discrimination are equally strong within the Roman Catholic Church. The question of the Church is the same as that of society, noted one subject. The Church does not value blacks. Subjects showed varying degrees of commitment to the Church but all of them agreed with the notion that the Church harbors racism and promotes discrimination. It was acknowledged that the degree of racism experienced varies according to how progressive a particular bishop might be in a particular location. Thus, the more progressive bishops provide an atmosphere in which APN groups can operate with some degree of freedom while other dioceses are very closed. There has been some discussion within the movement over exactly what the relationship should be between APN and the Church. Some activists feared that APN would suffer from excess control if the group became an official pastoral of the Church.

Accordingly, APN functions as an independent group, with varying degrees of support or opposition depending upon how progressive the local bishop is.

While all subjects found racism in the Church, some expressed a more negative attitude than others. Those who were most active in APN presented the most positive perceptions of the Church. They did not minimize the racism that was said to exist in it. Rather, they expressed a higher degree of hope and commitment to the possibility that racial equality could be pursued from within the Church. They saw the progressive Church as an area where an authentic challenge could be raised against the Brazilian racial ethos.

Three of the subjects interviewed expressed a much more pessimistic view of the Roman Catholic Church. One of these, who had become involved in the Catholic Church four years earlier, expressed doubts about identifying himself as a Catholic, even though he was regularly involved in Church services and activities. The fact that the Church had supported slavery and the Brazilian elite for most of Brazil's history made it difficult for this individual to feel comfortable with the name Roman Catholic. Two other activists related quite negative attitudes towards the Roman Catholic Church. They felt that the changes in the Church, even in progressive circles, were only superficial and argued that even where APN is accepted it is given only a marginal position when compared to other pastorals in the Church. When asked why they continued their involvement with APN if this were the case, they responded that of all the *movimento negro* groups in Brazil, APN did the best job of working with the poor through base groups. Other black movement organizations are more restricted to the political arena.

Another area where discrimination is alleged to exist in the Roman Catholic Church in Brazil concerns the clergy and the religious orders. Subjects voiced complaints

over the fact that the overwhelming majority of priests and bishops in Brazil are white. This is seen as a direct result of racism. Subjects reasoned that if it were not for racism, the majority of Brazilian clergy would be black, in proportion to the population. Black organizations among clergy and religious have been founded in order to address the problems of discrimination faced by their members within the Church.

Instances of systematic discrimination were alleged during a conference of the *Irmãs Negras* (black sisters) of the order of Missionaries of the Crucified Jesus. This order was one of the first to admit blacks, having done so in 1928. However, the sisters, in their summary document, wrote that two classes had developed within the order. Whites were able to rise to the higher levels while blacks were denied the right to pursue studies and participate in decision making processes (*Encontro de Irmãs Negras-Missionárias de Jesus Crucificado-Região do Rio de Janeiro*, n.d.).

The two APN activists who identified themselves as protestants, on the other hand, stated that their involvement with APN and the Roman Catholic Church was motivated by what they saw as its more open stance towards blacks. One subject came from the Baptist tradition but was disillusioned by the discrimination she saw there. This was particularly evident in the negative attitude towards the possibility of using black cultural expression in the worship services of the church. Baptists, according to this subject, considered the use of African music and symbols to be demonic representations of Afro-Brazilian religion. While not yet converted to the Roman Catholic faith, this individual found the progressive element of the Roman Catholic Church in Brazil to provide space for the expression of black culture and for addressing the racial problem of Brazil.

A final, but important area of discrimination reported by respondents was the persecution they suffered due to their involvement in the movement. Many reported

that their families had not accepted their involvement. Some experienced ridicule while others were subjected to more serious negative sanctions. Subjects commonly reported that other family members rejected the subject's assumption of a black identity. This of course, would imply that the whole family was black, an obvious absurdity. Beyond ridicule from family there were also efforts by family members to persuade subjects to give up what appeared to them as a foolish and useless effort.

Persecution also came from sources within the Church and society. At times this resulted in the loss of a work or church position and even the suggestion that there could be physical harm brought to an activist. A common thread found in the discussion of persecution was that subjects felt that they had paid a price, that for some was costly, in order to be involved in the *movimento negro*. Yet subjects stated that the struggle was worth it. One subject noted that during the 1988 Brotherhood Campaign it was somewhat more fashionable to be involved in the movement. This created much interest and growth. However, many dropped out afterwards, because it was no longer in style and they could not handle the social cost of continuing on.

In summarizing the movement's perception of the effects discrimination has on black Brazilians, the Commission of Black Religious, Seminarians, and Fathers states that blacks are made to feel different than others. They do not feel at ease being black. Instead, they are made to feel criticized and inferior. They internalize racism and rejection and they have a sense of shame at being black. Blacks see themselves as second class and do not feel like they are human (*Relatorio da IX Assembléa da Comissão dos Religiosos, Seminaristas, e Padres Negros* 3, 1992).

The perception of racism in the experience of daily life among movement activists is reflected in their strong repudiation of the racial democracy thesis. Racial democracy

was described as a "monster" and a deliberate deception perpetrated by whites in order to maintain domination over blacks. It exists only to deny blacks their citizenship and to keep them from fighting for their rights. Racial democracy, in fact, exists only on paper as an idea, but it has no foundation in reality according to movement activists. In reality, there is a great difference in how people are treated in Brazil based on their physical appearance. Movement participants frequently referred to the Brazilian racial democracy as a "false democracy." No solution to Brazil's race problems can be expected from whites and the white controlled government in their view. Instead, they claim that blacks must create a grassroots movement and overcome racism from below. This, they believe, cannot be done until the majority of Brazilians assume their identities as blacks.

#### Whitening: Confronting Lost Identity

The second major issue confronting the *movimento negro* is the problem of whitening. How is the movement to respond to a situation in which it identifies over 60% of the population as black, while the official government statistics put it at less than 5%? This question takes on great significance for the movement's task of identity construction.

The process of responding to the problem begins with the assertion that Brazilians with African ancestry who fail to identify as blacks are victims of the ideology of whitening. One respondent summarized it by saying,

of every 100 black people, 70 do not consider themselves black. They are victims to the highest degree of the ideology of whitening. It is also no different in the church. Priests, nuns, seminary students, and even Catholic lay people themselves, out of every 100, 70 or more do not assume their negritude.

The assigning of those who do not assume a black identity to victim status provides the starting point for the mission of conscientization.

According to movement participants the whitening ideology supports the racism of Brazilian society as it defines everything that is good as being white, while black represents everything evil. Consistent with the social whitening described by Fiola (1990), interviewees said that blacks tend to adopt white culture, values, and a desire to be white. The result of this is the myriad of different racial identities that appear in Brazil.

According to movement activists interviewed, the ideology of whitening is instilled through what was described as a process of indoctrination that begins when children are very small and continues throughout life. Subjects stated that the standard of beauty in Brazil is presented as being white and blonde. Children are exposed to this daily by means of the Xuxa show as well as her blonde imitators who appear on competing TV networks. White dolls such as Barbie are also presented by the media as the ideal, so that black children would not want a black doll even if one were available. The process of socialization into the whitening ideal continues in school. One subject asserted that the schools are the fundamental location where the "brainwashing" into the whitening ideology occurs. Subjects complained that this occurs in textbooks that present blacks in subservient roles. In one instance a group of black Roman Catholics, led by black clergy, threatened legal action against a publisher of children's readers for the depiction of a black child as undisciplined, clumsy, ill mannered, and dishonest. The book was altered to satisfy the complainants (*Comissão dos Religiosos, Seminaristas e Padres Negros Rio de Janeiro*, 1990). However, in spite of this victory, activists claim that the problem still persists.

A prominent and often mentioned example of the whitening ideal in practice is the tendency of dark skinned Brazilians to seek lighter skinned mates for themselves and their children. Some of the women interviewed reported strong opposition from their

parents to their having black boyfriends. Beyond the negative cultural stereotypes against blacks, a key reason given was that the parents wanted their grandchildren to be born with lighter skin so that they would not suffer the same discrimination that the parents had experienced. This last reason appears to be a tacit admission that the racial democracy theory does not reflect Brazilian reality by those who nevertheless profess to believe in it.

Movement activists acknowledge that there are social pressures beyond ideological indoctrination that encourage Afro-Brazilians to seek a white identity. The previously discussed racial discrimination in the workplace creates an incentive for blacks to conform to white patterns of culture and beauty in order to survive economically. A frequently mentioned symbol of adopting a white identity is the practice among women of straightening their hair so that it appears like a white person's. Such changes in image are often deemed necessary in order to meet the requirements of employers for a "good appearance." One subject summarized this by asserting that the social standard of beauty is what determines one's professional placement.

Subjects discussed the government's role in deliberately encouraging whitening and in attempting to create the impression of a whiter and whiter Brazil. As evidence they pointed to the decrease in the number of blacks reported in the census data over the past century while asserting that in reality the percentage of black Brazilians has grown. The census data was labeled false by the movement in a booklet distributed to introduce people to APN (*Comissão Regional dos Agentes de Pastoral Negros*, n.d.). Instead it asserted the figure of 60% as the correct proportion of blacks in Brazil. The discrepancy is attributed to the elite's desire to keep blacks divided and unable to assume power.

Movement activists understand the consequences of whitening as totally negative. Whitening not only divides the black people so that they are unable to fight racism together, it also deceives them into not recognizing the true nature of Brazilian society. Those who are not conscious of their negritude are unable to recognize the full extent of the racism that oppresses them. The two subjects interviewed who were not able to recall instances of discrimination against themselves were individuals who had been involved in the movement for under six months. Those who had been in for a longer period not only talked about how they had been discriminated against regularly, but they also went on to describe how being conscientized to their true identity as blacks had led them to reinterpret their personal biographies. That is, they were able to look into their own pasts and identify events as instances of discrimination that previously they had not recognized as such.

The ability to reinterpret one's past is just one of the many changes that activists talked about in their interviews. The adoption of a black identity involves a major change in how one looks at oneself and relates to others. This will become clear as we examine the meaning of negritude in the *movimento negro*.

### Negritude and Identity

The starting point for the racial project of the *movimento negro* is the construction of a black racial identity in the light of the widespread absence of such an identity among the majority of Brazil's population. Informants typically used the term negritude to designate their sense of black racial identity. The other preferred term used to describe their identity was *negro*. Additional designations, common in Brazil, such as *preto*, were avoided as they are considered pejorative by movement activists. It is interesting to note, however, that many Brazilians consider the term *negro* itself to be a pejorative term. The

movement has deliberately chosen this word, knowing that it has had a negative usage, as a part of its project of rehabilitating the image of blackness in Brazil. Black activists are thus attempting to assume control of the language used to signify them so that they may set the agenda concerning its content and connotation.

An underlying assumption that appeared in the interviews was that negritude or blackness is an objective reality that exists apart from any subjectively felt or experienced sense of racial identity. This assumption is most clear in the characterization that activists make of those who reject this identity. The characterization of them as victims who have been deceived by the whitening ideology tends to undermine the validity of the classifications of race between white and black. Common designations such as "brown" and "light brown" were dismissed as being false identities that only served to obscure the reality of one's negritude. Those who have not assumed their negritude are still black, they just do not know it yet. People might use many names to designate the races in Brazil, but in reality, only four exist; black, white, red, and yellow. It is on the basis of this assumption that the movement argues that the majority of Brazilians are black.

One respondent indicated that he did not accept those who have not assumed their negritude as being black. His reasons for this have to do with his definition of what it means to be black. In this case being black included assuming a militant political stance by identifying with the *movimento negro*. While most other informants also included a component of militancy in their understanding of negritude they did not make this a requirement for considering someone as black.

Subjects identified the qualities of being black mainly in terms of phenotype and culture. When asked how they would determine if another person, for example someone they met on the street, were black, specific physical traits were mentioned. The presence

of traits indicating even a small degree of African ancestry was usually viewed as sufficient to qualify a person as black. The most obvious indicator mentioned was dark skin. However, activists considered even those with light skin to be black if they had other characteristics such as kinky hair, and a large nose and lips that they considered typical of Africans. Also mentioned were the shape of one's eyebrows, chin, and forehead. As far as physical traits are concerned, the subjects indicated that if a person could trace any degree of African ancestry then that would be sufficient to allow him or her to claim a black identity. In this respect the movement's definition of black is a direct and deliberate reversal of how racial identity is constructed in the dominant ethos of race.

The meaning of being black for *movimento negro* activists includes accepting and participating in African and Afro-Brazilian cultural traditions. Frequently the women interviewed remarked that one of the first things they did after assuming their black identity was to cease the practice of straightening their hair. They learned to value their looks as something positive and beautiful apart from the standards of white society. Activists also spoke of African music, dance, and style of dress as important to their sense of racial identity. Each of these cultural elements takes on its greatest symbolic importance in the context of Afro-Brazilian religion. The deliberate adoption of these values sets the whitening process in reverse and serves both as a form of identity construction and as a rejection of the dominant racial ethos.

Beyond cultural practices, the assuming of negritude entails the acceptance of black values. Having a black identity was described as a way of being, acting, thinking, and participating in life. One subject expressed it as being free from the sense of shame at being black and being more free, agreeable, and communicative. Subjects spoke often of how negritude involves having a set of values more in line with traditional African values

of community and extended family rather than the individualistic values represented by white European capitalist society. Negritude causes one to know his or her value as a person and to no longer accept abusive treatment without resistance. Subjects spoke of how before they assumed their negritude they would respond to prejudice and discrimination "with heads bowed," not making any public protest. After assuming black identity they were empowered to consistently resist. Because they now valued themselves, activists expressed a willingness to struggle and not stand for injustices.

An interesting example of this changed attitude towards racism is illustrated by an incident that occurred with one of the interviewees as she was coming to the interview. She related that as she was walking down the street to our meeting place she heard the voice of a young man cry out to her, "Hey monkey!" Instead of walking by and ignoring it as she would have previously done, she turned back and saw two young white teenagers whom she confronted. She informed them that what they had done was an act of racism and that they could go to prison for it. She reported that the boys denied doing anything, but that they also had a look of terror on their faces because they realized that they could be in serious trouble. The subject lectured them for a moment on racism and satisfied that they were sufficiently contrite, she continued on her way. The incident was a very common type of racial persecution she said, but the satisfaction of being able to stand up against it was significant.

Negritude carried with it a sense of empowerment and consistency in the lives of activists that they had not been able to find without it. Interviewees remarked that negritude was something that they lived twenty-four hours a day. One subject stated that it allows one to be oneself. It provides a sense of values and self-esteem that allows one to continue to struggle and not give in to injustice. However, this is not an abstraction.

It is a concrete reality that affects how one lives. Once a person has assumed a black identity then society no longer has the means to walk on and crush him or her, one subject asserted, because one now has the resources necessary for self defense. Another stated that he felt less discriminated against because he no longer kept quiet when discrimination occurred. Once he began to respect himself and demand respect from others, he began to get more respect. Negritude is a stance one takes towards life that signals a fundamental change of attitude towards the Brazilian racial ethos.

There was a difference of opinion among the subjects interviewed concerning the role that political consciousness plays in defining negritude. While one subject would completely disqualify someone from being considered black if that person did not assume a militant posture, others held that this was not the case. However there was a consensus among subjects interviewed that a person who had assumed a black identity without a militant, activist posture of involvement in the *movimento negro*, was in need of further conscientization. Such a person could certainly be considered black, because blackness is an objective quality that exists in a person whether that person has assumed negritude or not. However, the process of assuming a black identity, for most activists interviewed, would not be complete if one were not an activist.

For the movement activists interviewed, negritude is something that must be consciously taken up or assumed. While a few of the activists interviewed stated that they had always known that they are black, the majority described the process of assuming a black identity as a *discovery* of their blackness or negritude. This discovery required a shift from the dominant symbolic universe and was frequently described in terms comparable to a conversion experience. Subjects gave up the mulatto designations that they had previously applied to themselves. Where they had previously considered black

identity to be of little importance, it now became the most important thing. One respondent recounted this discovery as "something very marvelous that thus changed completely, totally my life from water to wine... a new Maria<sup>2</sup> began and I changed much as a person."

For some subjects being confronted with their negritude brought on a crisis in which a decision had to be made as to whether to accept it or reject it. Assuming one's negritude therefore means a fundamental change in one's attitude toward everything associated with being black. It is to begin to value that which is devalued in the Brazilian ethos of race. The valorization of black culture and black physical appearance thus leads to a new self image. This self image is the affirmation that one is black and that being black is good.

In reaction to this new sense of value among blacks, whites often accuse blacks of creating a reverse racism. Movement activists reject this charge. They were insistent upon denying that their position is an assertion of black superiority. Rather it is, as one subject stated, "to negate the negation that someone makes of my culture." This negating the negation means the negation of the popular interpretation of Brazilian society. In short, assuming negritude involves a rejection of the symbolic universe represented by the racial democracy and whitening theories and participating in the process of constructing a new symbolic universe. It involves the reinterpretation of Brazilian society and racial values in terms of this new universe.

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<sup>2</sup>Name has been changed.

## "This History That I Didn't Know"

### Recovering Lost Identity

The building of a black identity through the use of religious and cultural symbols is viewed as a project of recovery. A key word used by movement participants is *resgatar*, meaning to ransom, redeem, or liberate. Most frequently the movement uses it to refer to redeeming the identity, cultural, and religious traditions which participants view as having been stolen and hidden from them by white oppressors. It is in the history of blacks in Brazil that black values are hidden.

The recovery of black identity in the *movimento negro* in the Brazilian Roman Catholic Church is thus a project that is carried out by means of the recovery of the history of blacks in Brazil. Movement activists contend that the "official" version of Brazilian history is a deliberate lie designed to support the false notions of racial democracy and whitening. They regard the history as told by Gilberto Freyre and others in the racial democracy camp as a deliberate distortion engineered to sustain the dominance of whites. Specifically, the subjects were offended at the presentation of docile and compliant black slaves who were cared for by benevolent, paternal masters. In their opinion this distorted perception of the true history of blacks must be refuted and replaced in order for blacks to recover and value their negritude.

The process of reconstructing history draws on various resources. Those movement activists who have access to higher education play a critical role in this process. They are well versed in the more recent historiography of blacks in Brazil that debunks the racial democracy and whitening theses. In addition, these leaders are beginning to engage in their own scholarly work in order to attack the historical problem more directly. Of significance along these lines is the series "Blacks in Liberation"

published by *Editora Vozes*, one of the primary publishers of liberation theology in Brazil. Frei David Raimundo Santos, one of the key national leaders in the movement, is on the editorial committee of the series that has published such titles as *Mulher e Escrava: Uma Introdução Histórica ao Estudo da Mulher Negra no Brasil* (Woman and Slave: An Historical Introduction to the Study of the Black Woman in Brazil, Giacomini 1988), and *O Feitor Ausente: Estudo sobre a Escravidão Urbana no Rio de Janeiro* (The Absent Overseer: a Study of Urban Slavery in Rio de Janeiro, Algranti 1988). In addition movement activist Marcos Rodrigues da Silva has published *O Negro no Brasil: História e Desafios* (Blacks in Brazil: History and Challenges, Silva 1987). Various shorter publications in the form of booklets have been produced by the movement and are widely circulated in the movement's centers and base groups.

Beyond the academic arena, some APN base groups have engaged in the reconstruction of black history through the recovery of oral traditions passed down in families. One movement leader described the process as a means for those who do not have access to books to be able to participate in the process of recovery. The process begins with a base group of 20 or so people being asked by the group leader to tell their personal history. In doing so, parents, grandparents and other relatives are mentioned. Other group members raise questions to elicit further information. When the individual has no more to give, he or she is encouraged to ask the parents and grandparents to recount their own histories and to recall the family stories passed down to them. In the case of those whose parents or grandparents are no longer living, their friends who still are alive are sought out. This leads to the most elderly in the community who are able to recount experiences passed to them of their grandparents from the time before abolition. The questions then turn to discover specific ways that these ancestors resisted and were

able to survive in slavery. It was stated that occasionally this process will turn up the name of an ancestor whose history has been preserved in a history book. This provides an opportunity for further study. The process as outlined here has as its goal the discovery of resistance in the history of blacks, and especially in the personal history of group members.

In contrast to the version of history promoted by the racial democracy proponents, the movement seeks to portray two critical ideas in its reconstruction of history. The first and most emphasized of these is that the history of blacks in Brazil is primarily a history of resistance. The second is the notion that it was blacks who actually built the nation of Brazil, while whites used them and stole the fruits of their labor. For movement activists both of these notions are a direct reversal of the story of Brazil as it has traditionally been told (interviews, Rodrigues, n.d.).

In retelling the history of blacks, the movement identifies black history with the history of Israel during the time of slavery in Egypt. This motif is taken from the biblical story in the book of Exodus. The influence of liberation theology, as well as the black civil rights movement in the United States, is evident here in that APN leaders are familiar with the similar interpretation of the Exodus story in these two contexts.<sup>3</sup> I attended a day long conference where this theme was developed and used as a model for the recovery of the history of black resistance in Brazil.<sup>4</sup> The question was raised as to what

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<sup>3</sup> Writings of James Cone and Martin Luther King, Jr. are available in Portuguese. I observed copies of these in the APN offices in São João de Meriti as well as in several bookstores across Brazil. Along with the writings of various liberation theologians, they are used as sources by the movement.

<sup>4</sup> *Encontro de Reflexão Bíblica a Partir da Temática do Negro*, São Paulo, August 16, 1992.

in the history of Brazilian blacks could be likened to the Exodus. Forms of resistance to slavery such as hunger strikes and suicide were brought up by the group in response. The black community was likened to the Jewish community with the notion that the solidarity of the community is itself a form of resistance. Portugal, England, and the United States were compared to Egypt as oppressors who have dominated Brazilian history creating poverty and misery. However, African religion was an important source of resistance for blacks just as the Hebrew religion was important in Israel's overcoming of slavery in Egypt. By means of connections such as these the conference attempted to empower those in attendance to assume and sustain a militant posture towards the Brazilian racial ethos.

Another aspect of the project of historical recovery is the movement's finding of Africans in Christian history who have been canonized by the Roman Catholic Church. This project has resulted in the publication of a booklet that is used to study the lives of these figures (*Equipe de Religiosos Negros* 1993). Among these are included Saint Augustine, who is said to have been black, as well as the fifth century Pope, Gelásio, whom the book also represents as black. In all, eight figures are discussed as examples of black Catholics who were recognized as worthy of sainthood by the Roman Catholic Church. They serve as examples that demonstrate the piety and value of the black people. The book concludes with a prayer composed by the Franciscan Order of North and Northeast Brazil asking for forgiveness from the black community for complicity in the historical process of black slavery and oppression and making a commitment to struggle for justice for blacks.

The recovery of heroes from black history is also a technique that the movement applies to the history of Brazil. Two persons, in particular, are treated as the most

important and have become key symbols for the movement. The first of these is Zumbi, who was discussed in the previous chapter. Zumbi is, in the words of one movement leader, "the maximum hero in the black struggle of resistance." Zumbi was referred to as a symbol of resistance, struggle, life, and of not despairing. His martyrdom is viewed as an act of giving up his life for the black people. Indeed, in many ways Zumbi appears almost as a Christ figure. The day of his death, November 20th, is celebrated by the *movimento negro* all across Brazil. Zumbi represents the recovery of the true history, the hidden transcript of resistance that is a source of vital fuel for the movement's resistance in the present.

In addition to Zumbi of Palmares, a second hero, widely acclaimed by the movement, is the female slave Anastacia. According to the story that is told, Anastacia was cruelly treated and forced to wear a muzzle over her mouth because her female master was suspicious that her husband was sexually involved with the slave girl. Anastacia has become a symbol of the suffering of all black women in Brazil and although she has never been canonized, she is venerated by many blacks as a saint.

Along with the story of Zumbi, the importance of the *quilombos* as historical symbols of black resistance and of the possibilities of a society where people live together in peace as equals was of critical importance for the subjects interviewed. The use of the term *quilombo* to designate individual APN groups reveals the importance of the concept. It is a primary mode of self-identification within the movement. Subjects appealed to the Palmares *quilombo*, which Zumbi ruled, as a model for the future of Brazil. They presented a picture of Palmares as a communal society which practiced an egalitarian philosophy that promoted justice for all. While it was predominantly composed of escaped African slaves, it also had white and indigenous residents, all of whom were

treated as equals. Land was held in common and the work as well as the fruit of the labor were shared among all of the inhabitants. Subjects also pointed out that Palmares had a well organized government that included numerous cities over a large area of land. They described Palmares as an independent state that only wanted to exist peacefully. However, it was unable to do so. Its very presence stood as a testimony against the oppressive colonial system of the Portuguese. Not being able to tolerate this, the white government determined to destroy Palmares and re-enslave or exterminate its people. This was accomplished and Zumbi was martyred.

Another often mentioned symbol of black resistance that is traced to the *quilombos* is *capoeira*. *Capoeira* is a type of Afro-Brazilian dance that resembles a form of the martial arts, except that there is no actual physical contact involved between the two "opponents." It is said to have been developed as a mode of self defense in the struggle of blacks during the colonial period (Areias, 1983). Today *capoeira* has become nothing less than an art form that is widely taught and practiced in Brazil. It holds special significance for *movimento negro* activists as a symbol of the struggle for freedom by black Brazilians.

A final aspect of the project of historical recovery involved the reversal of commonly understood interpretations of the role of whites in Brazilian history as taught in Brazilian schools. In particular it involves the assertion that what has been considered heroic and glorious by whites in Brazilian history is actually criminal and shameful. One subject who teaches elementary school children told of reframing the history of the discovery and colonization of Brazil into the perspective of indigenous peoples. He asked his class how they thought these people understood what happened. With this question he was able to lead the class in reconstructing the history as a history of the invasion and

conquest of Brazil. He reported that these students challenged their next teacher the following year when the traditional view was presented to them.

This type of re-telling of Brazilian history is said to be necessary because many of the traditional heroes of Brazilian history are actually criminals according to the movement. An example given by one activist during his interview was that of the *Duque de Caxias* (Duke of Caxias) who was the leader of the armed forces during a war with Paraguay. According to the subject, the Duke had led an army of mostly blacks to victory and was recognized as a war hero. The blacks had been promised their freedom from slavery in return for their service. However, the Duke informed the government that he feared that their military success might inspire other blacks to take up arms and revolt. With the government's compliance, the Duke allegedly ordered the black soldiers disarmed and killed on the return from the war. Activists are concerned that their version of events such as this become known so that blacks may be further inspired to resistance.

### Religion and Negritude

Without question, the most significant aspect of black culture raised by the *movimento negro* in the Roman Catholic Church in Brazil is the religious heritage of Afro-Brazilians. While it might seem obvious that the movement would hold such a position, given that it is a religious movement, the significance of this observation extends beyond the merely obvious. Religion for the movement represents the most essential value and nature of the black soul. One activist asserted that, "the black people are by nature a religious people, incapable of all forms of atheism" (Paixão, n.d.). Racism is said to be an invention of white Europeans. Blacks, on the other hand, are inherently spiritual people. Movement leaders have taken this assumption and concluded that the most significant avenue for the recovery for black culture and identity is through the recovery of black

religious values and traditions. This is one of the primary motivations for the reconstruction of black history, for that is where these values are hidden.

Throughout the interviews the subjects gave the role of religion in black identity a central place. Respondents agreed with movement leaders that blacks are an essentially religious people and that this aspect of black culture must be valued if black identity is to be valued. The interviews revealed three primary streams of religious influence shaping the development and course of the *movimento negro* in the Roman Catholic Church. These traditions include African and Afro-Brazilian religions, traditional Roman Catholicism, and the progressive church as represented in liberation theology and the CEBs.

#### The Roman Catholic Heritage

Most of the interviewees identified themselves as practicing Catholics.<sup>5</sup> Two of the subjects reported very little involvement in the Church outside of movement activities. Another had become active but admitted not feeling comfortable being called Catholic due to the history of the Catholic Church's support for slavery in colonial Brazil. As previously discussed, it was interesting to discover that two of the subjects were Protestants who became participants in APN because they found no openness to dealing with racial issues in their own churches. The movement is self-consciously ecumenical so that the Protestants were welcomed.

In spite of the negative statements about discrimination in the Roman Catholic Church, those subjects identifying themselves as practicing Catholics strongly affirmed

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<sup>5</sup> The term *Catholico praticante* has specific reference in Brazil to a person who is actively involved in contrast to its opposite, *Catolico não-praticante* denoting nominal Catholics.

their identity as such. They stated that their interest in exploring their African roots in no way infringed upon or compromised this commitment. They were not intending to convert. Subjects viewed Brazil as a Catholic country and hence Roman Catholicism as a part of their natural heritage.

The affirmation of a Roman Catholic identity was accompanied by an identification with traditional Roman Catholic symbols and a desire to remain connected to the institutional Church. Indeed, there was a concern, especially among leaders, to demonstrate the continuity of their work with the religious and social traditions of the Roman Catholic Church so as to legitimate the movement. This was more than just a strategy developed in response to its conservative critics. Activists felt that the Roman Catholic tradition was *their* tradition. Thus traditional symbols were prominent even in the more innovative Afro-Brazilian Masses as well as in the materials used for teaching in the base groups. Movement leaders also appealed to the Puebla and Santo Domingo documents in order to establish the continuity of their activities with the teachings of the Vatican.

One example of the use of traditional Roman Catholic symbolism by the movement is found in a study of the *Via Sacra* used by base groups during the 1988 *Campanha da Fraternidade* (Brotherhood Campaign, CNBB 1988b). The booklet takes the reader through each of the Stations of the Cross as found in traditional Roman Catholic worship and links them with a particular issue of concern to blacks in Brazil. As an example, in the second station of the cross Jesus is depicted carrying his cross. The worshipper is referred to John 19:17 which tells of Jesus carrying his own cross and is then called upon to contemplate Jesus' suffering. The cross of Jesus is said to be the means by which Jesus overthrows the power of sin, injustice and oppression that enslaves

the black people and turns the oppressors and the oppressed into brothers. The readings continue by describing the racism of Brazilian society as the cross that is being borne by blacks. It concludes with a prayer that the people might be relieved of the cross of oppression. In sum, the booklet uses the Stations of the Cross to link 15 different symbols related to Jesus' crucifixion to issues of concern in the *movimento negro*. The impression created is one of a strong connection between the concerns of the movement and the symbols of traditional Roman Catholicism.

While the presence of traditional symbols may be evidence of fidelity to traditional Roman Catholic faith among movement participants, conservatives are concerned that the use of these symbols in conjunction with symbols and concepts from liberation theology and Afro-Brazilian religions represents what is in reality a departure from the traditional faith. Nevertheless, movement activists are insistent upon their status as good Catholics and find the symbols of traditional Catholic faith a source of affirmation for their identity as both Catholics and blacks.

#### Afro-Brazilian Religions

All respondents agreed that an ecumenical stance towards Afro-Brazilian religions is necessary. Beyond simply having a generally positive attitude towards Afro-Brazilian religions, movement activists, especially the leaders, looked to the cultural traditions preserved in them as a resource for the recovery of a black racial identity. The appropriation of this resource occurs by means of the study of and participation in Afro-Brazilian religions, dialogue with practitioners of Afro-Brazilian religions, and the use of Afro-Brazilian symbols in Roman Catholic liturgy.

Among the Afro-Brazilian faiths commonly found in Brazil, movement activists generally showed greater preference for the religion of *candomblé*. The other popular

religion, *umbanda*, has the image of having too many white leaders and practitioners and so is not generally favored in the *movimento negro*. In addition, *umbanda* has been heavily influenced by the French spiritism of Allan Kardec. Activists look at excessive white involvement as a form of co-optation of black religion. They are wary of the European influences in *umbanda* as well. *Candomblé*, on the other hand, is viewed as being a closer approximation to authentic African religion and is thus a better place to discover authentic African values.<sup>6</sup>

It was not unusual to find activists who identified themselves as serious Catholics also taking part in *candomblé*. The type of participation in the two religions differed from the syncretism that has been documented throughout Brazil's history (Bastide 1978). Activists who participated in both *candomblé* and Roman Catholic rituals denied that they were involved in syncretism. Instead they were concerned to retain the integrity of each religion. They regarded each as distinct traditions that should not be confused. However, they saw no conflict between being simultaneously involved in the two. Those activists participating in *candomblé* did not report that they had taken the time to pursue the lengthy process of initiation required to advance to the level of spirit possession or leadership. However, they did frequent the meetings and identify themselves with the

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<sup>6</sup>*Candomblé* is the Brazilian form of the religious tradition of the Yoruba of West Africa. It originally was identified with Bahia, although the tradition now may be found throughout the heavily populated regions of Brazil. *Candomblé* operates in independent centers known as *terreiros*. These centers are typically autonomous and they provide the location where the rituals are carried out. The rituals, themselves, involve African dance, music, and culminate in a ritual of spirit possession by spirits known as *orixás*. The *orixás* are lesser deities created by the supreme spirit Olorum. Olorum himself is viewed as the one supreme God and for this reason activists insist that *candomblé* is monotheistic. However, it is only the *orixás* who have any concern with humankind. *Terreiros* are under the direction of a *pai do santo* or *mãe do santo*. The possession rituals are highly routinized and generally involve individuals who have undergone a lengthy initiation process (Bastide 1978, Cintra 1985).

tradition, embracing it as their own. Other activists also manifested an open attitude towards *candomblé* but did not participate in it. They restricted their activities to occasional observation or to the study of *candomblé* in order to learn more about the faith of their ancestors. All subjects showed a basically positive attitude towards Afro-Brazilian religions.

An important aspect of the relationship between *candomblé* and the *movimento negro* in the Roman Catholic Church in Brazil is the initiation of dialogue by movement leaders with leaders of *candomblé*. Subjects remarked that *candomblé* leaders are sometimes suspicious of being approached by Church leaders due to the history of repression from the Church. However, the movement has committed itself to ecumenical dialogue and its attitude of acceptance has been received well by *candomblé* leaders.

One example of the type of dialogue that is occurring was given by a subject involved in a course on black theology being taught by another APN activist. A *pai de santo* was invited to give a class on *candomblé* as a part of the course. The subject stated in his interview that this experience had changed his attitude towards *candomblé*. Whereas he had previously viewed *candomblé* negatively, the class changed that conception. While he had no plans to convert to *candomblé* he did say that the religion of his ancestors deserved respect, since God had also revealed himself in Africa by means of the *orixás*.

There was a consensus among the subjects interviewed that the negative reactions of conservatives towards Afro-Brazilian religions was a result of both ignorance and racism. Afro-Brazilian religions had deliberately been destroyed, according to movement activists, in order to weaken the ability of African slaves to resist the domination of whites

in colonial Brazil. This strategy was pursued because the destruction of African religion would also destroy African identity. Thus the Roman Catholic Church instigated a policy of forced conversion of African slaves and the repression of their religions. It labeled African religions as demonic and sought to create a sense of fear and revulsion against them.

Eventually, Afro-Brazilian religions became associated with evil. This was exacerbated by the negative stereotypes that came to be attached to blacks. In addition to demonizing African religions, activists claimed that whites trivialized it. Rather than considering it to be a religion they classified it as a form of folklore that need not be taken seriously. Afro-Brazilian religions thus became reduced to a form of witchcraft or folklore in the minds of many Brazilians, in contrast to the image of the Roman Catholic faith as intelligent and civilized.

One of the most important attractions of movement activists to *candomblé* is its value as a symbol of black resistance. African religion is viewed by activists as the primary means by which African culture and values were preserved and passed down to contemporary black Brazilians. Subjects interviewed interpreted the history of Afro-Brazilian religion as a history of the struggle of blacks against domination and saw their own movement as being in continuity with this history. While Afro-Brazilian religion has been usually understood in terms of a model of syncretism with Roman Catholicism, *movimento negro* activists have taken a different approach. They viewed syncretism not as an attempt to combine the two religious traditions, but rather as an attempt to hide the prohibited African tradition under the cover of the accepted Roman Catholic tradition. Syncretism was simply a necessity forced upon blacks by white repression. By means of this apparent syncretism, blacks were able to survive the trauma of slavery.

Subjects looked to *candomblé* not only as a model of resistance, but also as a repository of significant values that they desired to recover. *Candomblé* was said by interviewees to represent a positive approach to life. It is not concerned with sin and guilt. It also is not linked to a capitalist philosophy. This is an important issue for activists because traditional Roman Catholicism is closely linked in their minds with capitalism and colonialism. The African tradition offers an alternative model that activists consider to be a natural part of black culture. That is the model of community rather than individualism.

Key symbols drawn from *candomblé* were consistently given importance by interviewees as symbols to be appropriated and used by black Roman Catholics. These symbols aid in creating a sense of connection with the African religious tradition assisting blacks in recovering that part of their historical heritage that for many has been hidden. The importance of these symbols would be difficult to overestimate. One activist pointed out that many of the people the movement wants to reach with its message are unable to read. For them, it is critical to use symbols in order to help them understand and connect with their cultural heritage. They need a connection between faith and life and the symbols provide that connection, in the view of this activist.

African dance, used in *candomblé* ceremonies, is a symbol that was viewed as a significant aspect of the black manner of expressing faith. The connection of worship with a sense of liveliness and vitality is an important value that activists emphasized in contrast to what they considered to be the reserved and formal Mass in the traditional white Church. The use of the *atabaques*, the African drums, is another strong connection to the spirituality of their ancestors.

Activists claim that African religions do not make the sharp distinction between the sacred and the profane that is commonly understood to be a part of religion in the west. The *orixás* are a symbol of this direct linking of the people to the divine and of the nearness of the spiritual world. Traditional African foods are prepared and used in ceremonies as offerings to the *orixás*, with each *orixá* having a favorite. These foods then take on symbolic importance and are likened by activists to the Eucharist. They signify personal communion with the sacred.

One of the most important symbols drawn from *candomblé* is the notion of *axé*. *Axé* refers to the force of life that permeates all of reality. It is the primordial force that gives vitality to action (Neto 1986, 191). It signifies all that is good. Activists said that it represents peace, justice, equality, affection, and all that one would wish for the best for another. In this last sense *axé* is frequently used as a greeting and as a goodbye wish. *Axé* embodies all that is good and the power that animates life.

In spite of the importance given to the symbols of Afro-Brazilian religion, movement activists generally did not express a desire to convert to those religions. This was true even of those who participated in *candomblé*. Only one subject, one of the two who did not identify themselves with the Roman Catholic Church, showed a clear preference for Afro-Brazilian religion. The others, with the exception of the two Protestants, expressed the desire to remain Roman Catholic. This was the case for those who participated in *candomblé* as well. They considered themselves to be Catholics but they believed that the Church could benefit by incorporating some of the values and symbols of the African tradition.

That those in the movement could engage in the transposition of symbols from one religious context to another and also freely participate in two very different religious traditions simultaneously, all the while denying that they are mixing them together, is possible because the movement is based largely on the assumptions of ecumenical theology represented by the progressive elements in the Latin American Roman Catholic Church. The underlying presupposition articulated by subjects interviewed was that each tradition represents different revelations of the same God in different cultures. Each culture develops its own set of symbols to explain its experience of God and as heirs of both African and Christian traditions, activists believe they have the right to freely use symbols from both contexts.

### Liberation Theology

The acceptance of African religions by the *movimento negro* in the Roman Catholic Church reflects an ecumenical attitude that is common among movement activists. This ecumenical stance of the movement is natural as the movement itself originally arose out of the social context of liberation theology and the ecclesial base communities. While subjects indicated that they were not aware of any base communities devoted primarily to the *movimento negro*, they frequently spoke of participation in base communities as playing an important role in the process of conscientization that eventually led them to the black movement. Themes drawn from liberation theology are apparent in the literature of the movement as well as in the interview data. On the other hand, movement activists were also critical of some of the deficiencies they found in liberation theology. The result is that liberation theology is both favored and critiqued at the same time.

Among the main criticisms of liberation theology was the statement that it speaks of the poor as an abstraction. It has done a good job of dealing with the social aspects of poverty but it has not shown the faces of the people about whom it speaks. If it had done so, it would be apparent that the majority of those faces are black. Having revealed this, then liberation theology would have gone on to address the problems of racial discrimination and oppression as primary causes of the situation of the poor. However, liberation theology did not take this approach. Instead it described the problem of the poor in terms of class oppression, without addressing racism as a cause. It was not unusual for *movimento negro* activists to refer to liberation theology as a white theology.

There was a consensus among activists that an adequate theology for blacks must be developed by blacks. It was also stated that as of yet there is no formal black theology within the movement. The reference in this case was to the fact that there is no recognized black theologian in Brazil who is active in the movement and has published what could be considered a systematized black theology. This state of affairs was attributed largely to the fact that, as one activist stated, the movement itself is still in its infancy. Indeed it is true that while there are no professional black theologians identified with the movement, there are activists who have produced theological works in the form of masters theses (Neto 1986, Silva 1990, Rocha 1993). However, academic theology in this sense could be said to be an elite activity that is removed from the concerns of many of the participants in the base groups. Beyond this, important theological activity is also occurring on the base level. It to this that we shall limit our attention now.

Movement activists are pursuing the development of theology in APN base groups and the various other movement organizations. This activity may occur in groups such as APN groups that meet on a regular basis or in the context of special study and reflection

groups organized specifically to work with a particular theological theme. Workshops, conferences, and theology courses are also held in order to accomplish the theological "formation" of movement activists. Beyond those who have written the above mentioned theses, there are activists who have studied theology as a part of their preparation for religious vocation, who are able to lead such courses. In addition, there are the white religious and clergy who are in solidarity with the movement and its goals. Clergy and religious, both black and white, are influential in teaching liberation theology in their parishes and expanding it to include racial issues.

An examination of the interview data as well as written material from the movement reveals that themes from liberation theology are important. A summary of relevant theological themes from the data will be given here. It will be seen that upon analysis a correspondence exists between theological issues expressed in the life of the movement and the work of liberation theologians.

Movement activists identify poor Brazilians, especially the majority who are black, as an oppressed class. One specific characterization of this oppression is the often repeated statement by activists that as far as Brazilian society is concerned, blacks are not considered as persons (*o negro não é gente*). A slogan that is not uncommon within the movement is the statement, "I am black, I am a person!" Female activists frequently add to this, "I am a woman!" (*sou mulher, sou negro, sou gente!*). To a large extent the recovery of black history and identity is a project of the recovery of black personhood.

Activists noted that sin is not a significant category of discourse in the African religious traditions that movement activists are appropriating. This did not, however, prevent them from drawing upon their Christian tradition and using the notion of sin in expressing their understanding of the racial and class structure of Brazilian society. Sin

exists on a personal level in the form of individual prejudice and racist behavior, while it is said to be also manifested in sinful social structures that oppress the poor. The white capitalist system is the embodiment of this sinful structure.

In expressing concepts of God, movement activists focused on God as liberator. God was described as both Father and Mother and was depicted as one who suffers with blacks in their history of oppression. God was spoken of as the Supreme Being and identified as both the biblical Yahweh and by the African name Oxalá. Movement participants hold that one of his important attributes is that he is a God who manifests himself.<sup>7</sup> In the African tradition this occurs through the *orixás* and through the force of *axé*. This manifestation is said to be a different form of the manifestation of God through the history of Israel, the Bible, and the incarnation of Christ in the Christian tradition. As both blacks with an African heritage and Brazilians with a Roman Catholic heritage, the subjects interviewed drew freely upon both understandings of God. In particular, they relied upon the Christian tradition, especially the liberationist interpretation, when speaking of God as the One who helps and empowers in the struggle against sin and oppression.

In the previous discussion of the reconstruction of black history, the process of linking the history of blacks to that of the biblical story of the Exodus was described. This is a common motif that is applied to the poor in Latin America, taken from liberation theology and in this case applied to blacks by the *movimento negro* in the Roman Catholic Church in Brazil. Subjects understood God as suffering with his people and working

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<sup>7</sup>With the exception of one of the women interviewed, subjects consistently spoke of God using the masculine personal pronoun *ele*. I have chosen to reflect this usage in the presentation of the interview data.

actively in history for their liberation. The oppressive powers of white capitalist society were likened to the Egyptians and Babylonians who had enslaved the Hebrews. Brazilian President Fernando Color de Mello was said to be Brazil's pharaoh, oppressing the poor and stealing the fruit of their labor (*1<sup>o</sup> Encontro Biblical*, 1992). God is the one who works in history to liberate the poor from this oppression.

This interpretation of the liberator God was also apparent in the understanding of Jesus Christ. Activists interpreted Jesus as the incarnation of God and as a parallel to incarnation that occurs in *candomblé* during the possession rituals. Beyond this, activists viewed Jesus as one who came to liberate the poor and oppressed. He succeeded in liberating the people from blindness, according to one activist, so that they could look at people's souls, not the color of their skin. Another asserted that Jesus came in order to place himself before the poor as an example of how to live. He came along side them to live with them in the midst of their situation of oppression. In this manner Jesus enables people to overcome prejudice.

The hopes of movement activists were expressed in their understanding of the gospel of Christ and the Kingdom of God. Salvation is liberation in the understanding of movement activists. While it could be used in a personal sense to describe one who is liberated by discovering his or her true identity, salvation was spoken of more often in terms of its implications for society. Salvation was primarily seen in terms of the historical project of liberation. This historical project is the manifestation of the Kingdom of God in history. The Kingdom is to be realized in history through social activism. As a symbol the Kingdom represents a world where justice rules and where there are no racial, social or economic inequalities. It is a world where everyone is valued for who they are. The preaching of the gospel is the spreading of the message of equality and justice.

Activists looked for the concrete realization of the Kingdom in history in the form of a just and egalitarian society. On this basis they said that their activism in the Church, social, and political arenas was of value. This was the case even though none of them expressed the expectation to see the fruit of their labor fully developed within their lifetimes. They said they were continuing to work because they had a hope for the future for their children and grandchildren. Their belief in God, justice, and in the reality of the Kingdom of God were religious values that served as motivators in the struggle.

### Inculturation

In the final document of the 1992 Santa Domingo conference of CELAM, the Latin American bishops raised the question of inculturation in relation to the religions and cultures of indigenous, black and mestizo peoples in Latin America. The bishops defined inculturation as, "a process conducted on the basis of the gospel from within each people and community by means of language and symbols that are comprehensible and that the Church regards as appropriate" (Santo Domingo final document, sec. 243 in Hennelly 1993, 139). In respect to Latin American peoples of African origins, the document went on to say

Conscious of the problem of exclusion and racism weighing down on the black population, the Church in its evangelizing mission wishes to share in their sufferings and to accompany them in their legitimate aspirations for a more just and decent life for all ...

Hence, the Church in Latin America and the Caribbean wants to support African American peoples in defending their identity and in acknowledging their own values, and to help them to keep alive those practices and customs of theirs that are compatible with Christian teaching...

We likewise commit ourselves to devote special attention to the cause of African American communities in the pastoral fields by encouraging the manifestation of the religious expressions proper to their cultures... (Santo Domingo final document, sec 249 in Hennelly 1993, 140-141).

In the interest of genuine human development, the Church wants to support the efforts that these people are making to bring national and international law to recognize them as peoples with full rights to land and to their own organizations and ways of life, in order to safeguard their right to live in accordance with their identity, speaking their own language and observing their ancestral customs, and to establish relations with all the people of the earth on an equal footing (Santo Domingo final document sec 251 in Hennelly 1993, 141).

In addition to the pronouncement in the official documents, the Pope, in his Santo Domingo address to African Americans, had noted that African American communities in Latin America "...contributed to the common good, becoming integrated in the social whole but preserving their own identity, traditions, and customs..." and had said to them "...I urge you to defend your identity, to be conscious of your values and to make them bear fruit" (Hennelly, 162). This was seen as a victory by the *movimento negro* and these passages have been appealed to by movement leaders, such as Frei David (Santos, n.d.c.) and Padre Toninho (Marcos Silva 1993), in order to legitimate APN's efforts towards introducing black values and traditions into the life of the Roman Catholic Church in Brazil.

Inculturation is the process of incorporating cultural elements from the traditions of the cultures of the people making up the Church community in a particular context into the ceremonies and celebrations of the Church. In particular the *movimento negro* uses the terms to denote the blackening of the worship and liturgy of the Church by the introduction of African and Afro-Brazilian cultural forms into the Church's liturgy. Inculturation is founded upon the assumption that all cultures are created by God and that they each have a contribution to make to the Kingdom. To oppose inculturation is therefore to oppose God's kingdom (Santos, n.d.c., 4).

The movement's efforts of inculturation had already preceded the Santo Domingo conference by some years. In 1988 CNBB had affirmed the possibility of the inculturation of black values into the liturgy of the Church in the text for the Brotherhood Campaign (CNBB 1988a sec 151). However, in spite of the words of support from the Church hierarchy very little has been done to actually make Afro-Brazilian liturgical celebrations common. (Santos n.d.c., 3). Indeed, the use of African symbols in the context of Roman Catholic worship is perhaps one of the areas of greatest controversy generated by the movement.

Intense criticism emerged from conservative elements in the Church after a nationally televised documentary describing the movement was aired on the SBT network in 1993 (*Cultura Negra na Igreja*, March 4, 1993). While the documentary did not give a negative portrayal of the movement, it did present the movement as a means by which the Catholic Church is drawing closer to *candomblé*. The documentary included interviews with *movimento negro* leaders along with film footage from an Afro-Brazilian celebration of Mass and a Catholic wedding ceremony performed as an Afro-Brazilian rite. In both instances, the music and symbolism used drew heavily from Afro-Brazilian religion. The program also connected APN with the liberation theology and CEB movements. It went on to show examples of the mixing of African and Christian symbols, such as the use of the name Oxalá, an African deity, as the name of God's Son who was sent to the earth. The conscientizing activities of the movement were presented also so that it was clear to the viewers that the movement is spreading its teachings among the people and attempting to awaken the black conscience through Afro-Brazilian religion. While the program did not appear to offer a distortion of the movement, it highlighted those elements most likely to provoke a reaction from conservatives.

One of the chief conservative fears lies in the introduction of symbols and artifacts of Afro-Brazilian religions such as music, dance, and clothing into Roman Catholic liturgy. The reaction to the program was severe enough that Frei David found it necessary to circulate a response to the program in order to quell the rise of negative criticism from conservative sources (Santos 1993). In his response Frei David accounted for the reaction by asserting that the program had brought to the surface the prejudice against black culture that had been instilled in the Brazilian collective conscience during 500 years of the oppression of blacks. He argued that the casting of black culture as inferior resulted in the demonizing of African religion (Santos 1993).

The solution to this problem, he contented, is to recognize that culture is prior to religion and that all cultures are equally valid. This being the case, then the religion produced by blacks out of their culture should be accepted as having the same validity and value as the religion produced out the European culture of whites. He then asserted that the symbols being brought into Roman Catholic liturgy by the *movimento negro* originate from black culture which existed prior to black religion as such. Black people have the right to use elements of black culture, such as dance and style of dress, in their worship, just as many elements found in Roman Catholic worship, clerical attire for example, were drawn from the culture of Rome and Europe. Blacks are only attempting to use symbols from their own culture so that the black way of being religious will be adequately expressed. They reason that since the majority of Brazilians are black, by the movement's definition, then in order to valorize the *negritude* of the people the Church ought to be blackened. This is to be done by introducing African culture and values into the daily life and worship of the Roman Catholic Church (Santos 1993).

Ten specific elements from African culture have been emphasized as resources that should be included as a part of the inculturation process.

- 1) Dance as a profound expression of the worship of God; Exodus 15:20-21
- 2) The atabaque and other African musical instruments; Psalms 150
- 3) A re-reading of the word of God from the perspective of the history and viewpoint of blacks; Luke 1:45-55
- 4) Style of dress as a means of recovering the aesthetic of a people; John 19:23-24
- 5) The symbols of offerings from the history and culture of blacks; Exodus 23:19
- 6) The mysticism of the struggle and organization from the perspective of the black martyrs
- 7) The sharing of food as an advance sign of the Kingdom and a reconciliation of Axé (energies); Mark 14:22-25
- 8) A recovery of the memory of our ancestors as a new form to understand and celebrate the communion of the Saints; Mark 9:2-8
- 9) The celebration in a circle as an incessant quest for equality and unity; Matthew 18:2-4
- 10) An altar on the floor recuperates the African world view which has the earth as the space where the energies (Orixás) were created by Olorum (God) that give life to all beings. This understanding is also perceived in the rereading that we make of the birth of Jesus, (who came to restore life) in the manger, laying on the floor and not in a crib of gold. (Luke 2:12) (*Comissão Religiosas, Seminaristas e Padres Negros do RJ*, n.d.b. my translation).

All of the subjects interviewed for this study agreed that African symbols are important for the recovery of black identity but they did not agree on how they should be used. The appropriation of Afro-Brazilian religious symbols has generated division within the movement itself. Most of the subjects interviewed are in favor of Afro-Brazilian Masses, weddings, baptisms, and ordinations as an appropriate expression of black

culture in a Roman Catholic context. Others see this as a misuse of African religious symbols that actually destroys their true meaning by removing them from their proper context. They also fear that the rituals will become routinized and structured according to a strict pattern that will stifle the creativity of the people in worship. Some subjects went so far as to refer to the introduction of an Afro-Brazilian Mass as a means of manipulating the people into staying in the Church and remaining under the authority of its leaders. The alternative model they offered was one of participating in both religions without attempting to mix the two together.

As black Roman Catholics, most activists desired to express the black way of being religious by the introduction of an Afro-Brazilian liturgy into the ceremonies of the Church. Such a liturgy has been developed, and in spite of resistance from conservatives, is being implemented in various parishes. Although it does not appear to be very widespread at present, its acceptance is growing, especially among progressive sectors of the Church.

Afro-Brazilian rites have been developed for the Roman Catholic Mass, the sacrament of baptism, and the sacrament of marriage. These rituals include the essential elements of the Roman Catholic ceremonies. This, of course, is necessary in order for the Afro-Brazilian liturgy to have a claim to be authentically Roman Catholic. In the practice of the rites, each follows an order of service that is typical of traditional Catholic celebrations, although the details are not exactly the same in every case. However, within the context of each, certain distinct Afro-Brazilian elements are introduced. Here I will give a brief discussion of these rites in order to highlight those Afro-Brazilian elements.

The ceremonies begin with an opening song and then introduction by the officiating priest. This opportunity is taken to explain the purpose of having an Afro-

Brazilian rite and to explain something about exactly what it is. It was emphasized in the baptism rite that I attended that the service was not simply black folklore nor was it for entertainment. Rather it was a serious religious observance. Another introduction for a baptism asserted that such a ceremony is needed in order to continue to conscientize others and to continue the resistance of blacks against oppression. The Afro-Brazilian rite is a way for blacks to meet persecution "without bowing their heads" (*1ª Celebração de Batismo Católico segundo a cultura Negro-Brasileira* 1991).

Afro-Brazilian dance to the accompaniment of drums, and sometimes guitars, singing and other instruments, forms part of the processional. This may occur in the beginning as well as in other parts of the service. During this part of the celebration religious symbols are carried into the worship area, such as a statue of Mary, a Bible, the elements for communion, food and other items used as offerings. During an Afro-Brazilian baptism rite I witnessed the child being brought in by her father. He held her up over his head for all to see as he danced from the rear of the church to the altar. The holy water was carried in by the godparents who were preceded by dancing girls throwing confetti in their path.

The importance of dance in the rituals is seen in that it may be used at various times during the Mass. It is common that the taking of the Eucharist will be done by means of the congregation dancing, rather than simply walking in line, to the altar to receive it from the priests. Also during the consecration of the host, the priest may hold it up to show to the congregation while dancing as well. The type of dance used may vary from an informal swaying of the body to dances that are more complex and rehearsed by persons who are performing the dance as a part of their role in the Mass.

Prayer plays an important part in the Afro-Brazilian Mass. A common element in the various ceremonies is the use of African names for deity along with Christian names. Names such as Olorum and Oxalá are invoked along with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Interestingly, the African deities are sometimes presented in a trinitarian context so that the Father is Olorum, the Son is Oxalá, and the Holy Spirit is Obatalá. They are affirmed to be one God. Other African names for God are used along with names for various *orixás*.

The prayers offered during the ceremonies play a prominent role. During the prayer of penance the individual leading the prayer asks pardon for the sins of the Church in its complicity in the oppression of blacks. Prayers are offered for those blacks who do not yet realize their *negritude*, affirming that the worst kind of discrimination is the self-discrimination of not assuming one's true identity. Prayers may be offered, accompanied by the lighting of candles, for black ancestors and loved ones who have died. Ancestors are also invoked during the ceremony in order to obtain their blessing.

It is common for the altar in the Afro-Brazilian Mass to be located on the ground as a symbol of the importance of the connection between the black people and the earth. The altar itself holds the cup and the bread for the Eucharist and may also hold other symbols such as a black figure of Mary, and candles. As the Eucharist is offered and taken by the people, other offerings are brought to the altar by dancing participants. These food items are traditional African dishes that are associated with particular *orixás* and used as offerings to them in *candomblé*. These food items are passed out to the congregation as well, signifying communion with the *orixás*. Booklets for conscientization may also be passed out at this time (*Comissão dos Religiosos, Seminaristas e Padres Negros Rio de Janeiro* n.d.a., 5).

The manner of dress used by participants in the Mass may vary from the traditional priestly vestments. The use of an African style hat along with much more colorful robes brings a sense of connection with traditional African culture. The dancers who are leading the processions may also be dressed in traditional African clothing for this purpose. The circling of the congregation with the altar in the middle is also used when space allows for it. This creates more of a sense of equality among all the participants.

The language of liberation theology is prominent in the Afro-Brazilian celebrations. Prayers and invocations refer to God as liberator who comes to bring unity to all peoples and to overcome oppression and discrimination. God provides the *axé* or force that is necessary for both life and the achievement of liberation. The Eucharist prayer asks of God the strength to carry on the struggle for liberation. The African names of God are also used here in connection with the liberative process. God is called on, in one ceremony, to remake Palmares. Thus, Palmares comes to symbolize the eschatological Kingdom in the context of the Mass (*Comissão dos Religiosos, Seminaristas e Padres Negros Rio de Janeiro* n.d.a. ).

In the Afro-Brazilian Mass the symbols and the content presented serve to unify the movement around a common vision of its struggle, its past, its conquests, and its hopes. The Mass itself is both a moment of celebration and a moment of conscientization. The latter is critical for since, as one subject observed, only a small number of the people come regularly to base group meetings while it is not unusual to draw a large crowd for an Afro-Brazilian Mass. Thus, the Mass would appear to be a major avenue of contact with the people.

Another popular religious celebration that provides a potentially rich point of contact with the people is the *congado* of Minas Gerais. The *congado* is a tradition that originated in the African Brotherhoods (*Irmandades*) that were discussed in chapter two. These ceremonies have remained popular among blacks, especially in the state of Minas Gerais, where they originated and where they are still practiced today. I had the opportunity to observe the *congado* in August of 1993 while in Minas Gerais in a context where APN is becoming involved in it as a means of spreading the message of the movement. While a complete description of this ceremony is beyond the scope of the present work, there are some relevant aspects to be noted.<sup>8</sup>

The *congado* is said to have its roots in the ceremonies of coronation for the kings and queens of the Angolan peoples. Different popular legends place its origins either in Minas Gerais, at the hands of an enslaved African king who gained his freedom, or else in Africa (Nogueira 1993; *Centro de Extensão, Universidade Católica de Minas Gerais* 1974, 15-19). The *congado* today is an Afro-Brazilian ceremony that maintains the tradition of coronating a king, queen, princes, princesses, and other officers. The *congados* are associated with the veneration of *Nossa Senhora do Rosário* (Our Lady of the Rosary) and are held yearly in her honor. It was in the *congados* that the black lay Brotherhoods of Minas Gerais were able to find a social space where the preservation and expression of a distinctly Afro-Brazilian form of religious celebration was permitted. These rituals became thoroughly syncretized with Catholic symbols and forms of worship (Bastide 1978, 120-125). It is interesting to note that both conservative Catholics and activists in

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<sup>8</sup>For a more complete treatment of the *congado* see *Centro de Extensão, Universidade Católica de Minas Gerais* 1974.

the *movimento negro* accept these ceremonies as legitimate means of expressing black religiosity within the Church.<sup>9</sup>

The *congados* are composed of various guards that dress in distinct colors, carry flags, and beat drums as they march through the town. The ceremonies may last for several days and are accompanied by a festive atmosphere. The guards march through the towns and around the Church that is dedicated to *Nossa Senhora do Rosario* (Our Lady of the Rosary). Other worshipers join in the march as well. Many wear crowns which they eventually carry into the church to offer to Mary signifying promises that are being made in return for answers to prayers.

The *congado* includes the choosing of a king, queen, and their court. One of the subjects interviewed was an APN leader who had been chosen as queen of the *congado*. This was considered by her to be an extremely high honor and a strong affirmation of her identity and value as both a black person and a black woman. The position of queen also gave her a platform with the *congado* from which to speak of the movement. This is important for the movement because the *congado* is mostly composed of blacks who are not active in the *movimento negro* and who are not identified with the more militant and radical posture it represents.

The *congado* is also important for the movement because it has established a precedent within the Roman Catholic Church for a uniquely black way of expressing religiosity. The tradition has existed at least since the early 1700s (Nogueira 1993) and therefore offers the movement an opportunity to identify with a legitimated social

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<sup>9</sup>The discussion of the *congado* here is based upon my observation of the *congado* in Itaúna, Minas Gerais in August, 1993, as well as conversations with activists participating in it.

structure in the Church that is not likely to be questioned. It remains to be seen, however, how the black lay brotherhoods will respond to the movement with its political agenda, for while the brotherhoods were always active in helping to procure the freedom of individual slaves, since abolition they have not been seen as a political force. Indeed, most white Brazilians look at the brotherhoods as quaint institutions and the *congado* as interesting but harmless black folklore.

The movement's appropriation of Afro-Brazilian religion thus has a dual struggle in its bid for acceptance in Brazil. On the one hand there is the conservative reaction against it as demonic and politically radical. On the other hand is the trivialization of it so that it can then be conveniently ignored. As long as such manifestations are not seen as a threat to the elite status quo they are likely to be ignored. However, the *movimento negro* in the Roman Catholic Church in Brazil has a political stance that many conservatives are not able to ignore.

### Political and Social Perspectives

#### Political Involvement

Throughout the interviews movement activists consistently held to a political view identified with the Brazilian left. Some respondents went so far as to add this particular political stance to the definition of what it means to be black. Being black, from their point of view, requires one to take a militant stance against the racist, capitalist society that is dominated by the white elite. It entails becoming a militant and actively working for the black cause. Those who would not take such a stand would not be included among those who have adequately assumed their identity. They are in need of further conscientization. Even among those who did not make such a strong assertion, political

activism constituted an important part of their own identity as blacks. Being black means being one whose resistance is expressed politically.

Subjects were uniformly critical of capitalism, rejecting it in favor of socialist political and economic policies. Support for the Worker's Party (PT), known for its socialist position, was almost unanimous, although defeats in recent elections had created some doubts about the future. These doubts were heightened by preexisting questions about the PT similar to the doubts expressed about liberation theology. Subjects viewed both of them as being products of whites and therefore limited in their usefulness. Activists complained that not only did the party tend to not initiate dialogue about racial issues, it actively discouraged such dialogue. According to the subjects interviewed, PT party leaders claimed that engaging in the discussion of racial questions would be divisive and damage the party by diverting its attention away from its goals. Activists asserted that in light of this reality, it would be up to blacks to not only create their own theology, but also to assume political power from the bottom up by raising the consciousness of other blacks.

### Social Projects

One of the ways of working towards achieving its goals in the political and social arena is through the social activities of the movement. These activities engage movement participants in concrete projects designed to create social change. The activities vary from outright political acts, such as social protest, to projects designed to give aid to the poor through education and other services.

### Education

Examples of the movement's education projects are the pre-vestibular program and the Black Child, Beautiful Child program. The Black Child, Beautiful Child program

begins with small children and uses children's literature to teach reading along with a positive image of being black. One activist involved in this program related how it has helped her to begin to assist parents also. In some cases this involves opportunities to assist women and children who are being abused, as well as teaching reading for adults.

The pre-vestibular program in São João de Meriti is an educational program for high school graduates desiring to take the vestibular, a required exam necessary for entrance into any Brazilian university or college. Activists say that the low number of blacks in university is accounted for by the fact that most do not have the opportunity to take such courses and hence, they cannot compete for the free spaces in the public universities. Wealthy families are able to send their children to better schools where they are able to get the education needed to succeed. The pre-vestibular offers study at a low cost and has become very popular. It is reported that the results are quite positive with 34% of students completing the course successfully in its first year and gaining places in the highly competitive public universities (*O Que é Pré-vestibular para Negros e Carentes?* 1994).

#### Women's Concerns

Another significant area of social concern for the movement is that of gender issues. APN has produced a booklet *Mulher Negra: Resistência e Soberania de uma Raça*, published by *Vozes*, that addresses the concerns of black women (APN 1990). The booklet addresses the relation of black women to various areas of social life including sexuality, the abuse of women, work, politics, education, culture, the family, health, social communication, and the church. Dedicated to black women and all who seek egalitarian relationships, the book begins by asserting that women find themselves living in a macho-racist world that subjects them to a triple discrimination; as women, as blacks and as poor

(APN 1990, 9-11). The booklet sets forth as the goal of APN to call Brazilians to concrete social action (APN 1990, 9-10). Each chapter concludes with suggestions for practical actions.

The booklet specifically details modes of discrimination against women in Brazil that are said to be common. Rigid social roles in family and work, the inequality of education opportunities, low salaries, physical abuse, the lack of adequate health care are all discussed as aspects of the discriminatory process imposed by white, male dominated capitalist culture. The problem of sexism in the Church is addressed in the final section of the booklet. Throughout, the importance of the role of women in the various areas of social life are affirmed. The presentation basically follows the same type of outline as other APN materials addressing the racial issues in Brazil.

Women in the movement have felt the need for women's groups to speak to their specific needs and issues. The female subjects interviewed affirmed that, in spite of its progressive environment, the *movimento negro* in the Brazilian Roman Catholic Church is basically controlled by men and tends to reflect the *machismo* that is prevalent in Brazil. Women in the movement complained that the power was in the hands of male leaders who were not always concerned about issues important to women. They found that women's issues could best be addressed through women's groups that allowed them to meet together without the control of male movement leaders. The male leadership has been responsive to this need and has generally allowed women's groups to operate freely.

Women's groups meet regularly to allow women to talk and share their struggles that they might find support and empowerment from other women. One subject expressed that often poor women are under a heavy burden of work from child care and the necessity to make a living and that society in general does not look favorably upon

them taking time off just to talk. She claimed that society views such activity by women as idle gossip. It is acceptable for men, on the other hand, to gather at the bars and talk. The women's groups provide space where women feel the freedom to express themselves.

Beyond the social activism discussed, political activities engaged in by movement participants include educational activities to encourage blacks to vote and to vote for black candidates in particular, as well as participation in protests and demonstrations. It is not unusual to find individual APNs participating in activities of various popular movements in Brazil concerned with issues such as women's issues and the problem of Brazil's homeless children. Activists also spoke of participating in strikes and protests. Although the political parties remain wary of dealing with black issues, the movement views the political arena as a primary place where justice or injustice will be enacted (*Articulação Nacional dos Padres e Bispos Negros - Brasil* n.d., 3).

### Conclusion

Religion is a vital force in the social and racial project of the *movimento negro* in the Brazilian Roman Catholic Church. Within the movement a new black racial identity is being constructed out of the cultural and religious symbols drawn from the tradition of black Brazilians. Much of this tradition was forged in the history of resistance to oppression by the white elite. Out of this history the movement is building a concept of blackness that involves all aspects of personal and social life. In this context certain themes stand out as having particular importance.

Movement activists expressed that a prominent part of their daily reality is that they must face racism and discrimination at all levels of Brazilian society. This includes discrimination in employment and education as well as in the Church. Beyond this activists expressed opposition from family and friends over their involvement in the

movement. Families especially showed a reluctance to accept the activists' new identity as blacks. This goes against the desire of these families to whiten themselves.

Building a new racial identity requires going against the socially approved path of whitening and deliberately assuming the new identity. This brings the activist into a position of confrontation with the racial democracy and whitening ideologies that are held by the majority. Activists described the deliberate assumption of a black racial identity in this context of hostility as akin to a conversion experience. It resulted in a new and enhanced sense of self-esteem as well as a militant political stance that led activists into political and social activism.

The construction of a black identity drew largely from the resources of Afro-Brazilian history as represented in the resistance of blacks to white oppression and the symbols found in the religious traditions of traditional Roman Catholicism, African religions, and the liberation theology movement. The recovery of the history of the oppression and resistance of blacks in Brazil is an important aspect of the movement's campaign to challenge the racial democracy thesis and to provide models and inspiration for contemporary black resistance. The symbols and ideals of each of the three religious traditions provide a rationale and hope for the movement's struggle.

It was proposed that the movement could be analyzed in terms of Berger and Luckman's (1967) theory of sociology of knowledge along with Scott's (1990) theory of the resistance of subordinates to their oppression. In the next chapter the specifics of how these theories may be used for such a task will be treated.

## CHAPTER 5

### THE CONSTRUCTION OF RACIAL IDENTITY AND THE RECONSTRUCTION OF SOCIAL REALITY

Activists in the *movimento negro* in the Brazilian Roman Catholic Church expressed the hope for a future that would allow all peoples to live together as citizens without the effects of poverty and oppression. In their view, achieving this goal in Brazil means overcoming racial prejudice and discrimination among individuals as well as within the structures of Brazilian society. As the data in the previous chapter shows, movement participants confronted the racial ambiguity that operates in daily life within the Brazilian racial ethos as a major impediment to this aspiration. Their central struggle concerns the problem of constructing a viable black racial identity within the racial polity of Brazilian society. Controlled largely by the whitening and racial democracy theories, the racial ethos of Brazil acts as an obstacle to constructing such an identity. In response to this, the movement has developed its own racial project as a means for contesting the meaning of being black in Brazil.

In this chapter the theoretical perspective developed in chapter one will be discussed along with the data from the research, in order to examine the racial project of the movement. The thesis that the *movimento negro* in Brazil's Roman Catholic Church is challenging the symbolic universe represented by the Brazilian racial ethos by bringing the hidden transcript of black resistance forward as a resource in the construction of a new Afro-Brazilian racial identity will be explored in light of this perspective. Specifically, the

three dialectical moments of internalization, externalization, and objectivation in Berger and Luckmann's (1967) scheme of the social construction of knowledge will be used to organize the data presented in the previous chapters. The concepts of race, ethnicity, and signification as related to the racial project of the *movimento negro* will be elucidated. The discussion will conclude with a section outlining the ethos of race within the movement along with some basic features of its theological and ethical stance.

### The Social Construction of Racial Identity

#### Internalization

The notions of Brazilian racial democracy and whitening are still largely accepted by Brazilians as a part of the assumed social reality, in spite of the recent public discussion of Brazilian racial issues in the media since the centennial of abolition in 1988. Racial democracy and whitening appear as "objective" realities in the symbolic universe that confronts the individual throughout childhood and into adulthood. They therefore remain an important aspect of the symbolic universe that is internalized by children through the primary socialization of the home and the secondary socialization that occurs through other Brazilian social institutions. Berger and Luckmann (1967) argue that it is during this process of internalization, the first of the three moments in the dialectic of the social construction of one's own symbolic universe, that an identity is formed.

In the Brazilian setting, the data suggest that the negative images of blacks presented to Brazilians from the time they are children as well as the pervasiveness of the whitening doctrine, contribute to their rejection of a black identity. The historical reality of miscegenation and the resulting variance in physical features between black and white give rise to the construction of the numerous racial identities in Brazil.

Based on Berger and Luckmann's (1967) model one would predict that internalization would be an important arena of conflict in the process of constructing a new racial identity. Observing that the internalization of a symbolic universe and hence, an identity, is always precarious (Berger and Luckmann 1967, 147) and that domination inevitably produces resistance (Scott's 1985, 1990), we should expect to find that the process of internalization is critical to the challenging of the dominant understanding of racial identity and the construction of a new racial identity in its place. This is indeed the case.

The process of identity reconstruction involves to a large extent the internalization of the symbols that represent the new symbolic universe being offered in the conscientization efforts of the movement. In order to permit the internalization of a new identity, the conscientization process attacks the symbols of racial democracy and whitening that comprise the dominant Brazilian racial ethos. As the new movement participant takes part in this process, he or she is resocialized into the symbolic universe of the movement. During conscientization, the individual is assisted in reinterpreting symbols related to blackness, so that the formerly negative ideas associated with being black are transformed into positive ideas. In addition, new symbols from sources such as the African religions are appropriated to add to this positive image of blackness. As this new image develops a change in attitude occurs that allows critical interpretations of the dominant ethos to emerge into the public transcript. This is the case for both newly acquired criticisms and criticisms that were already held but previously only expressed in the private realm.

The *movimento negro* challenges the internalization of the dominant ethos of race through its various projects of conscientization as well as through informal contacts and

relationships. Three specific areas that the movement confronts are, the interpretation of the dominant definition of Brazilian race relations expressed in the whitening and racial democracy theories (the dominant objectivated social reality), the interpretation of personal experience of race relations, and the posture of submission accompanied by acceptance of the dominant racial ethos. Beyond the conscientization efforts with adults, movement activists are challenging each of these three areas on the levels of primary and secondary socialization. The Black Child, Beautiful Child project is just one example. Indeed, beginning with Afro-Brazilian baptism ceremonies for infants and on through the involvement of teenagers in APNs, the activities of the movement demonstrate the concern that blacks internalize the movement's interpretation of race from the beginning.

The materials used by the movement are quite direct in their disputation of both the racial democracy and whitening ideologies which form the dominant interpretation of race relations in Brazil. The booklet *A Violência Nossa de Cada Dia* depicts specific examples of discrimination and presents these as normative for Brazilian society. Both the CNBB and the *Comissão dos Religiosos, Seminaristas e Padres Negros Rio de Janeiro* texts for the 1988 *Campanha da Fraternidade* (Brotherhood Campaign) detail specific examples of racism in Brazil. These include the presentation of negative stereotypes in the media and the inequality of educational and employment opportunities for blacks. Statistical data is used to support these claims (CNBB 1988a, 8-12). In addition, extensive statistical documentation is provided in the booklet *Negros no Brasil: Dados da Realidade* (Heringer, et. al. 1989) for use in base group studies. The booklet presents in a non-polemical and straightforward manner, information that seriously undermines the racial democracy theory. Its stated purpose is to provide in one convenient location the

data concerning blacks in Brazil that is most frequently requested by activists. It contains much useful data for the use of the *movimento negro* in its quest to counter the internalization of the dominant racial ethos among blacks.

An important avenue of contesting the dominant racial ethos is the use of personal experiences of discrimination to refute racial democracy. Movement activists who have assumed a black identity actively discuss their experiences of discrimination in base group meetings and other settings. The view that racism is pervasive in Brazil is thus supported by personal testimony. In addition, base group meetings and study courses that discuss specific types of discrimination also call for personal reflection requiring participants to examine their own histories for similar occurrences. The groups themselves form plausibility structures that legitimate such activity. Hence a context is created that promotes the reinterpretation of one's biography so that specific past incidents come to be understood as examples of victimization by racism. In this manner the racial situation of Brazil is subjected to a reinterpretation that substitutes the ethos of the *movimento negro* for that of the dominant society and thus fosters the reinterpretation of one's personal experience of race relations.

Important in the process of conscientization is the challenge to movement participants to respond to each aspect of the reinterpreted reality that is presented. In the case of those who are beginning to assume a black identity the movement seeks to empower them to take a posture of overt resistance. Those who have previously responded "with heads bowed," only voicing resistance in the realm of the hidden transcript, are empowered to bring this hidden resistance into the open. Rather than being ignored, previously unseen discrimination becomes cause for anger. Testimony from activists revealed that as individuals are empowered, their tolerance of racism

diminishes to the point that they choose to react. A sense of self-respect is developed that causes activists to demand respect from others.

Based on the interview data, it can be concluded that one of the primary sources of empowerment comes through the change in self-esteem that accompanies a newly internalized set of values. Chief among these values is that being black is considered to be something very good. Subjects repeatedly stated that after assuming their negritude they began to feel at ease with themselves. The change from a sense of shame at being black led to an attitude of non-tolerance for racist treatment. The new sense of positive self-esteem resulted in consistent resistance and refusal to continue to internalize the negative symbolism of blackness from the dominant racial ethos. It provided resources for self-defense against racial discrimination.

This internalization of a new sense of value is itself based on the negation, as one subject put it, of the negative value placed on blackness by the dominant racial ethos. Whereas the dominant ethos signifies blackness with negative symbolism, the movement reverses this symbolism at each point. The positive attitude towards Afro-Brazilian religion is one of the most significant aspects of this reversal. By developing a construction of Afro-Brazilian religion as a serious arena for the interaction of black people with God, the movement attempts to negate the depictions of this religion as either folklore or demonic. In addition, the use of symbols from Afro-Brazilian religion in theological discourse within the movement tends to counter the popular perception that associates Afro-Brazilian religion with a lack of sophistication and education. The predominant definition of "culture" as that which is white is negated. Black religion and black culture come to be internalized as positive and significant.

Also reversed is the aesthetic value that is placed upon the physical phenotype associated with Africans. This reversal is so profound that whereas previously, any presence of white characteristics was sufficient to whiten one's identity, now even the smallest sign of skin color, hair texture, or facial features indicating a possible black ancestry are grounds for identifying one as black. Phenotype was taken by activists as a sure sign of one's being black regardless of whether or not the person in question identified himself or herself as such. It was connected with the essentialist notion of negritude that movement activists articulated.

#### Liberation Theology

Another set of religious symbols internalized by movement participants is derived from the theology of liberation. Important elements of liberation theology are internalized in the process of conscientization. Indeed, the notion of conscientization and many of the methods employed to achieve it are borrowed directly from liberation theology and the CEB movement. The use of the Exodus story exemplifies the use of biblical symbols to foster the identification of movement participants as the oppressed and the Brazilian elite as the oppressors. The perspective that social inequalities in Brazil are caused by unjust social structures related to white European capitalism is linked to these symbols and to the denunciation of the oppression of the poor found in the Old Testament prophets. This provides an interpretation of Brazilian social and economic structures that is in direct opposition to racial democracy. Thus, activists come to view racial democracy as a false democracy.

One of the values that subjects mentioned as being of great importance was that of community as opposed to individualism. The Palmares *quilombo* as well as the community emphasis that subjects saw in Afro-Brazilian religion are important symbols of

the significance of community. The notion of the Kingdom of God, especially defined as the utopian historical project that is often presented in liberation theology, serves as another forceful symbol of the priority of community. It also symbolizes the hope for a better future, an attitude that is internalized even in the face of an increase in negative sanctions that often accompanies participation in the movement. The Kingdom symbolizes a reality that transcends the injustices of racist society and represents a source of power that is greater than the power of the dominant elite. It is more than just an abstraction for many activists. It represents a reality that they believe will one day come. As such it provides a great source of empowerment in the face of the pervasive power of the status quo in Brazil.

The value of community also plays a role in the internalization of a militant political posture. The above mentioned symbols contribute to the internalization of a socialist oriented political stance and a general alignment of activists with the left. European capitalism, on the other hand, comes to symbolize the racist system that has exploited blacks from the era of slavery to the present economic and social inequalities of Brazilian society. Capitalism and individualism are viewed by activists as necessary aspects of the same oppressive system. Movement activists view political activism as a necessary expression of opposition. Activism is focused in the process of externalization as the new attitude is expressed back into the social arena.

### Conversion and Identity

Internalization is a process that takes place in the lives of individuals. Consistent with the hypothesis suggested in chapter one, the data indicate that the shift from the internalized dominant Brazilian racial ethos to that represented in the movement, may be

likened to a conversion experience for many. Such aspects of conversion as the facing of a decision, surrender, reinterpretation of one's biography, and testimony may be evident.<sup>1</sup>

The elements of decision and surrender are evident in the account of the seminarian who was conscientized by his superior. Like others who were exposed to an alternative interpretation of both their own biographies and the social reality of Brazilian race relations, he related that he was faced with the choice to assume his negritude. Such a construction of the situation by respondents indicates that there is both a subjective and objective element involved in the decision to assume a black identity. The objective element is found in the sense of objective reality that the notion of negritude assumes. Subjects reached a point in the conscientization process in which negritude became an undeniable reality that exists and must be faced, and to which one must surrender. This was readily apparent in the experience of the seminarian. After some investigation, his violent rejection of the idea that he was black was replaced with the understanding that he was truly black and that this had always been the case. On the other hand, the subjective element is clear in that negritude must be assumed. One must make a choice to give up whatever non-black identity one had held and to embrace a black identity. To use Rambo's (1992) metaphor, a clear fork in the road is presented. The conversion process

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<sup>1</sup>The step of commitment in the conversion process is described by Rambo (1992) as involving a "fork in the road" type of choice between two competing alternatives. This entails surrender to the new group or belief system and the reinterpretation of one's past in terms of the group's belief system. The result is a testimony that describes negatively one's former life in comparison with the positive changes experienced since embracing the new faith. William Sims Bainbridge (1992) argues that conversion should be understood in terms of the social influence of the new group by which strong attachments are made to group members as the new convert is socialized into its life and beliefs. Both Bainbridge and Rambo indicate that a sense of deprivation and crisis over one's circumstances can contribute to conversion, although this is not always the case.

is evident in the turning from the whitening ideology in favor of the "blackening" involved in assuming negritude.

The reconstruction of past biography has already been mentioned on several occasions in the course of our discussion. Events not previously perceived as discrimination are reinterpreted as such. One respondent, for example, noted that he was accepted by white schoolmates when they needed help with their studies while he and his dark skinned friends would not be included with them in recreational activities. At the time he paid little attention to this, but after becoming active in the movement he came to view this as racial discrimination. This type of biographical reinterpretation was common among the subjects interviewed.

Also common among the respondents was the notion that negritude is a reality that exists as a quality of all Brazilians of African descent, whether they have assumed a black identity or not. Those who have not done so are considered to be blind. They are victims of the whitening ideology and are outside of the truth. The subjects also attributed this state of affairs to themselves as they were prior to assuming negritude. They considered themselves to have been blinded to the truth of their real identity as blacks. In contrast to this, the new biographical construction is also highlighted by numerous positive changes that are alleged to have taken place since assuming negritude. These include the previously discussed changes in values, the sense of empowerment, positive self-esteem, and a sense of purpose in helping to carry out the project of the movement.

The element of conversion involved in the assumption of negritude brings to mind Burgess's (1978, 270) five operational properties that she argues are fundamental to

ethnicity.<sup>2</sup> In this scheme ethnic identity entails "affective attachments or bonds" that are founded upon a shared history and goals. Consistent with a social influence notion of conversion, affective bonds develop that facilitate and reinforce the new interpretation of reality. We have seen that much of the process of conscientization itself is based upon the appropriation and development of symbols that are drawn from the hidden transcript found in the history of black resistance and Afro-Brazilian religion. A sense of shared history is therefore basic to membership in the *movimento negro* and the accompanying black identity. With the refutation of racial democracy and the discrediting of whitening, ethnic goals become focused on continuing the resistance found in Afro-Brazilian religion and history with the hope of creating a just and non-racist society. The bonds and "ties" created are further expressed by the affirmation of the biological characteristics of the African phenotype and the shared symbols of African culture such as dance, music, dress and African religion. In addition, a sense of unity, derived from a shared connection with Africa, is maintained by means of both the symbols of Afro-Brazilian religion and the history of slave resistance. This creates a consciousness of belonging to a specific ethnic/racial group identified as black. This consciousness does not suffer from the ambiguity found in the racial identity of Brazilian mulattoes. It is a consciousness of a distinct ethnic identity and a sense of membership in a group that shares that identity.

The conscientization project of the movement challenges the dominant racial ethos which the subjects had internalized. This results in the adoption of a new ethnic and racial identity. The only exceptions to this among the subjects interviewed is that

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<sup>2</sup> The five operational properties were listed as "(1) ethnic group membership; (2) ethnic identity; (3) consciousness of belonging and/or of group differences; (4) affective attachments or bonds based on a real or putative shared past and perceived ethnic aims or interests; (5) ties elaborated or differentiated symbolically by 'markers,' tradition, emblems, beliefs (cultural, territorial, biological)" (Burgess 1978, 270).

minority of activists who already identified themselves as black prior to joining the movement. Even they, however, may find that their understanding of the meaning of negritude changes to conform to the movement's understanding.

The successful internalization of a new identity depends in large part upon the ability to create a reinterpretation of the dominant racial ethos that was previously internalized. Berger and Luckmann (1967) point out that such internalization is always incomplete. The stability of one's identity would therefore be subject to the tensions of the contradictions of the symbolic universe one has adopted as well as to the pressures from the presence of alternative universes that one is aware of. Hence, one's identity has a degree of insecurity that allows for the possibility of entertaining a different conception of reality.

The precariousness of identity may be seen in the four categories of political discourse developed by Scott (1990). These categories of political discourse are each evident in Brazilian race relations. The category, the appearance of agreement with the dominant view, still persists among many Brazilians of African descent. Their willingness to pursue social advancement by means of whitening illustrates this agreement. Agreement with the whitening ideal is also apparent in the opposition reported by *movimento negro* activists from family members who view the assumption of negritude by the activist as an absurdity. That families sometimes persecute those who assume a black identity shows the strength of this opposition among some Brazilians. This is further manifested in the case of those who were opposed to the possible union of their dark skinned daughters with black men, with its potential for producing black grandchildren.

As demonstrated in chapter two, the second form of political discourse outlined by Scott (1990), the hidden transcript, is also evident in Brazilian race relations. While it

was especially apparent during the era of slavery, the hidden transcript still persists. The example of the families opposed to their daughters' marriages to black men is again, a case in point. In this situation, family members are operating in Brazilian society in accordance with the assumption of whitening. This entails compliance with racial democracy and whitening in the arena of the public transcript. This conformity is shown by their opposition to the activist's involvement in the movement. They argue that the movement is absurd in its attempt to classify all mulattoes as blacks, hence defending the system of racial identity found in Brazil's racial ethos. However, when these same families express their opposition to the possibility of their daughters having black mates, the hidden transcript is evident. The desire to have whiter grandchildren on the grounds that they will not experience the same degree of racial discrimination that the family has previously experienced reveals the disbelief in the official ideology of racial democracy. It also points out the inherent contradiction between the racial democracy and whitening theories.

The act of asserting the reality of racism, while also defending whitening, may be viewed as an instance of Hanchard's (1994) contradictory consciousness. In this case contradictory consciousness involves the belief in the superiority of being white, while at the same time recognizing that whites are guilty of racial discrimination. However, the fact that such consciousness is contradictory does not negate the reality of the transcript of resistance that is involved in it. The resistance is just as real as the compliance. Rather than holding that either the compliance is completely feigned or the resistance is non-existent, the tension involved in contradictory consciousness may be explained in light of the tension between the internalization of the symbolic universe of the dominant elite and the experience of inconsistencies in the plausibility structures supporting that universe.

The symbolic universe presents a Brazil in which racism is not social problem. Yet within plausibility structures in Brazilian society such as education, the media, and the Church, these blacks privately indicate that they expect to be discriminated against.

A third form of resistance involves the veiled articulation of the hidden transcript into the public discourse (Scott 1990, 19, 137). During the slave era the signification of blacks as lazy may also be interpreted as an indication of passive aggressive resistance in the form of work slow downs. Secret theft of food from their white masters served not only for survival but also as a means of resistance for blacks during the slave era. While Brazil has been considered a Roman Catholic nation, the practice of African religions by baptized blacks has been a constant reminder to whites of their inability to completely assimilate blacks into the official faith. With the restoration of civilian government in Brazil, veiled resistance is not as necessary as previously.

Finally, the fourth form of resistance is most evident in the *movimento negro* today. Overt resistance is occurring as the hidden transcript breaks forth into the public arena in a way that has not been typical since the slave revolts of previous centuries. The movement's challenge to the traditional ethos of race represents the internalization of a new definition of the racial situation for movement activists.

In sum, the process of internalization can be viewed as a process of contestation for identity. The ethos of race represented by racial democracy and whitening encourages the internalization of a non-black identity. As the movement seeks to help Brazilians internalize its own ethos of race it is basically attempting to cause them to identify themselves as blacks. As such it is involved in the matrix of the power relations between dominants and subordinates in the struggle over the public expression and acceptance of

their respective symbolic universes. This public expression is the externalization of the identity and its universe of meaning. Internalization, then, implies externalization.

### Externalization

Whereas internalization involves the construction of a new identity and the incorporation of a new social reality into the life of the individual, externalization concerns the reconstruction of the social reality that surrounds the movement. In externalization the symbolic universe of the movement, as well as its sense of black identity, are cast into the public transcript. For the *movimento negro*, this means the externalization of negritude over against the dominant racial ethos that encourages its denial. Externalization may be viewed as an assertion of identity, a challenge to the dominant ethos, and a contestation for power. Given the inherently power laden relationships between dominant and subordinate, it necessarily is a process of resistance.

The controversy that immediately erupts when the *movimento negro* attempts the externalization of its new symbolic universe provides evidence of the inherent political nature of the racial projects of both the dominant and the subordinate. Beyond the arena of direct political and social confrontation, externalization also occurs in the movement's conferences, religious ceremonies, and base group meetings. Essentially all of the efforts of the movement to conscientize others necessarily entail externalization. Therefore, externalization is both deliberate and a natural result of the living out of the socially constructed black identity.

Recalling Berger and Luckmann's (1967) argument that a symbolic universe requires plausibility structures to sustain its credibility, it is clear that the preservation of a black identity, once constructed, depends upon the viability of such structures in the social universe of the movement. Externalization, therefore entails a struggle for the

control of the plausibility structures that support the dominant symbolic universe both within the Church and society. It also involves the creation of new plausibility structures with a new set of symbols. In both cases externalization seeks to create a social context that supports the *movimento negro* and its sense of black identity. Religious symbolism is again at the heart of this process. Much of the construction of identity in the movement consists of building supporting plausibility structures from the symbols of Afro-Brazilian history and religion. These symbols are drawn from the hidden transcript and given concrete form in the movement's social structure.

#### Religion and Externalization

The inculturation of African symbols into the Catholic Church represents perhaps the clearest example of the externalization process. It is both a reversal and a reclaiming of a system that in the past has served as a plausibility structure in support of the domination of blacks by whites. That most subjects readily identified themselves as practicing Roman Catholics indicates the importance of the Church as a plausibility structure, even though it must be reinterpreted and rehabilitated in their view. They did not intend to abandon it in favor of joining an alternative structure such as *candomblé*. Instead they intended to integrate both structures into their symbolic universe.

Activists maintained the link with their Roman Catholic identity by continued participation and identification with the symbols of traditional Roman Catholicism. Symbols such as baptism, and the Eucharist remained central to the *movimento negro* even as Afro-Brazilian religious symbols were added to them. The blackening of the Roman Catholic liturgy continued to give the traditional symbols a place of priority. In the Afro-Brazilian Mass the presence of God is symbolized by the consecration of the bread and wine, not by possession rituals as in *candomblé*. On the other hand, the

presence of offerings of foods traditionally associated with the *orixás* also is used to symbolize the connection with the realm of the sacred that they represent in African religion.

Religious symbolism in the externalization process is evident as well in the teaching activities of the movement. In the study on the stations of the cross used during the Brotherhood Campaign of 1988, the movement's perspective is externalized by means of the reinterpretation of this traditional Roman Catholic devotional exercise in terms of the movement's critique of Brazil's dominant racial ethos. The cross of Jesus is first identified with the cross of slavery and oppression born by black Brazilians and then turned into a symbol of the means by which God defeats sin, oppression and injustice (CNBB 1988b). In this way the symbols of traditional Catholicism that had been associated with the Church as the oppressor of blacks are reclaimed and transformed into symbols of liberation.

The reinterpretation of traditional Roman Catholic symbols as symbols of liberation is facilitated by the availability of liberation theology a resource for the movement. The internalization of the liberationist perspective provides resources for the creation and externalization of a black theology of liberation. The APN base groups, conferences, theological formation courses and other movement activities serve as venues, not only for the internalization of a black liberation theology, but for its construction and expression. Externalization takes place as movement leaders engage in teaching and leading group participants in reflection on theological themes drawn from a liberationist interpretation of the Bible and African religion. This externalization process is also extended beyond the confines of the group into the public arena through publications such as the series *Negros em Libertação* (Blacks in Liberation) published by *Editora Vozes*,

a Roman Catholic publishing house that is a major source of Brazilian liberation theology. The influence of movement leaders and sympathetic white clergy is also felt as black clergy lobby for the inclusion of a black liberation perspective in CNBB and CELAM meetings and documents.

From the perspective of the movement, themes found in the writings of liberation theologians are given a concrete face as the symbols of liberation theology are combined with African symbolism in the "blackening" of the Church. Therefore, as the movement externalizes its liberationist perspective, symbols drawn from Afro-Brazilian culture and religion become symbols of liberation as they are projected into the public transcript.

The liberative function attributed to Afro-Brazilian symbols may be seen in the attitude of those activists who favor the use of an Afro-Brazilian Mass. A traditional Roman Catholic Mass is often viewed as being too formal and restrictive. By introducing Afro-Brazilian styles of music and dance into the Mass, activists create a sense of spontaneity and liveliness that they report is lacking in traditional worship. The sense of celebration created in the Afro-Brazilian Mass, with its affirmation of negritude through the externalization of Afro-Brazilian symbols, thus serves as an important plausibility structure supporting the black liberationist perspective.

The ten elements of African culture articulated by the *Comissão Religiosos, Seminaristas e Padres Negros* are an example of the resources utilized in the inculturation process.<sup>3</sup> They are linked with biblical concepts so that the externalization of these symbols is loaded with meanings that appeal to both the Roman Catholic and African heritages of black Brazilians. African dance is linked with the dancing of Miriam the prophetess and the

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<sup>3</sup>Chapter four p. 202.

other women in worship to God (Exodus 15:20-21). African drums (*atabaque*) are connected to the use of other percussion instruments in worship (Psalm 150). The biblical record of Jesus' robe for which the soldiers gambled is referenced as a sign of the importance of style of dress for the recovery of the aesthetic of a people (John 1:23-24). Implied in this is the affirmation of distinctly African styles of dress that are worn during the Mass. Food shared as offerings to the *orixás* and in the Eucharist is a symbol of both *axé* and the coming of the Kingdom as signified in the last supper (Mark 14:22-25). The use of the altar on the floor symbolizes earth as the sacred space where the life giving *orixás* were created by the supreme God Olorum, just as Jesus, who came to restore life, was lain in a manger on the floor (Luke 2:12). Each aspect of African culture appropriated is thus linked to a biblical concept and hence to the already existing plausibility structure of the Roman Catholic ritual. At the same time, African symbols are intended to transform that ritual such that a new plausibility structure is externalized that will serve to legitimate and support a black identity.

Afro-Brazilian religions themselves also serve as important plausibility structures for the movement. This is the case for all activists who were interviewed. In particular Afro-Brazilian religions were seen as a source of affirmation of the value of black culture and its contribution to Brazilian life and spirituality. By expressing the conviction that African religion represents a form of divine revelation and spirituality that is equal in its validity to that of European Roman Catholicism, activists affirmed the legitimacy of their ancestors' forms of spirituality. They also negate the exclusivism of traditional Roman Catholic praxis along with the history of repression that it represents to blacks in the movement. Participation in *candomblé* allows the black identity to be externalized in a context that reinforces its value by giving it a sense of connection to the African heritage

and bloodline, hence assisting in the construction and maintenance of a black racial and ethnic identity.

Afro-Brazilian religion also functions as a link between activists and their ancestors who used their religion as a means of resistance during the centuries of their enslavement. An enhanced sense of belonging to the African race is thus both internalized and externalized through involvement in Afro-Brazilian religion, whether in the form of *candomblé* or the African lay brotherhoods and *congado*. In identifying with their ancestors who resisted oppression by means of preserving their culture through African religion, activists find that they are empowered to externalize their own resistance. This in turn reinforces the sense of black identity.

#### Externalization and Resistance

It was previously stated that externalization necessarily involves social conflict. This is an aspect of the social construction of reality for which Berger and Luckmann (1967) do not account. However, Scott's (1985, 1990) discussion of power relations between dominant and subordinates would predict such a state of affairs. The basic logic of this follows if we accept Scott's premise that domination always produces resistance. In Berger and Luckmann's terms this resistance is the externalization of the symbolic universe of the subordinate group, which in the case of the *movimento negro* is its racial project of externalizing a black identity into the Brazilian ethos. This externalization becomes a part of the overall externalization of human action and being that creates the larger social world. This is even the case when the subordinate group is largely limited to externalizing in the hidden transcript, as can readily be seen in the efforts of elites to control the arenas of social discourse where the hidden transcript is expressed. Since all societies are socially stratified, with at least some degree of dominance and

subordination, then social conflict will result from the clash of the externalization projects of the two groups.

That externalization is both a project of resistance and a source of social conflict in the case of the *movimento negro* in Brazil's Roman Catholic Church may be seen both in the actions of the movement and the reactions that are provoked when the movement's activities and viewpoint are injected into the public transcript. This was manifested in the negative reaction to the SBT television documentary *Cultura Negra na Igreja* (SBT 1993) that presented the movement on national television. The documentary portrayed the use of African symbols in the Roman Catholic Mass along with the movement's posture of resistance to the traditional view of Brazilian race relations. Conservative forces created a negative reaction to the movement that was sufficient to require a response from one of the movement's leaders.

The resistance in the externalization process is evident in the changes in individual behavior reported by movement activists. New values that are internalized result in the external expression of symbols of the new identity. When female activists cease to straighten their hair before going to work they are externalizing their new view of reality. In addition, they are negating the demand that they externalize the symbols of whitening by conforming to the standards of *boa aparência* represented in the straightening of the hair. The same holds true for both female and male activists who begin to wear African style clothing rather than conform to the standards of dress expected in the workplace. In each instance, the choice of a new appearance is more than an aesthetic preference. It is a political statement that challenges the dominant symbolic universe by inserting counter symbols into the social world.

Activists reported that sometimes such sudden changes in their behavior provoked negative reactions from family and co-workers. Social pressure and negative sanctions were applied in some cases as a means to force conformity upon the activists. Activists affirmed that after assuming their negritude they gained the confidence and self-esteem to continue the overt externalization of their black identity. They resisted rather than responding with "heads bowed" in an act of submission. Activists responded to the high cost in persecution and ridicule suffered with the observation that their sense of self gained from their black identity deprived society of its ability to "crush" them. They had a sense of hope that transcended the cost of assuming negritude.

Besides the individual resistance spoken of by interview subjects, resistance within the movement is also corporate. Corporate projects of resistance include the public articulation of the movement's position through protest, social projects, and its religious ceremonies. Protest occurs through activities as diverse as the distribution of literature countering government census data that supports whitening and the participation in all night vigils on the streets of Rio in protest against the killing of street children. Movement activists have even used the threat of law suits to counter situations that they viewed as discriminatory. An example of this was the successful confrontation of the publisher of a racially biased children's text by movement activists.

The Black Child, Beautiful Child program and base groups for women are specific social projects that attempt to implement concrete resistance to the dominant Brazilian ethos. Black Child, Beautiful Child confronts and counters the process of primary socialization into the whitening ideology and seeks to instill a positive black identity in the early stages of life. Women's groups provide support designed to enable women to value themselves and their work so that they are able to assert themselves against

discrimination and abuse. Other social projects attempt to address specific social inequities that the movement perceives to be neglected or perpetrated by the dominant system. The pre-vestibular program, for example, provides opportunities for poor blacks to study so that they might compete with the more privileged for entrance into the universities.

Resistance occurs in religious ceremonies such as the Afro-Brazilian Mass simply by virtue of the fact that the ceremony is carried out. It is a direct encroachment upon the social space previously under the hegemony of the dominant Brazilian ethos. Each act represents an incursion that challenges this hegemony and legitimates the inculturation of African symbols into the life of the Roman Catholic Church. Further resistance is represented in the symbolism used in these celebrations. The externalization of symbols affirming the movement's conception of negritude is an act of resistance against the signification of blacks within the symbolic universe of the dominant racial ethos. African music and dance as a part of the worship help redefine the relationship of blacks to the Church. No longer are they in submission to a system that attempts to define their culture by enforcing conformity to a European model. Rather they are active participants in contributing their own cultural forms to the shaping of the Church.

Conservatives in the Roman Catholic Church in Brazil have understood the activities of the *movimento negro* as a threat to traditional Roman Catholic theology and culture. The position expressed by conservatives clergy in the SBT documentary *Cultura Negra na Igreja* (SBT 1993) acknowledged that the Roman Catholic Church had attempted to replace African culture with European culture in evangelizing blacks and defended this with the assertion that European culture is superior. The negative reaction of conservative Catholics to the documentary demonstrates that the externalization

activities of the *movimento negro* are perceived by them as a challenge to the established system. The system is able to accommodate black cultural expression as long as it is contained within prescribed social spaces such as the *congado*, just as historically Afro-Brazilian syncretism was often tolerated so long as it remained largely in the hidden transcript. However, the emergence of Afro-Brazilian religious expressions into the public transcript of the traditional worship of the Church represents a direct challenge to the dominant symbolic universe and is more difficult to accommodate.

Based on the discussion of the *movimento negro* in the Roman Catholic Church, the externalization stage of the dialectic of the social construction of reality appears as a process that engenders social conflict. This conflict reflects the struggle to define social reality by means of a position that is fundamentally at odds with the dominant social ethos into which the symbolic universe of the *movimento negro* is being externalized. The struggle entails contestation over the meaning of the social institutions that serve as plausibility structures within the dominant symbolic universe. Hence, the question of the externalization of the movement's conception of negritude in, for example, an Afro-Brazilian liturgy goes much deeper than the aesthetic preferences of peoples with different cultural backgrounds. The very nature of reality itself is being called into question when the new liturgy enters the arena occupied by the traditional liturgy of the Roman Catholic Church. The contestation over the definition of reality is a battle over which version of reality, the traditional view or the view of the movement, will be objectivated.

## Objectivation

It is in the process of objectivation that the social reality created and externalized by human action begins to "thicken" and take on a quality of "facticity" separate from the human action that produced it (Berger and Luckmann 1967, 59; Berger 1969, 4). The plausibility structures that convey the meaning of social reality must themselves be objectivated if they are to successfully support the symbolic universe. That is, they must be perceived, not as mere human creations, but as an objective part of the order of things. Plausibility structures are the purveyors of the symbols that legitimate the symbolic universe. They are the locus of the conversation that affirms its reality (Berger and Luckmann 1967, 154-155; Berger 1969, 45-46). The externalization of the symbolic universe into plausibility structures that may be successfully objectivated is thus necessary for the social project of movements such as the *movimento negro* in the Roman Catholic Church in Brazil.

Much of the relationship between the dominant and subordinate as described by Scott (1990) is open to interpretation as the struggle over which of the two viewpoints will be objectivated into the social setting. In this sense one may speak of a primary objectivation and a secondary objectivation. The primary objectivation would be the presentation of the dominant symbolic universe as an objective reality. Racial democracy and whitening, even with their visible inconsistencies, still appear to the majority of Brazilians as adequate representations of the actual state of affairs and thus constitute a primary objectivation. A secondary objectivation would be social reality as it appears against the backdrop of competing symbolic universes. This conceptualization would be especially descriptive of a pluralistic setting. Each group would respond to its respective symbolic universe as an objectivated reality that nevertheless exists as part of a larger

reality represented by the totality of the pluralistic society.<sup>4</sup> To movement activists, their own symbolic universe, represented by negritude, becomes their primary objectivated reality in place of the dominant Brazilian racial ethos.

The pluralistic setting of Brazilian society, even with the dominance of the traditional racial ethos, also appears as an objectivated social reality that encompasses each individual symbolic universe. It functions as the secondary objectivated reality. Both the dominant and the subordinate primary realities would each attempt to develop an interpretation of the secondary objectivation that could be explained in terms of its own symbols. They would also compete with each other for concrete control of the social spaces necessary for this explanatory process to progress. This would entail both the competition for the control of existing plausibility structures and the creation of new ones in order to gain support for the competing symbolic universes. This means that much of the objectivation process, the "thickening" of social institutions, occurs in the construction and contestation of plausibility structures.

### Plausibility Structures

The use of symbols found in Afro-Brazilian religion constitutes one of the major avenues for the objectivation of the black movement's sense of racial identity. African symbols are taken from a valued tradition that already has status as an objectivated reality and are utilized to help "thicken" the reality of the movement. This occurs both as activists participate in *candomblé* and as Afro-Brazilian symbols are brought into the

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<sup>4</sup>This also is the case in a setting where one dominant view is held or enforced over others. While the official view may be the only one admitted into the public transcript, the awareness of other views in the hidden transcript creates a secondary objectivation in the background behind the primary objectivation of the symbolic universe of the dominant. The stability of the primary universe is always threatened by the larger social reality.

Roman Catholic Mass. In the latter case a clear effort is being made to redefine a critical plausibility structure within the Church in order to derive support for the externalization of negritude. The Afro-Brazilian Mass provides a symbolic base for the affirmation of the symbolic universe of the *movimento negro*. Each of the symbolic elements, such as African music and dance affirms the value of a black identity and contributes to a sense of group belonging. Together the symbols help to affirm the objectivity of the socially constructed reality of the movement. As such the dominant racial ethos is rejected and the reversal of the whitening process is legitimated.

Besides contesting for existing plausibility structures, objectivation entails creating new ones. Objectivation requires that such structures be externalized. Within the *movimento negro* in the Roman Catholic Church in Brazil, specific organizations and groups serve as additional plausibility structures. Negritude is externalized and then objectivated in the formation of the various movement entities such as APN and its base groups, *Comissão de Religiosos, Seminaristas e Padres Negros, Articulação Nacional dos Padres e Bispos Negros, Comissão de Mulheres Negras APNs*, and others. Within these groups a black racial identity is reinforced in response to the particular needs and life situations of the constituents of each group. In this way the objectivation of the movement's social reality is able to encompass specific and diverse concerns of individuals within the context of a shared racial identity.

One of the aspects of social reality that confronts Brazilians as an objectivated reality is the official history as presented according to the racial democracy thesis. This history is challenged by the movement as it externalizes the history of blacks contained in the hidden transcript of resistance. This transcript, hidden by the interpretive efforts of those who hold to racial democracy, takes on an objective quality that transforms it into a

critical plausibility structure for the movement. While the entire history of slavery in Brazil is reinterpreted and objectivated in this manner, perhaps the most important aspect of this is the objectivation of the Palmares *quilombo* into one of the defining mythologies of the movement.

The term mythology is used here, not to question the historical veracity of accounts of Palmares, but in reference to the functional place of the Zumbi/Palmares story as an account of both black resistance and the essentialist, idealistic view of negritude it presents. Palmares serves as a religious and social model of the eschatological Kingdom while the martyred Zumbi functions as a quasi-Christ figure who gave up his life for the liberation (salvation) of the black race in Brazil. Beyond the relatively undisputed question as to what actually happened at Palmares, the Zumbi/Palmares story is objectivated to an almost transcendent status. One could argue that like other religious symbolic universes, that of the *movimento negro* must have its own unique objectivated set of symbols that appear in the form of heroes "bigger than life." This objectivated reality provides a sense of purpose for continued resistance in the present.

Palmares objectivates the movement's communitarian model of society as opposed to the European capitalist model. It represents a time in which blacks were able to govern their own affairs in a just and egalitarian society. As an objectivated reality it makes plausible the possibility of a future in which such a society is realized.

The objectivation of capoeira, the Afro-Brazilian dance that has the appearance of a struggle, is another example of a symbol drawn from Afro-Brazilian history and culture that legitimates the view of blacks as a people who have always resisted. Capoeira symbolizes the tenacity of slave resistance that continued even when deprived of any

weapons other than the bare hands. It adds plausibility to the notion that the struggle should continue even if the odds appear to be against immediate success. The struggle has a value of its own apart from the possibility of victory.

### Signification

Finally, objectivation involves the counteracting of the process of signification by which the dominant attempt to define the culture and reality of the subordinate (Long 1986). When *movimento negro* activists engage in positive self-signification they are attempting to objectivate their conception of the meaning of blackness over against the racial typifications of the dominant ethos. We have seen that the dominant racial ethos typifies blacks and blackness in a variety of negative ways. Blacks are portrayed as lazy, dishonest, indolent, and ignorant. The black phenotype is considered to be ugly and unacceptable by many for jobs that require interaction with the public. The color black is frequently used as a symbol of evil. Movement activists challenge the typifications of the dominant Brazilian racial ethos by redefining blackness as a symbol of beauty and strength.

The reversal of signification occurs also in how activists react to traditional treatments of African and Afro-Brazilian religions. Alleging that these traditions have been distorted and signified as either demonic or mere folklore, activists look to them as plausibility structures that allowed their ancestors to preserve black culture and values during the years of slavery. African and Afro-Brazilian religions thus come to represent the strength of blacks as they resisted and survived efforts of whites to destroy their culture. African religion is thus objectivated as a plausibility structure which is neither evil nor trivial. Instead it is the carrier of values that activists find to be ultimately superior to those of white European religion. *Candomblé* represents a positive approach

to life that is opposed to the values of capitalism and colonialism. The ceremonies of *candomblé* convey to activists a sense of vitality and liveliness that they have found lacking in traditional Roman Catholic worship. This motivates them to objectivate their sense of identity by introducing symbols from *candomblé* into Roman Catholic liturgy.

By means of the three dialectical moments we have discussed, the *movimento negro* in the Roman Catholic Church in Brazil constructs its sense of racial identity out of the resources it draws from traditional Roman Catholicism, liberation theology, and Afro-Brazilian religion and culture. Much of the traditional Roman Catholic and Afro-Brazilian resources are drawn from the hidden transcript of resistance found in the history of blacks in Brazil. The bringing forth of this hidden transcript of resistance into the public arena in order to construct a black identity makes up the basic racial project of the movement. Out of this project the movement is constructing its theological and ethical stance as well as its own ethos of race and racial identity.

#### Racial Identity: Theology, Ethics and the Ethos of Race

In one sense it is premature to discuss the theology and ethics of the movement, at least from the standpoint of academic theological and ethical reflection. The movement is still in its early developmental stages in these areas. When asked about the theology of the APN movement, leaders generally reacted with a chuckle and asserted that there really is no formal black theology in Brazil yet. They characterized the movement as still being in its infancy. However, having made that observation, they then discussed some of the theological reflection that is taking place within the movement. A brief outline of the important theological and ethical themes within the movement is possible based on the data discussed in chapter four. These shall be discussed together as a unit.

Activists were unanimous in denying the charge that African and Afro-Brazilian religions are polytheistic. They identified God as the supreme being and held a generally monotheistic view of God. A small minority of activists used language that identified God with nature in such a way as to seem almost pantheistic, although a more accurate description of this might be related to a strong notion of the immanence of God. This represents an interesting tension expressed by activists in their understanding of African religions. The supreme God, Olorum, was frequently acknowledged to be distant and unconcerned with the affairs of the world. However, the *orixás* were created by him for the purpose of mediating and governing the earth. The possession rituals affirmed for activists the immediacy and immanence of the divine. This immanence was connected to Roman Catholicism through the symbols of incarnation and the Eucharist. Participation in these various symbols contributed to a sense of God's presence within individuals.

As has been previously discussed, the themes of liberation theology are prominent in the discourse of the movement. These themes concern the conception of God, Christ, and salvation, as well as the notions of social ethics developing in the movement. Activists view God as being the liberator of the oppressed. The oppressed are defined as those who are socially and economically marginalized by racist, capitalist society. The poor are given special status as God's children and this is applied particularly to blacks as they represent the "face" of the poor in Brazil. The natural religious nature of blacks marks them as God's chosen children who, similar to the Israelites in Egypt, are crying out to God for deliverance. God is a God who hears the cry of his people.

Jesus came also to liberate the oppressed from the bondage of sin. Sin is defined in terms of the unjust, racist social structures that oppress blacks. An important aspect of these sinful structures is that they negate the identity of the blacks and deceive the

majority of them into denying this identity. Salvation, then, is not only liberation from the economic oppression of poverty. It is also the liberation from the false system of whitening and racial democracy that negates the identity of blacks and deceives them into not resisting the dominant system that oppresses them.

The social ethics of the movement are related to the conception of oppression and injustice described above. More specifically the oppression of blacks in Brazil has deprived them of the basic rights of citizenship in the view of the movement. Justice is then defined in terms of these rights. To have justice is to be a true citizen of society. It is to have equal access to all of its benefits including education, housing, land, health, and adequate employment. Due to the racist and capitalist values of the dominant classes these essential rights of citizenship are systematically denied to the majority of blacks according to the movement. The struggle for social justice is thus a struggle to claim such rights.

Two theological motifs drawn from Afro-Brazilian religion and also liberation theology are important for the social ethics of the *movimento negro* in the Roman Catholic Church in Brazil. The first of these is the emphasis the movement places upon the priority of the community. Traditional African society is said to be community oriented. The force of *axé* a prominent symbol in African religion, is a unifying force that empowers the community as a whole. It is the energy that animates and preserves the life of the community and connects them to each other and to God. *Palmares* symbolizes the capacity for community building among blacks in opposition to the values of colonial slavery that systematically destroyed black community by separating tribes and families in the slave trade. The emphasis on a socialist approach to social and economic justice that is derived from liberation theology resonates with the community orientation the

movement finds in African religion and culture and creates a vision of hope for a future social order that is just.

The sense of hope articulated by activists centered around the belief in a better future for their grandchildren and great grandchildren. There was a consensus among subjects interviewed that the kind of social transformation they hoped for was not likely to occur during their lifetimes. However, they believed in the justice of their cause and they believed in the reality of the Kingdom of God as an historical project that would be eventually realized. This sense of hope and the justness of the cause provided motivation to pay the social costs of their activism.

The future hoped for by the movement is symbolized by the eschatology of the Kingdom of God from a liberationist perspective and relies heavily upon Palmares as an image of that possible future. Based on this, movement activists have a view of social ethics that does not depend upon the immediate success of their cause. Rather, they view the struggle as important because they are confident that it will bear fruit in the distant future. They are motivated by a sense of ethical responsibility that transcends the immediate improvement of personal social and economic status. This vision of a better future for Brazil is itself incentive enough for preserving a black identity.

### Conclusion

The *movimento negro* in the Roman Catholic Church in Brazil is involved in a racial project that is projecting the hidden transcript of black resistance from Brazil's past and present, into the public arena. The main objective of this is the claiming of what it sees as full citizenship, through the construction of a black racial identity in the Brazilian social context. Among the main motivating forces in this challenge to the dominant racial ethos are the religious traditions of Afro-Brazilians. These various traditions are all

contributing in a significant way to the program of this movement. The *movimento negro* in Brazil's Roman Catholic Church is therefore another of the many examples of the vitality and force of religion as a social and political influence at the end of the twentieth century.

Religion, then, plays an important role in providing the motivation and plausibility structures needed to make the assumption of a black racial identity a viable and rational choice for movement activists. The negative social costs of activism are offset by the compensators (Stark and Bainbridge 1985) gained from the belief in the justice of their cause and the belief in a better future. These compensators are founded upon faith in a transcendent order of reality symbolized by the Kingdom of God and the incarnation of the sacred into the world of humankind. Activists remain resolute in their black identity and their militant stance as they have a sense of participating with the divine in the historical project that will one day bring victory for their people. Religious values constitute the rational motivation for the choice to assume negritude. In the final chapter of this study the implications of these findings will be examined.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

The resurgence of religion as an influence in the political and social arenas has been widely discussed by sociologists of religion in the past decade.<sup>1</sup> One could interpret this phenomenon as the resurgence of religion after a period of latency in which the forces of modernity and secularization marginalized religious influences. The *movimento negro* in the Roman Catholic Church in Brazil could be seen as an example of this. On the other hand, the data from this study suggests that religion never ceased to be relevant to the political and cultural struggle of blacks in their resistance to domination. Even when this struggle was not conducted openly or with overt political goals in mind, religion and the religious institutions available to blacks served as a critical social space for a hidden transcript of resistance that allowed for the survival of African values and traditions. I have argued that the racial project of the *movimento negro* in the Roman Catholic Church in Brazil may be understood in terms of the projection of this hidden transcript into the public arena in an effort to construct a black racial identity and to challenge the dominant ethos of race expressed in Brazilian society.

The importance of religion as a force in contemporary global society is thus reinforced by the findings of our study of the *movimento negro* in the Roman Catholic Church in Brazil. Support is given for the notion that religion has continuing relevance

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<sup>1</sup> A sample of this discussion may be found in Stark and Bainbridge 1985; Hadden and Shupe 1986; Shupe and Hadden 1988; Hadden and Shupe 1989; Swatos 1989.

as an influential element in contemporary social movements. In addition, the study of the *movimento negro* has implications for our understanding of Afro-Brazilian religion, liberation theology, and liberation movements. There are also ramifications for our understanding of social and ethical theory. In this final chapter we will conclude by summarizing the findings and beginning the exploration of some of these implications.

### Racial Identity and Religion in the *Movimento Negro*

Building on the notion that race and ethnic identity are socially constructed, I have developed a theoretical approach grounded in a sociology of knowledge that accounts for the interaction between dominant and subordinate groups in relations of unequal power. From Berger and Luckmann (1967) the dialectic of the social construction of reality has been adapted to show how the racial projects of both the black movement and the dominant society involve the construction of an identity in terms of distinct symbolic universes. Black racial identity and its supporting symbolic universe are both constructed in the three steps of the dialectic process. The universe and identity of activists is externalized through their religious and social praxis. This includes both the creation and acting out of religious ceremonies as well as the conscientization efforts of the group. The externalized identity and symbolic universe of the movement are objectivated into plausibility structures such as the base groups, religious rituals, and organized social activism. Through exposure to the movement's conscientization efforts, new participants internalize its symbolic universe, along with a black racial identity.

The process of identity construction outlined here occurs within the context of the racial ethos of Brazilian society. Using Max Stackhouse's (1972) notion of ethical ethos in societies I have argued that the values and norms of Brazilian society in regards to race are expressed in the theories of racial democracy and whitening along with the

contradictions they create due to the reality of racism and discrimination in Brazil. Brazilians generally still hold to the racial democracy ideal, with its depiction of Brazil as a society where the races have lived together in harmony throughout Brazil's history. Within this society social advancement is thought to be available through whitening, even though data cited in this study indicates otherwise (Silva, 1985). In its strongest form the whitening doctrine holds that the mixing of the races in Brazil is leading to a whiter population. In the most recent census data the government reports racial demographics that support this view (IBGE 1993). Movement activists reject this data and attribute the apparent drop in the black population to the propensity of blacks to deny their blackness and identify as mulattoes instead. Meanwhile, data reported by Brazilian sociologists indicate that racial discrimination is prejudicial to blacks at all levels of society (Silva 1985, Silva and Hasenbalg 1992). Blacks are dominated by whites in Brazil even as this domination is denied by the prevailing racial ideology.

The domination inherent in the Brazilian racial ethos necessitates a theory that accounts for the effect of this on the process of identity and symbolic universe construction. I have argued that the dialectic of the social construction of reality as presented by Berger and Luckmann (1967) is incomplete without a mechanism to account for social conflict and power relations in society. Drawing upon the theory of resistance to domination developed by Scott (1990) I have proposed that the symbolic universe of the dominant is challenged by subordinates who attempt to construct an alternative that supports their own cause. Such resistance often takes place out of sight of the dominant in the hidden transcript of social relations.

In contrast to the benign view proposed by some racial democracy theorists, the history of Brazilian slavery was one of cruelty, abuse, and resistance. This history was

often relegated to the hidden transcript and movement activists have charged that it has been suppressed by white elites. Much of the resistance that occurred during the years of slavery was empowered and facilitated by Afro-Brazilian religion within the Roman Catholic lay brotherhoods, and the African religions as practiced by slaves in the context of Roman Catholicism. Data from the *movimento negro* indicates that this tradition of resistance sustained by religion is a critical resource in its attempt to construct a new social reality.

In investigating the *movimento negro* in the Roman Catholic Church in Brazil, three streams of religious influence were apparent. Liberation theology, traditional Roman Catholicism, and African religions each contribute to the theological context from which the movement analyzes Brazilian race and social relations. They also provide a framework for interpreting the history of black resistance in Brazil. Along with this history, each of the three traditions contribute symbols and concepts that are used in the construction of racial identity. Activists derive from liberation theology symbols of God as the liberator of the oppressed. They also adopt liberation theology's socialist model of the Kingdom of God. African traditions contribute religious values of community along with a general sense of positive value attached to a black identity. Traditional Roman Catholic symbols, such as the suffering of Jesus with the oppressed, are also a source of inspiration.

This study of the *movimento negro* has found that the above mentioned resources are used to construct a positive black identity in the context of a symbolic universe that challenges and reverses the Brazilian racial ethos at its key points. It would not be inaccurate to say that the black identity created by the *movimento negro* in the Roman Catholic Church in Brazil is as much a religious identity as it is a racial identity. Out of

this religious racial identity a social stance is nurtured that overtly challenges the dominant ethos and seeks to objectivate its own position in place of it. In this way the institutions of black religion which had served as the locus of the hidden transcript of resistance, are now becoming the source of the externalization of resistance into contemporary Brazilian society.

In light of the findings of this study it is clear that religion continues to be a vital source of social change in Brazil. The *movimento negro* is only one small example of the many changes in the dynamic religious arena of Brazilian society. Brazilian religions such as umbanda and candomblé are experiencing rapid growth. Evangelicalism, pentecostalism, and numerous sects and cults imported from abroad are leaving their mark as well. Meanwhile, the CEBs and liberation theology are still forces to be contended with. In the context of Brazil's changing religious and social scene there are some important implications arising from the study of the *movimento negro* that are worthy of consideration. It is to these that we shall now turn.

#### Afro-Brazilian Religion

The notion that Afro-Brazilian religion was a catalyst for black resistance in the history of Brazilian race relations was argued by Bastide in his classic study of the African religions of Brazil (Bastide 1978, 78-108). Bastide was, of course, involved in the original UNESCO studies that ultimately challenged the racial democracy theory. Bastide's conclusion that most, if not all, African religious activity in colonial Brazil must be understood in terms of cultural resistance resonates with the general orientation of the contemporary *movimento negro* (Bastide 1978, 96). To many within the movement this history of resistance comes as a new discovery. However, the idea that the history of Africans in Brazil is a history of resistance with religion playing a major role in that

resistance is nothing novel from the standpoint of the social history of Brazil and the sociology of Afro-Brazilian religions.

Nevertheless, the movement's interpretation of the history of Afro-Brazilian religions as expressions of African resistance to oppression is worthy of further research and reflection. The historiography of Afro-Brazilian religion as found within the movement assumes from the outset a position of advocacy of the racial project of the movement. This is, of course, obvious and to be expected. This position of advocacy does not, however, mean that there is not much to be learned from such an interpretation of Afro-Brazilian history. Specifically, it seems probable that there is much to be learned about religion as a locus of resistance, both public and private, that could be gained from further research in this area.

A different issue raised by the study of the *movimento negro* in the Roman Catholic Church in Brazil concerns the conceptualization of what constitutes the proper object of study when approaching Afro-Brazilian religion. Traditionally, the notion of African religions in Brazil has been understood to include primarily religions of African origin that had been transplanted and rooted into Brazilian culture. Studies of blacks and Christianity have normally focused on the issue of "syncretism" with the African religions. The focus is on the mixing of African and Roman Catholic symbols and traditions. Hence, when a term such as Afro-Brazilian is appended to the idea of religion, it generally brings up images of candomblé and umbanda. One seldom thinks of black pentecostalism as being in the category of Afro-Brazilian religion. The term is usually limited to refer to religions that can be traced more or less directly to African origin. One of the unfortunate results of this is that studies of religious movements such as Evangelical and Protestant groups, or the CEBs, usually do not include data concerning the groups' racial

demographics. Neither do they focus on distinctively black contributions to these movements.

In contrast to the above approach, the discipline of religious studies needs to recognize that Brazilians of African descent are involved in a wide variety of religious activities in Brazil today. This alone is enough to suggest that the above conceptualization of Afro-Brazilian religion is too narrow. Afro-Brazilian religion includes the religious expression of all Afro-Brazilians, not only those religious expressions directly related to the religions of Africa. Afro-Brazilian religion, then, would be understood to include Afro-Brazilian Evangelicalism, pentecostalism, Roman Catholicism, and any other movements where Afro-Brazilians are active. This is significant in that, in spite of their differences, Afro-Brazilian pentecostalism and candomblé both could be studied with a view to understanding distinct Afro-Brazilian elements and contributions.

The changing situation of the traditional Afro-Brazilian religions along with the growth of protestantism make such an approach appropriate. *Movimento negro* activists point out their frustrations with what they view as white co-optation of African religions. Indeed, there are many whites who participate in either candomblé or umbanda while the ranks of Evangelicalism and pentecostalism are filled with many blacks. Identification of a religion as Afro-Brazilian based on tradition may not give an accurate picture of contemporary social life. Rather than classifying a religion as Afro-Brazilian on the basis of shared beliefs and rituals with African religions the study of Afro-Brazilian religion should proceed by inquiring after those religious forms practiced by Brazilians of African descent regardless of the particular theological tradition or historical lineage of the religion.

It is tempting to conclude that the approach described here is inappropriate in the Brazilian setting. After all, there is no such thing as a black Baptist church in Brazil as opposed to a white Baptist church, as is the case in North America. The same holds for other Protestant, Evangelical, and Pentecostal groups in Brazil. Given that these congregations are racially mixed, how can we make an analytical distinction between black Baptist or black Roman Catholic religion in Brazil without reference to African religion? Such a distinction may not be simple but the argument of this study suggests that succumbing to the temptation to view Brazilian religion as racially homogenous is to fall into an interpretation more in line with the racial democracy and whitening view of Brazilian society. Such a view would not be able to adequately account for some critical issues of religious and sociological significance. Among these is the fact that the *movimento negro* has made inroads into both Evangelical and mainline Protestant denominations in Brazil. This being the case, it is clear that at least some black Brazilians in these groups see a distinctively black way of being religious in their own context. This is particularly of interest in the *movimento negro* among Evangelicals, since unlike their Roman Catholic counterparts, they tend to be less open to accepting candomblé and African religions as a legitimate expression of black faith. Yet they are interested in developing a distinctively black racial project. A broader view of what Afro-Brazilian religion is would allow for a more adequate analysis of this phenomenon.

The study of the Brazilian *movimento negro* in the Roman Catholic Church raises further questions that may be fruitful avenues of future research. The *movimento negro* itself extends beyond the Roman Catholic Church in Brazil. The relation of religion to resistance and racial identity needs to be researched within the traditional Afro-Brazilian religions as well as within protestantism in Brazil. Evangelical and mainline protestant

versions of the *movimento negro* are significant movements worthy of study in their own right. No doubt, many of the dynamics are the same, but there could be important differences that need to be analyzed in order to give us a more complete understanding of the issues involved in religion and racial identity in Brazil.

The notion of racial ethos could also be explored within black groups outside of the Christian churches. It would be interesting to analyze the ethical ethos of African religions and the Afro-Brazilian religions and explore the interaction of these with the Brazilian racial ethos. The types of resources, symbolism, and plausibility structures involved in this interaction should be explored and discussed along with those of the *movimento negro* in the Roman Catholic Church.

In sum, the *movimento negro* demonstrates that the dynamics of Afro-Brazilian religion extend beyond the normal boundaries that are usually treated when the subject is studied. Black Brazilians exhibit, through their religious experience, that religion remains an important element in contemporary Brazilian social and political transformation. Religion has not lost its relevance and power as a symbolic universe to provide meaning and coherence to the social project embodied in the *movimento negro*. The Afro-Brazilian religion remains an important aspect of this.

### Liberation Theology

The implications of the *movimento negro* for our understanding of liberation theology can most easily be seen in its demands that liberation theology begin to view the "face" of the poor in Latin America in concrete form. North American scholarship generally has not given adequate attention to this aspect of Latin American reality. Conservatives and neo-conservative scholars, such as Michael Novak (1986) have objected to liberation theology and argued their case in either economic or theological

terms. Progressive and liberal scholars have generally done the same in making a case sympathetic to liberation theology. Sociological analyses of liberation theology have not fared much better. Studies of CEBs have neglected to include race as a part of their analysis even though they may have contained solid empirical data on their other aspects (Hewitt 1991).

It seems curious to me, after having completed this study, to recognize that in spite of our own struggle over the question of black civil rights in the United States, North American researchers have not typically raised the question of race in relation to the social inequities of Latin America. Perhaps our studies of liberation theology have been too influenced by liberation theologians themselves, who have not usually taken up the racial issue until prodded to do so by the *movimento negro* in their midst. In both cases the theorists have usually been white and perhaps overly influenced by Marxian notions that focus on economic causes of social stratification. Whatever the case, one of the clear implications of this study is that much more work needs to be done in the areas of sociology of religion, theology, Christian social ethics, and political science in exploring the dynamics of Brazilian racial reality and religion.

During my time in Brazil, a number of whites I spoke with expressed the opinion that liberation theology had reached its peak and was waning both in its influence and relevance to Brazilian religious and social life. This opinion came from both Brazilians and expatriate North Americans resident in Brazil. They seemed confident that the return of democracy to Brazil, along with the apparent decline of socialism following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, indicated the eventual demise of liberation theology. I would argue that the results of this study indicate this to be a premature assessment of the situation. There are many social and economic problems yet to be resolved in Brazil

and three decades of liberationist thought are not simply going to disappear. Many of Brazil's citizens continue to suffer severe poverty. Liberation theology may take new forms, but it will likely continue to be used as a tool by Brazilians to address these problems.

Perhaps the *movimento negro* indicates something of the direction that the future of liberation theology might take. Liberation theology is already becoming a tool for specific minority groups, such as blacks and women, as well as groups with particular specialized concerns, such as land reform and the environment. As different groups of Brazilians seek to pursue their particular cause in the Brazilian social and political context liberation theology might be used by these groups. The influence of liberation theology, rather than waning, could thus continue to grow, especially on the grass roots level through the efforts of smaller, more specialized movements. Less influence on the macro-level could translate into more influence on the micro-level. Researchers interested in movements related to liberation theology may do well to look for such specialized, grass roots groups.

Finally, the study of the *movimento negro* suggests that liberation theology is being modified in Brazil, much as is happening around the world, such that it no longer focuses on social class and economics as the only independent variables in grappling with Brazilian social stratification. Liberation theology is itself embracing a broader range of explanations and strategies for the situation of the poor in Brazil. Both gender and race have become recognized as significant variables in the writings of liberation theologians around the world (Fabella and Oduyoye 1988; Biehl 1987). Future studies of liberation theology must not be content to analyze the more highly visible work of the liberation theologians, nor to engage only those groups and movements that appear most visibly.

The fortunes of these groups may not necessarily be the best gauge for the future of liberation theology and the movements inspired by it.

### Christian Social Ethics and Social Theory

The methodology and findings of the present study suggest significant implications for theory in the sociology of religion as it is employed in the study of Christian social ethics. In concluding, I will explore two of these. The first relates to the use of social theory in studying the ethical ethos of societies. The second focuses on religion as a compensator that motivates a rational choice to opt for an ethic of risk. In each case, practical applications for future research and study in Christian social ethics are suggested.

### Analyzing Ethical Ethos

At the outset of this study the definition of ethical ethos was adopted from Max Stackhouse (1972) as a guide for exploring the ethos of race in Brazil. In a later work Stackhouse (1984) presents a methodology for comparative studies of the ethical ethos of societies. The purpose of the methodology is to utilize the tools of social analysis as a tool for Christian social ethics. While Stackhouse's methodology has much potential, it also presents problems that limit its usefulness. The methodology and findings of the present study offer possibilities for resolving these difficulties.

Stackhouse's methodology consists, firstly, of a longitudinal analysis that attempts to study the historical development of the ethical ethos of a culture from the vantage point of the present (Stackhouse 1984, 14-15). Secondly, it involves a cross-sectional analysis that identifies the dominant structures of a society in order to reveal its dominant ethical ethos (Stackhouse 1984, 15-19). This methodology is applied to the study of the cultures of the United States, India, and the former state of East Germany in an attempt to

develop a comparative understanding of the Judeo-Christian, Hindu, and Marxist social ethos respectively. In each case the respective ethical ethos discussed is treated as the dominant ethical expression of the people of each society.

A fundamental difficulty that Stackhouse's analysis brings to mind is its presentation of the Marxist ethos in East Germany. If the symbolic universe of Marxism actually formed a pervasive ethical ethos in East Germany, why did the communist government that embodied it collapse so suddenly in 1988? In light of its rejection it is difficult to imagine that the ethos that Stackhouse discusses actually represented the view of East Germans. How, then, did Stackhouse's theory go wrong?

The solution to the problem posed here is addressed in one of the basic assumptions of the methodology employed in the present study. That is, that modern societies cannot, in general, be understood in terms of one over-arching symbolic universe. Instead, pluralism must be recognized as a social reality in its own right. This entails the presence of alternative and competing symbolic universes that contest for power and dominance within a single society. Pluralism in this sense operates, not only in open societies where it is officially tolerated, but also in closed societies that would attempt to enforce a dominant view. As societies become more closed, the subordinate symbolic universe may be forced into the hidden transcript. Nevertheless, it is still there.

In the course of the argument I contended that the *movimento negro* has externalized its own ethos of race as an alternative to the dominant ethos represented by the racial democracy and whitening theories. Implied in this line of reasoning is the notion that a society has more than one ethos operating simultaneously when there are different symbolic universes engaged in competitive relations of dominance and subordination. Specific social classes, movements, and other groups may each have an

ethos corresponding to their respective symbolic universes that may both share and depart from various aspects of the dominant ethos.

In conducting his study of the East German social ethos, Stackhouse did not adequately account for the hidden transcript of resistance and its implications for the social and political situation. Specifically, he failed to consider that the communist regime had been imposed on the East Germans by force at the end of a humiliating defeat, when the power to resist was greatly weakened. The symbolic universe of the Soviet Union's government was imposed arbitrarily. The symbolic universe of the Nazis was destroyed, but the traditions of the conquered East Germans were neither destroyed nor assimilated. They were simply driven underground. When adequate social space for the expression of the subordinate view was opened up by the policy of *glasnost*, the East German communist regime collapsed. Without the threat of violence the plausibility structures of the Marxist symbolic universe disintegrated. They were never adequately accepted by East Germans so as to be viable.

Considering Stackhouse's methodology from the vantage point of the situation of our study of the *movimento negro* in Brazil, it is therefore apparent that any study of the ethical ethos of a society must consider dominant and subordinate symbolic universes in its analysis. It cannot proceed on the assumption that modern societies are homogenous or that they contain any one central essence that unifies them. Instead, Christian social ethics must explore the ethos of a society in terms of its dominant and subordinate universes of meaning and the power relations involved in their interaction. On a practical level this means that research must be carried out among various social groups and movements in a society, in order to discover the ethical ethos of each. Only in this manner will the social context for reflection in Christian social ethics be adequately

established. My analysis of the *movimento negro* in the Roman Catholic Church in Brazil has attempted to follow this pattern.

#### Rational Choice and an Ethic of Risk

Black racial identity in the *movimento negro* in the context of the Roman Catholic Church in Brazil is chosen deliberately in the face of negative social sanctions imposed by the individual's family, friends, and society. Beyond this, assuming such an identity within the movement generally requires taking up a struggle for social goals that activists admit have little hope of realization within their lifetimes. I have argued that this choice may be viewed as rational, even though it goes against the economic and social advancement that rational choice theories generally propose as motivations for the switching of ethnic identity. A religious symbolic universe provides its own rationalities that support such a change.

I have previously contended that, from the vantage point of the sociology of religion, the religious universe of meaning found in the *movimento negro* provides compensators that function as adequate rationalities to explain the assumption of negritude by movement activists. Specifically, these compensators are to be found in liberation theology's notion of the Kingdom of God as developed within the movement. Movement activists find the reality of a just society for their posterity in the future Kingdom to be a significant motivation for taking up the struggle.

Stark and Bainbridge (1985) have shown the role of religion as a source of compensators in the face of unattainable goals. In their theory such compensators are personal and transcendent. They have reference to the hope for an afterlife where one is rewarded. They compensate for the inability to attain rewards in the present life and also for the unavoidable reality of one's own death. In order to be adequate, compensators

must be transcendent and supernatural (Stark and Bainbridge 1985). While movement activists did not deny this latter type of compensator, their understanding of the fulfillment of the ethic of the Kingdom of God was not related primarily to a future afterlife. They understood the eschatological Kingdom as a concrete historical project. However, they themselves did not expect to participate in it in its fully realized historical form. From the vantage point of Stark and Bainbridge's (1985) sociology of religion, that a compensator not involving personal reward would be an adequate rationality to make a costly choice for a black identity seems unlikely. This poses a theoretical difficulty that must be addressed.

The solution to the problem posed here is to be found in the development of the theory of an ethic of risk. Within the framework of an ethic of risk, plausibility structures may be constructed that will allow the activist to view the possibility of a better hope for future generations as an adequate compensator for the cost of assuming a black identity in a hostile social context. Sharon Welch (1989) has developed a theory of an ethic of risk that provides such a framework.

Welch offers a social framework in her conception of an ethic of risk that is composed of three basic aspects, each of which are already operative in the structure of the Roman Catholic *movimento negro* in Brazil. The first concerns a redefinition of the notion of responsible action. Rather than focusing on the immediate and certain success, responsible action seeks to achieve small advances that form a matrix for future resistance (Welch 1989, 20). Within the *movimento negro* this strategy was frequently evident. The emergence of resistance into the social space of the Church has occurred in bits and pieces. Movement goals were often expressed on the local level. Official permission from the Church hierarchy to hold an Afro-Brazilian Mass once a month in São João de Meriti

was heralded as a great advance in 1993. Such advances, once achieved, become for the movement a base for strengthening resistance and creating future change, thus keeping alive hope for the future.

The second aspect of the ethic of risk is that the activist be grounded in a community (Welch 1989, 20-22). This includes not only the community that is present, but also the larger community of past and future generations. A sense of solidarity with others in the struggle for justice is a key element of this (Welch 1989, 22). Within the *movimento negro* the sense of community is a central feature. Symbols based on black saints in Roman Catholicism and the sense of connection to ancestors in the African religions contribute to this sense of community. This is especially important in the case of figures such as Zumbi and Anastacia, who epitomize black resistance for the movement. Additionally, the African cultural emphasis on the importance of the community is cited by activists as an antidote to European individualism. The experience of many movement activists of the CEBs has reinforced the value of community as a base for resistance.

The third element of the ethic of risk is strategic risk taking (Welch 1989, 22). Strategic risk taking requires measuring actions of resistance in terms of how they will enhance the capacity of the individuals in the group to continue the struggle. If such actions bolster the imagination and courage of the group then they are worthy. Risk taking for its own sake is avoided. Leaders within the movement did take risks at times that placed their jobs and their physical safety in jeopardy. Yet, they understood that creating change within the Church could be carried out more effectively from the inside. They would be less productive for the movement within the Church if they performed acts of defiance that forced their removal from leadership and possibly the Church itself. There was little to be gained by becoming martyrs for the cause. For this reason, the

movement worked to legitimate its activities and goals in light of the Church's social doctrine as expressed in papal encyclicals and the documents of Medellín, Puebla, and Santo Domingo. Movement activists attempted to take measured risks in order to achieve small advances.

Out of the three social structures of responsible action through small advances, the priority of community, and strategic risk taking, a pattern of achieving concrete goals is established that facilitates the maintenance of resistance in a setting where the odds against the personal realization of victory are overwhelming. By employing such a structure the *movimento negro* is able to create an environment of successes that allows for the projected future Kingdom to appear as a viable reality. The dimension of faith adds a sense of certainty. With a sense of the certain fulfillment of the Kingdom, this symbol then becomes an adequate compensator for the cost involved in assuming a black identity. Religion within the framework of an ethic of risk is thus an adequate rationality at work in the option of movement participants for a black identity. Opting for a black identity and opting for an ethic of risk are implied in each other in this context.

A practical observation to be drawn from this is that social activism and the creation of a viable social movement are not contingent upon the prospects of immediate or certain success. Transcendent values of justice and equality informed by religious faith can motivate people to take up a particular social struggle in spite of great personal risk. An ethic of risk can provide plausibility structures that enables activists to persevere in that struggle even against very pessimistic odds. These plausibility structures reinforce the correctness of the cause and of the symbolic universe that supports it. Hard choices may be made based on the rationale that they are right and worthy of sacrifice, rather than the rationality of personal gains of status.

### Vulnerabilities and Future Possibilities

This study of the *movimento negro* in the Brazilian Roman Catholic Church would not be complete without something being said concerning the possible future of the movement. Concrete predictions would be mostly speculative, yet the social situation of the movement requires some general assessment of where it might lead. The focus of the study has been on the movement's own construction of black identity and its own social universe. From this vantage point, one could be influenced by the movement's hopes for the future into accepting the fulfillment of these hopes as an eventual reality. However, the weaknesses and vulnerabilities of the movement suggest that a much more cautious interpretation is in order.

A significant challenge for the movement to deal with is its small numbers. In a country with over 150 million people, most of whom identify themselves as Roman Catholics, the *movimento negro* is quite a small minority. It is true that the movement has gained national exposure. Yet, it also remains true that the movement does not have sufficient numbers to create major changes in the structure of the Roman Catholic Church. Subjects interviewed repeatedly noted that among the Roman Catholic clergy in Brazil, the number of blacks remains proportionally very small. They pointed out that the numbers who have advanced to the office of bishop is smaller still. Without sympathetic white clergy their influence is quite limited.

The issue of sympathetic white clergy has taken on more importance for the fortunes of the *movimento negro* in the Church with the tendency of the Vatican to appoint conservative bishops during the past 15 years. John Paul II's well known conservatism has not favored the position of progressive bishops in the Brazilian church (Smith 1991). The widely publicized silencing of Brazilian liberation theologian

Leonardo Boff by the Vatican is only one example of a policy that has created difficulties for progressive elements in the Church. Opposition from conservatives in the Roman Catholic hierarchy can deny both resources and potential members to the movement.

An additional and very significant limitation faced by the movement is in the area of finances. Activists mentioned this on various occasions during interviews and informal conversation. While resources such as office space and access to phones are made available to the movement by some parishes and diocese, subjects reported that there is usually little or no direct financial support for the movement and its projects. Black clergy serve as leaders, but often it is lay leaders and activists who make up the workers who carry out the movement's projects. Since these activists are not generally in the upper economic classes, time must be split between activism and making a living. The financial limitations of the movement make the likelihood of rapid expansion and widespread success tenuous at best.

A significant potential weakness of the *movimento negro* stems from the form of racial identity that activists have chosen to develop. The notion of negritude as held by the movement appears as a basically essentialist conception of race. While those activists with higher education affirmed that race is socially constructed, nevertheless, they promoted a notion of blackness that identifies it as an objective quality, inherent in those who possess it. For this reason, they argued that blacks must be conscientized by being led to discover their negritude. In taking such an approach there is a tendency to identify phenotype and culture. This overlooks the cultural diversity that exists among blacks themselves, who came from a variety of cultures in Africa. Within the *movimento negro* in the Roman Catholic Church in Brazil the use of African symbols drawn largely from *candomblé* can easily obscure this fact, reducing the meaning of being black in Brazil to

one particular cultural manifestation. This runs the risk of an arbitrary limitation of the possibilities for exploring what it means to be a black Brazilian into predefined socially acceptable channels in vogue within the movement.

A related problem that arises from an essentialist notion of racial identity is the possibility that the movement's efforts will create a situation of racial polarization. Seeing oneself as essentially different than others in some deeper ontological sense has the potential for creating an "us" against "them" mentality. Movement activists have been careful to deny that they are involved in any type of reverse discrimination. While their efforts to avoid this are commendable, there is still the danger that this could become a problem of significance.

Finally, perhaps the greatest challenge faced by the movement is the traditional Brazilian racial ethos. Racial democracy and whitening are still largely assumed by Brazilians. Even though the weaker notion of racial exceptionalism, as Hanchard (1994) discusses, has gained a foothold in Brazilian society, it has yet to displace the prevalent view. Even if it did so, this would not make a significant difference as racial exceptionalism still tends to justify the *status quo*. The strength of the traditional dominant symbolic universe in Brazil is such that the challenge mounted by the small *movimento negro* in the Roman Catholic Church in Brazil is unlikely to produce significant and widespread change without the support of other important Brazilian social institutions. There is little evidence that such support will be forthcoming in the near future.

Concerning the future of the *movimento negro* in the Roman Catholic Church in Brazil then, one may safely say that its opportunities for continued growth and expansion are good and should remain so, as long as the climate of political openness continues to

prevail in Brazil. Yet, any growth experienced by the movement will probably be slow due to the difficulties it faces. The possibility that the social goals of the movement may be realized on anything other than a very small scale in the foreseeable future remains very limited.

### Conclusion

Religion has continued to be a dynamic force in the life of Latin America as the close of the twentieth century draws near. In Brazil the popular interest and participation in religion continues as an important aspect of social life. The ability of religion to act as a catalyst for social movements with a political agenda is well illustrated in Brazil in the various popular movements that have grown out of the ranks of the progressive church during the past three decades (Mainwaring 1989). The *abertura* (opening) of Brazilian society has permitted radical religion to emerge as a significant element in the political and social discourse surrounding Brazil's most recent efforts at democratization. The *movimento negro* in the Brazilian Roman Catholic Church has appeared out of this context as a vivid example of the vitality and relevance of religion in this continuing conversation.

The data from this study indicates that the *movimento negro* in the Roman Catholic Church has provided social space and means for its participants to construct an identity as blacks where many of them did not have such an identity previously. Subjects have found a sense of identity, value and belonging as blacks within the community of the *movimento negro* that the dominant Brazilian racial ethos would negate. This represents a significant reversal of the dominant social ethos of racial democracy and whitening among those in the movement. Religion has provided the major impetus and resources for this reversal of the dominant Brazilian ethos that is represented by the process of the

construction of a black identity. While the movement itself remains a small element of Brazilian society, it indicates the continuing possibility for religion to act as a catalyst and resource for social change. That religion has taken on such a role in societies thought to be highly secularized, not only in Brazil but around the globe, indicates that the prospects for religion to continue as an important social influence into the twenty-first century are excellent.

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## APPENDIX 1

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Race and race relations in Brazil.

1. How do you know if a person is black, brown, etc? What is negritude?
2. Does racism exist in Brazil? Is Brazil a racial democracy? How do race relations in Brazil compare to other countries you have heard about?
3. Have you ever not been sure about your race? Do you have doubts about it today? How did you come to identify yourself as black? What caused you to begin thinking about negritude? What changes, if any, occurred in your life?
4. Have you experienced racial discrimination? How did you feel? Describe what it was like? Did you protest? Did protesting accomplish anything? Would you complain in the future? How do you resist discrimination?
5. What can you say about racial stereotypes concerning blacks and whites? How are the races presented on television, movies, etc.? What do children learn about the races in school?
6. Who was Zumbi? What does he personally mean to you? What does Africa mean to you?
7. Talk about your understanding of the history of blacks in Brazil. How does this history help you today?
8. Describe for me how the movement helps people recover black culture.
9. What are some of the difficulties a person has in assuming a black identity?
10. How did your family respond to your taking on a black identity? Your friends? Have you faced any difficulties from them?

Religious Beliefs and Practices

1. What is your religion? Do you consider yourself to be Roman Catholic or something else?

2. Do you consider yourself to be very religious? How often do you participate in some type of religious service or ceremony?
3. Do you participate in *candomblé* or some other African religion? How would you describe the level of your participation? What is the significance of African religion for you? for blacks in general? What is *axe*? How do you respond to someone who says that *candomblé* is demonic?
4. Are you a member of APN or some other *movimento negro* group? How long have you been a participant? How would you describe the level of your participation?
5. Do you think it is necessary to have a Mass for blacks that has elements of black culture or do you prefer a more traditional Mass.
6. What is your concept of God? What are some names of God? Is the same God revealed in Christianity and African religions? How are the two religions related to each other?
7. What are your beliefs concerning: salvation, liberation, the Kingdom of God?
7. Tell me your impressions of liberation theology. What is a black theology of liberation?
9. Do you find the Church to be supportive of the movement?

#### Politics

1. What do you think needs to be done to resolve the current economic crisis in Brazil? Do you have confidence in the government's ability to deal with it?
2. Describe your participation in strikes or demonstrations.
3. Do you belong to a political party? Which one and why?
4. Do other countries play any role in the Brazil's social problems?
5. If you were the president of Brazil what would you do?
6. What kind of political and economic system would provide the best chance for Brazil to overcome its problems?
8. What are your hopes for the future?

## APPENDIX 2

EXCERPT FROM, *AGENTES DE PASTORAL NEGROS:*

*ORIGEM, HISTÓRIA E ORGANIZAÇÃO.*

### Who are the Agents of the Black Pastoral? (Identity)

#### About the Agent:

An APN is one who works at the base, attached to the Black community, and with that work has the commitment to join with those other groups that seek social transformation. A descendent of the Black People, the APN knows and suffers the historical context of extreme poverty, infant mortality, illiteracy, social injustice, hunger, discrimination and racial segregation and many other evils. But he also lives a faith in a liberator God and expresses this faith in the journey of the liberation of the black population.

b) The APN therefore, assumes the socio-political-economic-cultural and religious struggle, introducing the black question into it. Always beginning from an ecumenical dimension of the liberating faith of the Black People. He is someone who is not concerned with reform, but with social transformation.

c) He searches for his identity continually in the light of the martyrs of the people and from the standpoint of the liberation of the blacks who are present in the popular movements.

d) The APN should be always conscious that he is the "subject of his own liberation and that of our black brothers."

e) It is the common practice of the APNs to welcome all who identify with the struggle against all forms of racism, overcoming differences in color and religion.

### What is a base group and how do the APNs express themselves in them?

a) It is by means of APN base groups that the agents come up with proposals to be discussed in the state and national assemblies.

b) It is in the base groups that the privileged location is found for assuming as a black person and a black people, with all of the history, values, culture, and the rights of the black Community.

c) Today, through the reality lived by the groups in their Regional Quilombos (organizations of various base groups), a strong necessity is perceived to trace a community project of real liberation.

d) The base groups of the APNs constitute a source, a vein that reunites life, a sign that affirms identity:

-In the base groups concrete situations arise, the anxieties and cries that affirm and define identity;

-It is in the face of reality that the proposals and priorities which give the characteristics of the group are defined.

-In the groups the search for concrete situations occurs, summed up in faith in the God of life, that transmits steadfastness and the testimony of the APNs.

-The base groups are constant cries for justice and constant appeals for conversion.

### Proclamation and conflicts in the journey of the APNs

One thing that stands out in the practice of the APNs is the great obligation for conscientization. With this, APN creates conditions in which the conscience can be awakened, animated and mutually strengthened in the experience of negritude; they celebrate history, once hope and faith make them see in the struggle of the Black Community in the here and now, signs of the victory promised to the little ones.

Among the models of the Christian Church, we see that the situation of the black Community was not taken in consideration sufficiently in the Traditional (conservative) model, nor in the model of the Modern church, but only in the model of the Liberative Church (ex. The CEBs). The APNs are, therefore, questioning elements inside of the ecclesiastical structures. They introduce the black question in the communities and the hierarchies of the communities, even without the support of some parishes or bishops.

### The mission of the APNs

It is a part of the mission of APNs to organize blacks as a Black People to withstand the structure of the domination of society. To seek a greater conscientization and recuperation of our cultural identity, of our human values, for the overcoming of the socio-political-economic-social-cultural and religious marginalization of the Black Community.

The APNs have as a base mission to construct a Political Project of a society based in the principles of equality, participation and respect for diversity, where everyone has their rights respected (APN 1993, 6-8, my translation).

RELIGION AND RACIAL IDENTITY IN THE *MOVIMENTO NEGRO*  
OF THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH IN BRAZIL

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An Abstract of a Dissertation

Presented to  
the Faculties of The Iliff School of Theology and  
The University of Denver (Colorado Seminary)

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Philosophy

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by  
Alan Doyle Myatt

June 1995

This project is a study of the interaction of religion with the process of racial identity construction in the black movement within the Brazilian Roman Catholic Church. The fundamental problem facing the movement is how to construct a viable black identity in the midst of a social situation filled with ambiguity and opposition. The process of this social construction of racial identity is the key problem explored in this dissertation.

The multi-racial polity of Brazilian society includes many racial designations for Brazilians of African descent. These identities are supported by the notions of Racial Democracy and whitening. Racial democracy is the idea that Brazilian society contains very little racial prejudice and discrimination. Whitening is the doctrine that the extensive racial mixing in Brazil has the effect of creating an increasingly whiter society. The social status of blacks may allegedly be improved through whitening. In this context very few Brazilians choose to identify themselves as blacks.

The study uses Berger and Luckmann's sociology of knowledge and James Scott's theory of the resistance of subordinate peoples to domination as its theoretical framework. The thesis argued is that the *movimento negro* is attempting to build a black identity by drawing on the history of black resistance that has been largely hidden, and constructing a new universe of meaning. The movement draws upon liberation theology, traditional Roman Catholicism, and Afro-Brazilian religions to achieve this. The research was based on field work in Brazil and focused on the analysis of interviews with movement activists as well as movement publications, documents, and videos. Long interviews were conducted according to a prepared guide, but in an open-ended fashion.

It was found that the notions of racial democracy and whitening are not plausible and that they act to inhibit blacks from overcoming problems due to racial discrimination. It

was also determined that Afro-Brazilian religions, Catholicism, and liberation theology provide resources that enable movement activists to create a new racial identity, involving an essentialist notion of blackness, that did not previously exist. The conclusion that religion is an important resource in resistance to domination was supported.