The Decolonial in Practice, *Quilombismo,* and Black Brazilian Politics in "Postneoliberal" Times

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Through an examination of anti-racist and decolonial politics in education in the Brazilian and Latin American contexts, this paper outlines underlying features shaping black political-epistemological struggles and the difficulties of reform via the state in an anti-black society. The article first situates emerging anti-racist legislation and multicultural policy in the region within larger discussions of the progressive Left Turn among governments and the emergence of postneoliberalism. The paper then examines how racism and state violence against black people have persisted within this leftward postneoliberal turn, shaping the manner through which anti-racist and decolonial politics seek to both contest *and* mobilize within state discourses and institutions to improve the situation of black people. In the last section, the paper proposes to understand black movement struggles of decolonial orientation through Abdias do Nascimento's black Brazilian praxis of *quilombismo,* a praxis that consciously reflects both the predicaments and future possibilities presented by working for political-epistemic and cultural transformation within and beyond an anti-black state. The paper demonstrates quilombismo as the decolonial in practice through an analysis of anti-racist education legislation focused on curriculum reforms.
Keywords: anti-black racism, anti-racism, decoloniality, postneoliberalism, educational policy, *quilombismo*, Brazil

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Consistency with and historical commitment to the struggle of black peoples in Brazil has brought us to this decision [to sever ties with government], *after various unanswered demands for an explicit response from the current* [municipal] *administration (DEM/PMDB).[1]*

The fight for public policies to combat racism and promote racial equality in education, health, and culture, among other areas, has been present throughout the history of the Brazilian Black Movement [Movimento Negro] *post-abolition. Being a participant in and product of this history, it would be an indignity on our part to continue as part of a government (DEM/PMDB) that insists upon ignoring our history and our demands.*

-Silvany Euclênio, excerpt from her "Open Letter" of resignation from the Ribeirão Preto, São Paulo Municipal Education Secretariat, June 10, 2009.[2]

This article addresses the challenges of engaging (or not) with the state when it comes to anti-racist transformation within so-called postneoliberal societies. The excerpt from Silvany Euclênio's letter reflects the difficult decision by the members of the Centro Cultural Orùnmilá (Orùnmilá Cultural Center, henceforth CCO) to withdraw from participation in the municipal government and, as such, end their local work on ethno-racial policy implementation. Since the mid-1990s, the CCO has undertaken various forms of anti-racist and cultural political work in the city of Ribeirão Preto, located in the interior of the Brazilian state of São Paulo.[3] With the passing in 2003 of significant Brazilian federal legislation regarding curriculum reforms

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[1] DEM stands for the right-wing Democrat (Democratas) political party and PMDB stands for the centrist Brazilian Democratic Movement Party (Partido do Movimento Democrata Brasiliero).

[2] A published version of the open letter (in Portuguese) can be found on the Geledés Insituto da Mulher Negra (Institute for Black Women) at: https://www.geledes.org.br/carta-aberta-por-profa-silvany-euclenio/

[3] The municipality of Ribeirão Preto has a population of about 670,000, with the larger metropolitan area including neighboring towns having a population of around 1.5 million. The city is located in the dry, hot region of the northeast of the state of São Paulo. Demographically, the city is about 75% white and 24% black and brown (people of African descent). Ribeirão Preto was also one location among a network of smaller cities in the interior regions of São Paulo state where a small number of black Brazilians were developing black cultural and political organizations and events related to larger black movement and anti-

aimed at incorporating African and black Brazilian content (Law 10,639/03, which I detail below), the CCO aggressively advocated to make racism a visible issue and for the local government to address racial inequality in various areas of social life. In particular, the sphere of education was of great concern, from the need to address issues of invisibility and the representation of black peoples in the curriculum to anti-racist training for teachers regarding black Brazilian history, culture, and lived experiences.

After approximately three years of citywide programming (2006–2008), implemented through an agreement with the ruling centrist party (the Social Democratic Party of Brazil, or PSDB), a change of government on January 1, 2009 brought all initiatives to a halt. The newly elected party moved issues of racism and racial inequality off the municipal government's priority list. Silvany, a black woman activist and educator as well as an active member of the CCO, stayed in her position as Municipal Education Secretariat Advisor for six months after this change. However, she resigned because the new administration not only rolled back previous gains, especially in the sphere of education, but also rejected the possibility of further anti-racist policy implementation and ignored ongoing calls by the black movement for continuity and accountability to its demands.[4]

In the CCO's case, the choice to cut ties with the local government rather than accept a very limited institutional presence was not taken lightly. Members contemplated what it would mean for them to disengage institutionally after a decade of building this aspect of their work. However, as Silvany states in the letter above, the decision reflected "consistency with and historical commitment to the struggles of black peoples in Brazil," the Center's formation "as a participant in and product" of that history of struggle, and the "indignity" entailed in the act of perpetually waiting for attention to be paid to anti-black racism, racial inequality, and demands for change (Euclênio, 2009, para. 4-5). With this action, Silvany and the other CCO members made clear that they would not, in their words, play the role of the "black face" (*cara preta*) in piecemeal policies and partially fulfilled promises. They took this position so as not to grant legitimacy to a political administration disinterested in issues affecting blacks, and rather than pursue compromised institutional transformations, CCO members refocused their efforts. They would work predominantly outside local institutional channels via a politics of opposition and explicit confrontation with the municipal government, while at the same time enriching their cultural-political and epistemological work internally at the CCO (Da Costa, 2014, p. 183).

While severing links with the state and refusing to engage on unequal terms felt like a regression (*retrocesso*) of the political and institutional accomplishments of the years of relatively amicable (but never easy) engagement with the municipal government, CCO members did not treat the change in tactics as a defeat. In fact, over the years of my own participation in and observation of their work from 2006 to 2011, members were always clear that they could not depend on the state to do the work of anti-racism in a wholehearted and nuanced fashion nor in a manner that eschewed forms of cooptation of movement issues and discourses.

For the CCO and many black movement organizations in Brazil, the point of departure for engaging with local state officials, and more broadly, educators in the school system, maintains a clear understanding that Brazilian post-racial discourses continue to shape racism denial even as racial and ethnic issues have become more prominent in societal conversations and policy (Da Costa, 2014; Guimarães 2001). At the same time, CCO members were well aware of and clear about the deeply anti-black nature of the state and its perpetual war on the lives of black and poor citizens that causes premature death and produces high body counts across the country.[5] Nonetheless, by calling for the implementation of Law 10,639/03 starting around 2004 and advocating for the creation of anti-racism institutions in local government, the CCO chose not to opt out of engagement with the state.

The conundrum to engage or not with the state when it comes to anti-racist transformation is not a challenge specific to Brazil. Rather it reflects the range of ways in which societies have more recently sought

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racist platforms emerging in the late 1970s and 1980s during re-democratization from military rule (1964-1985).

[4] During the first six months of the new administration Silvany made countless requests for clarity on policy and continuity of programming. The Education Secretariat organized a workshop here and there and claimed they were fulfilling their obligations to implement Law 10.639/03, which in reality had previously been a much more structured and thorough educational initiative reaching numerous educators. For details see my description of the Baobá Project below.

[5] For recent work examining the question of anti-black and gendered violence in Brazil and its effects see Alves (2014), Perry (2013), Smith (2016a; 2016b), and Vargas (2011).

to address cultural and racial diversity in order to expand inclusion through the politics of recognition. From Latin America to North America, Europe to Asia, recognition of cultural diversity and accommodation or distribution of rights for minority groups have shaped significant debates about national identity, belonging, citizenship, and subnational forms of governance. In this way, situating multicultural citizenship regimes and anti-racist policies in Brazil and Latin America in relation to neoliberalism and state formation illustrates the shifting, but ongoing persistence of racism and racialized violence and exclusion that certain groups, in this case black communities, face. Moreover, analyzing discourses and initiatives mobilized by black movements illuminates the critical knowledges created through these struggles and the challenges movements face in deploying such knowledge to transform state institutions.

The contradictory dynamics of working simultaneously through the state and through the semi-autonomous subaltern spaces illustrate the tensions and possibilities of decolonial praxis at a conjuncture shaped by over two decades of neoliberal multiculturalism.[6] The trajectory of CCO anti-racist activism, which elsewhere I describe as illustrating the "decolonial in practice" (Da Costa, 2014, pp. 181-186), inspires the analysis. By decolonial in practice, I refer here specifically to a process where black activists and organizations: (1) draw upon knowledge and experiences as black Brazilians to work for change both inside and outside state institutions; (2) take action in diverse ways that aim at cultural (James, 2018), epistemological, and material social transformation at various levels; (3) continue to foster autonomous and semi-autonomous black spaces in which cultural and ideological work takes place (Alanay & Aydin, 2016); and (4) remain alert and flexible enough to realize when state channels and possibilities have become exhausted and thus other routes of action become necessary.

An examination of the dialectical engagement between those who traverse semi-autonomous "alternative spaces of blackness" (Harding 2000) and state politics foregrounds the role of black struggle in fomenting policy reforms. It also highlights the ongoing significance of such spaces for black communities vis-à-vis ongoing (and perhaps worsening) anti-black state violence and the retrenchment of social policy. The examination of the local and national context in Brazil illuminates key experiences from the last decade that confirm what the work of the Red de Acción e Investigación Anti-Racista (The Antiracist Action and Research Network, RAIAR) has demonstrated as a "grinding to a halt" of the hard-fought expansion of black and Indigenous rights in the Americas that in turn elicits adaptation and evolution of anti-racist strategies and tensions in terms of working with the state (Hale, Calla, and Mullings, 2017, p. 84).[7]

To analyze the tensions and potentials of working with the state within recent anti-racist and multicultural policy reforms, I first examine racialization within the larger context of the Left Turn, postneoliberalism[8] and state policies in Latin America focused on black and Indigenous peoples. I then discuss issues of anti-black racism, institutional politics, and persistent concerns regarding the cooptation and depoliticization of anti-racist struggles. In the next part of the paper, I explore black scholar and activist Abdias do Nascimento's notion of *quilombismo* as an Afro-Brazilian praxis that is multidimensional—focused on cultural, epistemological, and material issues as well as strategies for immediate and long-term transformation. I subsequently draw on quilombismo to examine K-12 curriculum reform initiatives that address black exclusion and anti-black racism. Here, I demonstrate how the work done by the CCO exemplifies the dialectical relationship between alternative spaces of blackness and the state that shape a

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[6] By decolonial, I refer to the types of political work that contest coloniality and its hierarchical articulations of racial and cultural classifications to status (labor and class), systems of knowledge production (epistemology), forms of authority (patriarchal and institutional), and intersubjective relations (being/nonbeing) (Marque et al., 2018; Mignolo 2007, 2011; Quijano 2000; Walsh 2002). While I have found the decolonial framework useful to think with regarding the multilayered nature of social transformation necessary for liberation, my own perspective diverges a bit in that it has focused on the on-the-ground difficulties of making such change happen. Such a focus reveals the necessity for contextualized analyses of the politics of knowledge, ideas, and cultural struggles. For a recent, incisive critique of the de-contextualized and sometimes romanticizing nature of the scholarship shaping "the decolonial turn" see Martínez Novo (2018).

[7] RAIAR is a transnational activist-research network with member organizations and researchers in Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Guatemala, and Mexico. Information on RAIAR can be found at: http://redantiracista.net/.

[8] Postneoliberalism, defined in more detail below, refers to contexts currently shaped by the structural economic effects and subjective relations produced through 4 decades of neoliberal political economic policy but that are making efforts to reverse or move beyond these effects.

politics of decolonial orientation that emerges within community to extend outward into state institutions. The paper concludes by drawing out the larger implications for scholarly analyses of continuity and contradiction over periods where seemingly critical state discourses and policies to address exclusion not only neutralize anti-black struggle but also present opportunity to change the life conditions of oppressed groups.

Interruptions and continuities: Anti-black racism in "postneoliberal" times

Over the past three decades, diverse governments in Latin America have implemented policies focused on Afro-descendants and Indigenous peoples. This "multicultural turn" and the politics of recognizing cultural and racial differences that have shaped it broke with historical hegemonic national identities based on racial and cultural mixture. As Hooker (2008) illustrates, the range of collective rights developed in the 1990s and 2000s has typically included some combination of:

> formal recognition of the existence of ethnic/racial sub-groups, recognition of indigenous customary law as official public law, collective property rights (especially to land), guarantees of bilingual education, territorial autonomy or self-government, and rights to redress racial discrimination (such as affirmative action in education and employment). (pp. 279-280)

In a few cases, like Brazil and Colombia, anti-racial discrimination rights for Afro-descendants were also instituted (Hooker, 2008). The expansion of rights and legislation has been accompanied in countries like Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, among others, by the creation of government offices, ministries, and programs at various levels focused on implementing ethnic and racial reforms and promoting black and Indigenous political participation.[9]

While policies and institutions vary by country in relation to both local specificities and depth of implementation, collective rights and to some degree anti-racist/racial equality initiatives have become a significant part of governance within a larger leftward political turn in the region. In Brazil, the leftist Worker's Party (PT) strengthened ethno-racial policies alongside policies directed at eliminating poverty and hunger. For example, in his first term in office (2004–2008), President Lula instituted the cash transfer Bolsa Família (Family Stipend), which "slashed the number of people living in poverty by 28 percent" and went on to become the largest program of its kind in the world, benefitting 50 million people and slashing poverty in half (Vargas 2016, p. 554). Under the PT the bottom 10 percent of the population saw its income increase 7 times faster than that of the top 10 percent (a trend that benefitted many Afro-Brazilians in a country where class is correlated with race). Meanwhile, black and brown Brazilians saw their incomes increase "43.1 and 48.5 percent respectively" compared to a 20.1 percent increase for whites (Neri, 2011, p. 9, 14, 15, cited in Vargas 2016, p. 554).

The PT administration also "cast the right to credit, the right to buy, and the right to live a decent life outside of poverty as *citizenship rights*" (Smith, 2016a, pp. 95–6, emphasis in original). In this way, the government emphasized socio-economic inclusion via consumption simultaneously with improving the lives of the poor, but also extended the model of market-based participation as a right. Largely, policy directed at improving the lives of the poor intersected with policy aimed at racial inclusion, producing a significant improvement in the lives of black and brown Brazilians while also drawing more people into a market-based understanding of social and economic participation.[10]

Overall, the "Left Turn" in Latin America moved the region from a phase of resistance to neoliberalism to one in which alternatives to and a rollback of the effects of neoliberalism became possibilities, as governments to different degrees were elected "on the strength of their promises to reinstate

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[9] This shift across Latin America has coincided in many countries with the return to democracy after rule by military dictatorships and the goal of solidifying democratic governance and legitimacy through more inclusive societies. The Latin American multicultural turn also coincides with the larger global rise of debates, policy, and government entities focused on multiculturalism, cultural difference, and recognition since the 1970s. Countries like Canada, France, and the United Kingdom, for example, have been assessing models to deal with ethnic diversity and group difference, while Canada, Australia, and New Zealand have ongoing tensions around how best to engage with Indigenous peoples around questions of rights, sovereignty, and ongoing colonization of Indigenous lands.

[10] It is important to note that a rollback of these policies and rights in Brazil has occurred since the ousting of democratically elected President Dilma Rousseff and her replacement by former Vice President Michel Temer in 2016. Temer's promises to address the economic crisis facing the country have not been met and his policies have instead negatively affected the poorest and those dependent on public services.

social rights, reduce market power and restore the role of the state" (Sader, 2009, p. 172). Typically, as Yates and Bakker (2014) argue, postneoliberalism involves

> a combination of an ideological project and a set of policies and practices that revolve around the dual aim of: (1) redirecting a market economy towards social concerns; and (2) reviving citizenship via a new politics of participation and alliances across sociocultural sectors and groups. (p. 64).

Yet, the degree to which governments offered a substantive postneoliberal alternative strong enough to counter years of market deregulation and free trade, the financialization of the economy, commodification of social life, and the weakening of labor relations and social rights, has varied depending on the model chosen.

Reflecting the contradictory, multilayered, and differentiated aspects of this process, Goodale and Postero (2013) adopt the language of "interruption" to describe how the overall pattern of social change in the region involves not a break with neoliberalism, but both "extraordinary moments of social, political, and economic experimentation and moments of violent resistance and retrenchment" (p. 4). These "interruptions" involve contestation over and within a variety of spheres and at various institutional and societal levels. They have important consequences and offer "new horizons of possibility—social, political, economic, theoretical—within a broader, post-Cold War world in which many of the traditional alternatives to late capitalism and neoliberal forms of governance have lost ideological legitimacy" (Goodale & Postero, 2013, p. 1–2).[11]

When it comes to, for example, rethinking the structure of the state in plurinational form (i.e. recognition of Indigenous nations or groups and the right to self-government), electing anti-colonial Indigenous lawmakers, or writing societal visions reframed through Indigenous notions of *sumak kawsay* (*buen vivir*, or good way of living)[12] into national constitutions, Indigenous social movements in countries like Bolivia and Ecuador have been central. However, these emergent transformations and their potential to consolidate post-development and post-liberal political formations conflict with ongoing national dependence on natural resource extraction to fund social programs and undo the inequalities exacerbated by neoliberalism (Escobar, 2010; Hale, Cale, & Mullings, 2018; Martínez Novo, 2018; Postero, 2013). In this case, extractivist economies clash with remaking life on the land through an ecologically minded, culturally sensitive co-existence, preventing the move toward a society that might be considered beyond neoliberalism.

As Jodi Melamed (2011) has argued for the context of the United States, neoliberalism "recognizes some racial differences while disavowing others, it confers privileges on some racial subjects…while stigmatizing others" in ways that rationalize as "necessary and fair, the coding of human beings into regimes of social value" (p. 2). The forms of ethno-racial subject-making and multicultural policy that have arisen across Latin America since the early 1990s simultaneously foster the visibility and inclusion of racialized subjects while delimiting which racial differences and subjects matter within the recognition paradigm of multicultural citizenship regimes. Scholars have shown how this "neoliberal multiculturalism" mediates the degree of redistribution of resources and the shifting of power to oppressed populations while also seeking to incorporate activists and their ideas into governance regimes (Hale 2005; Martinez Novo 2018; Rahier 2012; Walsh 2012). In this way, despite certain counterhegemonic shifts from the bottom up to challenge neoliberalism, continuities between racial neoliberalism and racism in postneoliberal times remain within the "Left Turn" in Latin America and in the Brazilian context more specifically (2003-2016). This reality exhibits the contradictory nature of postneoliberalism itself and an underlying racist structure of societies that is difficult to dismantle through rights- and recognition-based frameworks due to ongoing coloniality.

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[11] Some of these possibilities have been recently curtailed with the resurgence of right wing regimes in Brazil and Argentina (2016), and a turn toward repression/silencing of social movements in Ecuador under Rafael Corrêa.

[12] "In Ecuador's constitution [of 2008], Buen Vivir is a set of rights including health, education, freedom, participation, and the Rights of Nature or Pachamama. This concept gives Buen Vivir a solid legal framework. In Bolivia's constitution [of 2009], Buen Vivir was interpreted as one of a set of principles such as dignity, social and gender equity, and social justice; this places them alongside the classic third generation human rights" (Mercado, 2017, para. 6). While *buen vivir* (sumak kawsay) has been interpreted as a community centered view with claimed origins in the cosmovisión of the Quechua peoples of the Andes, see Martinez Novo (2018) for a critique of this origin story and a critical examination of the meanings and uses of *Sumak Kawsay* by scholars, Indigenous leaders, and governments.

In the Brazilian case, black activists and movements have previously exposed racial democracy as a form of anti-black racial rule rather than a way to move the country toward a post-racial existence.[13] They have also challenged the instrumentalized use of black culture to shore up notions of Brazilian racial mixture and hybridity as symbols of a harmonious, shared racial experience. In such a context, effecting anti-racist changes that address inequalities has necessitated increasing the visibility of racism and blackness while contesting cultural co-optation and depoliticization. Activists have also demanded the creation of government offices and legislation (for an overview see Da Costa 2014, pp. 32-43), occupied positions in these spaces, and channeled efforts and resources to anti-racist initiatives and cultural programs aimed at countering coloniality.

State policy addressing racism and the material exclusion of the poor have created a conversation and helped many marginalized and oppressed people to gain access to jobs and education. Yet, anti-black racism persists in a variety of aggressive, humiliating, and dehumanizing forms, including the use of blackface among elite university students (Black Women of Brazil 2013), symbolic and physical violence against black women on the streets and in the media (Smith, 2014), ongoing urban segregation and dispossession of black communities (Perry, 2013; Vargas, 2013), and the harassment and assassinations of young black men by the police (Alves, 2014; Vargas & Alves 2010). Thus, black scholar João H. Costa Vargas (2012) notes,

> While economic uplift suggests a degree of assimilation into an expanding consumer market, state neglect and violence indicate a structural, long-duration antiblack disposition that calls into question the possibility of full black integration and citizenship. In debate is whether, and to what degree, black life is viable in the Brazilian polity. (pp. 8–9)

For Vargas (2012), the fundamental question is: "Can the Brazilian polis integrate Blacks?" And he goes on to say: "Speculating along these lines, one can propose: if the polis is not able to integrate blacks as de facto, full citizens, then the polis, from a black standpoint, is an impossible project and event" (p. 5). This conundrum, an outcome of the "structure of antiblack antagonisms" (p. 4) upon which the larger society and state are founded, creates significant delimitations for black political struggles that seek any form of intervention into and via the state. At the same time, any policy that reforms rather than dismantles the core operations of racial capitalism, which exploit everything from physical to cultural production, may also continue to render the Brazilian polis untenable for blacks.

For black feminist scholar Christen Smith (2016a), the coexistence of anti-black violence with black inclusion and visibility is a product of the "tension-cum-symbiosis between the nation's celebration of blackness and the routine killing of black people" (p. 7). The Brazilian state's "two-pronged approach to blackness… [micromanages] black life in order to harness its symbolic power while at the same time ensuring black death" (p. 21). This duality of the "imperative of death and the management of life that cannot be uncoupled" constitutes the paradox of what Smith terms "Afro-Paradise" (p. 21). Smith's analysis deepens the implications of the historical culturalist treatments of black Brazilians and their culture in state and society. In Afro-Paradise, culturalism not only reifies, folklorizes, and depoliticizes black cultural production and blackness itself (as described by Michael Hanchard, 1994), but is also a technique of racial government that extracts energy and life from black culture as sustenance for myths of a racially tolerant, multiracial/multicultural nation. How Afro-Paradise has historically structured black belonging poses fundamental questions about current state approaches to anti-racism and black inclusion as well as about the particular strategies black movements can take in the face of historical continuities between racial democracy, neoliberalism, and postneoliberalism.

Within this complex and contradictory context, then, examining anti-racism and decolonial politics in practice as interruptions of neoliberalism requires critical attention on what is done through and with forms of political inclusion, cultural recognition, and material distribution produced through emergent multicultural citizenship regimes (Da Costa, 2014). An understanding of the decolonial in practice would also involve examining how black Brazilian social movements choose to "charge their respective states with anti-black genocidal violence" while being "equally adamant about finding ways to hold the state accountable for the implementation of antiracist policies of equality" (Hale, Cale, & Mullings, 2018, p. 87). The state is at the

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[13] Racial democracy is the nationalist idea rooted in exceptionalism that racism plays a minimal role in structuring social relations, institutions, and life chances in Brazil. It was historically used to deny racism as a systemic issue, reducing it to individual prejudice and anomaly, while amplifying the focus on class as the principle site of inequality. Belief in racial democracy persisted as a unifying myth and national identity for much of the twentieth century.

same time the site of deep critique and illegitimacy when it comes to certain rights and citizenship *and* the site through which material and cultural transformation are sought and seen as having possibility.

The questions asked here resonate beyond the Brazilian context given the ways cultural difference and the avoidance of racism figure within the politics of recognition and state multiculturalisms across the globe, including places such as Canada, Turkey, the United Kingdom, Netherlands, and other European contexts (see for example Coulthard 2014; Faltis, 2014; Lentin and Titley, 2011) to shape the choices oppressed groups must make within these systems.

Quilombismo, Curriculum Reforms, and the Decolonial in Practice

For black Brazilians, there has been no choice but to endure and/or challenge anti-black discourses and state practices, from the ways in which racial and cultural whitening (*embranqueamento*) and anti-black prejudice influenced understandings of miscegenation and shaped racial democracy to genocidal violence and curricular invisibility/silencing/non-existence perpetrated by a white supremacist society. Over time, cultural resistance, physical survival, and political action have appeared in diverse expressions and institutions, including Catholic brother- and sisterhoods, candomblé *terreiros*, black run newspapers, anti-violence organizations, transnational activist networks, black political organizations, black studies programs in universities, black feminism and gender-focused organizations, historical maroon/quilombo communities and land rights movements, in cultural practices like *afoxés*, *maracatus*, samba schools, and hip hop, and in countless other instances. What makes up the black movement is an array of efforts producing a range of discourses and practices that aim for various outcomes and all situated within a longer-term vision for black liberation that is cultural, material, and epistemological.

Black scholar, activist, artist, political exile, and eventual federal deputy and senator, Abdias do Nascimento coined the term quilombismo in 1980 to describe his vision of a revolutionary socio-economic and cultural transformation of Brazilian society that was "antiracist, anticapitalist, antilandowning, antiimperialist, antineocolonialist" in its foundations (1980a, p. 277).[14] Within Nascimento's quilombismo, the diverse articulations of black political and cultural action just mentioned constitute expressions within the larger historical struggle for survival, the creation of space for black life in a foundationally anti-black society, and transformation of the state. As Nascimento (1980a) writes:

> both the permitted and the "illegal" [black practices] were a unit, a single human, ethnic and cultural affirmation, at once integrating a practice of liberation and assuming the command of one's own history. To this complex of meanings, this Afro-Brazilian *praxis*, I give the name quilombismo. (p. 255, emphasis in original)

For Nascimento, the ideas and practices shaping quilombismo have the ability to mobilize the black masses because they link memory, culture, knowledge, and lived experience with action, while also having their roots within the history, culture, and lived experience of black Brazilians (1980a, p. 256).

The term quilombismo comes from the word quilombo, which is the name for free communities established by enslaved Africans and African descendants who escaped captivity. Quilombos hold significant power as symbols of black struggle, fugitivity, and freedom in the face of a racist colonial, slavocratic society. For the black movement in Brazil, they have historically been characterized as the creation of free societes involving more just social structures and the retention of African worldviews and ways of life. One quilombo, *Palmares*, along with its last and vanquished leader, Zumbi, figure centrally in black movement conceptions of the historical struggles and potentials of such struggles undertaken by black Brazilians. The quilombo of Palmares had tens of thousands of inhabitants, resisted many incursions by Portuguese soldiers and hired mercenaries who sought to destroy the community, and was made up of a multiracial population including Africans who escaped slavery, Indigenous peoples, people of mixed race backgrounds (black and white as well as black and Indigenous), and poor whites, among others.

The significance of quilombos, Palmares, and Zumbi is both confirmed and further strengthened as a symbol of black justice and freedom via the manifesto of the new Unified Black Movement (*Movimento Negro Unificado*), that describes it as the "first and only attempt to create a democratic society, free, in which all people—Blacks, Indians, and Whites—achieved great political, economic, and social advancement" (cited in Nascimento 1980a, p. 256). As Elizabeth Farfán-Santos argues, this statement by leaders of the Unified Black Movement "officially connected quilombo history to postabolition Afro-Brazilian struggles" and made

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[14] For an English version of Nascimento's argument, see Nascimento (1980b)

Palmares a means through which blacks could conceptualize and make "claims to citizenship and a place in Brazilian society past and present" (2016, p. 39). With quilombismo, Abdias do Nascimento reworks this larger, historic symbol of black consciousness, memory, and utopia and grounds it in the range of black practices and struggles that capture means of remaking life and belonging in an anti-black society. Quilombos appear in many places and are created in many spaces, not only those communities that removed themselves from mainstream society, were located in far off places, and resisted via violent rebellion.[15]

The significance of Nascimento's quilombismo is that, as a concept and praxis, it foregrounds racial capitalism as the cause of black oppression and a target for dismantling, offering an anti-racist, anti-colonial socialism as a national alternative to the inhuman capitalist system. It is a collective project concerned with justice and proposes various means to achieve the elimination of economically and racially oppressive ideas, practices, and institutions.[16] The struggle is simultaneously cultural and material, challenging racist ideologies and cultivating cultural politics while also proclaiming the need to secure representation in and control of political institutions of the state.

For Nascimento, reflecting the range of social movement work necessary to accomplish the task of transformation, the black struggle has to keep in mind two key factors: "1) the *most distant objectives* for radical transformation of the socio-economic and cultural structures of Brazilian society; [and] 2) *immediate tactical interests*" (1980a, p. 270, emphasis mine). Quilombismo thus holds in tension the vision and resources for decolonial futures with the immediate tactical interests that necessitate a variety of actions to maintain the possibility for the ongoing production of critical black thought, anti-racist action, and improving the material conditions of black people. Immediate tactical interests would include what today we see as policies like affirmative action in post-secondary education and employment, K-12 curriculum reform, land titling for rural black communities, prison reform or abolition, struggles of urban communities over housing and gentrification, and diverse expressions of black cultural production, spirituality, and community education. It is to the question of curriculum reform, critical consciousness, and anti-racism to which I now turn.

History, Knowledge, Politics and Law 10,639/03

Among black activists and organizations, education has long been seen as a measure to counter the status quo of racial inequality and exclusion (Gonçalves and Gonçalves e Silva 2000). This focus on education has over the past few decades involved a variety of issues including access to quality education and well-resourced elementary and secondary schools, the retention of black students in these schools, institutional racism and discrimination by teachers and administrative staff in schools, curricular invisibility and stereotyped representations of Africa and Afro-descendants, incorporating Afro-Brazilian history and culture into the K-12 curriculum (including the affirmation of diverse forms of knowledge production, transmission, and ways of knowing), and affirmative action in post-secondary institutions (Da Costa, 2014, p. 120; Da Costa, 2016, p. 27-28). With the passage of Law 10,639/03 in 2003, many black scholars, activist organizations, and NGOs focused on anti-racism and/or on education have dedicated themselves to advocating for implementation at the municipal and state level on the one hand, and developing resources both for inclusion in the school curriculum and for use in programs that train educators to comply with the law on the other.

The passing of Law 10,639 in 2003 was a significant achievement for black Brazilians in terms of the institutionalization of anti-racist initiatives at the Federal level and within the education system at various levels. Like many related policies, Law 10,639/03 was the result of activism, advocacy, critical research, and knowledge drawn from the experience of black educators (and their families) within the school system.[17] In

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[15] For an analysis of the implications of romanticized and "heroic" constructions of quilombo histories both in relation to popular culture and to the question of land rights for actual quilombos existing today, see Elizabeth Farfán-Santos (2016).

[16] While some of the propositions and language of quilombismo demonstrate the historical conjuncture of its formation, for example, in dialogue with pan-Africanism, black transnationalism, socialism, and anti-colonial critiques of Eurocentrism, it also envisions a decolonial politics where the cultural and material re-founding of a decolonized, anti-racist, anti-sexist state is paramount. I thank Keisha-Khan Perry for pushing me to consider quilombismo as a form of black politics that is both locally and historically grounded (vis-à-vis a broader decolonial theory), and that simultaneously addresses the material and cultural dimensions of struggle (vis-à-vis more culturalist or potentially culturalist frameworks).

[17] Law 10,639/03 focuses only on Afro-descendants. In 2008, it was modified to include Indigenous peoples (Law 11,645/08). Here I refer to Law 10,639/03 given my focus on Afro-descendants.

terms of its content, the text of Law 10,639/03 declares in its Article 26-A that, "The teaching about Afro-Brazilian History and Culture becomes obligatory in the public and private institutions of elementary and secondary education," with paragraph one specifying that the content will include the study of the "History of Africa and of Africans, the struggle of blacks in Brazil, black Brazilian culture and the role of blacks in the formation of national society, redeeming the contribution of black peoples to the social, economic, and political spheres pertinent to Brazilian history" (para. 1), and that such content "will be taught throughout the whole school curriculum, especially in the areas of Art Education and Brazilian Literature and History" (para. 2). The law also includes article 79-B, which states that "the academic calendar include the 20 of November as the 'National Day of Black Consciousness'". Article 79-A, which stated that educator participation in training was mandatory, was vetoed (Brasil, 2003).[18]

The passing of this law by the Lula administration was one of many initiatives that brought the ethno-racial theme further into view in education. Entities like the Federal Special Secretariat of Policy and Promotion of Racial Equality (SEPPIR), created in 2003,[19] and the Secretariat for Continuing Education, Literacy, Diversity, and Inclusion (SECADI), created in 2004 and housed within the Federal Ministry of Education (MEC), focus on ethno-racial issues and have mandates to develop policies to promote racial equality (Da Costa, 2016, p. 28; See also Guimarães, 2015; Nguyen, 2018). Through SECADI, the Ministry of Education focuses on inequality and access to education, and develops diversity policies "that culminate in partnership with municipal and state education systems through technical support, financial and human resources, to solidify changes resulting from Law 10,639/03" especially "five key axes that structure education policy, namely: teacher training, administrator training, development and distribution of teaching materials and textbooks, school curriculum and political-pedagogical projects[20]" (Cavalleiro and Marques, 2008, p. 4).

Working within and through these state agencies, as well as in partnership with non-governmental and black movement activist organizations, policymakers, activists, and educators (the majority of them black) have created diverse initiatives to implement Law 10,639/03. These efforts have engaged tens-of-thousands of educators across Brazil through training courses, workshops, seminars, and new pedagogical materials focused on the ethno-racial issues of implementing the Law.

Given the breadth and number of initiatives and the involvement of diverse organizations from activist to more mainstream NGOs working on race and diversity issues, the depth of engagement with critical anti-racist and decolonial knowledge and pedagogies has varied.[21] Nevertheless, decades of struggle to make racism an issue, and to make black Brazilians visible as black peoples, has produced a typical set of historical events, peoples, and processes, contemporary issues and areas, and an assortment of perspectives that resonate in common across the materials and discourses shaping the content and practice of implementing Law 10,639/03. For example, Law 10,639/03 work with educators in various contexts involves identifying stories and themes that represent black people in general, black Brazilians, and the worldviews of West African societies in a complex and multilayered fashion. Work with teachers has also involved making dolls with black skin, an activity that simultaneously addresses the paucity of such toys while providing a "hands-on" way to facilitate complex conversations about issues ranging from the colonial attribution of negative connotations and status to blackness and positive connotations and status to whiteness, to the ways in which notions of aesthetic beauty shape racism and deeply affect the self-esteem of black youth.

Quilombismo and the Baobá Project

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[18] The veto of this requirement has since posed significant challenges in reaching educators that reject training on this subject matter due to various reasons, including the belief that the discussion of racism is unnecessary and/or divisive in a Brazilian context shaped by racial democracy and mixture, the belief that a focus on black Brazilians gives them special treatment or too much space in the curriculum, or the ongoing attitude that this history and knowledge is not important material to have in the curriculum. For a larger discussion of these dynamics and their relation to post-racial ideology, see Da Costa (2014).

[19] In October of 2015, SEPPIR's was combined with the Human Rights Secretariat and Secretariat for Women's Policy.

[20] Comprehensive school plans.

[21] By "decolonial pedagogies," I refer to pedagogies that foreground ways of knowing and cosmovisions that emerge from black and Indigenous cultures, experiences, and knowledges and that seek to displace Eurocentric ways of knowing and understandings of sociality, community, nature, economy, among others.

In the city of Ribeirão Preto in 2006, the Centro Cultural Orùnmilá (CCO) designed a curriculum for local implementation of 10,639/03 that incorporated historical and anti-racist content as well as approached African and black diasporic cultures as sites of knowledge production and other ways of knowing with different epistemological underpinnings than that of Eurocentric knowledge systems and their understandings of modernity, mind and body, nature, individualism, and human progress.

The perspectives of CCO members on raising black consciousness and anti-racist struggle develop through the diverse black cultural practices and diasporic knowledges practiced at the Center. These include seminars and discussions on history, culture, and politics; cultural workshops involving *dança afro* (Yoruba dance), percussion, samba de roda, capoeira, and hip-hop;[22] performances of the *afoxé*[23] locally and nationally; and activism in the spheres of education, health, media, religion and culture (Da Costa, 2014, p. 16). Workshops, cultural events, and local protests cultivate a sense of shared community and bring people into a more critical consciousness of what it means to be black in Brazil on the one hand, and ways of thinking and being present in African and black diasporic histories and cultures on the other. This work by the CCO also cultivates a critical knowledge that grounds political-epistemological black Brazilian critiques of Eurocentrism and white supremacy. In this way, the CCO's praxis has shaped the content and activities it views as significant for implementing educational reforms related to Law 10,639/03.

The name of the initiative was the *Projeto Baobá: Educando para a Igualdade Étnico-Racial* (Baobab Project: Educating for Ethno-Racial Equality) and it was implemented from 2007 to 2009 (funded by MEC), reaching approximately 300 educators registered in the 120-hours of professional development offered and about another 700 educators who attended some sort of workshop, discussion, or public presentation related to the project (out of a population of 5000 educators in the municipality).[24] The *Projeto Baobá* included detailed lectures on themes like African history (its diverse peoples and cultures); colonialism, slavery and the question of abolition; black spiritualities and the worldviews of African and African-descendant communities; academic approaches to race, ethnicity, and gender (conceptual grounding); black Brazilian history and Brazilian racial inequalities; race in the media; and racism in education. The project also included workshops on music, dance, drum-making, mask-making, doll-making, percussion, and capoeira (Da Costa, 2016, p. 32). Workshops elaborated the history, philosophy, and meaning behind these practices and gave educators experience with cultural practices and the forms of knowledge they produce.

Additionally, the project recommended and provisioned academic and didactic materials and lesson plans to teachers and schools throughout the municipality (one of Silvany's tasks as municipal advisor), which not only included easy references for understanding racism and black history but also ways to incorporate key texts into lessons through which children of different ages could learn.

The various activities, topics, and content of the *Projeto Baobá* reflected the multilayered anti-racist and transformative vision, as well as experiential knowledge, that black political organizations have sought to bring into the educational sphere. The CCO's *Projeto Baobá* (Baobab Project) included historical, conceptual, and practical content as important for a holistic education and political grounding in issues of racism, discrimination, and black Brazilian and African history. *Projeto Baobá* content sought to dismantle "commonsense" Brazilian conceptions of which peoples, cultures, and everyday practices produce knowledge, a commonsense that has equated Africanness with backwardness and ascribed a whole range of negative attributes to blackness and black peoples. By challenging the institutionalization of white, Eurocentric, middle-class dispositions and cultural capital within the mainstream K-12 education system, the CCO's intervention went beyond addressing a lack of representation to also undermine the invisibility, silencing, and stereotyping produced by official knowledge.

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[22] Capoeira is a black Brazilian martial art/dance considered a mode of black resistance and collectivity since slavery. Samba music and dance originated in the late nineteenth/early twentieth century with strong Black Brazilian percussive and rhythmic influences. Samba de roda is a more "traditional" or "roots" form of samba danced in a circle.

[23] *Afoxés* (pronounced Ah-foh-sheh) are public expressions of Candomblé religious temples that parade usually during carnival performing song and dance that draw on Candomblé rituals where movement and song venerate the different gods of the Yoruba pantheon.

[24] Despite designing the content requirements and workshop themes, the CCO was not awarded the contract through the bidding process to implement the initiative. An organization run by black intellectuals and activists, some with links to the University of São Paulo, orchestrated seminars and presentations. Members of the CCO were involved in some of these events.

The content of the project reflects how the CCO drew in knowledges based in black Brazilian worldviews as alternative epistemologies and means to disrupt racist conceptions of which people and which cultures have the capacity to produce knowledge relevant to shaping contemporary society. At the same time, the project pushed teachers to address the biases and practices that shape everyday and institutional racisms that pervade schools. In such ways, the CCO hoped that Law 10,639/03, when engaged in a critical, anti-racist, and anti-colonial fashion, would address a whole range of experiences non-white students face in the school system, from an inability to "see themselves" in the curriculum to demeaning experiences generated via the racism of teachers and classmates. This multilayered goal reflects quilombismo praxis in its focus on racist ideologies and their institutional formations and effects, while simultaneously reclaiming, reconstructing, and disseminating hitherto excluded histories, cultures, and knowledges of Africans and black Brazilians.

Given the monumental task of undoing centuries of anti-black racism and discriminatory practices and institutional structures, the CCO and many in the black movement more broadly see Law 10,639/03 as necessary to address current racism and discrimination in education and thus to improve the experiences and life outcomes of black and brown children in society. At the same time, a more radical transformation always remains in view in which schools and educators are one node in a longer-term process of mental decolonization and raising the black consciousness necessary for more radical social change. Thus, for the CCO, engaging with the state to implement these curriculum reforms and educational projects from 2005-2009 involved an "immediate tactical interest" in shifting curricular content and practice as well as addressing institutional racism, but did not replace ongoing work done within the organization and outside of state channels since the founding of the CCO in 1994. It is in the instances of working outside state channels, in the diverse "alternative spaces of blackness" (Harding, 2000), that possibilities for decolonial thought, cultural politics, and the regeneration of black life arise, and where the most significant visions for radical change are not only lived, but also nurtured and strengthened.

Conclusion

Findings from this study deepen our understanding of the current dynamics shaping the almost three decades of multicultural citizenship regimes and anti-racist policies in Brazil specifically, and Latin America more broadly. First, by examining critical black studies scholarship (Smith, 2016; Vargas, 2012; Vargas 2016) and studies of neoliberal multiculturalism (Hale 2005; Martinez Novo 2018; Rahier 2012; Walsh 2012) alongside those focused on postneoliberalism (Byker & Marquardt, 2016; Goodale & Postero 2013; Postero 2013), we were able to illustrate the contradictory effects of cultural recognition and anti-racist policy for black Brazilians. We see how the focus on education curriculum reform legislation signal K-12 schooling constitutes an important site through which the decolonization of minds, addressing institutional racism and its effects, and the amplification of black history, culture, and knowledge can occur. But, issues like state violence and, as such, the lack of full black citizenship and inclusion remain pronounced and organizations continue to struggle with this in their day to day work.

Second, the study showed how organizations mobilize within this contradictory context by embodying the black Brazilian praxis of quilombismo. This praxis (1) centers the cultivation of critical consciousness in a variety of black organizations, community spaces, and cultural practices, and (2) works to undo the discursive, epistemological, and material structures that sustain anti-black racism and white supremacy. In this way, the research shows the centrality of black memory and experience, forms of autonomy, and critical knowledge to the cultivation of a decolonial vision and its maintenance in the face of a contested, often frustrating tension with work directly focused on state institutional transformation. Moreover, through the example of the *Projeto Baobá* and curriculum reform, we see how, once they are given access, social movements integrate and deploy within state institutions the discourses, knowledge, and pedagogies they cultivated in their semi-autonomous spaces.

This is the nature of the decolonial in practice grounded in the contradictions and challenges of struggles located at the nexus of citizenship rights, recognition, and deeper structural transformation. Quilombismo's attention to within and beyond the state attends to these aspects of practice and the challenge of working towards decolonization that are sometimes left unaddressed within the abstracted conceptualizations emerging from the "decolonial turn" in theory.

The findings in this study have broader implications for interpreting contexts where there is a perceived break between moments, for example, those we might characterize as neoliberal and postneoliberal, multicultural and post-multicultural, and/or racist and postracial. Critical scholarship must remain attentive to those underlying structural continuities (like racist violence, institutional uses of cultural difference, and/or

extractive economic development models) that persist within discourses and policy that claim newness or claim to address longstanding forms of oppression and exclusion. It is precisely through the dialectical relation between state discourses and the grounded contexts of cultural and political work in communities and movements that we as analysts can perceive the intricacies of these continuities and address the limitations of contemporary race equality initiatives.

Contribution
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