

Orientalism in One Country? Race, Region, and Nation in 20th-Century Brazil

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.20501/pf340/2016.15-28/05>

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Abstract: This article considers the different approaches to the problem of regional inequalities within nations in Latin America, and specifically in Brazil. Beginning in the 1960s, scholars used “internal colonialism” to analyze these inequalities, but this concept fell out of fashion in the 1980s with the post-structuralist/cultural turn. Yet dramatic regional inequalities continued to be a feature of Latin American societies. This article suggests adapting Edward Said’s concept of “orientalism” to the processes by which difference gets produced to naturalize regional inequalities, and then explores the way this “internal orientalism” emerged in the increasingly dominant region of São Paulo, especially vis à vis the “Norte” or “Nordeste.” In particular, it looks at the 1932 regionalist movement known as the Revolução Constitucionalista, in which the insurgent state government of São Paulo took up arms against the federal government, and declared its unwillingness to be subordinated to the authority of politicians from “inferior” regions. This period of intense paulista chauvinism allows us to see the way in which regional difference became racialized, and how São Paulo’s claims to modernity became associated with whiteness. At the same time, São Paulo’s location within the same nation as its regional opponents limited the degree to which it could maintain political and cultural hegemony, even as it remained Brazil’s economic “locomotiva.”

Keywords: Orientalism; Regionalism; Constitutionalism.



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In 1965 the Mexican sociologist, Pablo González Casanova, published a seminal article entitled “Internal Colonialism and National Development,” thereby coining a term that would soon become common currency among historians and social scientists. It is not surprising that the concept of internal colonialism emerged from Latin America, a region where concerted and concentrated efforts at industrialization had intensified already existing patterns of uneven development. At the same time, internal colonialism proved to be a perfect example of an “idea that travels” – one that could quickly sever its moorings to the Latin American context and be deployed in other national and regional settings. Over the next twenty years, this concept—internal colonialism—would appear in studies on dozens of different national contexts; scholars used it to explore the causes and consequences of uneven development with regard to Britain’s “Celtic Fringe,” Italy’s Mezzogiorno, the Peruvian highlands, French-speaking Canada, Inuit peoples of Arctic North America, African-American and Chicano communities in the US, and the Brazilian region known as the Nordeste. Whether discussing the subordinate position of a particular region or a specific minority community, scholars applied the concept of internal colonialism to explain relations of domination and exploitation that seemed comparable to formal colonialism but which operated within a particular national space.

By the mid-1980s, the bloom was off internal colonialism—like its alter ego, dependency theory, it was losing some of its intellectual appeal as a scholarly trope (though it might still be deployed in the context of political claims). Here I don't agree in the least with Walter Mignolo's contention that this was a consequence of the "top-down, scientific" critiques of North American students of Latin American Studies; indeed, I would argue that scholars outside Latin America—whether in the US or Africa—clung to these concepts longer and harder than most Latin American historians, social scientists and political economists. The problem with internal colonialism was its structuralist origins—it required a demonstrable mechanism of material exploitation that was often difficult to sustain empirically in the conflicts over regional power and identity. For example, a 1976 study of regional differentiation in Brazil—a topic that any progressive scholar at the time would insert into the framework of internal colonialism—left the author, Yves Chaloult, flailing to figure out how he could define the relationship between the northeast and the southeast as internally colonial. To be sure, there were many political groups in the Brazilian Nordeste in the 1970s who blamed the paulistas—as natives of São Paulo were designated—for the poverty of other regions. But few Brazilians outside of the Nordeste believed that São Paulo had grown rich off the exploitation of the Nordeste—already a sharply declining region when São Paulo emerged as Brazil's dominant regional economy. Since there was no evidence of surplus expropriation or a substantial flow of raw materials from the poorer to the richer region, "internal colonialism" in this case boiled down to an "unequal allocation of resources" fostered by a federalized system of tax collection. This strict emphasis on the structural mechanisms of economic inequality led the author to conclude, rather desperately, that this allocation of resources was unequal and unjust—and therefore "colonial" in

nature—because “the State must not favor one class or one region but has the same responsibility to all citizens and must favor an equal distribution of resources and provide equal opportunities for all.” He did include tables indicating that some 75% of Brazilian revenues were collected in the southeast, and a mere 8% in the Northeast, and that a considerably higher proportion ended up being spent in the latter region. In other words, the basis for this claim of colonialism was the failure of the state to *dramatically* redistribute resources to diminish regional disparities. Politically, I sympathize with this author’s insistence that the state should promote a more equal distribution of resources, but I would hesitate to label as “colonialism” the failure to do so on a heroic scale.

In saying this, I do not mean to claim that regional disparities are not a major problem in Brazil—or Colombia, or Mexico, or India, or China. But the materialist-structuralist premises of internal colonialism, as originally conceived, made it too rigid a framework for understanding these spatially organized inequalities or the historical processes that produced them. Not surprisingly, with the cultural and linguistic turn, scholars have shifted away from internal colonialism—a concept that emerged from the social sciences—to internal orientalism (or what I and others have called “orientalism in one country”), a concept with an impeccable literary pedigree. Based, of course, on the critical theory conceptualized by Edward Said, internal orientalism created a more fluid and flexible framework for understanding spatially organized hierarchies of knowledge, wealth, and power. Rather than a set of specific socio-economic processes, orientalism emphasizes the emergence of discourses that allow a certain culture to create a sense of its superiority and to wield authority over other cultures, whether politically, culturally, economically, or militarily. Although he later modified some of his arguments in light of criticism from

postcolonial studies, Said saw orientalism—that is, the construction of the “Orient” as Europe’s “other”—as underpinning the entire European imperial enterprise (and operating whether or not an economic surplus was being extracted from the colony by the metropolis). This same approach has been deployed, by myself and others, to explore the ways in which a particular region of a nation—represented as more modern, urban, “progressive”—constructs other regions as “backward,” stagnant, semi-civilized, and thereby consolidates a dominant position within the boundaries of a single nation.

By foregrounding discursive power and the construction of difference, the trope of orientalism also allows us to think more specifically about the role that race and culture play in the formation of these regional hierarchies. Ironically, the study of regional differentiation in Brazil that I cited earlier—whose author worked so tirelessly to cram his evidence and argument into internal colonialism’s materialist framework—dismissed out of hand the notion of “racial-cultural heterogeneity” as a potential aspect of internal colonialism in Brazil since, according to Chaloult, there were no significant distinctions in racial composition between the Northeast and the Southeast of Brazil. This treatment of race as something fixed, easily recognized, categorized and existing prior to historical processes belongs, of course, to an earlier era of historical interpretation. Central to my own work is the claim that paulistas have represented themselves as “white” and constructed nordestinos as non-white (and therefore less modern, industrious, etc.) even when no physical/racial differences are apparent.

In short, I would argue that “internal orientalism,” or “orientalism in one country” is a more productive framework for thinking about regional difference and disparity than the concept of internal colonialism, and certainly it is more suited to

the types of questions historians would be asking today. But it is not entirely without its flaws. First of all, in its anxiety to avoid reducing imperial domination to a matter of material interest—Said is very insistent that orientalism precedes imperialism and hence is not a mere justification for economic avarice—the concept of orientalism tends to minimize questions of economic exploitation, and thus often treats economic divergence as a collateral effect of orientalism’s discursive power. But more pertinent to my concerns today is another problem that I perceive in the “internal orientalism” framework, and in the “internal colonialism” concept that preceded it. Both seek to illuminate the workings of power within a nation through applying concepts first developed for relationships that were specifically NOT nationally bounded. In applying internal colonialism, scholars labored mightily to demonstrate what was colonial about the position of subordinate regions or minorities, but would virtually ignore or dismiss the “internal” aspect of internal colonialism. Similarly, in my own work and in a book of stimulating essays published on Italy’s Southern Question, subtitled “orientalism in one country,” there is a great deal of effort to demonstrate the orientalizing of the southern Italian, but not nearly so much attention to the “in one country” part of the phrase. Yet surely when processes of domination, exploitation or subordination—cultural, social or economic—emerge within a shared national context, it makes some difference in the ways these processes operate. Harking back to Benedict Anderson’s claim that “the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship,” even if we might argue with the always, or question the “depth” of that feeling, certainly this is a common feature of nation-ness, and one that contrasts dramatically with imperial formations, which are explicitly conceived as vertical relationships. At the very least, this presumed horizontality would make a difference with respect to the way subaltern regions

or ethnicities could frame their protests and demands, and the opportunities for alliances in the political arena that cut across lines of proto-colonial domination.

Orientalism, as a theoretical orientation, does have another particular advantage for my own work on São Paulo and regional identity in Brazil—unlike internal colonialism, it is specifically focused on the colonizing power; one of Said's principal points is that orientalism tells us much more about the desires, aspirations, and identities of its conceptualizers than it does about the reputed "Orient." In this regard, it is notable that some of the strongest regionalist movements in the 20th century have emerged precisely from populations that, far from considering themselves as being subaltern, oppressed or exploited in the usual sense, enjoy a dominant socioeconomic position, which they regard as resulting from their superior qualities, and thus they chafe at having to share (or being pressured to share) national political power or fiscal resources with other, "inferior" regions. The aggressive assertion of regional supremacy usually comes accompanied by the claim that the region in question is disproportionately responsible for the greatness and sustenance of the nation. In effect, it is a conservative, even reactionary protest against "exploitation" that results from spatially coexisting with other, poorer regions. Their critique of the status quo usually rests on the implicit claim that the region's (and by extension, the nation's) prosperity is a consequence of its superior cultural attributes, an argument that can easily lend itself to racist ideologies. This tendency is exemplified by the explanations northern Italians proffered for their region's "superiority" over southern Italy, and the disadvantages that accrued to the North as a result of the South's backwardness (a position articulated today, in its crudest form, by the secessionist Northern League). As Antonio Gramsci observed in "Notes on the Southern Question,"

the propagandists of the northern Italian bourgeoisie portrayed the south as “a ball and chain that impedes a more rapid development of the civic sphere in Italy” and treated the southerners as biologically inferior beings.

By the 1920s, the final decade of Brazil’s First Republic, paulista politicians and writers commonly referred to their region as the “locomotiva” –but not only was São Paulo, in the paulista imaginary, the shiny, modern locomotive pulling the nation forward, but the rest of the nation, and particularly the Nordeste, was commonly identified as a chain of empty boxcars.¹ São Paulo’s relationship with the northern states may have resembled colonialism in a number of respects, but their common location within the same national boundaries created some distinctive elements as well. Whereas in formal colonialism the metropolitan interests typically need to maintain the notion that the mother country gains some material benefits from the colonial relationship, paulista elites had no incentive to acknowledge any contribution whatsoever from the Nordeste to their region’s prosperity; indeed, economically it was represented as nothing but a drag on São Paulo’s forward progress.² Hence the image of the empty boxcars

The similarity between these representations of the relationship between northern and southern Italy and the well-known image of São Paulo as a locomotive pulling a train of empty boxcars is striking. In other words, the “other” regions are not only inferior, but serve as a drag on the progress of the “normative” region. In contrast to regional leaders elsewhere, who have positioned their cause as a

1 I discuss this at greater length in “Racializing Regional Difference: São Paulo versus Brazil, 1932,” in *Race and Nation in Modern Latin America*, eds. Nancy Appelbaum, Anne S. Macpherson and Karin Roseblatt (Chapel Hill, 2003), 237-262.

2 The Nordeste did become a source of “authentic” folklore for many paulista scholars and artists. Nísia Trindade Lima, *Um sertão chamado Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro, 1999).

movement of the subaltern, the excluded or the oppressed, those writers, intellectuals and politicians who contributed to formulating the identity of regions such as São Paulo typically identified their home region as culturally and economically (if not always politically) superior, as the vanguard of progress and civilization, while the rest of the nation served as the “Other,” in a cultural relationship reminiscent of that between colonizer and colonized.³

O Nordeste emerged in the early 20th century as São Paulo’s “Orient,” a region of unrelieved misery and disorder. The geographic area gradually being classified and homogenized as the Nordeste actually encompassed a very diverse set of topographical, social and economic formations. The coastal zone was carpeted by fields of cane and dotted with sugar mills and industrial-scale refineries; the near interior was a semi-arid zone of cotton cultivation and subsistence farming, and the backlands or “sertão” was a region of cattle ranching and hardscrabble farming, relieved by fertile areas of natural and artificial irrigation. The region also included several large urban centers and some significant industrial enclaves, and had a population whose color and ethnicity was as varied as its landscape and social structure. From this strikingly diverse stretch of Brazilian territory emerged São Paulo’s “Other,” a uniformly backward region plagued by droughts, a stagnant economy, and, above all, a wretched population whose very bodies bore the

3 Gramsci notes that the claims about the “inferiority” of other regions were not exclusively an elite discourse; for northern Italian workers, too, the poverty of the south was “inexplicable,” and therefore attributable to innate qualities of the southerners. Gramsci’s own explanation—that southern Italian poverty was a direct and proportional consequence of northern Italian prosperity (an early case of “internal colonialism”)—is politically more appealing, but limited in its explanatory power. Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (New York, 1971), pp. 70-1, 94. On Antioqueño regionalism, see Nancy Appelbaum, *Muddied Waters: Race, Region, and Local History in Colombia, 1846-1948* (Durham, NC, 2003).

stigmas of their backwardness and misery.⁴ Disparaging portraits of the nordestinos would proliferate during the 1932 uprising, but even before then there was ample evidence of paulista disdain for the Nordeste. According to an outraged account by a North American engineer who participated in a fact-finding tour of the drought-stricken Northeast in the early 1920s, the paulista in the team of visitors described the nordestinos in his report as “pigmies with bad complexions who lack intelligence and have little energy or initiative.”

One of the ironies of these public discourses on regional identity is that politicians, journalists, novelists, and professionals from the Nordeste, though offended by the disparaging images constructed by the paulistas, reinforced certain features of this orientaling discourse. Pleas for additional funds from the federal government—especially during the worst points in the drought cycle—typically came with representations of the region as immersed in misery and poverty. Faced with the sharp decline in the region’s political and economic fortunes, northern regional writers contemplated their region’s fatal flaws, and often cited the very same elements—violence, fanaticism, misery—that appeared in paulista diatribes. And seeking political advantage in regional unity that transcended borders of a particular province/state, these writers also performed the same homogenizing operation—imagining a uniform “Nordeste” — as their critics in the Southeast.

In crafting their discourse of São Paulo’s regional superiority, paulistas could draw upon a very wide range of “evidence” and arguments, nearly all of which, I would contend, reflected

4 There is a growing literature on the social and political construction of the Nordeste. Durval Muniz de Albuquerque Jr., *A invenção do Nordeste e outras artes* (Recife/São Paulo, 2001); Stanley E. Blake, “The Invention of the Nordestino: Race, Region, and Identity in Northeastern Brazil, 1889-1945,” Ph.D. diss., State University of New York at Stony Brook, 2001.

a racialized worldview shared by elites, and non-elites, from all regions of Brazil, but which gained its most elaborate expression in São Paulo. [And I want to emphasize this point—“racism” was not a specifically paulista problem, but it was the paulistas who could most effectively deploy claims of “whiteness” to their own advantage.] Despite the declining currency of biological or scientific racism, certain “immutable” characteristics, both positive and negative, continued to be attributed to Brazilians according to their region of origin, both in elite and popular culture. Even as discourses of civilization, modernity and progress replaced earlier preoccupations with race mixture and degeneration, notions of difference based on race (broadly construed), far from fading, continued to flourish in new discursive contexts.⁵

Said, in his introduction to *Orientalism*, insists that orientalist discourses should not be seen merely as post hoc justifications for imperialism; indeed, they preceded the heyday of British and French colonialism and “authorized” the ensuing imperialist enterprises of the 19th century. Although it is easy to slip into the language of justification, of myths and lies constructed to embellish an already existing reality, I would also argue that, in the case of São Paulo, one can see an emerging discourse of regional superiority well before São Paulo had established itself as anything more than yet another locale of temporary, export-fueled prosperity based on large-scale plantations and slave labor. The confluence of impending abolition, a growing crisis in the centralized monarchical system, a local boom in coffee production, the stagnation or decline of regions that traditionally wielded political power meant that the paulistas precociously sought to craft a position of autonomy

5 Thomas Skidmore, *Black into White*. Several of the essays in *República em Migalhas* note the way in which modernity becomes the touchstone of regional superiority, but they tend to be silent on the way in which race is used in the relevant discourses and counter-discourses. See Cardoso Silva, “Regionalismo,” pp. 44-5.

based on their exceptional regional character. And the specific political and fiscal structure of the Brazilian bureaucracy meant that, spatially, the region became coterminous with the province or state of São Paulo (rather than the paulistas seeking to create a larger southeastern identity that would include Rio de Janeiro and Minas Gerais). In the 1880s, São Paulo was even the site of a significant separatist movement, as paulista republicans contemplated a formal break with the Brazilian monarchy and the founding of a “pátria paulista.” In *Orientalism*, Said notes that his study will try to show that “European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self.” On a much more modest scale, one can observe the same process in the context of São Paulo, as paulista elites constructed a strong, cohesive regional identity that promoted a federalist system under Brazil’s First Republic (1889-1930), and allowed them to boldly appropriate state tax revenues first to subsidize European immigration and then to create price supports for coffee exports. Well before São Paulo had established its overwhelming pre-eminence within the Brazilian economy, paulistas were representing their region not only as the most prosperous, but the most civilized, the most cultured and the most modern. Equally important, this representation depended upon a sharp contrast with other regions of Brazil, and especially the North/Northeast, with its largely non-white and impoverished population, figured as backward, illiterate, semi-civilized.

Thus, regionalism was a major theme of political and cultural life in Brazil throughout the Old Republic (1889-1930), but I would cite the 1920s and early 1930s as a particularly crucial period for understanding the relationship between regional and national identities precisely because of the political crises of this period—the growing criticisms and impending exhaustion of the political system of the Old Republic (1889-1930), the impact of the 1929 stock market

crash, the effective challenge to paulista hegemony represented by the Revolution of 1930 and Getúlio Vargas's seizure of power—all of these developments moved politicians and intellectuals in São Paulo and elsewhere to consider very deliberately the relationship between region and nation.⁶ This period would culminate in the Constitutionalist uprising of 1932, a three-month civil war in which São Paulo took up arms against the federal government.

As one would expect, the Revolution of 1932 and the period leading up to it produced a torrent of literature, polemics, poetry, posters, music and artifacts as paulistas sought to delineate and clarify their regional (*cum* national) identity and justify their claims to national dominance. Regional struggle against the central government provided a hothouse environment for the cultivation of representations and discourses of regional identity. But the narratives and images of paulista superiority that propelled the movement forward clearly did not spring full-blown into the political arena with the onset of the Constitutionalist Campaign. The leaders of the movement could draw upon nearly six decades of speeches, essays and iconography to support their claims to regional greatness.⁷

The increasing diffusion of record-keeping and statistical comparison also created a representational context within which one could quickly and dramatically visualize São Paulo's superiority over other regions of Brazil. The authors of the many books published in the 1920s and '30s cataloguing São Paulo's glories and accomplishments liberally sprinkled their texts with a surfeit

6 On regionalism under the Old Republic, and political centralization in the 1930s see Angela Maria Castro Gomes, org., *Regionalismo e Centralização Política* (Rio: Nova Fronteira, 1980).

7 On this earlier separatist movement, see Cássia Chrispiniano Adduci, "A 'Pátria Paulista': O Separatismo como Resposta à Crise Final do Império Brasileiro," Tese de mestrado, PUC-São Paulo, 1998.

of tables, graphs and charts showing how much more of *everything* São Paulo produced than the other Brazilian states, and especially how much more São Paulo contributed to the federal treasury.⁸ Such statistics homogenized standards of living and productivity within the region, rendering the considerable hardship and misery faced by urban workers and rural peasants invisible. Needless to say, this helped fuel a tendency to see São Paulo as the prototype (and perhaps an unattainable one) for the rest of Brazil, as Tania de Luca observes in her recent study of the influential paulista journal, Revista do Brasil. According to de Luca,

One representation in particular vividly emerges: that which conditions all hope for the future upon the imposition of the paulista example on the nation as a whole. More and more the nation is being identified with the State of São Paulo which, with its plantations, industries, railroads and great cities, enjoys a degree of prosperity without parallel in rest of the nation.

The attributes of nationality—defined frontiers, the conquest of political sovereignty, glorious historical events, inhabitants who exhibit specific ethnic traits, the possession of its own language and culture—end up being accredited exclusively to the paulistas. [The result was a discourse] that attributed to the State [of São Paulo] any and all positive features contained in the idea of Brazil.⁹

As Prasenjit Duara argues for China in a similar period, there is no necessary contradiction between strong regionalist and nationalist movements. But he, and most scholars who have studied regionalism, are primarily concerned with regions struggling to retain an autonomous identity against the threat of marginalization or homogenization represented by the dominant centralizing forces.

8 Alfredo Ellis Júnior, *Confederação ou Separação?* (São Paulo, n.d.); T. de Souza Lobo, *O Brasil Confederado* (São Paulo, 1933). Such calculations usually omitted the tax receipts of the federal capital.

9 De Luca, *A Revista do Brasil*, p. 78.

¹⁰ In the case of São Paulo, not only are we considering a regional *cum* national identity, but one that would relegate most of the other regions of Brazil to the status of pre-modern or insufficiently civilized “other.” The nationalism of the paulistas was based, in most respects, on the notion that São Paulo would lead the rest of Brazil into greatness and modernity.¹¹ Thus, even a self-declared anti-racist nationalist like Antonio Baptista Pereira claimed that São Paulo would always be in the “forefront” of Brazil’s march to modernity, and that São Paulo was “the Apostle of the Peoples . . . it is São Paulo that takes up the burden of the long crusades, to teach Brazil the meaning of Brazilianness [brasilidade], to show Brazil the path to a Greater Brazil [Brasil-Maior].”¹² As de Luca notes, the paulistas spoke of national greatness in entirely regional terms.¹³ During the 1932 Revolution, a popular (if oxymoronic) slogan--“Tudo por São Paulo! Tudo pelo Brasil!”--neatly encapsulated this tendency.

To explain how São Paulo increasingly became, among regional elites (and many non-elite Brazilians), not just a model for the nation, but a metonym for the nation Brazil should be, I would cite three crucial elements. One is São Paulo’s rise to political dominance with

10 Duara, *Rescuing History*, chap. 6; also Alon Confino, *The Nation as a Local Metaphor*.

11 In other words, these regions would always be at a more distant (and therefore inferior) point in history than São Paulo. For a provocative discussion of what she calls both “the imperial idea of linear time” and “panoptical time,” see Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York and London, 1995), pp. 9-11; 36-42. According to McClintock, “the stubborn and threatening heterogeneity of the colonies was contained and disciplined not as socially or geographically different from Europe and thus equally valid, but as *temporally* different and thus as irrevocably superannuated by history.” If one changed “colonies” to “other regions,” I think this would adequately describe the way in which paulistas used “stages of civilization” discourse.

12 These lectures were later collected and printed in Baptista Pereira, *Pelo Brasil Maior* (São Paulo, 1934), p. 347.

13 De Luca, *A Revista do Brasil*, chap. 1.

the decentralization of politics under the Old Republic. The second is the previously described economic development of the ensuing decades. But neither of these trends can be treated as a self-evident basis for identity formation; they do not, in and of themselves, provide the raw materials for the construction of a regional identity with widespread appeal. Indeed, compared to other regionalisms, paulista identity is relatively thin in a cultural sense, in part because a regionalist movement inspired by rapid economic progress and claims to modernity does not have a rich lode of folklore or traditions (invented or otherwise) with which to construct such an identity. São Paulo would seem to be, on the whole, remarkably poor in the performative aspects of regionalism that Pierre Bourdieu cites as crucial to the cultivation of regional loyalties. With one exception—paulista intellectuals, principally historians, during this period can be credited with the successful construction of a foundational myth of origin—one that positioned São Paulo not only as crucial to the formation of the Brazilian nation, but also as qualitatively different from the rest of that nation. The Brazil beyond São Paulo's borders was represented as fundamentally backward, weighed down by a colonial legacy of declining Portuguese power, unenlightened monarchy, and plantation slavery. In contrast, São Paulo's idiosyncratic colonial experience supposedly explained the region's singular aptitude for, and receptivity to, modernity. The foundational myth for this cultural representation was the saga of the *bandeirante*.

To put it as briefly as possible, the *bandeiras* were bands of men who had their home base in São Paulo and organized long-distance expeditions to explore the Brazilian interior during the seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries, largely in search of precious minerals to mine and Indians to enslave. In the "Black Legend" writings of Spanish missionaries, the *bandeirante* is a cruel

and unsavory character, but in the hands of early twentieth-century paulista regionalists, he is recast as a proto-capitalist entrepreneur. In contrast to the parasitical, decadent and tradition-bound sugar planter of the colonial Northeast, the *bandeirante* is enterprising, risk-taking and industrious. Moreover, it was the *bandeirantes*, by intrepidly exploring the furthest reaches of the Brazilian interior, who guaranteed the capacious boundaries of the future Brazilian nation (and thereby its one unimpeachable claim to greatness). Finally, being men from a “virile” culture, the *bandeirantes* could absorb the positive traits of exotic elements (such as the Indian in the colonial era and the immigrant in the modern era) without losing their essential characteristics.¹⁴

What these self-congratulatory paeans to São Paulo’s exceptionalism routinely suppressed was the rather crucial (postcolonial) “interlude” of plantation slavery. Indeed, one could read popular and scholarly accounts of São Paulo’s history and entirely miss the fact that the region had been for several decades in the second half of the nineteenth century the home of Brazil’s most important slave-plantation economy. When acknowledged at all, this awkward fact was trumped with the claim that paulista planters demonstrated a progressive disposition that made them eager to adopt new techniques and reluctant to rely on slaves. Thus many planters (it was claimed) became active abolitionists, anxious to make the transition to free (and as it turns out, white) labor. In sum, not only was the paulista NOT a typical slaveowning planter, but he even played a crucial role in abolishing slavery and modernizing

14 For examples of the *bandeirante* myth in the making, see Paulo Prado, *Paulística: História de São Paulo* (São Paulo, 1925), and Alfredo Ellis Júnior, *Raça de Gigantes* (São Paulo, 1926). The best historical study of the construction of the *bandeirante* myth is Kátia Maria Abud, “O Sangue Intimorato e as Nobilíssimas Tradições: A Construção de um Símbolo Paulista—O Bandeirante,” Ph.D. diss., USP, 1985.

agriculture.¹⁵ As for the eventual racial composition of São Paulo, the noted folklorist Dalmo Belfort de Mattos assured his readers (in the 1930s) that São Paulo had been predominantly white (3:1) during the colonial period, and while people of color temporarily became a majority during the first phase of the coffee boom, “this soon passed. Mortality and mixture gradually eliminated the African *excess*.”¹⁶

The success of the *bandeirante* saga, and its role in the construction of regional identity, could hardly be exaggerated. Virtually every piece of poetry or polemic that I’ve read from the period of the Constitutionalist campaign (including popular poetry submitted to newspapers) makes some reference to the paulistas’ *bandeirante* forebears. Portraits of Fernão Dias, Domingos Jorge Velho, and other historic *bandeirantes* graced the bank notes issued by the short-lived revolutionary government. And beginning in the 1930s, the *povo bandeirante* became a widely accepted synonym for the *povo paulista*. The *bandeirologistas* had created a highly successful “fictive ethnicity,” to use Etienne Balibar’s apt phrase.¹⁷

As one would expect, the 1932 Constitutionalist campaign and civil war, produced particularly heated defenses of paulista superiority and unusually derogatory depictions of Brazilians from other regions. However, as the foregoing discussion should indicate, such defenses and depictions were hardly new; on the contrary, the images deployed during this especially dramatic moment in

15 I discuss this persistent theme in the slavery historiography in “The Decline of the Progressive Planter and the Rise of Subaltern Agency: Shifting Narratives of Slave Emancipation in Brazil,” in Gilbert Joseph, ed., *Reclaiming the Political in Latin American History: Essays from the North* (Durham, 2001), pp. 81-101.

16 Dalmo Belfort de Mattos, “A influência negra na alma paulista,” *Paulistânia* 3 (Oct. 1939). [emphasis mine].

17 Prasenjit Duara, “Historicizing National Identity, or Who Imagines What and When,” in Eley and Suny, *Becoming National*, pp. 151-74. Duara invents the word “discent” to express both descent and dissent.

São Paulo's history had their provenance in the decades prior to the outbreak of the actual civil war, when nationalism emerged as a major political tendency, and when paulista elites exercised considerable political dominance at the federal level—a dominance they energetically sought to “naturalize” through a set of discursive and narrative strategies, especially once Vargas' ascendance began to disturb the existing configuration of political power.

Drawing liberally on social-darwinist theories about the suitability of different races for progress and modernity, as well as on apparently contradictory historical theories about stages of civilization, paulista journalists and intellectuals celebrated the civic virtues of the regional population, which they attributed to its more “civilized” character. In speech after speech and essay after essay, paulistas extolled the civic and moral fiber of the *povo bandeirante*, the civilized and cultured character of the paulista people, and the direct association between their region's “stage of civilization” and their concern for the rule of law.

What of the rest of Brazil? How did paulista regionalist discourse construct its “Other” within the Brazilian nation? Just as one might expect, this could vary according to the political proposals of the individual or group, though certain assumptions informed political discourse across the spectrum of political factions. The handful of paulistas who openly advocated separatism, unencumbered by the need to curry favor with potential allies from adjacent regions, did not hesitate to construct every other region of Brazil as vastly inferior to the state of São Paulo, and in the most derogatory terms. One separatist manifesto described the federal troops as “mestizos who have the souls of slaves, and who are but one step removed from their ancestors whose bodies were enslaved both here and in Africa . . . You must defend our patrimony against this barbarous horde that descended on us from the north and the

south, impelled by hunger and envy.” It continued in this vein, portraying Brazilians who opposed São Paulo as “Sons of the slave quarters and misery, victims of destructive climates, encrusted with the grossest ignorance, a people who are losing human form, such is the physical degeneration that ravages them . . .” And it ended by denouncing the “mestizos born of slaves, the foul offspring of the slavequarters, who now wish to enslave you.”

Conversely, most of the Constitutionalist leadership, who were not separatists, maintained hopes of receiving support from anti-Vargas factions in Rio de Janeiro, Minas Gerais, Paraná and Rio Grande do Sul, and had to represent these regions in a more favorable light; they might be inferior to São Paulo, but the tendency among “moderates” was to emphasize their shared concern for the rule of law and the maintenance of order.¹⁸ What, then, was the common nemesis? It was the North/Northeast of Brazil, which would be consistently portrayed as a backward land populated mainly by primitive or degenerate peoples.

Indeed, one of the most striking features of paulista/Constitutionalist discourse during this period is the increasing identification of Vargas’ regime with the impoverished and largely non-white regions of northern/northeastern Brazil—despite the fact that Vargas and several of his closest advisors were from the far *South* of Brazil. The bases for this identification varied, but several prominent writers claimed that only peoples who had reached the “industrial” stage of civilization felt the need for the rule of law; agrarian/pastoral societies such as those of the Northeast had a natural affinity for arbitrary, authoritarian rule.¹⁹ And the federal troops that “invaded” São Paulo were consistently described as

18 Some important paulista political figures, however, found it difficult to suppress their contempt for all other regions. See Paulo Duarte, *Que é Que Há?*, pp. 38-9.

19 *A Gazeta*, Aug. 24, 1932, p. 1.

having been recruited among the semi-savage inhabitants of the northeastern backlands. Through this process of representation, the paulistas heightened the cultured, civilized character of their own campaign while situating Vargas' forces in the camp of the backward, the uncivilized and the "darker" elements of Brazilian society. Perhaps no account expresses this better than Vivaldo Coaracy's description of the "occupying forces" that entered São Paulo city upon the state's surrender: "They were soldiers of a strange sort, who seemed to belong to another race, short, yellow-skinned, with prominent cheekbones and slanted eyes. Many of them had teeth filed to a point. All carried in their dark eyes, mixed together with astonishment at the sight of the superb city, a glint of menace and provocation."²⁰ Yet another striking expression of the paulistas' contempt for the "intruders" in their midst is the comment by Paulo Duarte, a leader of the Democratic Party, that nordestinos "act the same role as those Negroes in Dakar, top hat on their heads and [bare]feet on the floor, [who are] convinced that they hold the high position of 'French citizen'."²¹

Some of the contemporary accounts of the war even contained eerie echoes of Euclides da Cunha's *Os Sertões*, his renowned chronicle of the 1896 conflict between backlanders in the interior of Bahia and republican troops. During the brief phase of armed struggle in 1932, paulista war correspondents and combatants were reluctant to admit that the Constitutionalist forces were at a severe technical and material disadvantage since such an admission would have belied the notion of São Paulo as by far the most technologically

20 Vivaldo Coaracy, *A Sala da Capela* (São Paulo, 1933), p. 14. The images Coaracy evokes here are an interesting pastiche: teeth sharpening was a practice associated with sertanejos of African descent, but the other features (short, yellow, oblique eyes) seem more reminiscent of the derogatory stereotypes associated with the Japanese troops that had recently (1931-32) occupied Manchuria.

21 Duarte, *Que é Que Há?*, pp. 257-8.

advanced and materially prosperous region of Brazil. Many preferred to lay the blame upon the thousands of nortistas who “fanatically” hurled their bodies against the paulista troops and overwhelmed the constitutionalist forces with their sheer numbers. To quote the leading paulista daily, *O Estado de São Paulo*:

Against the youth of São Paulo, against the students, the doctors, the lawyers, the engineers, the merchants, the landowners, the men of industry and intelligence, [the government is] throwing a band of thugs [jagunçada] gathered and herded together in the backlands . . . Against a civilized people, they hurl batallions of gangsters.

This is very much the military scenario that da Cunha chronicled in his account of Canudos in the Northeastern sertão, though this time it was the self-anointed “forces of civilization” that suffered defeat.²²

Other paulista writers, such as the historian and genealogist Alfredo Ellis Junior defined different regions of Brazil by racial types, clearly group the states of the south with São Paulo, and identifying the Nordeste, in racial terms, as radically different. While acknowledging that all Brazilian regions had some “mixture” of races, he claimed that São Paulo was 85 percent “pure white,” while Bahia was only 33 percent. He then claimed that such racial differences automatically translated into weak national ties:

²² OESP, July 31, 1932, p. 5. To be sure, by the end of *Os Sertões*, da Cunha himself exhibited little certainty on the question of precisely who the forces of civilization might be, but that aspect of his masterwork tended to get lost in the remembering. Some paulista writers in 1932 did echo da Cunha’s grudging admiration for the sertanejo (similar to Domingo Sarmiento’s descriptions of the Argentine gaucho or Francisco Bilbao’s portraits of the Chilean “huasos”), but the backlander’s courage was, once again, depicted as the instinctive bravery of the semi-primitive man. “Viva o Sertão!,” *Folha da Noite*, Sep. 15, 1932, p. 2. It is also interesting to note that some accounts claimed that federal troops had been recruited from the very region of Canudos, as well as from the Contestado region south of São Paulo state, the site of another major millenarian rebellion—i.e., the government was deliberately recruiting “fanatics” to fight against São Paulo. *A Gazeta*, Aug. 7, 1932, p. 3; Aug. 24, 1932, p. 1.

It would be pure sentimental lyricism if we were to regard as brothers of a *dolico-louro* from Rio Grande do Sul, of a *brachy-moreno* from S. Paulo, or of a *dolico-moreno* from Minas, a *platycephalo amongoilado* from Sergipe or Ceará, or a *negro* from Pernambuco.

But even Ellis, a notorious advocate of racial science, did not rely entirely on explicitly racist terms to construct the Nordeste as radically different:

They do not have the same needs as São Paulo. While the large states, due to their respective stages of civilization, due to the necessities of their respective economic situations, etc., require the rule of law, these small states, that have a much more backward level of civilization, much less economic development, etc., do not have the same needs . .

Perhaps even more telling is the secondhand narrative of an unusual encounter between paulista soldiers and federal government forces. During an impromptu ceasefire, according to the paulista soldier's account, he and his companions engaged in a poignant conversation with their fellow Brazilians from Rio Grande do Sul in which both sides expressed their regret at having to "fight against brothers." But the idyll ended when an "unhinged mulatto northerner" intruded himself into the conversation and began threatening the paulistas.²³ In other words, despite the war there was a natural solidarity between white, middle-class Brazilians from two different states, but the fly in the ointment was the non-white northerner who felt only irrational hostility toward the paulistas.

A major objective of the literature produced in São Paulo at the time of the war was to rebut federal government claims that the movement was separatist or secessionist. Virtually every major

²³ AESP, Col. Rev. de 1932, Pasta 378, Doc. 1587, pp. 9-10. Note that the "racial" identity of the nordestinos in the paulista gaze was quite unstable. The "racial type" deprecatingly referred to as "*cabeça chata*" would have been vaguely described as a mixture of Portuguese, Indian and African, whereas in other contexts, nortistas are referred to as *negro* or *mulato*.

paulista leader spoke with great irritation of the “lies” unleashed by Vargas and his cohort about São Paulo’s separatist ambitions. The paulista leadership claimed, to the contrary, that Constitutionalism was a movement “formed in the spirit of *brasilidade*,” with the intention of redeeming Brazil, perhaps with their very lives, from an oppressive dictatorship. In this vein, the semi-official *Jornal das Trincheiras* (Journal of the Trenches) began to portray paulista identity as transcending regional boundaries, observing that as a result of the uprising, the meaning of the term paulista “had been broadened, expanded, widened and extended to include in its purview more than just a simple designation of an accident of birth”; rather, it had become a category that included all those who “think like São Paulo.”²⁴

This message of transcendent *paulistinidade* did find some resonance among groups beyond the boundaries of São Paulo—particularly aspiring middle-class professionals in the law and medical schools of Brazil’s urban centers. But the charges of separatism proved difficult to shake precisely because even those factions of the paulista movement that claimed greatest devotion to *brasilidade* could not convey a sense of horizontal solidarity with the rest of the nation.²⁵ Despite some earnest efforts, even the *Jornal das Trincheiras* could not sustain this pose: as the defeats piled up and the war neared its conclusion, the newspaper resorted to more acerbic rhetoric, including a frontpage article that defined the war as a struggle between two different ideas of civilization, “not to say between civilization and barbarism.”

On this same theme, the prominent journalist Vivaldo Coaracy argued that São Paulo, because of its unique character,

24 “Paulistas,” *Jornal das Trincheiras* 5, Aug. 28, 1932, p. 1.

25 On horizontal solidarity as a key aspect of national identity, see Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, Introduction.

“based on a robust and hardy individualism,” was alone among the regions of Brazil in denouncing the dictatorship:

What has made São Paulo exceptional within the Union was its economic determination . . . the spirit of initiative it aroused in reaction against the compulsory routinism of the colonial era, the accumulation of traditions, that entire web [of habits] that constitutes the living foundation of History.

São Paulo became different. And because it is different, it is misunderstood. This is why São Paulo stands alone!

Even Mário de Andrade, today celebrated as one of the most critical and insightful of the modernist writers with respect to racism, claimed in the aftermath of the surrender that São Paulo had become a “European Christian civilization,” that it was “too great for Brazil,” and derided the federal troops who came to “kill paulistas” as akin to primitive Indian tribes.

The limited resonance of Constitutionalist discourse beyond the boundaries of São Paulo is hardly surprising given that much of that discourse emphasized how superior and how different São Paulo was from the rest of Brazil, which indicates the limits of an *explicitly* regionalist effort to re-imagine the nation. Thus paulistas could deride as ridiculous anti-Constitutionalist claims that São Paulo was trying to turn the other regions of Brazil into its economic colony, but there was nevertheless something distinctly “colonial” about the way São Paulo positioned the rest of Brazil, and especially the poorer areas of the North and Northeast.

This set of attitudes helps to explain an initially puzzling silence in Constitutionalist discourse. One might expect a movement that was rallying against a dictatorship to make extensive use of the term “democracy,” a word that even in the early 1930s was generally regarded as expressing the antithesis of dictatorship. And yet there were remarkably few references to the need for democratization in the writings and speeches of the movement. There were uncountable

references to the need for a constitution, for a restoration of Order and the Rule of Law but, for the most part, the paulistas were silent on the matter of democracy. On the rare occasions when the matter did appear, it was likely to be called into question. Thus we have the unusually blunt assertion by Vivaldo Coaracy who, in O Caso de São Paulo, wrote:

The difference in their evolutionary rhythms navoidably establishes a hierarchy among the Brazilian States... Democracy proclaims civil equality for all citizens and tends to concede them political equality. But it is incapable of creating natural equality.²⁶

From this perspective, we can appreciate more fully the political vacuum that existed in the early 1930s as far as democracy is concerned, with Vargas edging toward an authoritarian/populist appeal to the popular classes, and the emerging paulista “middle class” identifying with a hierarchical and non-inclusive notion of political rights. Ironically, under these circumstances, it was the dictator Vargas and his allies, not the “liberal constitutionalists” of São Paulo, who were more likely to favor an eventual transition to a broad-based democratic politics. Paulista regionalism *cum* nationalism, so intensely identified with the white middle- and upper-classes in São Paulo, had little capacity for sustained popular mobilization, making democratization an implicit challenge to paulista dominance. Instead, it was Vargas’ centralizing nationalism that attracted support from the working classes. Both before and during the Constitutionalist campaign, the paulista elites cited the inhabitants of Brazil’s less “advanced” regions as impediments to the formation of a coherent and progressive national culture. But I would argue that it was precisely the paulistas’ insistence on a *hierarchy* (rather than a diversity) of regional identities that formed

26 Coaracy, O Caso de São Paulo, p. 18.

the greatest impediment to a more progressive and democratic national culture in the early 1930s.

Paulista claims of superiority, of course, would not go unanswered. Given the considerable competition for national power unleashed by the Revolution of 1930, the moment became an auspicious one for contending regional interests to construct a national identity that was an overt challenge to the paulistas' racialized exclusivism. Again, without ignoring the flaws and defects of the notion of "racial democracy," it is worth recognizing that, in this particular historical context, the discourse of racial democracy imagined a much more inclusive version of the Brazilian national community than the one offered by paulista intellectuals.²⁷ It may have been a nationalist discourse that occluded ongoing racial discrimination and discouraged militancy around identities of color but, in contrast to the paulista vision of the nation, it did not expunge non-European ethnicities from Brazil's colonial or postcolonial history or imagine a nation where whiteness was the only guarantor of modernity and progress.

It is also significant that Gilberto Freyre, the main architect of the concept of racial democracy, was writing not from some imagined supra-regional space, but from the immediate context of northeastern regionalism, and with the conscious objective of rehabilitating his home region's cultural position in the Brazilian nation.²⁸ For Freyre, as for the paulista intellectuals, imagining national identity did not require rejecting regional loyalties; rather,

27 For a thoughtful discussion of the relationship between Gilberto Freyre's regionalism and his ideas about modernity and national identity, see the essay by Ruben George Oliven, "O nacional e a regional na construção da identidade brasileira," in *A Parte e o Todo*, pp. 31-45.

28 *Ibid.* To be sure, Vargas himself (locked in battle with regional interests in São Paulo and Rio Grande do Sul) presented this as an "either-or" question, as symbolized by the ceremonial burning of the state flags in 1937, but I would argue that regional identity, rather than declining, re-emerged in different guises, especially after the fall of the Estado Novo. On Vargas and regionalism, an excellent

regional identities provided the raw materials to craft national identities. The difference is that Freyre's regionalism produced a vision of the nation that would resonate with both elite and popular aspirations in a way that the paulistas' explicitly racist, exclusionary and hierarchical vision could not.²⁹

Data de Submissão: 01 out 2015

Data de Aprovação: 15 jan 2016

Processo de Avaliação: Double Blind Review

Editor: Ernesto Pimentel

Tradução encomendada para publicação na próxima edição

Diagramação: Emmanuel Luna

source is his Diário, especially Vol. II, 1937-1942 (Rio de Janeiro: Siciliano/FGV, 1995), pp. 9-101.

29 Again, we have arrived at the point where it is no longer necessary to focus all our energies on debunking the "myth" of racial democracy, and we can consider the meanings and circulation of this discourse, both among elites and the popular classes. For a stimulating discussion along these lines, see Sueann Caulfield, In Defense of Honor: Sexual Morality, Modernity, and Nation in Early 20th-Century Brazil (Durham: Duke U. Press, 2000).

Orientalismo em um só País? Raça, Região e Nação no Brasil do Século XX

Barbara Weinstein

Resumo: Este artigo tem em conta diferentes abordagens para o problema das desigualdades regionais no contexto das nações latino-americanas, em especial o Brasil, como é o caso analisado. Desde inícios dos anos 60, os pesquisadores tinham usado a expressão “colonialismo interno” para analisar tais desigualdades, mas o conceito saiu de uso nos anos 80 com o pós-estruturalismo e a virada cultural, também intitulada em inglês de cultural turn. Apesar disto, as diferenças regionais continuavam a ser uma característica das sociedades latino-americanas. Este artigo traz a ideia de adaptar o conceito de Edward Said acerca do “orientalismo”, em processos pelos quais a diferença produz a naturalização das desigualdades regionais para então explorar a maneira como este orientalismo interno emergiu do crescimento dominante da região de São Paulo, especialmente frente ao Norte ou ao Nordeste. Em particular, o estudo aborda o movimento regionalista de 1932, conhecido como Revolução Constitucionalista, na qual São Paulo levantou armas contra o governo federal, declarando sua indisposição em se subordinar à autoridade de políticos de regiões consideradas “inferiores”. Este período de chauvinismo paulista intenso nos permite ver o caminho pelo qual a diferença regional se tornou uma questão racial, e como as demandas de modernidade ficaram associadas com identidades de brancura racial. Ao mesmo tempo, a localização de São Paulo na mesma nação dos seus oponentes regionais limitou o grau de sua hegemonia política e cultural, ainda que tenha permanecido como a “locomotiva econômica” do Brasil.

Palavras-Chaves: Orientalismo; Regionalismo; Constitucionalismo.