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# BRAZIL'S NEW RACIAL POLITICS

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5. Oliveira gained access to each registration card of city council candidates to obtain demographic information.

6. I interacted color and education. I ran a regression with voting for a black candidate as the dependent variable and the independent variables of the interaction variable color and education, education, color, political party, and age. The interaction variable was not statistically significant for the Salvador or São Paulo sample. In Salvador, the age effect went away. In São Paulo, age and political party remained statistically significant, but there was no longer a color and education effect.

7. Today in Brazil one can find products for *pele moreno e negro* (brown and black skin). These products include soaps and lotions. Once, shopping on the infamous Paulista Avenue in São Paulo, I looked for hand lotion and was recommended to try a product that was for black and brown skin. Such a product never existed thirty years ago in Brazil. Despite the fact that Brazil is known as a racially mixed nation, businesspeople have recognized and are taking advantage of the popularity of racial categories.

# 4

## Out of Place: The Experience of the Black Middle Class

*Angela Figueiredo*

With a little hesitation, they approach me, they look at me with curiosity or with compassion and then, instead of asking directly how it feels to be a problem, they say: In my city I know an excellent man of color. . . . I smile, or I show interest, or I reduce the heat of my rage, according to the occasion. With regard to the real question: How does it feel to be a problem? I rarely say a word.

—W. E. B. Du Bois, 1999: 52

Historically, the structure of Brazilian society has been described as a social pyramid in which the majority of whites occupy the top, the majority of *mestiços* (mixed-race) occupy the middle, and blacks occupy the bottom.<sup>1</sup> In this perspective, racial differences are subsumed in class differences, and, consequently, racial prejudice was explained simply as a mere expression of this, that is, prejudice is the result of class. “In Brazil, scholars suggested that the Brazilian system of racial identification necessarily subordinated race to class. They tended to believe that the persistence of racial inequality was due to class antagonism” (Winant 1999: 113).

Many researchers tried to explain the position of the *mulato* in Brazil with the “mulatto escape hatch” concept as defined by Carl Degler (1971). Precisely since *mulatos* have been described as a group, analyses have been centered on individuals or on a small group of *mulatos* that experienced social mobility. The majority of researchers did not try to understand the strategies of social mobility used by *mulatos*. The arguments to explain the presence of few blacks and *mestiços* in high positions of social strata were that this simply reflected the disadvantages of the past, poverty, and the absence of education that inevitably resulted from slavery (Skidmore 1974: 12). In fact, few *mulatos* occupied a position between blacks and whites. The majority were next to the economic position of blacks.

As I demonstrated in another work (Figueiredo 2002), different contexts and racial dynamics resulted in the use of distinct strategies of social mobility for blacks in Brazil and the United States. Brazil is different from the United States because the first generation of the black middle class emerged inside of the black community, as the result of official racial segregation (Frazier 1975), and, later, it grew as a consequence of affirmative action policies (Evans 1995; Landry 1987). For a long period in Brazil, the small group of *mulatos* that ascended socially was mainly associated with a network of relations with whites. This situation was described as sponsorship—a mechanism through which black individuals of low socioeconomic class benefited from an individual or a white family of upper- or middle-class status. In the 1980s, the Brazilian government modified the mechanism for attaining public jobs—which in the past were carried out through such mechanisms—by starting to have more public competitions. The stability, wages, and the benefits guaranteed with public jobs were important for the black middle class in Brazil (Figueiredo 2002).

The majority of the black middle class in Brazil are first generation. Most of them are children of manual workers who ascended socially through schooling. This means that the majority of them keep a distance from their families. This leads to a rupture with their familial origin. The objective of this chapter is to reflect on the experience of middle-class blacks in Salvador, a city with the largest black population in Brazil.

### **The Context**

The number of blacks in the city of Salvador is noticeable to any observer. Nevertheless, this number is not represented in the racial distribution in the occupational structure. Nor does a substantial black population mean that there is a large middle class. Also, as for their participation in politics, the black population has, in fact, stayed at the edge of power in decisionmaking politics. There is a small percentage of blacks in elected office (Oliveira 1997).

This information comes as a surprise to a significant number of Brazilians, who still believe that in Bahia racial dynamics are different from what occurs in other states. According to Jéferson Bacelar (2001), Bahia underwent a period of economic stagnation postabolition, which was only modified in the 1950s with the establishment of the state-controlled oil industry, Petrobras. Despite that some believe social ascension of blacks was relatively easy in Salvador, there are no records affirming this, nor are there any sources that give an account that blacks' positions were elevated during this period.

In contrast, Bacelar's research shows that in Salvador, the maintenance of a racial hierarchy in the labor market during slavery and for work relations was still based on personal, and not contractual, relations in customary and traditional norms.

It is likely that since the 1950s in some Brazilian capitals, and since 1970 in Brazil as a whole, structural changes in Brazilian society occurred that affected the mechanisms or strategies of ascension used by blacks. It is important to note the transformations in the occupational structure as a result of industrialization and urbanization. At the same time, there was a relative democratization of public education. Nevertheless, these structural changes were not enough to create equal chances between whites and blacks. Despite the fact that blacks have benefited from the expansion of public education, they are still concentrated in the lowest levels of education.

The interest in the social ascension of blacks or the "integration of blacks in society's class structures" is not recent (Fernandes 1972, 1978). Nonetheless there has been little interest in understanding the social ascension of blacks in specific sectors of the labor market, as well as the strategies used in the process of upward mobility. In Brazilian academic circles, even in the social sciences, especially in anthropology, where excluded groups are studied, the debate concerning the black middle class is relatively recent. This is most likely related to the fact that so few blacks are engaged in social science research activities, where, in addition, academic interest has traditionally focused on problematic and excluded groups. Which class do blacks who have socially ascended belong to and have they been integrated into the system? What are the constraints provoked by one's social origin and color?

Like the African American middle class, the Afro-Brazilian middle class also faces exclusion. Middle-class Afro-Brazilians are looked upon with curiosity when they participate in middle-class social activities and with distrust when they try to acquire or enjoy the symbolic and social goods associated with people with high financial means.<sup>2</sup> Even if they possess these goods, there is a certain discomfort among the nonblack middle class, creating questions about the possibility of black people owning certain goods and having the financial means to pay for them, or of frequenting social spaces that are restricted to the middle classes.

All of this creates additional tension in the daily routines of black people with higher economic means, who are always perceived as "out of place," which is socially constructed and symbolically determined. In other words, they pay a high price for being "out of their place." This distrust with regard to middle-class blacks results, in my opinion, from some important factors. The first, which is also the most well-known, has to do with the negation and rejection of the existence of racism and racial prejudice in Brazil and, consequently, the emphasis on class-based prejudice. The second is the low percentage of blacks in elevated social status positions. The third is the social construction of blacks that always places them in economic and symbolic positions that are inferior to whites. The fourth is the socioanthropological construction of the black racial category in such a way that blackness becomes incompatible with enjoying goods associated with modernity. This means that

there is a resonance or an interpenetration of the social constructions originally formulated in different places and by different agents, such as ideologies in social science and common perceptions that are in perfect accord with one's understanding about the "place of blacks" in Brazilian society.

In this chapter, I tackle questions about the meaning of social mobility and about the perspective of Brazilian blacks in the contemporary context. One of the most salient characteristics of the Brazilian black middle class is the fact that it is constituted, mainly, by individuals who are the first generation of those who socially ascended. That is, most of the time they are children of manual workers who did not inherit goods and property, and therefore survive exclusively on employment salaries. They have also not been socialized in a middle-class environment, which means that they have not incorporated the values and worldviews that define the *habitus* of the middle class.<sup>3</sup> We are thus dealing with a middle class of a subalternized group, which, for this very reason, is unstable, incipient, and encounters many difficulties in securing and maintaining itself in this class position (Figueiredo 2003).

## Methodology

Research was conducted in Salvador, Bahia, with thirty black employers who own companies involved in various businesses.<sup>4</sup> The sample was composed of individuals who are commonly identified as mulattos, dark mulattos (*mulatos escuros*), and blacks (*pretos*); 86 percent of those interviewed were men, married, and the great majority were above the age of 40. All of those interviewed were owners of companies with six or more regular employees. The variation in the number of employees was great, ranging from the minimal limit of 6 to 100 permanent employees and 400 temporary ones, such as the case of the owner of a construction firm. I interviewed subjects occupied in professions typical of Bahian culture, such as the *baiana de acarajé* (African-dish street vendor), to the owner of a taxi company. There were significant differences in terms of income, educational level, and type of business. All this contributed to a very heterogeneous group of interviewees.

## Social Mobility and Insertion in the White World

Although there are differences in the results and the approaches of research conducted on the upward social mobility of blacks since the 1930s, the majority is unanimous in demonstrating that upward social mobility of blacks only happens through dependent social relations between blacks and whites—that is, to ascend socially, blacks have to be supported by whites, to be married to someone white, or to emulate in their dress code and way of speaking the ways

of whites. With regard to *apadrinhamento* (formalized extended family membership produced by becoming a godfather or godmother), Azevedo (1996: 166) observes:

It is important to register that, until this moment, the main channel of social ascension, through which a great number of black people and *mestiços* had acquired elevated status, is education in the double meaning of good manners and a high level of education, beyond the mores and conception of the dominant culture, which, ultimately, is a problem of acculturation. . . . One of the mechanisms that facilitates this integration is the protection and the aid that many godfathers and godmothers extend to their godchildren of color, educating them in their own houses, or, at least, finding them jobs or directing them to institutions of secondary and superior education and many times continuing to guide and protect them.

Bacelar finds that in the recent past, working in the public sector was indicative of the good relations that blacks and browns had with whites, unveiling the existing clientelism in hiring practices and the *apadrinhamento* of blacks by white families.

To belong to the public service, even if in subordinate positions, already denoted some form of prestige, indicating, at least, good relations with the owners of political power . . . to the extent that this insertion was achieved through clientelism and *apadrinhamento*. (Bacelar 2001)

In this sense, the unequal relationship between blacks and whites in the past did not imply an absolute impossibility of access of blacks and *mestiços* to higher ranks in the social hierarchy. Nevertheless, the ingestion occurred based on a structure of individual merit, where affection, the allegiance to those recognized as superior, and confidence in the maintenance of these criteria could transform an agent, who was poor and black, and qualify him or her to gain access to scarce cultural goods. As this distributive structure is dependent on investments on the family and affectivity levels, the process of distribution of symbolic goods tends to strengthen individualizing strategies among the agents of dominated people.

The modern context has significantly modified structures of power, as much through the appearance of a mixed economy and the expansion of the Brazilian state as through the relative democratization of education. With this movement, hiring in public service by means of open competition has been consolidated. This process will decisively impact the social status of those who, until now, hardly had access to higher education and, as a consequence, the possibilities to transform their social status and to assume a social status distant from those in their families.

The mechanisms used to recruit public servants were modified completely, with the criterion of selection by means of open public competition, because it

was perceived as more democratic. This was based on the fact that it not only reduces the likelihood of discriminatory actions that occur in other sectors of the labor market, but also because it diminishes the importance of networks and social contacts, the famous indications that regulate access to work. Nevertheless, we are unaware of the promotion criteria within public service employment.

In previous research, I demonstrated that the strategies of upward mobility used by the group in question (liberal professionals) were high education levels, the association they made between public and private jobs, and resources that marked the trajectories of the majority of those interviewed (Figueiredo 2002). With regard to black entrepreneurs and employers with low education levels, the establishment of a business is made possible, in most cases, through resources from the resignation of a formal job, where unemployment benefits (FGTS) are used for the opening of their own businesses. Those entrepreneurs with higher educational levels typically initiate their own business by forming small societies, with proper resources that are not necessarily proceeding from unemployment benefits, but from personal savings. It is important to note that none of them were able to count on the support of family capital.

Independent of the mechanisms to achieve mobility, it is worth noting that the social ascension of blacks has been historically guided by the use of individual strategies. Those blacks that ascend are seen, almost always, as an exception to the rule, mainly represented in inferior stratas of the professional hierarchy. More recent research points to the importance of the family in social ascension (Teixeira 1998). Azevedo observed that “the social ascension of black individuals is frequent and easy to verify. As a group, however, people of color ascend with more difficulty” (Azevedo 1996: 164).

Although focused more on public sector jobs, these brief references aim at demonstrating how the strategies of social mobility used by blacks changed in the last few decades—given that in the past they were characterized by the dependent relationship to white individuals or families. It appears that the relationship to whites, which allowed for upward mobility, was the same that allowed for the entrance into the white world, if only at the margins. I argue that the use of more independent mechanisms of mobility—that do not necessarily involve a relation of subordination, subservience, and, consequently, the need to accumulate debt with someone— influences the perception of the meaning of social mobility, of prejudice, and of racial discrimination.

With reference to data concerning inequalities in access to education and income inequality between white and black workers, there still remains a strong belief that black middle-class members are seen and treated as whites. Thus, inside specific spaces where their status can be easily recognized, exemplified by the home and workplace, some blacks have achieved purchasing power that is comparable to that of whites. Nevertheless, it is possible to have a problem or misunderstanding that makes their economic and social position irrelevant

and their racial status gain salience and the term *black* and other, more pejorative denominations prevail, often in the form of accusations. Moreover, when going beyond these restricted spaces of recognition, almost always these individuals are seen as blacks and are treated in the way blacks are treated in general in Brazil, that is, always with a certain degree of distrust. In my interviews, this occurs typically when respondents want to enjoy their elevated economic position, such as in the consumption of luxury goods and services.<sup>5</sup>

Pelé is constantly cited in the occasions where racial discrimination and the dichotomy between race and class in Brazil are discussed. Nevertheless, the treatment extended to Pelé does not result from his socioeconomic position, but from public recognition, especially from people normally considered racist. Pelé is considered a special black person; his success in his profession made him a symbol of soccer and of national identity. Therefore, he does not provide a good example.

Starting from this conclusion, I analyze the examples of those who mentioned they were victims of prejudice and racial discrimination.<sup>6</sup> It appears that belonging to the middle class, far from being an antidote against discrimination and racial stereotyping, exposes blacks to situations of increased vulnerability, given that whites predominantly occupy the social spaces they frequent.<sup>7</sup>

In this manner, they are forced to reflect on their ethnic-racial condition and the limits of Brazil’s racial ideology. As I will argue, the realization of being black, as well as any attempts at producing a discourse of identity, appears in the adult phase and as a result of contact with the white world.

It is certain that the interpretations of discriminatory practices can vary, and it is perhaps a good indicator of an individual’s social status; a poor person who is discriminated against can attribute the different treatment to the fact that she is badly dressed for the occasion, can blame the fact that she did not know how to express herself properly, and even the fact that she did not know how to act properly. Many times these people end up, in one way or another, assuming responsibility for their discrimination. Inversely, the majority of middle-class blacks know that they are well dressed, that they have income and, at times, enough education not to be treated inadequately on the basis of stereotypes that establish the “place of *negros*.”

The initial question about racial discrimination was “Have you ever suffered any type of racial discrimination?” Some said no because they were well-known in Salvador, but they cited examples of discrimination that occurred in other cities. Others said no, but cited cases involving other people close to them. A significant segment of the interviewed answered no at first; however, when the interviewer insisted a little more on the subject, the interviewees ended up mentioning facts they considered unimportant and routine, for example, the fact that they had been mistaken for workers of the company. This was not taken seriously if they had not affirmed themselves to be the owner, manager, or administrator; but even then, some people insisted, “I want to speak

with the manager." This demand would come from a salesperson, product representative, or a customer.

Nevertheless, none of the interviewees answered to this situation, and instead presented it as embarrassing. They typically spoke about it in an ironic tone, because it happened so many times they no longer considered it relevant. The example of one interviewee is sufficiently illustrative: at the time of the commencement of her youngest sister, she, the sister, and a friend went to the building of a dressmaker, located in a prestigious area of Salvador; when entering the elevator, a lady asked them if they had a friend, like themselves, that could work for her. The sister, a physician, educated in one of Salvador's most recognized universities, the Federal University of Bahia, felt extremely offended, while the others laughed about the "mistake" committed by the lady. It became evident that they had perceived this situation as discriminatory; after all, they were mistaken as house servants. Nevertheless, they did not believe this was sufficient for taking further action.

Others are slow to perceive that the differential treatment they received was indeed discrimination, based on their race. (Anecdotal information is identified by the interviewees' first names only to protect their identity.) When invited to participate in a culinary course in São Paulo, one respondent states:

It is a hotel in São Paulo, pretty, five stars. I had to be housed in this hotel. . . . I think they never had a black guest before in that hotel; blacks probably just sweep the floor. A black woman appears, all in high heels, and says that she will give lessons there, and nobody believed it. So when I arrived, my reservation was already made, I showed my ID to the receptionist, saying that I was Antônia, but he did not find my name in the computer, but I knew it was there. I acted very appropriately, but he made me look for the training room, the bastard, in that immense place, and I had to walk around, going up the elevator, down again, coming out in places that I didn't even recognize, and I ended up entering all these conference rooms that had nothing to do with my course. I arrived at ten and walked around for four hours, before I came back to the reception hall. I asked him again and nothing. He said: "This name does not exist; I have never seen this name." Already irritated, I said: "Can you call this number for me?" He took the telephone and put it on the balcony for me to call. That's when I realized that it was prejudice; until then I had not felt that it was prejudice; I thought that he was just bullshitting! (Antônia)

Let us look at another example:

This thing happened to me, and I didn't even think it was prejudice; I thought it was just a misunderstanding. I entered a drugstore in Rio de Janeiro. I made purchases there, and when I was writing the check, the cashier did not understand my city code, which is 071 for Salvador. Then I gave her my entire number, and she called to check if it was correct, but she made a mistake and used the Rio area code. The woman on the phone said: "I never had a servant with this name." Then the manager came and asked me "Ma'am, what is your

phone number?" I said, "My number is 071 . . ." When I gave them my number, the manager was already terrified, because he thought I might think that this was discrimination. Never! I always knew it was a misunderstanding. (Dinalva)

This statement is rather odd. Before telling the facts, the interviewee affirms that what happened in the hotel incident was a misunderstanding. After that, she speaks of the incident that happened in Rio de Janeiro and says that the employee of the drugstore, when calling to confirm the phone number, heard the following reply: "I never had a servant with this name." Was it an interpretation of the interviewee or did the employee ask for the name of the servant? Then the manager appears, who already enters the scene "terrified, because he thought I might think that this was discrimination." In all instances of the story, direct and indirect references to racial discrimination appear—direct, in the case of the manager, and indirect, when the interviewee is mistaken as a house servant.

People who practice racial discrimination are always viewed as people with bad manners or as misinformed, but are never perceived by the interviewee as racists.

If somebody discriminates, I see that this person is not prepared, is not a person who has a formation, and education. . . . It happens sometimes with people who have education, that have formation, but in those cases, it is part of their nature, because that person was raised with discrimination in this way and does what he learned. (Armando)

Another interviewee considers the surprise with which new clients react at their first meeting and considers this a manifestation of racial discrimination, even though tolerable. He emphasizes that all the time their expectation is to encounter a white accountant, given that he was referred by a white colleague.

The intolerable one, I have not experienced yet. I think that it can happen at any time, but it has not happened yet. The tolerable one happens all the time, you perceive it clearly. . . . I will have a meeting on Monday with an entrepreneur whom I already know, but I am certain that he will refer me to another customer. It is very unlikely that he will make a comment saying, "Look, I am referring you to an accountant. He is black, but he does a good job." . . . Now, I am absolutely certain, about 90 percent certain, that the friend to whom he will recommend me is white. (Joseval)

The distrust with which they are observed when they are driving their cars is also a never-ending experience, even if the topic is not racism.

I find that the people . . . I don't know, I don't mind. I let it pass without paying attention. It is in the head of everyone, but the important thing is what is in my own conscience; I let it pass without paying attention, when I drive in

the car, with a new car, and somebody looks at me. . . . My car is an L-200, the other day I had a BMW, I don't really care . . . if somebody points at me, I turn my face and look to the other side. (Armando)

The hegemonic position in academic circles concerning the prevalence of class prejudice over racial prejudice in Brazilian racial relations is also present in the statements of some of those interviewed. Sometimes the informants offer an interpretation that demonstrates that they believe that, in Brazil, prejudice is still class-based, or that the problem of differential treatment of blacks is caused by a lack of financial resources. Nevertheless, when inquiring more about this, an interviewee answers:

*Interviewee:* The question of race exists, because in Brazil, if you are rich and black everything goes, if you are poor and black nothing goes; if you are poor and white nothing goes.

*Interviewer:* Is it the same to be rich and white as being rich and black?

*Interviewee:* No, it is not as equal compared to the rich and white, because the people want to know why we are there. An example is when I participated in some social circles, I was socializing with rich people, and people wanted to know how I was there; they were very curious. I went into a five-star hotel, the people expected me to speak English, but when I started to speak with a Bahian accent . . . I stepped off an airplane, catching a connection, in the middle of all these whites and everybody was thinking that we were American or African, whenever I was with some colleague of my social level. . . . We entered the same hotel; for example, in Formula 1 trips, trips to automobile shows, people were asking why we were there; they didn't want to come and ask us, but they were always curious. (Derivaldo)

The statement of this interviewee demonstrates the curiosity and the distrust with which he is observed in social spaces frequented by members of the middle and upper class. Although he was never asked "Who are you?" or "Why are you here?" he seems to anticipate these questions. It is intriguing to notice that the interviewee analyzes the expectations of those he encounters: "I went into a five-star hotel, the people expected me to speak English, but when I started to speak with a Bahian accent . . ." It is as if the fact of being black and to frequent spaces associated with the upper classes could only be justified by not being Brazilian. After all, the representation of black spaces in Brazilian society never would allow for a different association between color and class.

From various examples, I realize that, even when they recognize that they are victims of racial prejudice, they do not seem to react. When discrimination is practiced by a customer, not reacting can be a strategy, since, after all, the business needs to sell in order to make profits; but why do they react the same way when discrimination is practiced by other people, away from the workplace?

Confronted with this question, I tried to understand how, when, and why people react with gestures, physical and verbal aggression, or appeal to legal action against discriminatory attitudes. Then I reformulated the question: "What would it take for you to take a position against a discriminatory attitude?"

From this question, I obtained several answers. In a few cases, the interviewees said they would not appeal to the judiciary power due to the dysfunction of Brazilian justice; other interviewees said that they would not like to be involved in public scandals. One interviewee mentioned that he would only take action if the offender had the same level as he, by which he meant socioeconomic level; the great majority stated that, frequently, those that discriminate were employees and not owners, thus making it inappropriate to take action, because, after all, "the poor thing could lose his/her job." Reacting against discrimination can also be related to third parties, as I learned from one interviewee, who affirmed that he would take action if the discrimination occurred against people whom he considers unable to defend themselves, for example children and some family members. The probability of him taking action on his own behalf is smaller than if the problem had occurred with someone whom he considers weak and fragile, effectively incapable of taking action.

In this sense, it is important to understand how and under what circumstances the topic of racism is dealt with at home. Different from their own educational experience in public schools, all the interviewed had their children enrolled in good private schools in Salvador, mainly attended by whites. We also know that spaces of sociability are not reduced to the classroom. Their children's contact with white children created in the parents the necessity to protect them from some type of racist prank, joke, or exclusion. They do not want their children to be humiliated; therefore, they feel it is necessary to dialogue with them about a topic until recently considered taboo: racial prejudice. Nevertheless, they were unanimous in their answers concerning how to react to discriminatory acts, and in some cases silence is advised. It is preferable not to react, that is, if it is common to address the topic of discrimination and racial prejudice when children are the victims, the same is not true for the answers offered in this situation. Making reference to racial discrimination affecting children, one interviewee commented:

*Interviewee:* I talk a lot with my children, because they study in a Diplomatic school that is 99 percent white. And I always say this, to remain indifferent, that if somebody discriminates it is because he is bothered; just act as if you have not seen it.

*Interviewer:* But do they make any comments about what happens at school?

*Interviewee:* They do, but I always tell them to let it go, not to give answers, not to argue; not to discuss it; not to get offended. I tell them to go to the director and tell them so they take can action. (Amando)

Another interviewee said:

*Interviewee:* I talk, and I do not induce any racist acts. But I say that they must protect themselves and not to let it happen; that they have to impose themselves; that outside of school, in real life, the opportunities are rare, so they have to go for it early on and not waste any time. I say that to my son every day and someday he will understand.

*Interviewer:* Did your father tell you these things when you were young?

*Interviewee:* He did not speak about it, but he showed me. He did not speak the way I am talking to you, but he was always someone who worked very hard, and he was always a person dedicated strongly to his family. So I try to do the same thing. (Eraldo)

We cannot forget the difference between differing social contexts under which parents and children grow up. Topics that until recently were treated only within the academy and black-power movements are now in the media and shown on prime-time television. As I demonstrated, all the interviewees mention existing racism in Brazilian society; however, this does not mean they all react to discriminatory acts. There is still a large gap between the recognition of racial discrimination and taking action when confronting discriminatory acts.

The majority of the interviewees of this research have a trajectory presenting that they were children born into poor families, and, depending on their social and economic upbringing, their stories are shorter or longer. Those that migrated from the countryside to the capital tell the story of a large family and of different strategies used to survive in the city—a job as a domestic servant among the women and informal commerce among men were the most quoted. After this first moment, they talked about what they considered their first job and all the other jobs they had before becoming entrepreneurs. Strangely, skin color only appears in these narratives in the adult phase and, frequently, through a third person, who referred to them as being black in an offensive, almost accusatory tone. Only one of the interviewees told the story that she was discriminated against during elementary school, and in fact her understanding of race and color has been different ever since childhood.

My interpretation follows some studies that have demonstrated the existence of an intrinsic relation between modernity and negritude. Based on the life stories of the interviewees—typically the first, and oftentimes the only, members of the family to experience mobility—I argue that the experience of being a member of the middle class seems extremely important for the recognition of difference between “us” in ethnic or racial terms and “others,” thus restricting the possibilities of a late identification. In other words, while they occupied the base of the socioeconomic stratification, living in slums, these individuals did not feel out of place, and they were not seen as such. The opposite occurred

when they started to assume positions of power, to occupy positions of prominence in the labor market, to live in middle-class neighborhoods (which, in Salvador, are predominantly white), to go to social spaces frequented by the middle class, such as bars, stores, and restaurants, and when they enrolled their children in good private schools.

The same way that identities seem to reconfigure themselves in late modernity, for the interviewed of this research, black identity definitively resists the use of identity in a collective political sense, going more in the direction of an identity that serves individual needs, most of all to gain access to full citizenship; that is, the emphasis falls back onto the individual right and not onto collective strategies of mobilizing ethnic resources. Even if they are ill-informed and not worried about racial questions, the belief in the inferiority and incapacity of blacks prompts them to problematize and reflect on the Brazilian model of race relations.

## Notes

1. A preliminary version of this chapter was published in *Cadernos Pagu* (23), 2004: 199–228.
2. The research presented in the text was conducted with black businesspeople in the beginning of 2000 in Salvador.
3. I define *middle class* with objective criteria, such as education, occupation, and income. In previous research, I problematize the use of the notion of middle class when applied to blacks and the expression *the black middle class*. See Figueiredo 2002.
4. The information presented in this chapter was gained through research conducted for the dissertation “The Black Middle Class Does Not Go to Paradise: Trajectories, Profiles, and Identity Among Black Entrepreneurs.”
5. In my master’s thesis, I dedicated a chapter to explaining social whitening utilized by various authors. I observed various examples of racial discrimination cited by those interviewed. Guimarães attests that people with more schooling and those who live in large cities are more likely to denounce being the victims of racism (Figueiredo 2003; Guimarães 1997: 51–78).
6. Considering the limits of a chapter, I utilize a number of examples of discrimination and racial prejudice, including those that are not considered as such by those interviewed. This allows the reader to have a better understanding of the subject. The identities of those interviewed are kept anonymous.
7. I refer to the major vulnerability of the symbolic point of view that differentiates physical violence suffered by poor blacks.