

LETÍCIA MARIA COSTA DA NÓBREGA CESARINO
University of California, Berkeley

BRAZILIAN POSTCOLONIALITY AND SOUTH-
SOUTH COOPERATION: A VIEW FROM
ANTHROPOLOGY

In both lay and academic circles, it is not common to find the term postcolonial associated with Latin America, and perhaps even less so with Brazil. This probably has to do with the dynamics of this idea, a relatively recent construct that was born overseas and has circulated mostly in Anglophone scholarly environments other than Latin America. But this low currency of postcoloniality versus notions such as modernity or nation-building in the subcontinent might point to some of the very issues postcolonial theory seeks to approach: the constitution of postcolonial subjects, the politics of enunciation, and so forth.

In Latin America, postcoloniality has involved the construction, by Creole elites, of a corpus of political thought and social theory during lengthy and contested processes of state-formation and nation-building which are particular to the former Iberian colonies (among which, as will be discussed here, Brazil holds an even more peculiar post-colonial outlook). The contemporary approximation between Brazil and other countries in the global South, those in Sub-Saharan Africa in particular, invites us to revisit this nation-building literature in terms of an articulation between processes of internal and external colonialism. Contemporary postcolonial theory may provide a fresh avenue for looking at this literature as an early effort to make sense of Brazil's post-colonial condition.

This paper will begin by reviewing two contrastive approaches in the anthropological and neighboring literatures on Latin America: the

postcolonial and the multiple modernities perspectives. It then discusses the possible place(s) of Brazilian classic nation-building literature in these debates, putting forth an argument for the need for substantial historical embedding when addressing the postcolonial in relation to Brazil. It concludes with remarks based on ongoing ethnographic research about contemporary South-South cooperation between Brazil and the African continent.

1. Perspectives on Brazil and Latin America: modernity, nation-building and postcoloniality

Differently to the postcolonial, the notion of modernity is a common one in indigenous and foreign social sciences literature about Latin America and Brazil. That modernity is no longer to be thought of in monolithic terms seems to be by now part of scholarly commonsense: multiple (Eisenstadt “Introduction”, “The First Multiple Modernities”, Roniger and Waisman), alternative (Gaonkar), other (Rofel), global (Featherstone, Lash and Robertson), critical (Knauff), at large (Appadurai) – and, more specifically for Latin America or Brazil, subaltern (Coronil), subterranean (Aldama), mausoleum (Whitehead), cannibal (Madureira), or tropical (Oliven) – are among the wide range of epithets that can be found in the literature.

Contemporary globalization is the preferred chronological and epistemological starting point of much of the literature on multiple modernities. According to one of the champions of this approach, the adjective multiple is meant to come to terms with the fact that “the actual developments in modernizing societies have refuted the homogenizing and hegemonic assumptions of th[e] Western program of modernity” (Eisenstadt “Introduction” 1). Modernity is thus disentangled from “the West”, and its unfolding into multiples is regarded as the outcome of Western modernity’s intrinsic opening to reflexivity which, with the intensification of global connections, would have allowed for the emergence of non-Western moderns. In anthropology, the idiom of multiple modernities is present among those working on “areas and locales

that have different cultural histories” than the West (Knauff 1) – that is, regions caught within the grasp of Western colonial expansion much later than Latin America, such as Asia (Appadurai, Rofel, Tambiah) and Africa (Piot, Deutch et al.).

There are however fundamental differences between the Latin American experience with modernity and colonialism and that of the areas typically covered by the anthropology of multiple modernities. As a “first multiple modernity” (Eisenstadt “The First Multiple Modernities”), Latin America entertains a relation with the West that vastly predates contemporary globalization, reaching as far back as early European modernity. Historical depth is therefore a particularly important analytical element when reflecting on postcoloniality in Latin America, as the subcontinent has a long colonial and post-colonial history that cannot be reduced to the more recent acceleration of global processes, and even to modernization and development discourse.

Thus, multiple modernities literature generally associates modernity in Latin America less with one linear, continuous process than with periodic “modernizing moves” (Domingues xi). Replicating a common argument in Brazilian historiography, Brazilian sociologist Renato Ortiz locates the consolidation of Brazil’s interest in modernity in the 1930’s, when, according to him, it became

something present, an imperative of our times, and no longer a promise dislocated in time. Problematic modernity, controversial but without doubt an integral part of day-to-day life (television sets, automobiles, airports, shopping centers, restaurants, cable television, advertising, etc.). (258)

Another important claim is that Creole elites in newly independent states have been the key architects of Latin America’s post-colonial versions of modernity (Roniger and Waisman). Indeed, in contrast with European colonization in Asia and especially in Africa, during much of the nineteenth century the Latin American republics were, even if still largely

financially dependent on Europe (Britain in particular), relatively left alone to carry out their own state-formation experiments.

As others (Tavolaro, Caldeira, Domingues), Ortiz deploys the idea of multiple modernities to counteract the incomplete modernity paradigm common in Brazil's classic social theory – briefly put, those works that, implicitly or explicitly, define modernity in Brazil in terms of a *lack*. Brazilian sociologist Sérgio Tavolaro advocates the multiple modernities approach as an alternative to what he calls sociology of dependency and sociology of the patriarchal-patrimonialist heritage, which would be “incapable of thinking contemporary Brazil as a finished exemplar of modernity” (6), being therefore responsible for “our permanence in a sort of *semi-modern limbo*” (10). Following Eisenstadt, he argues that an acknowledgement that modernity is “historical”, “contingent”, “multifaceted” and “tending towards the global” would be enough of a way out of Brazilian intellectuals’ – in his view wrong-headed – obsession with unauthenticity and peripherality (11).

A question can be raised here that parallels the one put by Ferguson (*Global Shadows*) concerning multiple modernities perspectives on Africa. Would the brushing away of the incomplete modernity paradigm with the stroke of a pen, and by selectively associating modernity with the diffusion of certain material and immaterial forms,¹ be enough to wipe it out of the self-consciousness of the actors themselves? Moreover, this would imply dismissing an entire corpus of Brazilian classic social thought that has more to offer than being either wrong or right.

At least since independence in 1822, Brazil's intellectual and political elites have been struggling with the challenge of constructing a nation-state. But it was the inception of the Republic in 1889 that prompted an onrush of what would become known as *ensaios de interpretação do Brasil* (essays of interpretation of Brazil), a hybrid literary-political-scholarly genre characterized by a quest for Brazil's uniqueness as a nation while at the same time diagnosing obstacles to, and proposals for, its self-

¹ Like a “modern” cultural industry, urbanization, telecommunication technologies, a “rationalizing mentality” in public management, or greater commitment to “market efficiency” (Ortiz 257).

fulfillment. The most interesting aspect of this literature is not whether it “accurately” describes Brazil’s socio-cultural configuration or its particular brand of modernity, but to which extent such publicly acknowledged and highly influential works have effectively concurred for shaping their own object.

Modernity in this case refers not to one dividing line between the national and the foreign, or between center and periphery, but encapsulates a host of other cleavages that are particular to Brazil’s historical experience. A key cleavage refers to the idea of the “two Brazils”. Generally associated with Jacques Lambert’s *Os Dois Brasís*, this notion maps a divide between the modern and the traditional onto spatial discontinuities (such as urban-rural and coast-backlands) whereby the underdeveloped regions and peoples of the country are seen as the past of modern ones.

Historically, this dualism has been tightly connected to the slow process of occupation of the Brazilian hinterlands, which culminated in the country’s politico-territorial unification. Although officially completed with the consolidation of Brazil’s contemporary borders in the early twentieth century, this integration effort persists to this day in other fronts ranging from infra-structure (transportation, telecommunications, energy, agriculture, etc.) to culture (education, mass media, etc.). The very forging of a Brazilian national identity is intimately connected to these processes, and indigenous social theory has been a key ideological mediator in both internally and externally-directed nation-building efforts.

Virtually all *ensaios* draw on some version of the modern-traditional dichotomy, but often wind up complicating rather than reaffirming it. By the time Gilberto Freyre was writing *Casa-Grande & Senzala* (1933) – later translated as *The Masters and the Slaves* – for instance, the Brazilian Northeast had long lost the political and economic weight it held during colonial times to Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo in the Southeast. From the standpoint of this new domestic hegemony, the Northeast came to be seen as a traditional region, the prestige of which Freyre tried to rescue by

elevating the status of its culture from regional to national. In the same masterly tour-de-force, he appealed to nationalist appetites by providing a language with which to talk about Brazil as a civilization in its own terms, that is, outside of the racial degeneration straitjacket implicated by biological approaches to race and by the whitening ideologies prevalent in Brazil during the early twentieth century (Skidmore). In his oeuvre, Freyre's regionalism – often opposed to the cosmopolitanism of São Paulo modernists like Mário and Oswald de Andrade, also on the spotlight during the 1920's and 30's – is further coupled with Lusotropicalism, his transnational alternative to Western European hegemony based on a supposed cultural unity and superior civilizational potentials of the “Portuguese world” (Freyre, *Um Brasileiro em Terras Portuguesas* 244).

An earlier manifestation of the two Brazils paradigm is even more telling of the contradictory and complex nature of post-colonial nation-building efforts: Euclides da Cunha's 1902 masterpiece *Os Sertões* – translated as *Rebellion in the Backlands*. The key dichotomy here is between the coast and the backlands, but the book's core effort lies precisely in an ambiguous reversion of the common association between the former as civilized, and the latter as primitive. In Da Cunha's hands, European scientific theories of environmental determinism turn into a contradictory praise of the *sertanejos* (backlanders) as a race better-adapted – and therefore more authentic and in a sense superior – than the moderns of the coast. Towards the end of the book, these paradoxes unfold into an unprecedented denunciation of the coastal elites' neglect (or misconceiving) of their own civilizing mission towards “our rude native sons, who were more alien to us in this land of ours than were the immigrants who came from Europe. For it was not an ocean which separated us from them but three whole centuries” (161). Da Cunha's account is therefore set apart from Freyre's in its refusal to think in terms of the assumption of a harmonic whole underpinning Brazilian culture and society. Not by chance, Da Cunha has been framed (e.g., by Sanjinés) as a sharp postcolonial critic *avant la lettre*.

More recently, the idea of the two Brazils has been cast by Brazilian anthropologist Cardoso de Oliveira (“A Noção de ‘Colonialismo Interno’”) in terms of the concept of internal colonialism (Stavenhagen), that is, the continuance of external colonialism, this time led by national elites over domestic subaltern groups. Until the 1988 Constitution, the Brazilian state used to conceive of this relation from the perspective of indigenous peoples’ incorporation to the national polity. The paradigm of incorporation has been rendered problematic both by indigenous movements and by scholarship inspired, among others, by postcolonial critique. Alcida Ramos has looked at the Brazilian state’s relations with indigenous peoples along the lines of Edward Said’s *Orientalism*. Going a bit further, Teresa Caldeira has shifted the focus of the ethnographic authority critique away from central, empire-building anthropologies in order to ask the important (though barely addressed) question of if, and how, national peripheral anthropologies like Brazil’s would reproduce domestically the predicaments of the colonial encounter (Asad).

On the other hand, critiques from a multiple modernities standpoint (e.g., Tavolaro) claiming that the *ensaios* essentialize a supposed Brazilian character, might be missing the point by reducing their complex reflections on what we would today call the postcolonial question, to an assertion of Brazil’s inability to become fully modern due to its Iberian roots. Intellectuals like Freyre and Da Cunha were not simply identifying obstacles to Brazil’s modernization, but unsettling the very grounds on which modernity was thought of as possible in the peripheries. In this sense, the nation-building literature paved the way for rendering problematic, always in an ambivalent fashion, the very epistemologies of central ideologies and institutions – thus presaging future postcolonial moves. Here, moreover, a situated position is made explicit: these authors were not just describing some objective reality out there, but participating in the very constitution of their object, the Brazilian nation-state.²

² Even though such works came to be associated with a genre – the *ensaio* – that partly deprives them of scientific status, Caldeira and others have convincingly extended the nation-building claim to Brazil’s contemporary social sciences. The nation-building drive is here contrasted with the empire-making implications of central anthropologies (cf. Stocking, Cardoso de Oliveira “Peripheral Anthropologies”).

This literature has therefore a different character than a simple either-or focus on coloniality and modernity, as it has performed the very questions raised by the contemporary scholarship discussed here. If, for example, the foreign appears as the full-fledged modern which opposes the domestic as backward and incomplete, the latter simultaneously appears as the autochthonous authentic in contrast to the foreign spurious. This dichotomy intersects further with other cleavages that bring into relief internal contradictions to the nation-state. Ideas of Brazilian modernity are multifaceted depending, in each case, on the articulations between the regional and the national, and the local and the universal. One can see, for instance, how the idea of the nation is deflected by regional dispositions in the works of authors such as Gilberto Freyre (Northeast), Roberto DaMatta (Rio de Janeiro), and the 1922 modernists (São Paulo); and how these relations can be further articulated with (and complicated by) statements of universality, as with the 1922 modernists. Finally, Brazilians have seen and continue to see their own reality vis-à-vis central modernities from a multiplicity of angles: opposition, hybridism, difference, deference, dependency, mimicry, deficit, catching up, creative absorption, inappropriateness, and so forth. The authors approached here are but a small (albeit influential) sample of these multiple possibilities.

In general, the postcolonial literature is more sensitive to such complexities than its multiple modernities counterpart. But as virtually all discussions on the question of postcoloniality in Latin America suggest (Mignolo, Ashcroft, Moraña et al., Moraña and Jáuregui), turning the disciplinary lenses of postcolonial studies to the subcontinent is not a simple task. The overarching question seems to be whether postcolonial analysis could be applied to earlier post-colonial experiences such as Latin America's, that is, beyond the late twentieth century context from which the field emerged, mostly in response to independence struggles in Africa and Asia.

Ashcroft has traced a useful picture of the multiple layers involved in this debate: whether it makes sense to speak of decentering modernity at a moment (that of the conquest of America) when modernity itself was

being formed in Europe; differences between the Spanish and Portuguese colonialisms and the ones to which postcolonial studies normally refer (especially British and French); whether and how the occupant of the Empire position has changed over time (to include, chiefly, the United States); the greater ambiguity between colonizers and colonized, often framed in terms of hybrid or Creole cultures; the question of internal colonialism in relation to black, peasant and indigenous populations; the particular dialectics of acceptance-resistance to colonial domination and foreign influence by national elites; and whether the attempt to extend postcolonial studies to Latin America wouldn't be itself a neocolonialist move.

As is also the case elsewhere, to think of Latin America from a postcolonial standpoint requires going beyond the Colonial Period as demarcated by the historiographical canon (in the case of Brazil, from 1500 to 1822). Colonialism as a historical experience is, in this sense, distinguished from coloniality, where the latter concerns those more elusive yet persistent and contradictory effects of colonization on formerly colonized peoples' self-consciousness. Moreover, given the longer time span elapsed since the demise of colonization, the primordial colonizer has lost ground to further waves of external influence that have succeeded the period of Portuguese and Spanish dominion: most obviously Britain and the US in geopolitical economy, but also France and even Germany in "softer" (intellectual and institutional) spheres. Such *longue durée*, coupled with Brazilian particularities within Latin America, make the application of postcolonial theory insights to Brazil a rather complicated task indeed.

Various attempts have been made by students of (and from) the subcontinent to bring insights from contemporary postcolonial critique to bear on Latin American particularities: to expand the problem of coloniality as conceived by postcolonial theory's chief paradigms (Said, Fanon, Spivak, or Bhabba) (Moraña et al.); more focused approaches from a subaltern studies (Rodrigues) or cultural studies (Del Sarto et al.) perspective; and studies connecting colonialism in Brazil with its counterparts in Lusophone Africa (Santos, Fiddian). Dependency theory

has also been a favorite topic, be it as the object of, or in contrast to, postcolonial approaches (Grosfoguel, Kapoor). For Brazil, popular themes have included cultural movements like the 1920's Brazilian modernism (Madureira) or mid-century *Cinema Novo* (New Cinema) (Stam). The question of race, particularly fraught with tension in the contestation of Freyre's racial harmony legacy by late-century black activism, is extensive enough to make up a subfield on its own (for instance, Bourdieu and Wacquant, Sansone, and other contributors to the same issue of the Brazilian journal *Estudos Afro-Asiáticos*).

In general lines, one could say that if the multiple modernities approach has its ultimate reference in contemporary globalization, views the history of modernity as starting in eighteenth century Europe and unfolding through a multiplication of modernizing projects mediated by local elites, and privileges modernity's "bright side" (i.e., its emancipating aspects), the postcolonial approach to Latin America begins with the Conquest and the world-system which unfolds thereof, views the history of modernity as the systemic articulation of coloniality's multiple elements, and privileges modernity's "dark side" (i.e., its subalternizing aspects).

A collective of Latin-American scholars (many of whom US-based) has been particularly vocal in these debates. According to one of its members, the Colombian anthropologist Arturo Escobar ("Worlds and Knowledges Otherwise"), the group's chief claim for innovation lies in the uniqueness of its "decolonial critique", firmly grounded in the particularities of Latin America's experience. This critique does not claim to be situated outside of modernity, but at its *margins*, and proposes that modernity-coloniality (rather than modernity alone) be the unit of analysis. One of the notions propounded by this group, that of coloniality of power, seeks to account for the tenacity of colonialism's material and discursive structures beyond national independences, and refers to a chain of entangled global hierarchies that extrapolates military and economic domination to include racial, gendered, spiritual, epistemic, and linguistic elements. All these forms of power are articulated in what has been

referred to as the “modern colonial world system” (Quijano and Wallerstein, Escobar “World and Knowledges Otherwise” 185).

The idea of border-thinking (Mignolo) also has a subcontinental flavor in its evocation of the tropes of mixture and Creolization so familiar to Latin-American social thought, but now stripped of connotations of harmony (as in Freyre). If, on the one hand, border-thinking may be seen as occupying that othering space of alternative (i.e., non-modern) civilizational matrixes that was, in the case of Latin America, eventually filled by the Creole, on the other it takes place in the epistemological and political space opened up by colonial difference, from where it aims at reaching at an outside of Western hegemony. This view is in line with that of many postcolonial critics, but in Latin America the idea of margins acquires greater prominence, since its subaltern point of view has been historically constituted as *internal* to the West.

The postcolonial perspective therefore opens up a field of inquiry for which most multiple modernities approaches lack appropriate conceptual tools. Some of the latter’s insistence in detaching modernity from the West (Eisenstadt “Introduction”, “The First Multiple Modernities”, Roniger and Waisman), for instance, is telling of, as Mignolo would put it, their blindness to colonial difference, or to the fact that modernity’s claims to universality are the result of a historical process of expansion of *Western* societies predicated on the hierarchization and subjugation of alternative worldviews. Moreover, multiple modernities’ focus on collective identities cannot address the postcolonial question of subaltern enunciation in all its complexity. It is no surprise, then, that the pool of actors populating such studies, pictured as struggling for the hegemony of their own version of the modern project, is almost exclusively limited to national elites, intellectuals, or organized social movements. The subaltern who does not exist as a well-defined collective subject (in other words, who does not have an explicit, bounded identity) does not find much room in this framework.³ Most of the multiple modernities

³ The idea of “popular culture” is one way of framing these amorphous identities (Rowe and Schelling).

approaches to Latin America only seem to be able to work against contradiction, ambiguity, and indeterminacy. In this sense, a postcolonial approach would have the advantage of thinking not against but *through* the latter in order to make sense of subaltern subjectivity, instead of dismissing the incomplete modernity paradigm in Latin America by generously democratizing modernity to the global peripheries.

A stimulating engagement with the question of Brazil's status within the postcolonial terrain has been put forth by the Portuguese sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos. Among Santos's arguments on the particularities of Portuguese colonialism are the original hybridity of Portuguese culture; Portugal's status as a subaltern colonialism (*vis-à-vis* the British, but at points also in relation to Spain); the fact that its enterprise was more colonial than capitalist, resulting in that "the end of Portuguese colonialism did not determine the end of the colonialism of power" (10); and that, given the incompleteness of the nation-building process in Portugal itself, Portuguese culture became a "borderland culture" where form would prevail over content.

According to Santos, these would have shaped a peculiar (post-) colonial outlook in Portugal's former colonies, especially Brazil, which was not only the largest of them but eventually became itself the center of the Portuguese Empire between 1808 and 1821. The fact that the Portuguese colonizer had to retroactively reckon with what became the new norm – namely, British imperialism – had paradoxical and long-lasting consequences for its colonies: they came to suffer, Santos argues, from both an excess and a deficit of colonialism. Portuguese colonialism came thus to be seen by those in Brazil both as a root cause of its underdevelopment and as a sort of "friendly colonialism".

Santos goes on to argue that the particularities of Portuguese colonialism entail a specific kind of postcolonialism. In the case of Brazil, two points stand out in this regard. On the one hand, the abovementioned double colonization (by Portugal and then by the Empires that followed it) "became later the constitutive element of Brazil's myth of origins and

possibilities for development. ... It divides Brazilians between those who are crushed by the excess of past and those that are crushed by the excess of future” (19). On the other hand, the “colonial weakness and incompetence of the Portuguese Prospero” did not allow for the persistence of neocolonialist relations, but “by the same token it facilitated, particularly in the case of Brazil, the reproduction of colonial relations after the end of colonialism – what is known as internal colonialism” (34).

Indeed, the intensity with which colonialism was turned inwards in Brazil might have been a historical effect of having had a colonizer that was itself subaltern (but which had nonetheless the tradition of a strong patrimonial state). One can think of the gap in Brazil between those “crushed by the excess of past” and those “crushed by the excess of future” as moving along the lines of internal colonialism (most prominently, in relation to indigenous peoples, but also encompassing peasants and descendants of African slaves). But it also overlaps with other long-lasting gaps in Brazil such as those in income and education. On the other hand, the “excess of future” – eloquently encapsulated in the recurrent motto in Brazilian culture: “Brazil, the land of the future” – nourishes the long-lasting expectation of one day becoming a fully developed country, as well as a major global player.

The particularities of Brazilian postcoloniality as accounted for by Santos also seem to have shaped nation-building ideologies as they turned outwards. From the point of view of double colonization, for instance, Freyre’s *The Masters and the Slaves* can be regarded as a retroactive response to Britain’s redefinition of “the rules of colonial discourse – racist science, progress, the ‘white man’s burden’” (Santos 12). Freyre’s borrowing of Franz Boas’s notion of culture as an alternative to biological understandings of race (*The Masters and the Slaves* xxvi) allowed him to recast in a positive light what was until then understood as a source of degeneration (Skidmore): miscegenation. Many of the dichotomies present in the *ensaios* and elsewhere also struggle with the perceived gap that emerged between Brazil’s Iberian roots and Western European hegemony.

Each of their poles refer, as it were, to one “colonizer”: hierarchy-equality (DaMatta), patrimonialism-bureaucracy (Faoro), or cordiality-civility (Hollanda).

Finally, Santos invites us to think in terms not of a generic postcolonialism accessed by means of postcolonial theory’s abstract constructs, but of a *situated postcolonialism*, which supposes “a careful historical and comparative analysis of the different colonialisms and their aftermaths” (20). I would add to this the importance not only of historical but ethnographic embedding when reflecting on postcoloniality in particular peripheral regions (or between them, as in South-South relations). In this vein, one could take “situated” also in the sense put forth by Donna Haraway: making explicit the concrete interests undergirding epistemological constructs and their corresponding claims to universality. In the remainder of this paper, I will tentatively take up these and other insights by exploring recent approximations between Brazil and the African continent within the context of (re)emerging South-South alignments.

2. Postcoloniality in Contemporary South-South Alignments: Brazil and Africa

As suggested by Santos’s notion of situated postcolonialism, discussing contemporary relations between Brazil and Africa should not be an intellectual exercise in the abstract. Moreover, a *longue durée* historical frame as well as Brazil’s ambivalent position between its historical alliance with the West and *terceiromundista* (Third-Worldist) alignments are key for understanding how such relations are unfolding today. The trajectories of Brazil and the African continent have crossed each other at various points during the half millennium of European colonialism in the Americas and in Africa, and continue to do so along lines that are fundamentally shaped by their respective post-colonial legacies. From the very beginning, relations between the two continents have been a constitutive part of the world system inaugurated by Western European expansion from the fifteenth century onwards. These have often been framed by the historical literature

in terms of the “Atlantic triangle” whereby Europeans provided African traders with manufactured goods such as textiles and guns, in exchange for slaves to work in their New World colonies (the so-called Middle Passage), while the latter supplied Europe with highly valued products as sugar and precious metals (to be joined by coffee, cotton and others) (Mintz). In the case of Brazil, however, it makes more sense to think in terms of a four-vertex figure, as by the late seventeenth century Portugal itself had become politically and economically dependent on the rising British empire (Penha).

Throughout Brazil’s colonial history, its relations with Africa have been fundamentally mediated by the transatlantic slave trade, in which the Portuguese, and later on the Brazilians themselves, played a prominent role. The mid-nineteenth century, when England finally succeeded in curbing the influx of African slaves to Brazil, is generally regarded as inaugurating a century of stalled relations between the two regions, eventually punctuated by free and forced movements of returned slaves and slave-descendants especially to West Africa. Meanwhile, the Brazilian state was busy with its own process of internal colonization and territorial unification and, later on into the twentieth century, industrialization. It is not until later in that century, with the African continent ushering into independence struggles, that Brazilian diplomats (and businessmen) would look again with interest across the Southern Atlantic (Saraiva, D’Ávila).

But regardless of the flow of people, goods and information between the two regions, Africa had an important role to play in Brazil during the early twentieth century. This was not, however, the actual Africa, but an Africa seen through the mirror-image of Brazil’s nation-building ideologies. In the best-known and most influential version of Brazilian nationality, Africans joined the Amerindians and the Portuguese to make up the Brazilian “melting pot” – the Freyrean picture of a racially mixed society devoid of segregation and racism. According to another axis of Freyre’s oeuvre (*Um Brasileiro em Terras Portuguesas*), which would also wield high influence in Brazil’s foreign policy circles, Portuguese colonies in

Africa participated in the fantasy of a Lusotropical civilization sharing similar characteristics with the Brazilian post-colonial experience.

Historical works (such as Saraiva's, or D'Ávila's recent account of Brazil's stance on independence struggles in Portuguese colonies in Africa) suggest that the power of Freyrean discourse in Brazilians' self-consciousness and its influence on the country's international moves should not be underestimated. This is especially true with regard to Brazil's special relation – which some have described as sentimental (Penna Filho and Lessa) – with Portugal, which prevented it from taking a clear stand opposing the last stronghold of European colonization in Africa. Freyre himself played a role in this respect, not only in Brazil but also in Portugal, where he supported, sometimes in person, the ideological apparatus of the Salazarist regime. This eventually came at a cost to Brazil, by breeding acrimonious resentment among leaders not only from former Portuguese colonies in Africa (Mozambique in particular) but from the remainder of the continent as well.

Brazil's foreign policy for Africa therefore reflects its fundamentally ambivalent insertion in the world system that gradually emerged with the conquest of America. On the one hand, there has been an almost automatic privileging of relations with the former empires of Portugal, Western Europe and the US. On the other, there is an opposite drive towards *terceiromundismo*, where a closer alignment is sought with other developing nations across what is being today called the global South. While the former follows the typical dynamics of center-periphery relations, the latter is driven by a will to shed political and economic dependence on Northern nations (the US in particular, whom Brazilian diplomacy has always resented for being treated like a “junior partner”) while striving for regional – and more recently, global – leadership. It is not casual, then, that closer relations with Africa were most aggressively sought by Brazil in moments of emergence, such as during the 70's “economic miracle” and recently during Lula's two terms in office (2003-2010).⁴ Therefore, by

⁴ A partial exception was the independent foreign policy pursued during Jânio Quadros and João Goulart's short-lived presidencies (1961-64). Attempts at approximation with Africa would be resumed during the

becoming a provider of international cooperation, Brazil is addressing as much its Southern counterparts as Northern powers, from whom it seeks recognition as a major global player.

Such efforts at approximation with Africa, based on the doctrine of responsible pragmatism (Saraiva), submit foreign relations to the imperatives of national development to the point of sometimes clashing frontally with geopolitics. Probably the most striking instance of this was during the Geisel years (1974-79), when the paradoxical situation came about where a harsh anti-communist military dictatorship was the first non-African regime to recognize a Marxist government: independent Angola under the MPLA (People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola). This was a late attempt at redeeming Brazil from the lack of a firm commitment against the persistence of colonization in Lusophone Africa and the South-African apartheid regime, which had bred hostilities among many of the new African leaders and put Brazil in the black list of oil-producing African nations and their Arab allies during the 1970's oil shocks (Saraiva).

Much in Brazil's discourse on its relations with Africa has been retained since then. In cooperation activities, the Itamaraty's (Brazil's Ministry of Foreign Relations) standard discourse on Brazilian culture tends to follow the Freyrean lines of racial mixture and harmony – even if during the last decade or so, as happened occasionally in the past, such hegemonic discourse has been increasingly challenged by race-based movements in Brazil (Saraiva). As one moves however from policy to operational staff involved in cooperation activities, references to race politics (and even to questions of race in general) become increasingly less common. This points to the relevance of other analytical angles or rather, to the need for an articulated approach, as has been suggested by the Latin American postcolonial literature discussed above.

An analytical angle that stood out during fieldwork relates to the idea of culture, particularly in the central way assumptions of cultural

Military Regime, but such efforts eventually fell apart during the 80's under the weight of an economic crisis that swept both sides of the Atlantic (Saraiva).

affinities between Brazil and (especially West and Lusophone) Africa are deployed in cooperation. Most typically, such affinities are evoked in the spheres of music, food, dance, sports, religion, or language. Such emphasis on assumed affinities at the level of culture is in line with arguments stressing the centrality of “non-conceptual forms” of “embodied subjectivity” in Africa’s trans-Atlantic diaspora (Gilroy 76). But it could as well reflect gaps in historiography that are being gradually bridged by studies focusing for instance on the African origins of agricultural techniques brought to the Americas (e.g., Carney).⁵ What this indicates most forcefully, however, is the peripheralization of both world regions during the rise to hegemony of the West and its dominance in “harder” social dimensions such as (industrial-capitalist) economy, (liberal-democratic) political institutions, and (techno-scientific) knowledge. Thus, what would be the proper terrain for relations across the Southern Atlantic was left to what is understood, according to Western modernity’s normativity, as the “softer” (and autonomous) spheres of religion, culture, and so forth.

But culture is not a pre-given essence that would have remained unchanged throughout the centuries, untouched by history or politics. This becomes especially evident when dissonances arise between Brazil’s constructed image of its African heritage and actual contemporary Africa. Especially in the aftermath of the independence struggles, not all Africans saw such supposed cultural legacies in a positive light, connected as they were with a tradition that those eager to modernize wished only to leave behind. A telling anecdote recounted by D’Ávila (61) speaks of a Nigerian student in Salvador who went crazy of fear of *candomblé* gods,⁶ associated as they are by many urban, Christianized Africans with the dangers of the “bush” – a revealing contradiction between Africa’s place in Brazil’s nation-building and contemporary Africa’s own processes of internal colonialism.

⁵ An important lacuna in Gilroy’s account relates precisely to technique (and technology). In the case of African slaves brought to Brazil, this dimension of embodied knowledge includes fields such as metallurgy, herbal medicine, construction, textiles, and the manufacturing of sugar (cf. Furtado, Cunha Jr.).

⁶ *Candomblé* is a modality of Afro-Brazilian religion akin to the Haitian *Vodou* or the Cuban *Santería*.

But cultural politics may also take on a deliberate form, as in the invention of shared traditions focused on African returnees from Brazil. D'Ávila tells of how visits to communities of returnees in Benin, Togo, Ghana and Nigeria were mandatory in Brazilians' missions to Africa in the 60's and 70's. More recently, the Brazilian government has been actively engaged in enhancing the visibility of these historical ties, even including them in the cooperation it provides. I have visited a house in Jamestown (Accra) that has been turned into a small museum telling the story of one such community of returnees, the Tabon people of Ghana. It also housed weekly Portuguese classes and periodical screenings of Brazilian movies. President Lula visited the new museum (named "Brazil House" and located at "Brazil Lane") in one of his many official trips to Africa.

Such active construction of shared identities does not mean that spontaneous affinities may not arise during cooperation activities. Indeed, I have sometimes heard from African participants of how their Brazilian counterparts were more easy-going, less patronizing and had a better sense of humor than – as one of them tellingly put it – "other Europeans". But that these are manifestations of some lingering shared culture or even consequential for the success of technical cooperation itself is far from obvious. After all, other social dimensions at play during cooperation activities – political constraints, career interests, bureaucratic protocols, institutional environments, material infra-structure – carry significant weight.

But neither is the assumption of similarities limited to the realm of the social, it also includes nature in a central way. In the world of Brazil-Africa cooperation, it is common to hear of how, as in a very easy jigsaw puzzle, the Eastern coast of Brazil and Africa's West fit each other perfectly, united as they once were before the Atlantic Ocean came into existence. Thus, Brazilian technologies would be more easily adapted to Sub-Saharan Africa, the discourse goes, because of their shared geo-climatic conditions. The imagery of the tropics is salient here. In the 70's, Brazilian manufacturers aimed at getting a piece of Nigeria's at the time burgeoning consumer market (what would also help offset the rising cost

of importing Nigerian oil) by actively advertising domestic appliances especially suited to tropical areas. According to one of the ads, which brought soccer star Pelé as poster boy, these appliances, “tested at the source: a tropical country, Brazil”, were made to work “no matter the conditions of heat, humidity and voltage fluctuations” (D’Ávila 240-1). These and other arguments about how Brazil was “determined to share the technological patrimony it has accumulated in its experience as a tropical country with these African nations” (D’Ávila 225) bear striking resemblance to the ones put forth by cooperation agents with respect to agricultural technologies being currently transferred to Africa.

Brazil is indeed a global leader in tropical agriculture, and similarities in soil and climate are assumed (and advertised) as a comparative advantage vis-à-vis both traditional and emerging donors. In the practice of projects, however, such correspondence between contexts has to be actively established (or some would say, constructed) by the adaptation and validation work carried out by Brazilian researchers in partnership with their African colleagues. Moreover, such work involves not only overcoming technical hurdles, but dealing with the broad range of social elements that also have a play in the successful transfer of technology and knowledge – agricultural research, education and extension institutions, land and labor systems, market access, availability of inputs, credit, and risk management mechanisms, among others. And these are elements in Brazil’s and African countries’ colonial and post-colonial *histories* that are not always marked by similarities, for instance in regions like West Africa where agriculture remains largely a domain of politically weak subsistence small-holders (in sharp contrast with Brazil’s influential lobby of export-driven large landowners).

In cooperation discourse, such topography of natural-cultural similarities is further articulated with a temporal dimension: if Brazil and Africa can entertain today a potentially promising cooperation partnership, it is because, as a tropical developing country, Brazil has already suffered from, and overcame, many of the problems plaguing African nations today. This is a particular way of rearranging the developmentalist timeline of

modernization discussed by Ferguson (*Global Shadows* 188). If, on the one hand, it reproduces the classic modernization *telos* by assuming that the path already treaded by a more developed periphery (Brazil) could somehow show the way for a less developed periphery (Africa), on the other it claims that the kind of knowledge (in this case, in tropical agriculture) historically accumulated by Brazil would be *better* than alternative solutions offered by the developed world. As Freyre's, this is an ambivalent view on modernization deflected by postcolonial preoccupations about turning a peripheral historical experience into a positive asset vis-à-vis central hegemonic models.

In a similar vein, some versions of cooperation discourse claim that Brazil, as a receiver of international aid for decades, would know how *not* to provide it – for instance, by not tying conditionalities and not interfering in the receiving countries' internal affairs. Moreover, Brazilian cooperation is deeply shaped by questions related to international asymmetries, especially with respect to global governance and trade frameworks that are considered as no longer appropriately responding to the realities of an increasingly multipolar world.

Thus, one of Brazil's most visible interests in cooperating with Africa has been to muster support for a reform of the United Nations Security Council that would include Brazil as a permanent member. Other prominent arenas of interest have included other levels of the UN system (the Food and Agriculture Organization, for instance, has recently elected a Brazilian for its Director-General) and trade negotiations in the WTO (especially over agricultural subsidies and market access to Europe and the US). In this sense, it could be argued that South-South cooperation presents a more situated view than the “god trick” (Haraway) frequently associated⁷ with Northern development institutions such as the World Bank: that is, an interest-free view of everything that is itself situated nowhere.

⁷ For instance, by Escobar (*Encountering Development*) or Ferguson (*The Anti-Politics Machine*).

Finally, Brazil's rhetoric of cultural affinities also diverges from Western views of Africa as "absolute otherness" (Mbembe). Rather than being that which one is not, Africa has been incorporated in a central (albeit ambivalent) way in Brazil's nation-building ideologies, most prominently and consequentially in the Freyrean framework on focus here. Both Africas are no doubt imagined; but not in the same way, and not with the same consequences. On the other hand, the fact that the racial harmony paradigm is today under heavy fire domestically attests to the precarious nature of ideologies that claim to be all-encompassing in a world region marked by the postcolonial ambivalences and contradictions sketched above.

As history unfolds, then, new questions are raised. If once Freyre and others took seriously the project of creating "future Brazils" in Africa (D'Ávila), in contemporary practice this seems to unfold less in the spheres of culture and race relations than at the harder levels of technology transfer, institution-building, global trade and other areas directly or indirectly addressed by cooperation efforts. Moreover, even though Lusophone Africa remains a privileged target of Brazilian cooperation, the alignment currently sought with the continent at large is fed not by the dream of a transnational community heir to a common colonial Empire, but by a long-term political project, spearheaded by Brazil and other emerging countries, of changing global structures of governance and trade along lines more congruous with the growing relevance of the so-called global South.

In a historical sense, then, Freyre's legacy may be seen positively, not so much in terms of how it came about at a time when scientific racism and whitening policies were prevalent in Brazil (Skidmore), but by having provided a necessary ideological foundation for Brazil's nation-building efforts in the aftermath of the inception of the Republic. In other words, the racial harmony claim had an ideological part to play in a broader historical process of construction of a national economy and state institutions during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, that eventually became a firm foundation for Brazil's contemporary emergence as a global

player and trader. Contrastively, in the wake of national independences few if any countries in Sub-Saharan Africa were able to carry forward such process in a sustained manner. In this sense, one may say (not without some irony) that if, as race-based movements in Brazil claim today, Freyrean discourse was a mistake, it is at least a mistake Brazilians did have an opportunity to commit. If the Freyrean legacy is today being rethought and challenged, this is done in a highly globalized context in relation to which Brazil is less vulnerable and dependent than most African nations, both economically and politically. Meanwhile, particularly in weakly-governed African states “the national economy model ... appears less a threshold of modernity than a brief, and largely aborted, post-independence project” (Ferguson, *Global Shadows* 207). Today, expectations of modernity in the African continent are also being shaped by relations with Brazil and other emerging donors like China or India. It seems early to assess the effects of this new state of affairs – whether it will actually correspond to the invariably beneficent discourses that usually accompany and legitimize South-South cooperation. But one consequence that is already visible is that these new presences are providing African actors at various levels with extra leverage to deal with traditional donors.

Therefore, when looking at Brazil-Africa relations, Latin American postcolonial literature’s insight about looking not at discrete levels of analysis (such as race or ethnicity) but at the chain of entangled, historically constituted world-system hierarchies (in the economy, trade, geopolitics, knowledge and technology, and so forth) is most welcome. Moreover, in spite of the discursive construction of South-South cooperation contrastively to North-South development, it must be recognized that the global South is neither homogeneous, nor external to the world system built under Western hegemony. This entails reinstating the analytical relevance of margins, ambiguities, contradictions, and situatedness. Insights from ethnography (e.g., Watts), which draws on the practice of cooperation rather than exclusively on institutionalized discourse, also point in these directions. Finally, for all that was said about Brazil’s perspectives on Africa, the reverse must also be true: Africa’s varied post-colonial experiences and expectations must have a play in

current attempts at approximation from both sides. This however has rarely been the object of attention by scholars. For the picture to be complete, it is in need of scrutiny by historians, anthropologists, and the wide array of actors, from both Brazil and African countries, involved in the design and practice of South-South cooperation.

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