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Cosmopolitan Theory and Anthropological Practice in Brazil

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In relation to the theme of this volume – to inquire into transformations marked by knowledge-making projects and the role played by intellectuals – in this chapter I will focus on Brazilian anthropologists. In considering how impoverished or marginalized communities become integrated into global claims about the human condition, I analyze the efforts of Brazilian anthropologists on behalf of rural black communities in the northeastern backlands in light of cosmopolitan theory.

This chapter is based on research I conducted in Sergipe, the smallest state in Brazil and the northern neighbor of Bahia. Until 1823, Sergipe was part of Bahia, although in early colonial days it had been a captaincy in its own right. Even today there are some who believe that parts of Bahia should belong to Sergipe. In true boundary-setting practice, *sergipanos* insist that they are not like *baianos*. However, like Bahia, Sergipe shares an important geographic reality, a rainy coastal area, best-suited for sugar cane production, and a semi-arid interior, known as the *sertão*, where cattle raising is predominant. I carried out ethnographic research in the *sergipano* sertão not far from the point where Bahia, Sergipe, and Pernambuco converge. It was here that a large-scale messianic movement – the Canudos movement – arose and was then destroyed by government troops at the end of the 19th century.

It is also the region where the famous bandit Lampião and his band were captured and beheaded in 1938.

What follows is part of a larger book project about this region in which I develop a model for understanding how law can work to instigate revisions in ethnoracial identity and cultural practices. I focus on the two neighboring communities of the Xocó Indians and Quilombo Mocambo. Each was recognized and provided land within the last thirty years, the Xocó in 1979 under the Indian Statute of 1973 (full land title received in 1991) and Mocambo in 1997 under the 1988 Constitution's *quilombo* clause (full land title received in 2000).[1] My work addresses the ways that, in a place with many African-descended people, in a state that is largely nonwhite, these two *sertanejo* communities have asserted distinctive identities and rights to land. I am also interested in how they have succeeded with the crucial assistance of a number of forces, including NGOs, government lawyers, Catholic Church and political activists, and, most importantly for this chapter, anthropologists.

"COSMOPOLITAN HOPE" AND ANTHROPOLOGICAL PRACTICE

When I mention cosmopolitan theory to U.S. anthropologists I am generally told, "Anthropologists have always been cosmopolitan. So what's new?" Yet as I began to delve into the literature on cosmopolitanism, it occurred to me that the anthropologists I was talking to were referring to a preanalytic understanding of the concept. In the general sense, anthropologists from the global North travel and do their research at a variety of sites, speak multiple languages, and although traditionally concerned with cultural specificity and, more recently, with group rights, they have always debated and worked to reconcile that ostensible Boasian legacy with a universalistic concept

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1. The *Quilombo* Clause (Transitory Article 68) provides that descendants/remnants (*remanescentes*) of *quilombo* (runaway slave/maroon) communities occupying their lands are recognized as owners, and the State shall issue them titles to the land. Consequently, the shortcut "*quilombo*" is used to designate a descendant of fugitive slave community, although technically there are no existing *quilombos*, since slavery was abolished in 1888.

of human rights (Engle). For example, there have been a number of recent attempts to resurrect the universalist aspects of Boas's career (see, e.g. Bunzl; Orta). Brazilian anthropologist Alcida Ramos ("Disengaging" 480) critiques these attempts with a sharp reproach that selective *ex post facto* readings of Boas's popular writings are being proposed now to show that "what for so many years lay dormant in the folds of anthropological memory, submerged by successive waves of theoretical novelties, reemerges as ancestral wisdom with the potential to rescue the discipline from a pending impasse." In a more fine-tuned analysis of the universalism of Boas, in this case in the context of the "failure of vernacular cosmopolitanisms," Charles Briggs (76, 78, 91) productively reflects on "the problem with Boas's notion of culture" which he states "lies not in its isolation from a broader critique of state and racial power," but rather "how [Boas] positioned 'culture' in relation to consciousness, science, colonialism, and cosmopolitanism" echoing through his commitment to rationality and modernity what Briggs calls "purifying practices."

Here I would like to investigate the role of anthropologists in *quilombo* and Indian recognitions in light of cosmopolitan theory. As such, I will focus on a theoretical development that might assist us in understanding the collaborative nature of, and the nature of collaboration in, the production of new ethnoracial identities in northeastern Brazil. New interest in theorizing cosmopolitanism in relation to anthropology has led to a burgeoning of literature (see e.g. Briggs; Friedman; Kahn; Kuper; Marsden; Notar; Tsing; Werbner) and the development of "Cosmopolitan Studies" as a field. For example, the St. Andrews' Social Anthropology department has a Center for Cosmopolitan Studies, and Keele University sponsored a high-level conference on cosmopolitanism and anthropology in 2006. Beth Notar provides a condensed history of cosmopolitanism from the Stoics through Kant to a revival in the 19th century and to Hannah Arendt's vision of "a revival of cosmopolitan ideals as a way…to guard against the extreme fascism of WWII" (620). Most recently, the re-emergence of cosmopolitanism "as a topic of interdisciplinary study" may be seen as an "intellectual response to the perceived political dangers of isolationism, nationalism, [and] factionalism" (620). In its current permutation, cosmopolitanism is seen as a "continuous openness to the world" and a "capacity to interact across cultural lines" (618).

Moreover, Dorothy Hodgson (225) in a point particularly relevant to my field site sees a "dynamic relationship between cosmopolitan political projects such as the indigenous peoples' movement and the nation-states in which participants are inevitably located." In other words, what anthropologists have begun to discover is that backlanders in far reaches of the world are becoming cosmopolitans without going anywhere and that construction of new ethnoracial identities are an integral part of their cosmopolitanism.

A related trend that has attracted a fair amount of attention in U.S. anthropology is an interest in advancing a "critically engaged activist" practice (Hale; Speed), in its most sophisticated form. However, I believe that recent concerns with anthropological activism have short-circuited a full discussion of the role that requirements of "authentic" culture play in perpetuating an assumed dichotomy between cosmopolitanism (in its negative Bushite militaristic permutation [Briggs 94] or its positive universal human rights representation) and cultural specificity (in its negative relativistic version or its positive liberal multiculturalism variety). It is my goal to demonstrate that Brazilian anthropologists together with *quilombolas*[2] seeking government (and international) recognition are together constructing a form of cosmopolitanism that links universal expectations associated with human rights and an activist vision and politics of the Black Atlantic that draws on "subaltern cosmopolitan legality" (Santos and Rodríguez).

Boaventura de Souza Santos (Santos, "Toward;" Santos and Rodríguez Garavito) helps us understand cosmopolitanism in its counterhegemonic form, as "animated by a redistributive ethos in its broadest sense, involving redistribution of material, social, political, cultural, and symbolic resources" (Santos and Rodríguez Garavito 29). For this, he explains, we need "alternative principles of law and politics" that "combine political mobilization with legal mobilization" (30). In fact, "subaltern cosmopolitan legality views law and rights as elements of struggles that need to be politicized before they are legalized" (16). This is an aspect of cosmopolitan theory particularly suited for analyzing the extraordinary story of *quilombo* recognitions in Brazil. For

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2. *Quilombolas* are residents of *quilombos* who have been recognized as being descended from fugitive slaves, although often being "black" is sufficient.

these reasons, I believe it is useful to focus on scholars centered in the global South so we are able to conceptualize a more processual and less polarized meaning of "cosmopolitan anthropology" (Werbner) often viewed as a practice principally tethered to travel (Clifford).

I will not rehearse the political philosophical discussions of the Kantian foundations of cosmopolitanism as world citizenship which entails subjecting all relations to the test of uncoerced interaction and impartial reason. Rather, in what follows I will point out insights from that field which might serve as a gateway to the application of cosmopolitan theory to anthropology and move us toward a reinterpretation of the practices and political commitments of Brazilian anthropologists (cf. Hemming; Pacheco de Oliveira; Peirano 1985, 1998; Ramos 1990, 2000, 2008; Velho). David Held (18-20), for example, has developed a "layered cosmopolitan perspective" that "lays down the universal or regulative principles which delimit and govern the range of diversity and difference that ought to be found in public life." In a Habermasian move, Held builds on principles that all can "reasonably" assent to, "while recognizing the irreducible plurality of forms of life." Disagreeing with a "strong" form of cosmopolitanism he associates with Martha Nussbaum, in which special relationships (or loyalties) to family, kin, nation can never be justified, Held's layered perspective draws instead on a "weak" form, drawing on the work of Michael Walzer, asserting that while each person stands in "an ethically significant relation" to all other people, this is only one source of responsibility (17). In fact, Held asserts, cosmopolitan principles are compatible with recognition of different "spheres" or "layers" of moral reasoning.

Adopting Held's "layered" perspective allows us to consider how national laws might advance cosmopolitan values (and vice versa) in practice. Catriona McKinnon's explication of "cosmopolitan hope" provides a theoretical bridge to understanding the role of many Brazilian anthropologists in advancing a cosmopolitan project together with their interlocutors who live in villages in the backlands of the Northeast. McKinnon (236) tells us that cosmopolitans hope for "the extension of commitments to justice at the domestic level...to the global level." However, they do not hope in the colloquial sense of the word, but rather theirs is a "specific hope" or perhaps more accurately, a practical hope, by which is generated "a disposition to act so as to

make the realization of hope's objective more probable whenever possible," which also involves a belief that an objective is "physically possible" (237, 238). In a similar vein, Catherine Lu (264) explains that a cosmopolitan ethic requires not only an acknowledgment of the humanity of others, but also intervention "against active and passive injustice," thus making "difficult but possible demands" on those dedicated to its ethic.

It is my contention that a requirement of "authenticity" for government recognition is an impediment to a collaborative production of cosmopolitanism, as envisioned by Santos and Rodríguez Garavito, Held, McKinnon, and Lu. To that end, a key point that emerges from my research is that recognition proceedings in Brazil no longer require proof of cultural or historical "authenticity." In the cases of the over forty indigenous tribal recognitions in northeastern Brazil since the early 1970s, anthropological expert reports that explicitly reflect the constructed nature of ethnic and cultural identities have not impeded recognition. With respect to *quilombos*, although the media and public have often associated the *quilombo* movement with 'African' cultural practices, proof of connections to 'Africa' have not been required for recognition (French "Buried Alive"). Perhaps even more important, historical proof of descent from runaway slaves, after an initial set of objections by some scholars (e.g. Price), has not been required since the mid-1990s, and in fact has been eschewed (French "Dancing"). In my view, adherence to the necessity for authenticity is the primary impediment to developing a fruitful, alternative cosmopolitan project (French "Legalizing"). I assert this in spite of the attraction that Gayatri Spivak's "strategic essentialism" holds as a workaround for advancing subaltern political and economic causes while holding in abeyance the fundamental problem that requiring "authenticity," a notion that continues to haunt the social sciences, creates for cosmopolitanism. By wrapping undesirable segments of the population in a cloak of "authenticity," it is hoped that tolerance will be advanced. However, we must ask, after Wendy Brown, is "tolerance" what we are in the market for? For this reason, the Brazilian case is ideal for investigating the relationship between authenticity and cosmopolitanism.[3]

3. In other settings, such as eco- and ethno-tourism, similar issues arise (see e.g. Bruner).

ANTHROPOLOGISTS AND THE QUILOMBO CLAUSE

The case of the Quilombo Clause of the 1988 Brazilian Constitution is useful for illuminating this relationship. The enactment of that clause expressed a desire for justice as a legal requirement on a domestic level: poor rural black communities who could show (in some form) that they were descended from *quilombos* were to be recognized as such and given title to the land they were living on, even if it meant divesting other landowners (large or small) of their title to the same land. But the requirement of proving descent from actual runaway slaves did not last long. As will be shown in this section, anthropologists were instrumental in loosening the requirements for recognition – a move that created vast opportunities for previously-designated rural black communities who often lived in shame of being "black" to connect to larger transcontinental movements for recognition and rights by national governments. As an expression of a "cosmopolitan hope," in addition to extending domestic efforts to global commitments to justice, the expansion of what it meant to be a *"quilombo"* also extended global hope for justice to the domestic arena.[4]

During the first half decade of its existence, the Quilombo Clause was interpreted to require for any community claiming to be a *quilombo* (anachronistic, but colloquial term for *remanescente de quilombo*) historical evidence of descent from an actual runaway slave community. By virtue of a process I call "post-legislative negotiation," activists and particularly anthropologists (with their history of political commitment) were instrumental in broadening the definition so that by the beginning of the new century the proof required for recognition had opened up such that the expression of a desire to be considered a *quilombo* (self-identification) was sufficient to meet the requirement (French *Legalizing*). It must be noted that recognition is only the first step to receiving title to land, a complex process that has been moved between government agencies more than once and which, unsurprisingly, has been controversial. As of April 2008, only eighty-two communities had received title out of 1,200 that had been certified as *quilombos*. However, recognition itself has brought important

4. An example of this is the 2001 Durban World Conference against Racism, in which Brazil was an important participant.

resources and aid from the Brazilian government and international attention that has also attracted concrete assistance, raised consciousness of the history of African slavery in Latin America, and has been instrumental in the revision of identities and cultural practices (French *Legalizing*).

In October 1994, the Association of Brazilian Anthropologists (ABA) constituted a "working group on rural black communities."[5] This was done under the presidency of João Pacheco de Oliveira, the anthropologist who coined the expression "ethnogenesis" in Brazil to indicate the process by which peasants were able to reassert an indigenous identity ("Povos," "A Viagem"). In 1987 Pacheco engineered an exclusive contract between ABA and the federal government requiring the government to engage only ABA anthropologists (rather than engineers or agronomists) as experts to produce the reports required by law for indigenous tribal recognition. The ABA working group issued a statement that defined *"remanescentes de quilombo"* through a series of negatives: "the term does not refer to residual or archaeological relics of occupation in time or of biological proof ... not as isolated groups or of a population strictly homogeneous ... not necessarily formed by insurrectionary or rebellious past." Rather, in the ABA's 1994 "Documento do Grupo de Trabalho sobre Comunidades Negras Rurais," they were defined as

> groups that developed practices of resistance in the maintenance and reproduction of their ways of life characterized in a determined place. The identity of these groups is not defined by size and number of members but by the lived experience and the shared values of its common trajectory and of its continuity as a group. They constitute ethnic groups conceptually defined by anthropology as an organizational type that confers belonging through norms and methods employed by indicating affiliation and exclusion (Barth). As to territoriality, the occupation of land is not by individual lots, with common use predominating. The utilization of these areas obeys seasonality of activities...characterizing different

5. The working group was composed of Ilka Boaventura Leite (UFSC), Neusa Gusmão (UNESP), Lúcia Andrade (Comissão Pro-Índio), Dimas Salustiano da Silva (Lawyer, Maranhão human rights organization), João Batista Borges Pereira (USP), Eliane Cantarino O'Dwyer (UFF-Treasurer), João Pacheco de Oliveira (UFRJ-President).

forms of use and occupation of space that take for their base, kinship and neighbor ties based on relations of solidarity and reciprocity.[6]

In 1996 a member of the group and strong proponent of a broad-ened view of *quilombo*, Eliane Cantarino O'Dwyer, visited Mocambo, which would later become my research site in Sergipe. There she arranged for an anthropologist and student of João Pacheco, José Maurício Arruti, to research its possible *quilombo* status.[7] Within a bit over a year, Arruti's report was published in the federal register and Mocambo, by this point officially designated a *quilombo*, was visited by national and international figures. It also began sending leaders of the community to regional, national and international meetings, just as their neighbors, the Xocó Indians, have done since their 1979 recognition.

The role of the anthropologist, Arruti, cannot be overstated. He worked with the elder members of the community to bring family sto-ries into the open and to assist in resignifying them as slave narratives. This led to, among other things, a play produced by the Mocambo teenagers intended as a celebration of *quilombo* identity that is still performed today (French "Buried Alive"). In each visit since his first, Arruti has aided in writing letters and discussing strategies for dealing with internal factionalism and slowness in federal responses to needs.[8]

Another case of the embodiment of "subaltern cosmopolitan legal-ity," was that of a nun and lawyer turned legal anthropologist, Mariza Rios. In the first days of the land struggle that would become a bid for *quilombo* recognition, Rios not only introduced the possibility of "becoming" a *quilombo*, but created mnemonics for the rural workers to remember which legal category they needed to use when testifying in the local court against the injunction actions instituted by powerful

6. My translation.

7. O'Dwyer was quoted in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* a few years later as being "worried that a narrow interpretation could defeat the spirit of the law, excluding other rural groups that need land. But at the same time Article 68 has opened a space for negotiation that didn't exist for rural people before. The govern-ment is looking at other issues, such as a group's autonomy, and not just its link to slavery'" (Mooney).

8. Although not Brazilian, I was also involved in the production of cosmopoli-tanism through my presence at meetings with the federal attorney during the year Mocambo received its title.

landowners (French *Legalizing*). Notably, Mariza Rios herself was born to a poor family in 1958, the youngest of nine children. After returning from a stint as a nanny at the age of eleven (while she was also attending school), Mariza worked in a shoe factory and attended high school at night. In her teens, she became involved with a youth group run by a congregation of nuns, and by the time she was 21, she had taken her vows. After two years as a missionary working with onion farm laborers in the interior of Bahia, she went to Rio de Janeiro to study law. Most recently, she studied legal anthropology with Boaventura de Souza Santos as part of a masters degree received with the financial assistance of the Ford Foundation. The mutual production of cosmopolitanism can be seen in the relationships of both Arruti and Rios with the people living in Mocambo, four hours by rutted road from the capital of the smallest state of Brazil.

These brief examples shed light on the intellectual practices that should contribute to a further theorizing of cosmopolitan theory and anthropology. Similar processes are unfolding in relation to the case of the Xocó Indians, who also live in the region. However, there is one crucial lesson to be drawn from this initial discussion, which is that requirements of authenticity are inimical to the production of cosmopolitanism. There is widespread agreement among sociocultural anthropologists worldwide that identities – even ethnic and racial ones – are socially constructed. Less understood are the processes by which social identities are conceived and developed. Theories such as "subaltern cosmopolitan legality" help us see how domestic law can successfully serve as the impetus for the transformation of collective identity and provide critical connection to global justice. Recognition and land title were won by the village of Mocambo and their neighbors, the Xocó, over the last couple of decades even though, and perhaps because, anthropologists called upon to assess the validity of their claims recognized that their identities were "constructed." The positive outcome of their claims demonstrates that authenticity is not a prerequisite for identity. Nor is authenticity a prerequisite for membership in a cosmopolitan community. In fact, authenticity is a barrier to cosmopolitanism. For these reasons, I suggest that through the prism of Brazilian anthropological practice, it is possible to theorize a production of cosmopolitanism that obliterates the false dichotomy between cultural specificity and universal human rights.

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