Another Black Like Me

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The Construction of Identities and Solidarity in the African Diaspora

Edited by

Elaine Pereira Rocha
and Nielson Rosa Bezerra

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CONTENTS

Introduction ix

Chapter One 1
"Another Black Like Me": Strategies of Identification
among *Afrodescendientes* in Latin America
Elaine Rocha

Chapter Two 24
Transplanted West Indians: Forgotten People on the Western Shores
of the Caribbean Sea
Ron Harpelle

Chapter Three 46
Racial Taxonomy in Puerto Rico and the Anglophone Caribbean
Victor C. Simpson

Chapter Four 65
Mothering Cuba: The Poetics of Afro-Cuban Women
Rhonda Collier

Chapter Five 97
Escape Routes, *Mocambos* and Fears of Sedition in Brazil and French
Guiana during the 18th and 19th Centuries
Flávio dos Santos Gomes

Chapter Six 132
Slave Resistance and the Notion of Space: The Case of Afro-Amazonians
(c. 1850-1880)
Ygor Rocha Cavalcante

Chapter Seven 159
The Trajectory of Mahoman Bardo Baquaqua in Brazil: Slavery, Freedom
and Emancipation in the Atlantic World
Nielson Rosa Bezerra

Chapter Eight 174
A Nation “Blended of Colours”: African-American Abolitionists and their Perspectives on Race Relations in Nineteenth Century Brazil
Luciana da Cruz Brito

Chapter Nine 185
Afro-Brazilian Diaspora in West Africa: The Tabom in Ghana
Marco Aurelio Schaumloeffel

Bibliography 200

Contributors 219

Index 222

INTRODUCTION

The project that gave rise to this book was motivated mainly by the idea of bringing together authors from different institutions and perspectives and, most of all, researchers on different aspects of the experiences of the African Diaspora in Latin America, to create an overview of the complexities surrounding the lives of black people in various periods of history, as they struggled to build their lives away from Africa amidst societies that in general denied them the most basic rights, such as the right of fully belonging in the countries where they lived, by choice or force of circumstance.

Over several centuries, Latin American societies have struggled to face the reality of blackness, holding on to fantasies of miscegenation that would erase any trace of African cultures or features among their population. The long process of denial arises from the colonial process, when slaves were brought from Africa but denied recognition as persons, while the humanity of Amerindians became part of political and religious arguments between colonizers, religious authorities and administrators. During the long process of nation building that took place for most Latin American countries throughout the 19th century, the discriminatory structure of the social and racial hierarchy was reinforced by the newly coined arguments of scientific racism that reinforced discrimination.

In addition, those nations aimed above all to be thought as civilized and modern as their models, the cities of Western Europe. Civilization would come with a price: the internal pacification and the subjection of ethnic groups other than Europeans. Unable at the time to stop, control or deny the prevalence of interracial sexual contact, and the resulting mixed populations, these countries created a different perspective on the racial hierarchy. Instead of seeing a mixed population as degenerate, as proposed by some of the masterminds of scientific racism, authors like José Vasconcelos[1] invested in the idea of a *cosmic race*, a proposal that argued that a mixed population was the strongest and best fit as it would bring together the positive elements of every racial group. Here was the adoption of the *mestizo* as the national identity. However, representations of the

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[1] José Vasconcelos, *The cosmic race / La raza cosmica,* (Baltimore: John Hopkins, 1997).

mestizo emphasize the mix between European and Amerindian, condemning the black population to invisibility.

Similar phenomena can be seen in Brazil where, even with the largest Afro-Brazilian population on the continent, the country embraced the idea of a land of mixed race people, predominantly European and Amerindian. Although theoretically recognizing the African element, popular culture tends to minimize its influence. Therefore, all over Latin America, Brazil included, racial identity was forged with the Amerindian as the heroic character that in the end submitted to the European, recognized as superior. The black population was for a long time relegated to the margins of society, culture and history.

Few works explore the trajectory of Blacks in Latin America and most do so from the last years of the 20th century, following the revision of black history and the demands of Afro-Latin Americans for more visibility in history and in textbooks in general. Among the best works published in the period are Richard Graham's edited collection, *The idea of race in Latin America, 1870-1940*, with articles on the Brazilian, Argentinean, Cuban and Mexican perspectives on race;[2] the seminal work of George Andrews that discusses two centuries of black experiences in Latin America;[3] Peter Wade's discussion on race and ethnicity in Latin America;[4] and the extensive book edited by Appelbaum, Macpherson and Rosemblatt with articles discussing racial relations involving Blacks and Amerindians in Colombia, Peru, Cuba, Belize, Brazil, Mexico and Latin America in general.[5] The latest to add to this list is the popular work of Henry Louis Gates Jr. that uses interviews and bibliographic research to understand the concepts of blackness in Brazil, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Cuba, Mexico and Peru.[6]

This book, therefore seeks to add new perspectives on Black History in Latin America, exploring the strategies constructed by Africans and their descendants in the diaspora to identify and differentiate themselves in a manner that resisted the imposed patterns of inferiority, and to build networks that permitted them to deal with the harshness of their conditions in various parts of the continent.

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[2] Richard Graham, *The Idea of Race in Latin America, 1870-1940*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990).

[3] George Reid Andrews, *Afro-Latin America, 1800-2000*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

[4] Peter Wade, *Race and Ethnicity in Latin America*, (New York: Pluto Books, 1997).

[5] Nancy Appelbaum, Anne Macpherson and Karin Rosemblatt, *Race and Nation in Modern Latin America*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

[6] Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *Black in Latin America*, (New York: New York University Press, 2011).

Another Black Like Me is in this way an attempt to present a few cuts from the long history of Blacks in Latin America, in different periods and circumstances: as runaway slaves through the official documentation denouncing the illegality of those who resisted captivity; through the memoirs of a slave who still dreams of his homeland; reflections on the status of black women; the demands for citizenship and kinship from black immigrants; the fantasies of Blacks in the United States about the lives of Blacks in Brazil; a case of those who returned to Africa and there had to build a new identity based on their experiences as slaves; and the abstract representations of race and colour in the Caribbean. All to give the reader a glimpse of complex phenomena that, though they cannot be generalized in a single definition of blackness in Latin America, share one common element, which is the fate of living in societies where the definition of blackness is quite flexible, there are no laws of racial segregation, and where the culture is such that on one hand it tolerates miscegenation, and on the other denies full recognition of rights to Blacks.

By using the term Black, instead of Afro-Latin American or African Diaspora in Latin America, I am acknowledging the problematic situation in which blackness can be circumstantial, subjective, and even changeable. For Latin Americans, the main reference points in determining racial relations are the physical features (skin colour, hair type and shape of lips and nose), making it not uncommon to have Blacks, *morenos* and Whites among siblings. However, racial classification is heavily influenced by class, affection and education, as explored here by Simpson. In this way, a person can be seen as black by some and as *moreno* (or any other variation of colour denomination) by others, because of his economic status or education or because of affection.

The book focuses on a wide time frame, discussing issues related to identities and networks from slavery until recent decades. The reason for this is that Blacks in Latin America are still seen as strangers and the networks and strategies of identification still play a major role in the way the Afro-Latin American populations—including those in the Caribbean—adapt and resist in such hostile environments. The stigma generated by centuries of slavery and European domination was not erased by abolition and even today, after many achievements in equal rights and recognition, the black population in Latin America continues to struggle to prove that they belong in their homeland or in whatever country they decide to live as immigrants.

Starting with the title article, *Another Black Like me – strategies of identification among Afrodescendientes in Latin America* aims to give an overview of the questions of identification among Blacks in Latin America, from slavery up until the 20th century. It discusses how the identities could be created and manipulated to meet specific needs and how identities became a tool in resistance to domination and cultural annihilation under the pressures of hegemonic powers.

In the second chapter, *Transplanted West Indians: forgotten people on the western shores of the Caribbean Sea,* Ronald Harpelle explores in depth the fate of (black) Caribbean immigrants in Central America and their struggle to be recognized (and protected) as British by the British Empire at the turn of the 20th century. The presence of those immigrants in countries like Costa Rica, Guatemala, Belize, Panama, Honduras and Nicaragua challenges the national identities of those countries, that—except for Costa Rica, which asserts a white identity—have adopted the indigenous and *mestizo* as the symbol of their nationality, denying the importance of their black citizens.

Victor Simpson, in *Racial taxonomy in Puerto Rico and the Anglophone Caribbean,* uses literature to discuss the diversity of representations of blackness in the Caribbean, as opposed to the polarized definitions that prevail in the United States. Latin America and the Caribbean constructed over the centuries of miscegenation a variety of colour classifications that still have great influence on social life in those islands.

Also using the literature, Rhonda Collier analyzes the views of black poets on the racial issues of Cuba. Her article tackles the problems of racial discrimination and exclusion before and after the Cuban Revolution, utilizing references from the Afro-Cuban religion, *santería*. The article, *Mothering Cuba: the Poetics of Afro-Cuban Women*, gives voice to black women in Cuba, acknowledging their importance and incorporating the issues of gender and interracial sex alongside race into the problem of national identity.

Flavio Gomes describes and analyzes the phenomenon of runaway communities in northern South America in *Escape routes, mocambos and fears of sedition in Brazil and French Guiana during the 18th and 19th centuries.* The article brings a new perspective to the topic as it uses official documentation to analyze the transit of slaves across the borders between the two countries and the existence of maroon communities on both sides of the frontier. Apart from the diplomatic problems with respect to capturing escapees and exchanging prisoners, the fear of a black revolution that would follow the example of Haiti, the influence of the ideas of equality raised by the French Revolution, followed by the abolition of slavery in the French and British Caribbean were among the topics found in the documentation analyzed and that demand more comparative and transnational studies.

Also discussing slavery in the Amazonian region, Ygor Cavalcante's article—*Slave resistance and the notion of space: the case of Afro-Amazonians, 1850-1880*—deals with the perceptions of territory and freedom in the strategies used by slaves to escape from rural and urban properties. The author analyzes slavery in a region, the Brazilian Rain Forest zone, that is traditionally seen as not having had a significant number of African slaves. In addition, the article gives the reader the opportunity to visualize rivers and creeks as routes for runaways and traders amidst the jungle. The phenomenon of miscegenation in that area, heavily populated by Amerindian groups and a diverse number of Europeans, also gave space to a complicated representation of the slave, based on the skin tone and on other physical features that were quite subjective and is part of the argument in this chapter.

From a different perspective, Nielson Bezerra writes on the autobiography of a man who transited from freedom in Western Africa into slavery in Brazil and back to freedom in the United States. *The trajectory of Mahoman Bardo Baquaqua in Brazil: slavery, freedom and emancipation in the Atlantic World* utilizes the memoirs of Baquaqua as the main source for analyzing aspects of the daily life of an enslaved man, working as a sailor in Brazil, and his memories from his life in Africa. The personal narrative is combined with some official documentation that clarifies the roles of enslaved men in the nineteenth century coastal trade.

Luciana Brito, in *"Blend of Colours": African-American Abolitionists and their Perspectives on Race Relations in 19th century Brazil,* examines the uses of Brazil as a model for the non-conflictive racial relations that abolitionists in the United States were struggling to implement in their society. With the support of articles and books published around the mid-1800s, Brito offers an insight into African American abolitionists' views and representations of Brazil as a place of racial integration in contrast to the segregationists laws found in the United States at the time. The views of those abolitionists are based on superficial observations by travelers who, influenced by two main factors, namely the absence of segregation laws and the prevalence of interracial marriages, failed to identify the patterns of racial discrimination and exclusion in Brazil—and in Cuba and Puerto Rico.

The quest for identity is posed from a different angle in Marco Schaumloeffel's *Afro-Brazilian Diaspora in West Africa: the Tabom in*

Ghana, where the author analyzes a group that claims Brazilian identity in Ghana, to which they returned around the 1830s. The events surrounding this migration of Blacks from Brazil to Africa during a period of slavery calls for more investigation and is probably related to a slave rebellion occurring in Bahia during that period. This chapter introduces the problem and examines their strategies of identification as a differentiated group in Ghana, and that still preserves elements of the Brazilian culture of the 19th century.

The experiences of slavery in Latin America, influenced by the cultural norms of racial differentiation implemented by the colonial system and reinforced by the necessities of subordination, prevailed for more than four centuries, including the post-independence and nation building period of the 19th century. At that time, as nations constructed their national identities, the heavy influence of scientific racism became an ally to the desire of the elites to maintain the status quo by exploiting the labour force to the maximum. Part of the dynamics of inequality was to create differentiation based on physical features, to which scientific racism—reinvented in Latin America—provided a perfect argument.

Latin America managed to extend these dynamics of exclusion into the 20th century and even today the Afro-Latin Americans are struggling for recognition and equal rights and full citizenship. In the words of George Andrews:

> People of African ancestry are not the only ones who live in Afro-Latin America, of course. Whites, Indians, Asians and racially mixed people lived there, too, often (and since 1900, almost always) outnumbering the black population. Whether majority or minority, however, the black presence marks a specific historical experience shared by almost all the societies of Afro-Latin America: the experience of plantation agriculture and African slavery. This requires them to define their relationship to "blackness", the most visible and obvious indicator of low social status.[7]

Considering that blackness is the most important indicator of low social status and barriers to upward social and economic mobility, although not stated in legislation, and that miscegenation is very common in these societies, it is easy to conclude that personal success becomes more difficult as African features are more visible. In this way, what was once called a *pigmentocracy* is put in place, where lighter skin tones get a better chance of upward social mobility. That gave way to the culture of *whitening. Whitening* started as the practice of miscegenation, allied to the importation of more European immigrants who would increase the proportion of the white population in contrast to the black. However, whitening took place also in the cultural sphere, as elements of black culture were influenced by European patterns or simply forced to change or disappear, creating a culture of syncretism. In a way this culture has contaminated Latin American historiography, with studies of Afro-Latin Americans usually contained within the frames of slavery and condemned to invisibility in the 20th century.

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[7] George R. Andrews, p. 4.

This book is part of the struggle against that invisibility. What the reader will find here is parts of the extended research being undertaken by the authors and by those included in the bibliography.

I would like to thank all the contributors for their confidence and for their commitment to black history in Latin America. I also want to thank Andy Taitt, who patiently revised and formatted every text, and without whom this book would not be possible.

CHAPTER ONE

"ANOTHER BLACK LIKE ME": STRATEGIES OF IDENTIFICATION IN *AFRODESCENDIENTES* IN LATIN AMERICA

ELAINE PEREIRA ROCHA

When the issue is racial identification Latin America is known as a territory of contradictions. Latin societies are strongly marked by miscegenation and national obsession with being represented as modern (using European models of modernity) while trying to distance themselves from the backwardness traditionally associated with Africa. Therefore, blackness has been historically an undesirable element in their culture and in their population, resulting in racist attitudes and policies.

Strategies of self representation among Latin American societies follow irregular patterns of exclusion and inclusion, with unwritten norms for denial or acceptance of Blacks and mixed people as part of the select group that is intended to represent their countries. The only common element in this dynamic is the rejection of blackness and African descent and culture as an important component of the society, just as the indigenous element is accepted as part of the past, as the ancestral and mythic hero, that separates America from Europe, reinforcing the independence of the nations of the New World.

This paper discusses the politics of identification of African descendants in Brazil and other countries in Latin America, and how these identifications have influenced misconceptions about the origins of enslaved peoples and the stereotypes related to the African phenotype and its relation to behavior and ability. On the other hand in this game of belonging and not-belonging, the politics of self-identification have created networks and given self confidence to groups of Blacks who have managed to survive and overcome the challenges of being taken away from their homeland or being subjected to exploitation and abuse. Amidst the tensions of the external identifications or stereotypes and the challenges of a hostile environment, groups of African descent, part of the

African Diaspora, have created new identities and survived away from home creating cultural and political experiences that are quite peculiar and constantly changing over time and circumstances.

Some intellectuals, like Raymond Williams, have proposed a system that could explore the complexity of the cultural process as the product of the constant conflict between residual, dominant and emergent features of the culture and its eternal transformation. In the same line of thought, Michel De Certeau talks about the construction of tactics and strategies that people use to deal with the challenges of everyday life. In fact, the quest for identification, whether self-constructed or imposed by outsiders, is a matter that is related to cultural, social and political issues and that demands strategic adaptations and transformations in order to survive a hostile environment. This is not a phenomenon found only in Latin America or in societies that have experienced slavery, given that that there can be found, in every society, groups that differentiate themselves from others and have created reference points of identity as a means of self-organization and as a tool to deal with the challenges of negotiating with other groups.

At the base of every structure of identification are the cultural norms of differentiation that allow a group to distinguish between those who belong and outsiders. Normally the mechanisms of differentiation follow a pattern of the granting and denial of certain attributes. In this way we are fairly accustomed, for example, to reading “non-Whites” as a term to indicate everyone other than Caucasians. There is also the frequent use of negative characteristics such as uncivilized, unskilled and illiterate. These classifications are loaded with notions of hierarchy that separate those who have the required features from those who lack them. As explained by Simon Clarke,

> The question of difference is emotive; we start to hear ideas about “us” and “them”, friend and foe, belonging and not belonging, in-groups and out-groups, which define “us” in relation to others, or the Other.[1]

With the African population and the African Diaspora, as seen by outsiders, the definitions and classifications are part of the policies of domination and exploitation that must be justified by other notions of biological differences, added to religious, political, social and economic definitions that often put the Africans at a disadvantage, or as the group or groups defined in negative ways. The Africans would be those who combine the characteristics of "not having" this or that attribute with the idea of "not being", in contrast to the European groups that "have" the wanted qualities and therefore "are" superior.

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[1] Simon Clarke, "*Culture and Identity*." The SAGE Handbook of Cultural Analysis. 2008. SAGE Publications. 8 Aug. 2011. <http://www.sage-ereference.com/view/hdbk_culturanalysis/n24.xml>

Given the powerful influence of such discourses on Africans that have prevailed for centuries and are still unfortunately strong in the media and in academia, even the discourse that denounces racial exploitation is contaminated by these hierarchies of values translated into a victimization of the "poor" Africans by the "evil" European. In past decades, these views have been challenged by post-modern intellectuals, heavily influenced by those of African origin.

The first questions that must to be asked are: Who are the "Africans"? Are they Blacks? Can we use blackness as a synonym with Africanity?

The idea of "the Africans" as a collective only came about with colonization and the slave trade from Africa to other continents. At that time, external references would classify as "Africans" individuals from very diverse ethnic backgrounds, but fairly soon "Africans" became "Blacks" or "negroes". In a study on Somali immigrants in the United States and Canada, Abdi Kusow points out that among those interviewed about their experiences in those racialized societies, there was the common understanding that the Somalis did not see themselves as "Africans" or "Blacks", but mostly as Somali and Muslims.[2] Similarly, in my experience living in Ethiopia, I found that Ethiopians in general do not consider themselves as "Africans" or even "Blacks". Analyzing the same issue, my good friend Ochieng, from Kenya, explained to me that he used to think of himself only as a Luo, and of the other as Kikuyu or Maasai. It was only when he left his village to study in Nairobi that he discovered that they were "Africans".

Nevertheless, in the Americas, the enslaved African became the negro or the "Black" even if, only for issues of control of trade, people were classified according to their region of origin, usually the port of embarkation. Once in American territory, each colony—and later, each country, as in Brazil or the United States—would employ their own differentiations in classifying Africans, a common one being to designate newcomers as "Africans", separate from those born locally, often called *creoles*, *criollos* or *crioulos*, depending on the local language. The classifications could also determine other values. The same Africans, for example, were called *bozales* (Spanish America) or *boçais* (Brazil), designating those newcomers not able to speak the colonizer's language. At the same time, some believed that the *bozales* were stronger and more resilient workers. The African slave who had already mastered the language and customs of the masters were called *ladinos*, and were often seen as lazy and as scamps.

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[2] Abdi M. Kusow, "Migration and racial transformations among Somali immigrants in North America." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, vol. 32 (3), 2006, 533-51.

From colonial times, Latin American societies developed systems in which miscegenation between classes and races was tolerated and became common. The Spanish colonizers developed a long list of classifications for different forms of miscegenation, based on racial and colour schemes. Portuguese colonizers on the other hand simplified their classification into just a few categories, such as *negros, caboclos, mulatos, pardos, cabras* and *cafuzos*. Tolerance towards miscegenation does not mean the absence of racism in those societies. On the contrary, the entire colonial system relied on the assumption of European superiority over the indigenous, black and mixed populations, even though acceptance of a mixed person who had achieved economic power was not uncommon. In general, as in most parts of the world, in Latin America there is a hierarchy of race and colour that, if not obvious in legislation and national representations, is present in everyday attitudes, with consequences at each level of social life.

The differentiations and categorizations based on inventions and representations of colour, cultures, regionalisms, body features, and other abstractions have also generated other classifications that vary according to region, time, group or circumstance. In Brazil, for example, the historiography points to a predominance among the slaves taken from Africa during the 18th and 19th century of people originating in the region that today includes part of Nigeria, Benin and Togo, whose language was Yoruba. The major ports of arrival for those slaves were Salvador, Bahia and Rio de Janeiro where, despite their common origins, the Africans were classified in different ways. In Salvador, documentation related to slave registrations and trade referred to Africans as *Nagôs*, while in Rio de Janeiro they were called "*Pretos Mina*" (Mina Blacks), in reference to the major Portuguese slave trading port from where many people were taken to the Americas: the Forte São Jorge da Mina, or Elmina Castle.

João José dos Reis discusses the importance of ethnic and cultural identifications among slaves in 19th century Salvador, as they organized themselves in labour movements and urban rebellions, like the strike of 1857, when slaves of African origins working as porters in the city of Salvador halted activities for one week in protest against the imposition of taxes.[3] Reis also studies another movement in Bahia, the 1835 rebellion of Muslim slaves, where ethnic and religious characteristics were key in organizing hundreds of slaves who fought for freedom in the streets of Salvador.[4] In his words:

> Although the slaves involved in the movement could be of distinct regions of Western-Central Africa, in the documentation, they were identified and identified themselves as Nagôs. The self-identification as part of a large group was part of the strategy for unification and cooperation against the oppressions of the slave system, and a way of developing a network that would facilitate their survival in the hostile environment. It was also a way to differentiate themselves from the other Africans and *ladino* slaves.

In general, the enslaved had to adapt to slavery and to the new society and, indeed, it was essential to be able to negotiate their own identity in such a way as to create allies and to distinguish oneself from other groups. These types of strategies were useful for getting better jobs, especially in the case of urban slaves who had to find the means to provide services and make money for their masters. It was also important in the struggle for freedom or to achieve a higher status in a society through religious association, such as with the Catholic and Muslim brotherhoods.

The same group was seen differently in Rio de Janeiro. Internal trade and migration between the two most important cities of Brazil during the 19th century brought many Blacks from Bahia to Rio de Janeiro, especially after the uprisings of 1835, and many of the newcomers to Rio de Janeiro found means to re-organize themselves by keeping in contact with others from Bahia, or by introducing themselves into similar networks in the new place, where they were known as the *Minas*. The *Minas* had a reputation for being dangerous, rebellious, arrogant and difficult to control. They were also resilient and organized workers. Some among them were Muslims, some Catholic and others practiced other African religions.

According to Carlos Eugenio Soares, the Minas women in Rio de Janeiro's urban life were usually *quitandeiras* (hawkers), many of them prominent practitioners of African-rooted religions—another way to make extra money. But they were also a majority among the female runaway slaves reported in public notices and rarely left the urban areas, preferring to conceal themselves within the urban fabric with the help of other slaves or free peoples.[5]

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[3] João J. Reis, "The revolution of the ganhadores: urban labour, ethnicity and the African strike of 1857 in Bahia, Brazil." *Journal of Latin American Studies*, vol. 29(2), 1997, 355-93.

[4] João J. Reis, *Slave rebellion in Brazil: The Muslim uprising of 1835 in Bahia.* (Baltimore, John Hopkins University Press, 1995)

Ethnic categories of identification for black people were not restricted to slaves. Beatriz Mamigonian analyzed cases of re-captivated African men (those who arrived in Brazil after the abolition of the international slave trade and were considered free by law, but were put to the service of the State or rented out to employers) fighting for freedom, finding the same patterns of identification among the *Minas* in Rio de Janeiro and in São Paulo, who organized themselves for collective action against the State. In one of the cases studied, Mamigonian highlights the letter from Cyro, a re-captivated freeman imprisoned in a dispute with the person who hired his services. The message was written after the prisoner learnt of the death of his wife and that his two children had been sent to an orphanage. It was added to an official complaint by Dionisio Peçanha, Cyro's employer, to the Minister of Justice as proof of the danger represented by the African man, who identifies himself as a *Mina*.[6]

> Between the years 1820 and 1835, Nagôs, Jejes, Hausas and Tapas (Nupes) made up 57.3 percent of the Bahian African-born slave population. (…) Once landed in Bahia, these same slaves inevitably and fundamentally altered the African community's way of life. They also changed its internal structure, its sociocultural hierarchies, its strategies of alliance and interethnic conflict, and so on, as well as its relationship with the seigniorial class and the native inhabitants. This period (1800-1835) saw the Jeje-Nagô culture sweep over Bahia and become its dominant African culture. Also during these decades, African rebellions shook Bahian slave society.[7]

Cyro complained that this was the third letter he had addressed to Peçanha on the subject, so far with no response. He requested that his hirer go to the House of Correction next day to have his sons released and insisted that Peçanha obtain his immediate release. The liberated African added a threat: if his request were not fulfilled in three days,

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[5] Carlos Eugenio L. Soares, "Comércio, nação e gênero: as negras Minas quitandeiras no Rio de Janeiro 1835-1900," *Revista do Mestrado em História, Vassouras*, vol. 4(1), 2001/2002, 55-78.

[6] Beatriz Gallotti Mamigonian, "Do que o preto Mina é capaz: etnia e resistência entre Africanos livres," *Afro-Ásia,* 24, 2000, p. 90.

[7] Mamigonian, p. 140-1.

Peçanha "would discover what a Mina is capable of." He had written this note himself and signed "*Chiro Pisanjes Africano Livre*".[8]

Mary Karasch also discussed the ethnic group called *Mina* in Rio de Janeiro. Analyzing several sources, she concluded that there were differences among the Mina, and that despite being commonly associated with the Muslims, there were other Africans who shared the same identity.[9]

In some cases, documents would refer to the *Mina* group as synonymous with African. There is also the hypothesis that other men and women embraced the *Mina* identity, emphasizing aspects of dignity, belonging and strength that could rescue them from a status of being almost inhuman. There was also the aspect of acquiring means to survive through the network of extended families and brotherhoods that could bring a better job, loans, religious comfort, education (many of the enslaved and freeman *Mina* were literate), support and even a proper funeral.

More than three decades after abolition in Brazil (1888), most of the black porters or stevedores in Rio de Janeiro claimed to be Mina, even though by then the majority had been born in Brazil. The stevedores formed the oldest and most powerful labour union in Brazil. Their level of organization guaranteed better payment and working conditions for Blacks in times when there were no regulations to protect workers. Maria Cecilia Cruz refers to these workers and their high level of organization in Rio de Janeiro during the first decades of the 20th century. Given the large number of European immigrants who arrived in Rio de Janeiro at the time, the black porters there had to compete with European workers who, lacking the same organization, would accept lower pay. On some occasions the competition for work became violent with clashes between the two groups of workers.[10] Then the Mina identification disappears and the struggle becomes part of the tensions between black and white workers competing for the same jobs.

In other parts of Brazil and Latin America similar problems occurred between 1870 and 1930, a period in which European immigrant workers flowed into the continent. At that time, recently freed Blacks became unwanted workers in places where they had been enslaved for centuries. Treated worse than foreigners, they learned to build new networks in the urban centers where a great number had gone seeking employment in the construction boom that came with urbanization. These networks were built initially according to family ties, place of origin and religious affiliation, but later on would include neighborhood and profession or place of work. In some cases, as in Cuba, Blacks even formed a political party after abolition and independence, the Partido Independiente de Color, which challenged the white elite for political participation; in other cases, as in Brazil, they formed musical associations that progressively became the Samba Schools of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo.

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[8] Beatriz G. Mamigonian, "To be a liberated African in Brazil: labour and citizenship in the nineteenth century." PhD thesis, University of Waterloo, 2002, p. 254.

[9] Mary Karasch, *A vida dos escravos no Rio de Janeiro 1808-1850* (São Paulo, Companhia das Letras, 2000)

[10] Maria Cecilia V. Cruz, "Tradições negras na formação de um sindicato: sociedade de resistência dos trabalhadores em trapiche e café, Rio de Janeiro, 1905-1930," *Afro-Asia*, vol. 24, 2000, 243-290.

By the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries, Latin American countries were defining their national identity and at the same time trying to deal with the fact that the majority of their population was classified at the bottom of the scale created by scientific racism, one of the most prevalent ideologies in the contemporary period. As explained by authors like Richard Graham,[11] Thomas Skidmore,[12] Lilia Schwarcz[13] and George Andrews,[14] among others, the racial dilemma of Latin America revolves around the fact that these are countries of mixed populations, some with a large population of African descent, and therefore classified by scientific racism as inferior.

Two paths were found out of this biological condemnation: one was to argue that the "American Race", composed of mixed peoples (Blacks, Indigenous and Europeans) was superior because it would have inherited the best qualities of each racial group, being also more adaptable and able to survive;[15] the other was to promote *blanqueamento,* or whitening, a policy that consisted of importing more European immigrants to increase the white population and to make the local mixed population "whiter" by introducing more Caucasians in the racial mixing pool. Obviously, this idea would only work in Latin America, where colour and physical features are more important than blood ties in racial classification.

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[11] Richard Graham, *The idea of race in Latin America, 1870-1940* (Austin, Univ. Texas Press, 1997)

[12] Thomas Skidmore, *Black into white: race and nationality in Brazilian thought.* (Durham, Duke University Press, 1974).

[13] Lilia Schwarcz, *O espetáculo das raças: cientistas, instituições e questão racial no Brasil 1870-1930* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1993)

[14] Andrews.

[15] This theory was common in Latin American countries in the first decades of the 20th century, but it was better developed by José Vasconcelos in *La Raza Cósmica* (Madrid, Agencia Mundial de Libreria, 1925)
http://www.filosofia.org/aut/001/razacos.htm

The plan fit perfectly into Latin American aspirations, as governments created laws and decrees to increase the number of European immigrants, injecting federal funds to finance what was seen as entrepreneurship, contracting recruiting agents to attract European families, offering public land to those immigrants and facilitating their nationalization. On the other hand, a ban was needed on immigration of Blacks, along with other undesirable people who would compromise the national plan for racial redemption.

The Brazilian constitution of 1890 instituted a decree on immigration that specified that Asian and African immigrants should not be freely granted entry into Brazil, and could only be admitted on the authorization of the National Congress, and that diplomatic and consular agents and port police should prevent the disembarkation of those individuals, along with beggars and indigents.[16] The topic came into the public eye in 1921 when a group of African-Americans tried to emigrate to Brazil, supported by the Brazilian-American Colonization Syndicate which planned to buy land in the state of Mato Grosso, in the central part of Brazil, to accommodate the families. The news of this project was presented through the newspapers not only to Brazilian authorities but to the general public, causing general commotion and great debate. In general, Brazilian opinion was for rejecting this project on the grounds that the United States attempt to expel troublesome people involved in racial disputes to Brazil showed a lack of respect and consideration. Many also said that Brazil had solved its racial differences satisfactorily and the arrival of those individuals would initiate power disputes and instigate the kinds of racial conflict that existed in the United States.

However, during the first decades of the 20th century—while the southern and southeastern regions of Brazil were accepting European workers and their families as permanent immigrants—the northern states, complaining that the federal government was not supporting their demands to attract "good immigrants", started to receive another type of foreign workers: black immigrants.

West Indian immigrant workers arrived in Brazil from several islands of the Caribbean, but predominantly from Barbados. In the Amazon region they became known by the generic denomination of "Barbadianos". The workers were part of the great project of modernization that gave British companies contracts to construct railroads, tramlines, infrastructure for telegraphs and electricity, and to upgrade the harbours in the northern areas of Brazil. These immigrants managed to break through the barrier of immigration laws by entering the country as temporary workers, under the responsibility of the contractors. In the words of Brazilian historian Vicente Salles:

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[16] Skidmore.

> In fact, there was no conventional immigration. The migratory movement of Barbadians was directed by British capitalists who were granted successive contracts to carry out urbanization projects in Para and Amazonas. For that they needed skilled labourers, probably some who could speak the language and shared the same culture. The Barbadian Blacks, tamed by the English, were brought by ships of the Booth Steamship Co. Limited, which came from New York to Manaus, stopping in Barbados and Belém. Many of those workers were also taken to work in the construction of the Madeira-Mamoré railroad.[17]

Even so, they had to face the discontent of the local population who rejected the idea of bringing more Blacks into their midst and therefore delaying the process of whitening. In Belém do Pará, on the occasion of the arrival of a few Barbadian immigrants, journalists argued against the newcomers, comparing them negatively with the local Blacks, who were already accustomed to the Brazilian invisible barrier of racism, softened by the miscegenation that created the smiling and easygoing *pardos*. "...the *Barbadianos* were seen as 'ugly people', as intruders, (...) people with scowling faces..."[18]

The West Indians, or *Barbadianos*, formed an isolated community. First because of the language barrier, but soon because of their culture: notably because they were not Catholics and because they behaved differently from the local Blacks. These intruders, seem as "ugly people" of darker skin, contrasted with the locals as they dressed in the British style and refused to participate in the *batuques*, *sambas,* and cults of the *orixás*, like the other Blacks. In just a few years, they formed a very well structured group, calling themselves *barbadianos*, no matter they came from different islands, working hard to maintain their language and customs, and trying not to mix with the locals, whom they saw as backwards and inferior.[19]

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[17] Vicente Salles, *O negro no Pará sob o regime da escravidão*. 3ª. ed., (Belém, IAP, 2005), p. 84.

[18] Roseane C. Pinto Lima, *Ingleses pretos, barbadianos negros, brasileiros morenos? Identidades e memórias (Belém, séculos XX e XXI*). (Belem, Doctoral Thesis, Universidade Federal do Pará, Centro de Filosofia e Ciências Humanas, 2006) p. 24.

In less than 10 years, some of the *Barbadianos* had built their own businesses, such as bars, small hotels, taxis and clubs. But most preferred to rely on their jobs with the companies or, in the case of women, in the houses of high ranking British workers. As the community grew, they hired their own teachers from Barbados to educate their children in English and, as in Belém, they could attend the Anglican Church with an Anglican priest. Endogamy was encouraged as the *Barbadiano*s did not trust the locals and socialized among themselves. They continued to buy products from England or—when possible—from the islands and to identify themselves as subjects of the Empire.

Around the same time, thousands of West Indian migrants started to arrive in Panama to work in the construction of the Canal and related jobs. They were not the first ones; since the 1850s the zone had been receiving West Indian workers who moved there to work in constructing the railroad, contracted by British companies. However, from 1903 the numbers of these immigrants increased to a point that alarmed the local population and the authorities.

Panamanian society shares the beliefs of other Latin Americans that try to distance themselves from slavery and inferior races and at the same time to improve their self image through "whitening". Therefore it is no surprise that in 1904 the government of the newly created country of Panama passed a law that made the migration of West Indians to Panama illegal. Once again the black immigrants managed to overcome the prohibition, as they entered the country under the protection of foreign companies, as "contracted workers", therefore, not expected to become part of the population, but to leave Panama at the end of their contracts. What was at first accepted as a temporary situation became a national problem as the Panamanians realized that some of those workers were not going back to their places of origin. Public concerns about black immigrants spread among the population who feared the immigrants would cause their society to degenerate, holding them back in the race towards whitening, seen as mandatory in the process of modernization.

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[19] For more information on West Indian immigrants in northern Brazil see Dante Fonseca and Marco Antonio Teixeira, "Barbadianos: os trabalhadores negros caribenhos da estrada de ferro Madeira Mamoré" in Teixeira, Fonseca and Angenot (eds.), *Afros e Amazônicos: estudos sobre o negro na Amazônia* (Porto Velho, Edufro/Rondoniana, 2009), p. 137-66; Menezes, Nilza, *Chá das cinco na floresta* (Campinas, Kimedi, 1998); Ma. Roseane C. Pinto Lima, *Ingleses pretos, barbadianos negros, brasileiros morenos? Identidades e memórias (Belém, séculos XX e XXI*). (Belem, Doctoral Thesis, Universidade Federal do Pará, Centro de Filosofia e Ciências Humanas, 2006); Elaine Rocha and Frederick Alleyne, "Millie gone to Brazil: Barbadian migration to Brazil in the early 20th century." *Journal of the Barbados Museum and Historical Society*, vol. 58, 2002, 1-42.

Marixa Lasso argues that despite Panama having had a local black population since colonial times, when the country was still Colombian territory, Blacks were seem as inferior to mestizos and Whites. However, after the arrival of a large number of West Indians in the country, the category of blackness was applied only to foreign Blacks.[20]

At first, the West Indian workers were accused of stealing jobs from Panamanian workers; there was also animosity based on the foreign workers being paid better salaries than locals. Although working and living conditions in the Canal Zone during the construction years were far from desirable, foreign workers were seen as privileged by those struggling to find steady employment there.

> Panamanian society has constantly questioned the right of the Chinese and West Indian community to become Panamanians. In 1904, one year after the formation of the Republic, law declared them races of prohibited immigration, a status that was reinforced by successive laws and culminated in the 1941 constitution that denied citizenship to the races under the category of prohibited immigration.[21]

Velma Newton states that by 1921 a total of 13,319 West Indians had been repatriated. Still, a great number of those workers stayed behind. Many of them had formed family ties with locals, some had opened small businesses in the area, and many could see no job opportunities in the islands and decided that prospects in their homeland were no better than what they had overcome in the foreign land. The Panama Canal Zone was politically isolated from the rest of the country, as the United States government ruled the zone and everything to do directly or indirectly with the construction, workers included. Discrimination, based on Jim Crow laws, was enforced in the hierarchical system among the Canal workers. Given this, West Indian workers were doubly isolated: from the local workers, as they resided inside the Canal Zone, and from white workers, who were given better living standards. As the years went by, without decent prospects of life in their home countries, the West Indian workers renewed their contracts, got married to Caribbean or local women and started families. It then did not take long for the Caribbean workers to create their own living/social spaces, creating dancing and sports clubs, churches, schools, fairs and other events.[22]

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[20] Marixa Lasso de Paulis, “Race and ethnicity in the formation of the Panamanian identity: Panamanian discrimination against Chinese and West Indians in the thirties,” *Revista Panameña de Política*, n. 4, 2007, 61-92.

[21] de Paulis.

Barbadian and Jamaican were the predominant nationalities; however, they used their West Indian identity to separate themselves from the local Blacks, called *Congos,* and to deal with job related issues. Aside from being a racial category of identification, West Indian became a category of worker in the Canal Zone, one that gave them an advantage in negotiating better work and living conditions.

After the inauguration of the Canal, in 1914, some West Indians decided to stay put and negotiated contracts to work in the maintenance and operation of the Canal; others engaged as field workers or overseers or skilled workers in the banana plantations, also controlled by US capitalists, while a small group managed to buy some land and establish themselves as banana farmers. Others opened small businesses in the two main cities: Colón and Panamá. The hostilities between West Indians and Panamanians prevailed during the 20th century, as the children and grandchildren of those foreign Blacks held on to their West Indian identity even though after two generations they could hardly consider themselves Jamaicans, Barbadians, or Trinidadians, etc. and had adopted the Spanish language.

In the 1930s the West Indians were the target of a nationalist campaign that identified them with the imperialist Yankees. In 1932, of 17,407 non-American workers in the Panama Canal, 10,115 were West Indians, as opposed to 4,474 Panamanians. There were about 50,000 people in the West Indian community in the same period, however, a Panamanian law passed in 1929 denied citizenship to West Indian children until they reached adulthood and the police made a point of criminalizing the black foreigner.[23]

The persecution only increased the isolation, as the West Indians were left with no choice but to provide education for their children in their own English speaking schools, and to avoid socializing and doing business outside of their community. It also made community ties and the West Indian identity grow stronger, because the Caribbean descendants embraced their identity to differentiate themselves from the locals, claiming cultural superiority, meaning being more educated, better work skills, and—from the second generation on—being bilingual, as they could master English and Spanish.

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[22] Velma Newton, *Silver Men: West Indian Labour Migration to Panamá 1850-1914* (Kingston, Ian Randle Publishers, 2004)

[23] de Paulis.

A similar phenomenon occurred in Costa Rica among those identified as *"Jamaiquinos"*, West Indian immigrant workers from different islands but predominantly from Jamaica, who established a community in the east coast province of Puerto Limón from around 1870 and which is still the most important locus of Afro-Caribbean culture in the country. However, it is probable that Caribbean migration to Costa Rica and other Central American countries started earlier, around the middle of the century, as individual enterprises that are quite difficult to trace. The post-emancipation period in the British Caribbean was marked by economic crisis and political and social exclusion, aggravated by the limited access to land ownership for former slaves and the maintenance of the colonial administrative structure that kept Blacks and Coloureds out of power, and by occasional natural disasters such as hurricanes or droughts.[24] In response, many individuals left their homeland seeking a better life elsewhere. The railroad project was taken over by the American Henry Meiggs Keith, who turned towards the British Caribbean for cheaper workers, given the lack of interest among Costa Rican workers who preferred to avoid the tribulations of the east coast with its dense forests and accompanying dangers and tropical diseases.[25]

There, too, the black immigrant was unwelcome. The racist ideologies of the 19th century, as discussed before, had a strong influence on Costa Ricans' notions of national identity and modernity. The country became independent in 1925 and was built on the notion that Costa Rica was a white nation, closer to Spain than to indigenous communities and denying any African roots, despite a history of African slavery and the fact that part of the population was a mix of Whites and Blacks and *Índios*. Slavery was abolished in 1823.

In 1862, the nation's leaders had promptly reacted to rumours, that United States president Abraham Lincoln was planning to create a colony of black immigrants in Central America, by passing the *Ley de Bases y Colonización* that, among other things, was to protect Costa Rica from undesirable immigrants, mainly Chinese and people of African descent. At the same time, the law created a means of supporting government policies to attract European immigrants. The demand for workers in the railroad and the company's preference for Caribbean workers forced the government to be more flexible and to accept labourers from the prohibited races.[26]

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[24] Erna Brodner, *The Second Generation of Freemen in Jamaica, 1907-1944.* (Gainesville, University Press of Florida, 2004)

[25] Ronald Harpelle, *The West Indians of Costa Rica. Race, Class and the Integration of an Ethnic Minority* (Kingston, Ian Randle Publishers & McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001)

As in the cases of Panama and Brazil, the construction of the railroad opened the country to other Caribbean immigrants who would take other jobs, create small businesses or small farms to make some money. Harpelle gives the case of the female immigrants who

> ... arrived in the region as daughters, sisters, wives, and mothers of the workers. Since they were seldom contracted for work in the West Indies they were not counted as part of the labour drive and the details of their arrival are less clear. Nevertheless, thousands of women did make their way to the region, where they too found employment in and around the construction project.[27]

The presence of West Indian women facilitated adaptation to the new environment and to overcoming isolation. Carmen Hutchinson-Miller explores the construction of a Jamaican way of life in Puerto Limón, where the Jamaican version of English, the *patois*, became the spoken language among all immigrants and the identity also shifted from West Indian to Jamaican. According to the author, women supported their families often not with regular jobs but by keeping house, and by occasional self-employment as laundry women, nannies, cooks or seamstresses, or by selling food, and keeping vegetable gardens and small animals like chickens, goats and pigs in their backyard.[28]

The Jamaicans of Puerto Limón faced discrimination and isolation. Federal authorities paid little attention to the needs of the province such as health, education and transport services. The community tried to manage their own needs by hiring teachers and priests, for example, reinforcing the Anglo-Caribbean culture and the differentiation between Costa Ricans and the Jamaicans of Puerto Limón.

When work on the construction of the railroad finally ended in 1910, there was a new generation of workers, born in Costa Rica of Caribbean descent, to whom the host country denied citizenship. Some found employment in services and maintenance related to the railroad, others moved on to work for the United Fruit Company in the banana plantations.

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[26] Harpelle.

[27] Harpelle, 13-14.

[28] Carmen Hutchinson-Miller. "The Province and Port of Limón: Methaphor for Afro-Costa Rican Black identity," PhD dissertation, University of the West Indies, Cave Hill, Barbados, 2011.

Authors like Ronald Harpelle and Aviva Chomsky[29] agree that the construction of the railroad between San José and Puerto Limón opened a connection between the capital and the Atlantic coast, inserting the Caribbean coast of the country—which had been neglected for centuries—into the capitalist system and making it possible for the United Fruit Company to implement a modern form of agro-business with the development of banana plantations in the region.

West Indian struggles in Costa Rica also need to be framed within the context of experience of capitalism and modernization. This distinction is important because it speaks to the ability of West Indian migrants to deal with the issues they confronted as they participated in the emergence of United Fruit as a modern multi-national corporation. Like the fruit company, the West Indian community in Costa Rica was transnational, adaptable, and complex, and so were their responses to the challenge they faced.[30]

Considering similar analysis in Eric Hobsbawm's *Age of Capitalism*,[31] it is important to note that while other immigrants in this period, mainly from Europe and Asia, were settling in several countries to work in manufacturing, commerce, and other activities related to the modernization and transition of economies from agricultural to industrial, West Indian immigrants, as stated above by Harpelle, were foreigners adapting to life as workers for foreign companies in the hosting countries, thereby multiplying their challenges.

The expansion of the United States business in Costa Rica contributed to another wave of West Indian immigrants, again with a predominance of Jamaicans. It is estimated that more than 20,000 Caribbean workers migrated to Costa Rica between 1870 and 1940. The arrival of the West Indian immigrants was key to the development of the Province of Limón. The population of the provincial capital rose from 1,000 in 1875 to 32,278 in 1927, with 57% of African descent.[32] In 2010 the census taken by the government of Costa Rica counted a population of about 450,000 people in the province, of whom at least 225,000 were of Afro-Caribbean descent.

Similar to Panama, the economic crisis of the 1930s affected the West Indian community of Costa Rica more than it did the rest of the country.

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[29] Ronald Harpelle, *The West Indians of Costa Rica*; Aviva Chomsky, *West Indian Workers and the United Fruit Company in Costa Rica, 1870-1940* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 1996)

[30] Ronald Harpelle*, West Indians of Costa Rica,* 17.

[31] Eric Hobsbawm, *The age of capital 1848-1875*. (New York, Random House, 1975).

[32] Ronald Harpelle, *West Indians of Costa Rica,* 19.