# Metaphors of the "nation"

Metáforas da "nação"
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ALBERTO, Paulina L. *Terms of inclusion:* black intellectuals in twentieth-century Brazil. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011. 396 p.

How did black intellectuals and activists of São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, and Bahia mobilize themselves in movements of racial and cultural affirmation throughout the 20th century? In what way did they address issues such as racial identity, self-determination, projects of "nation", and citizenship? How did they relate and negotiate with the dominant ideologies that emerged in Brazil during this period? Or, to be more precise, how did they deal with the "racial democracy" — the term most commonly used to refer to Brazilian ideas of racial harmony? These questions are not easy to answer. However, it is around them and other related matters that revolves the subject of the book *Terms of inclusion*: black intellectuals in twentieth-century Brazil, by Paulina L. Alberto.

Born in Argentina, Paulina Alberto is an associate professor at the University of Michigan, in Ann Arbor, United States. The book is a product of her PhD dissertation, presented at the University of Pennsylvania. The author's aim is to investigate the articulations and tensions between the narratives of race, national identity, social thought, and black activism from three cities (São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, and Salvador) between the 1920s and the 1980s. To undertake this research, she has consulted mainly reports, articles, and editorials published in the so-called "black press" of São Paulo. On a smaller scale, she has looked into the newspapers of the mainstream media and texts of memoirs. The author also consulted interviews with African-Brazilian activists done by other researchers. On specific occasions, she has made use of the annals of the Constituent Assembly, reports of the DOPS (Departamento de Ordem Política e Social,

Department of Political and Social Order) — the political police department — and correspondence (personal and institutional).

Assuming that the ideas of "racial fraternity" and "racial democracy" were the mutant metaphors of the "nation", which acquired different senses and diverse meanings throughout the 20th century, Paulina Alberto argues that black activists and intellectuals conceived those metaphors primarily as a way to open a space for dialogue and negotiation with the elites (intellectual and political). From that space, the African-Brazilians could formulate their questions, expectations, and aspirations for recognition, equality, and citizenship. While the ideal of "racial democracy" was often used by the elites to deny racism in Brazil and to circulate the images and representations of harmonious coexistence between blacks and whites, the African-Brazilians tried to transform it in a bid to discuss rights and, to a great extent, to negotiate their inclusion within the national community.

In the six chapters of the book — "Foreigners" (1900–1925), "Fraternity" (1925–1929), "Nationals" (1930–1945), "Democracy" (1945–1950), "Difference" (1950–1964), and "Decolonization" (1964–1985) —, the author examines how black activists and intellectuals of São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, and Salvador played an active role sometimes in building, at other times in maintaining, or even in challenging the ideology of racial harmony since the first decades of the 20th century. Even if, at some points, they legitimized such an ideology, at other occasions they refuted it, ranting publicly the existence of racism. More than this, there were contexts in which that ideology was put in action in the anti-racist sense. This occurred, for example, when the discourse of racial harmony was adopted to denounce prejudices and discriminations of color/race as contrary to the *ethos*, if not the *modus vivendi*, of the Brazilian. Thus, the book seeks to outline the different stages of thought and political and cultural actions of the African-Brazilian activists — with their narratives, associations, and newspapers that acted as advertising vehicles for their ideals — by inscribing these stages as a part of the long struggle waged by these activists for promoting the black as a Brazilian citizen.

After the abolition of slavery (1888) and in the early years of the First Republic (1889–1930), the images and representations that pointed to Brazil as an "exceptional" place where blacks and whites lived together harmoniously and brotherly, free, therefore, of antagonisms and tensions typical of the American racial system, were amplified. From 1920 onwards, many intellectuals portrayed the Brazilian "nation" as "of mixed race" or "mixed". Seeing an opportunity to discredit the postulates of scientific racism, many activists and intellectuals of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro hailed the importance of the race mixture discourse, to the extent that it recognized the contribution of black people in the formation — linguistic, musical, affective, behavioral, and so on — of the Brazilian population. In the 1930s, many intellectuals were lured

by nationalist sentiment and positively reinforced the idea of the mixed race (mestizo) Brazil, both racially and culturally. In line with this new moment, Getulio Vargas implemented a nationalist policy, appraising the "black" and "mixed race" cultural expressions to the point of adopting them as a symbol of nationality. The African-Brazilian activists — in their speeches, newspapers, and associations — applauded the Vargas government. At the same time, they took the opportunity to broaden the meanings of citizenship for the Afro-descendant population so that the symbolic recognition would translate into reality, with the achievement of rights and social inclusion.

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After the Second World War (1939–1945) and the end of the Estado Novo dictatorship (1937–1945), with the consequent return of democracy, intellectuals (black and white) began to describe the "exceptionality" of the Brazilian society, when it comes to being free of racial tensions, in a language not of fraternity or harmony anymore but of democracy. The term "racial democracy" emerged against that backdrop. For the activists and black leaders of this period, the "racial democracy" should be celebrated less as a reality than as a new national pact about what Brazil could become in a scenario of redemocratization and increased popular participation. While he endorsed the inclusive potential of the "racial democracy", the black leader Abdias do Nascimento, for instance, acted in the public sphere — through press, theater, academic conferences, and political parties —, indicating distortions that needed to be corrected to eradicate racism and its deleterious effects on Brazil. Nascimento and his fellows in Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, and Salvador fought also for securing the right to difference, in the face of increasingly dominant discourses of national unity (uniformity).

With the installation of the military dictatorship in 1964, the black intellectuals and activists abandoned hope in the inclusive potential of the "racial democracy". Target of open attacks, the "racial democracy" began to be seen as an instrument of ideological domination. As in previous times, the selection of the political strategies of the anti-racist movement responded in part to the injunctions of the international scene. The protests of young people of the Marxist left from Paris to Prague, the civil rights protests in the United States, and the struggles for national liberation in Africa were an inspiration to a new generation of black activists with higher education.

However, the decisive factor in the redefinition of the political strategy came from the national scene. The consecutive military governments of the 1960s and 1970s transformed the "racial democracy" into an ideological "smoke curtain", which concealed any public claim made by blacks with state repression. It was at that moment that this ideal lost its social basis of legitimacy and became empty rhetoric, thus, breaking the national pact outlined in the era of democracy. In other words, black activists (in their speeches, newspapers, and groups) took on a political and ideological stance of opposition and denunciation, as we know today, in the period of closed channels for political and cultural negotiation of the national agenda. At that time, the notion of racial democracy became incompatible with the "terms of inclusion", and new forms of anti-racist struggle emerged in the national context. Racial democracy was no longer seen as a field of dispute and possibilities but as a "myth", being characterized thereafter as fallacy, hypocrisy, or false consciousness. This assumption of the black movement was reinforced with academic researches in the 1970s and 1980s, which confirmed the existence of inequalities of opportunities between blacks and whites in the Brazilian society.

Paulina Alberto concludes that black activists and intellectuals of São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, and Salvador have handled in various ways — settling, negotiating, or even challenging — the ideas of harmonious racial relations in Brazil during the 20th century. Their change of stand, however, should not be seen as a political contradiction, nor does it suggest the awakening to a higher level of racial consciousness. On the contrary, it reveals the multiple strategies developed by black activists and intellectuals of those three cities to demand social inclusion and full participation in the national life, even because, between those individuals, there were no fixed identities, single thought, or even essential links. In building and rebuilding fluid and specific identities, according to the historical, regional, and contingent experience, they unfurled several discursive banners of racial affirmation and different perspectives of belonging, recognition, and citizenship.

In the first decades of the 20th century in São Paulo, where the population of African ancestry was a minority and mass immigration from Europe led to the development of a broad white majority in the city, the "people of color" strongly felt the effects of discrimination in the labor and housing markets, and in the outlets of public space. In response to this situation, a group of Afro-Paulistas (individuals of African ethnicity born in São Paulo state) that were in social ascent created newspapers and associations in defense of the "men of color". Perceiving themselves as spokespeople for the desires and aspirations of the "colored population", this group of activists assembled around the racial centrality and developed a racial identity from the opposition of binary categories (blacks *versus* whites). Hence, Brazil has been portrayed largely as a multiracial "nation" where blacks and whites lived separately — a system of coexistence rather than fusion (namely, miscegenation). It was this binary way of seeing racial relations that characterized the black activism in São Paulo in the course of the century.

In Rio de Janeiro, a city that received less European immigrants than São Paulo in the first decades of the 20th century, the black and mixed race population was significant, but a minority. It was there that intellectuals (black and white) envisioned and celebrated Brazil as a mixed race "nation", from both the racial and cultural points of view. This view became popular and official, adopted as a basis of national identity from the 1930s onwards. In addition, that oriented the black activism in the city until the 1970s, when racial and political tensions arising from the military dictatorship led the activists there to incorporate a binary view of the race relations similar to the one observed in São Paulo. However, in the city of Salvador, which was a major entry port for enslaved Africans, the black population was the majority. There, race was not the main vector around which the "people of color" sought to guide their lives. Instead, their identities were shaped by cultural and religious traditions dating back to Africa. Because of the efforts of leaders from the major terreiros de candomblé (candomblé spaces) in association with Brazilian and foreign scholars, Bahia gained prominence on the national scene, from the 1930s onwards, as the birthplace of the most "authentic" African cultural traditions in Brazil. Like what happened in Rio de Janeiro, a new generation of political and cultural activists emerged in Salvador in the 1970s, giving new meaning to the understanding of racial relations. Although they maintained the concern with the African cultural heritage, these activists have supported the ideas of race and black identity following the model of São Paulo.

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The book has admirable analytical foundations, although, for some topics addressed, the empirical and bibliographical research has lost strength and consistency. For instance, the author stated that the FNB (Frente Negra Brasileira, Brazilian Black Front) — an association in defense of the "colored men" organized in the city of São Paulo in 1931 — expanded to the interior of São Paulo and to the states of Minas Gerais, Espírito Santo, Rio Grande do Sul, and Bahia (p. 130). The FNB did not open branches in Rio Grande do Sul and Bahia. It is true that, in these states, homonymous associations (Frente Negra Pelotense, or Pelotense Black Front, and Frente Negra de Salvador, or Salvador Black Front) emerged, but these associations were independent, with no direct link, therefore, to the São Paulo counterpart.[1] About the TEN (Teatro Experimental do Negro, Black Experimental Theater), Paulina Alberto argued that it was the black organization of higher visibility in Rio de Janeiro in the post-World War II period (p. 213). It is critical to emphasize that TEN — a group of "black theater" founded by Abdias do Nascimento in 1944, which, over time, undertook a broader role in

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[1] Petrônio Domingues, *A insurgência de ébano*: a história da Frente Negra Brasileira, Tese de doutorado, Universidade de São Paulo, São Paulo, 2005.

the political and intellectual fields — never created a membership system, code, internal rules, or even regulated its operating structure (through meetings, assemblies, elections, mandates etc.). Therefore, it does not seem appropriate to characterize it as a "black activist organization", as the Black Front, for example. Keeping itself in informality, TEN consisted of an avant-garde pressure group, which brought together a small number of members. Certainly some of the actions of the TEN have affected the public sphere, but one cannot underestimate the role played by the UHC (União dos Homens de Cor, Men of Color Union) in Rio de Janeiro during the same period. As new surveys have indicated, the UHC had a bigger scope than the TEN in terms of number of supporters, collective actions, social projects, political and institutional representation, not to mention higher acceptance within the "colored population".[2]

A complex question might be raised about the analytic enterprise of Paulina Alberto: not at a single place, the author defines conceptually what she means by black intellectuals, in particular, and black movement, in general. These terms of polysemic connotations — and key to the narrative thread — appear almost naturalized, often without the proper problematization. There is a clear preference of the author for consulting literature in the English language, especially researches of American scholars regarding racial relations in Brazil, and an associated "negligence" concerning the more recent works (mainly theses and dissertations) written in the Brazilian academic world.[3]

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[2]Joselina da Silva, *União dos Homens de Cor (UHC):* uma rede do movimento social negro, após o Estado Novo, Tese de doutorado, Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, 2005.

[3]Here are some of the recent academic papers absent from the book of Paulina Alberto: Maria Cláudia Cardoso Ferreira, *Representações sociais e práticas políticas do movimento negro paulistano:* as trajetórias de Correia Leite e Veiga dos Santos (1928-1937), Dissertação de mestrado, Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, 2005; Flávio Thales Ribeiro Francisco, *Fronteiras em definição:* identidades negras e imagens dos Estados Unidos e da África no jornal O Clarim da Alvorada (1924-1932), Dissertação de mestrado, Universidade de São Paulo, São Paulo, 2010; Flávio dos Santos Gomes, *Experiências atlânticas:* ensaios e pesquisas sobre a escravidão e o pós-emancipação no Brasil, Passo Fundo: UPF, 2003; Karin Sant'Anna Kossling, *As lutas antirracistas de afro-descendentes sob vigilância do DEOPS/SP (1964-1983),* Dissertação de mestrado, Universidade de São Paulo, São Paulo, 2007; Maria Aparecida de Oliveira Lopes, *História e memória do negro em São Paulo:* efemérides, símbolos e identidade *(1945-1978),* Tese de doutorado, Universidade Estadual Paulista "Júlio de Mesquita Filho", 2007; Rodrigo Miranda, *Um caminho de suor e letras:* a militância negra em Campinas e a construção de uma comunidade imaginada nas páginas do Getulino *(Campinas, 1923-1926),* Dissertação de mestrado, Universidade Estadual de Campinas, 2005; Laiana de Oliveira, *Entre a miscigenação e a multirracialização:* brasileiros negros ou negros brasileiros? Os desafios do movimento negro brasileiro no período de valorização nacionalista (1930-1950): a Frente Negra Brasileira e o Teatro Experimental do Negro, Tese de doutorado, Universidade Federal Fluminense, Niterói, 2008; Amilcar Araujo Pereira, *O "mundo negro":* relações raciais e a constituição do movimento negro contemporâneo no Brasil, Tese de doutorado, Universidade Federal Fluminense, Niterói, 2010; Antônio Liberac Cardoso Simões Pires, *As associações de homens de cor e a imprensa negra paulista,* Belo Horizonte, Daliana; MEC/SESU/SECAD; NEAB/UFT, 2006; Francisco Carlos Cardoso da Silva, Invenções negras na Bahia: pontos para a discussão do racismo à brasileira, Tese de doutorado, Pontifícia Universidade Católica de São Paulo, São Paulo, 2008; Joselina da Silva, *União dos Homens de Cor (UHC):* uma rede do movimento social negro, após o Estado Novo, Tese de doutorado, Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, 2005; Marcelo Leolino da Silva, *A história no discurso do Movimento Negro Unificado*: os usos políticos da história como estratégia de combate ao racismo, Dissertação de mestrado, Universidade Estadual de Campinas, Campinas, 2007; José Jorge Siqueira, *Orfeu e Xangô:* a emergência de uma nova consciência sobre a questão do negro no Brasil (1944-1968), Rio de Janeiro, Pallas, 2006; Reinaldo da Silva Soares, Negros de classe média em São Paulo:estilo de vida e identidade negra, Tese de doutorado, Universidade de São Paulo, São Paulo, 2004; Lívia Maria Tiede, Sob suspeita:negros, pretos e homens de cor em São Paulo no início do século XX, Dissertação de mestrado, Universidade Estadual de Campinas, Campinas, 2006; Petrônio José Domingues, *A insurgência de ébano:* a história da Frente Negra Brasileira, Tese de doutorado, Universidade de São Paulo, São Paulo, 2005.

In the book from Paulina Alberto, the interpretative ramifications of prior researches conducted by brazilianists are noteworthy. When she analyzes the movement advocating the construction of the monument to the "black mother" in Rio de Janeiro, originally defended by the white journalist Cândido de Campos in 1926, Paulina Alberto argues that the black activists and intellectuals have appropriated this movement with the aim of including African-Brazilians in the symbolic, political, and social body of the "nation". This interpretation is analogous to the one from the historian Micol Seigel, who, in *Uneven encounters*: making race and nation in Brazil and the United States, published in 2009, set apart the sixth chapter ("Black mothers, citizen sons") to investigate the matter. She concluded that African-Brazilians of various profiles (activists, journalists, artists, and religious) saw the proposal of Campos as a suitable vehicle to steer the full citizenship and the increase in rights into the national agenda.[4]

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This would also be valid for the compared perspective in the creation of different black identities in the cities of São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, and Salvador. In *Freedoms given, freedoms won*, from 1998, the historian Kim Butler had already pointed out that, at least in São Paulo and Salvador, black people created specific racial identities in the post-abolition context. In the first city, there was the search for a black identity, or "racial policy", while, in the second one, the fight for the right to religious and cultural manifestations, or a "cultural policy", prevailed.[5] And even before Butler, the historian Richard Morse — in *The negro in S*ão Paulo, Brazil, from 1953 — had also warned against the historical and cultural differences between black people in São Paulo and Bahia in the post-slavery period. If in one place, candomblé or "a residual standard" of African culture has developed, at the other, the black man was deprived of this cultural basis to organize. Nevertheless, he would have found enough motivation to mobilize "in search for the socioeconomic rights", creating associations and newspapers in order to help him conquer a "place in society".[6]

Although the proposal from Paulina Alberto is ambitious — covering three capitals — and the time frame is extensive, her book is a valuable contribution to the history of the Brazilian black movement, through the perspective of its

[4]Micol Seigel, *Uneven encounters*: making race and nation in Brazil and the United States, Durham, Duke University Press, 2009, p. 206-234.
[5]Kim D. Butler, *Freedoms given, freedoms won*: afro-Brazilians in post-abolition São Paulo and Salvador, New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press, 1998.
[6]Richard Morse, "The negro in São Paulo, Brazil", *Journal of Negro History*, vol. 38, n. 3, 1953, p. 297-303.

agencies, collective actions, identity policies, and racial rhetoric. The author is part of a new generation of historians seeking to reconstruct, document, and study the course of anti-racist political mobilization from its own terms — "terms of inclusion". The activists, who populate the pages of her book, are portrayed as complex subjects, who imagined their own story in different directions and acted through their own logics, although multifaceted. The existence of mediations, traded actions, articulations by intricacies, and the small but valuable achievements is not neglected. Paulina Alberto makes advances in terms of the sectarian vision of black leadership. Her activists are not heroes, but plural, versatile, articulate human beings, though endowed with limitations, dilemmas, ambiguities, and contradictions — individuals that, lulled by the emancipatory impetus, granted, protested, sealed alliances, retreated, or advanced, depending on the circumstance. Individuals, at last, who dreamt and fought selflessly — and some of them fought almost their entire life, like José Correia Leite — for a more just Brazil, with equality and respect for diversity.