

EDITED BY ANTONIO D.
TILLIS



(RE)CONSIDERING
BLACKNESS
IN CONTEMPORARY
AFRO-BRAZILIAN
(CON)TEXTS



Introduction

"Blackness and Cultural Tourism in Brazil: The Case of Salvador da Bahia"

ANTONIO D. TILLIS

This volume purposes to interrogate critically the issue of Blackness in Brazil under the lenses of Cultural Studies, broadly defined, to include utterances on transnationalism and cosmopolitanism. From a multidisciplinary perspective, the collection queries the notions of national and racial identity and ambivalence, through critical investigation of contemporary (mid-20th century to the present) Brazilian cultural materiality in the form of literature, religion, film/video and theatrical production, and cultural anthropological manifestations. The overall object is to try and understand how a multiethnic nation such as Brazil negotiates issues of Blackness in contemporary contexts. This volume proposes to bring to English-speaking audiences critical articulations regarding the concept of Blackness from the nation in that all scholars herein are leading Brazilian researchers in the area of race, gender, theatre, music, literature, film, and religion studies. By concentrating on how these disciplines and ideologies relate to matters concerning Blackness in the construction of identities in Brazil, the collection will be of significant value to scholars in the areas of Brazilian studies, Latin American studies, interdisciplinary studies, cultural studies and African Diaspora studies.

As an introduction, I offer iterations on the thought of the marketing of a nation racially as a contextual framework for this volume. The polemics of marketing national identity is closely tied to our contemporary understanding of the

politics of how a nation markets itself for a globalized understanding of who or what she represents. It is understood that national identity has been conceived to have geographical and linguistic implications as peoples and nation states carve out ontological and epistemological identities that distinguish them from the “other.” A classical positioning of such thought is the fact that global association as to what and who is considered French, as an example, has its ethos firmly lodged in Europe, France in particular, as the geographical space of identity and representation. Linguistically, the French language is yet another layer of the palimpsest of identify signifiers for this geographically and linguistically defined nation and people. Arguably, one could go on and on listing semiotic markers that have come to be associated with what is accepted generally as a meaning of being “French” to the point of the labeling of champagne. However, historians and other scholars, as do I, argue that for Europe and consequently her former colonial territories, the ideology of national belonging and identity chartered murky waters with the inception of colonial expansion, slavery and their aftermath.

Such can be said to be the case of Brazil: the largest of the South American nations, still linguistically tied to the colonial histories of Portuguese invasion, African slavery, Japanese migration, other European settlers, and visible indigeneity. Thus for me, the question becomes how does Brazil market herself in light of the fact that she birthed the second largest population of people of African ancestry (Nigeria being the first), the second largest global community of Japanese (Tokyo being the first), a neo-colonial apparition in her southern part (replete with German, Italian, and other European migrant descendants), as well as a visible indigenous population in the country’s interior. There are obviously a countless number of “Brazilians” for whom a cultural and biological composition engages two or more of the abovementioned groups. The question then becomes one of how to define national identity in the midst of contemporary cultural and biological pluralism. This brief introduction circulates intellectually around the periphery of such an inquiry. It is not located within the scope of how does one “market” an identity for global consumption, but seeks to deconstruct the marketing of one regional identity in particular for the sake of what contemporary scholars are calling “cultural tourism.” In so doing, this analysis will focus on the Black Brazilian identity as a consequence of colonial slavery and continental African territorial expansion and its exploitation of this historical heritage for economic gain: cultural tourism. Specifically interrogated in this effect is the issue of global response to a nation that “pimps” a cultural, racial identity that does not have a similar cultural collateral within the public sphere of Brazilian society. So, the underpinning query belies the fact that the construction of Blackness in Brazil is replete with contradictions that show a nation that continues to battle with, yet exploit, the ideology of blackness as a national marker of identity. The theoretical paradigms used for this undertaking

range from postcolonial thoughts to cultural studies, cultural tourism and historical assumptions.

The temporal migration of people to foreign terrain is without doubt in vogue due to a rise in expendable cash flow and cultural curiosity for many. Additionally, colleges, universities and academic centers are internationalizing curricula to include foreign study options for students that undoubtedly include visits to cultural heritage sites as a part of the academic cultural experience in a foreign space. In part, the institutionalization of foreign study and study abroad programs has fueled the establishment of tourism studies programs in numerous major universities in response to globalization and economic intellectual enterprise. John K. Walton, in the introduction to *Histories of Tourism: Representation, Identity and Conflict* (2005), discusses the expansion of tourism studies in major academic institutions to include the history of “the world’s largest and most dynamic industry,” tourism, as a major methodological approach to understanding tourism and its effect on culture. He states:

The importance of the contribution of history to the understanding of tourism as an outstandingly significant current phenomenon, the world’s largest and most dynamic industry, a leading sector both in continuing globalization and the generation of cultural resistance to its implications, with the capacity to create enormous environmental footprints and to transform cultures in ways that are hard to predict, is now beginning to gain recognition within tourism studies, which has been slow to accept that it needs to learn from historical studies, and within history, whose innate conservatism as a discipline has tended to relegate it to the margins of the allegedly inconsequential. (1)

For Walton and other scholars, tourism, as a major contributor to globalization of cultural materiality, has a deep historical impact and the ability to alter geospacial tapestries in ways that have yet to be imagined. As people and cultures shift from localized spaces to others, the geographical landscape from which they move and to which they migrate undergoes a cultural alteration through cross-cultural contact, or transculturation. Furthermore, there exists a historical element that belies the desires that catapult the urgency to expand beyond one’s territorial boundaries coupled with a preparation of receivership. And, in understanding this complex dynamic between the motivations for travel and the offered cultural attraction of foreign spaces, we might approximate legitimations for certain developed marketing plans that speak directly to the need of the given tourist or groups that have an indelible impact on how those visiting spectators imagine a nation versus how a nation sees herself, irrespective of the cultural angle bartered in the international exchange. Agencies, such as the European Commission and UNESCO, through establishing global heritage tour sites in Africa, Asia and the Americas, have carved spaces within particular geopolitical landscapes uniquely crafted for the heritage and/or cultural tourism industry. In so doing, these agencies have

decided for the touristic consumer that element of culture that merits examination due to a historical event or set of events that have been etched onto the landscape of national history. In *Cultural Tourism: Global and Local Perspectives* (2007), Greg Richards argues that globalization of cultural tourism is a response to the “culturalization of society”; in that, culture becomes a commodity, emerging “markets” or marketable cultural sites appear in order to stimulate economic competition. In so doing, culture becomes a commodified commodity for public consumption. I argue that such is the case or has become the case in certain regions of Brazil, in particular the Northeastern region and the city of Salvador da Bahia.

The history of the geographical space that we recognize as Brazil has a historical timeline that certainly predates colonialism and the arrival of European settlers to this newly encountered territory. However, that which is studied most is her colonial history onward. Historical moments such as colonialism, slavery, independence and modernity become select historical moments that impact the nation in a way that elicits current travel and cultural observation relative to what Brazil is and who she represents in terms of national identity and culture. I could go on regarding the history of immigration of numerous groups of “globetrotters” who historically migrated to Brazil from the seventeenth century to the present; however, that is not the focus of this work. My focus is to highlight the movement of a particular group that has resulted in currently established cultural tours and foreign study programs to her northeastern state of Bahia, the city of Salvador in particular.

A major theoretical paradigm that has framed the racial discourse in Brazil and has fomented national utterances on national origin has been the notion of racial democracy. As of late, this early 20th century articulation on “race” in Brazil has come under scrutiny from intellectuals both nationally and transnationally. With regard to racial democracy and the concept of Blackness in Brazil, leading scholar Zila Bernd states that racial democracy in Brazil presupposes that Brazilians live in a nation where racial prejudice, discrimination and preconceptions regarding race is obsolete in light of equal access for all: “que fazia como que todos acreditasse que vivíamos em um país livre de preconceitos ou discriminações o onde todas as raças tinham igualdade de oportunidades” (1992, 37). Thus, numerous scholars agree that the concept in itself is born of a racist and patriarchal process in its attempt to present Latin America, especially Brazil, as if it were organically nondiscriminatory in its evolutionary racial politics. Thus, the concept of otherness, especially Blackness in Brazil, has been the proverbial “elephant in the room” within Brazilian society, emerging as a concept where “race” is nationally “practiced” but not recognized.

With the abovementioned in mind, this volume centers the ever-growing conversation regarding Brazilian Blackness and its historical legacies. From the issue of the ethnic/racial identity of one of its most celebrated writers, Machado de

Assis, to the performance of Blackness as a means of cultural and political survival, the scholars in this volume provide for the readership insightful understandings and configurations of the epistemologies of Blackness in Brazilian (con)texts. It is the hope that the collections therein, advance further the national discourse on Blackness in Brazil from the perspective of Brazilian-national scholars.

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