

# Cordial Racism: Race as a Cultural Complex

by Walter Boechat

*No people that go through this [the slavery period] as their daily routine through the centuries could come out without being indelibly imprinted by it. All of us, Brazilians, are of the same flesh of those tortured Blacks and Indians. All of us Brazilians are, in an equal way, the possessed hand that tortured them.<sup>1</sup>*

## Introduction

When the Brazilian Jungian group was starting to form its first International Association for Analytical Psychology (IAAP) society back in 1978, we received a visit from Adolf Guggenbühl-Craig. Although almost thirty years have passed, I can well remember the days he spent with us in Rio de Janeiro. Driving with him along the seaside, he told me:

Brazil is well known for its *racial democracy*. Its crowded beaches where everybody can go, no private places in which people have to pay to enter as we sometimes have to do in places that are called “public” in Zurich. You can see, as we now see, White, Mestizos and Blacks all together on Brazilian beaches. But if you go to good restaurants, you notice a *whitening* of the atmosphere at the more expensive places. But at the less expensive establishments, like small bars on the corners, it is the other way around: there is a *darkening* of the place, you see more Blacks.

With his sharp social eye, Guggenbühl-Craig had an intuitive understanding of a crucial problem in Brazilian cultural identity—that is, the close connection between our social prejudice and a very subtle “racial”<sup>2</sup> prejudice not always admitted in different groups, amongst scholars and lay people.

The peculiar way in which multiple people of different origins have been composing Brazil’s social structure since colonial times led the famous sociologist Gilberto Freyre to state that a “racial democracy” exists in Brazil.<sup>3</sup> This assertion has been challenged along time by many anthropologists and scholars who began to demonstrate that racial democracy does not, in fact, exist in Brazil; rather, there is strong evidence of a peculiar kind of racial prejudice.

The problems of class, wealth distribution, and skin color are closely intertwined, a topic of endless debate among Brazilian anthropologists and sociologists. In my approach to Brazilian culture, some psychological models for understanding larger groups are very important.

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Considering the growing importance of psychological studies of groups and communities, we believe that a psychological perspective on the cultural identity of Latin America is of major importance. We must always remember that Jung emphasized that psychology is a peculiar science since the psychologist is both the observer and object of its work. He also said that a psychological theory is always a personal confession. So, I believe it is important for us Latin Americans to have a specific perspective in analytical psychology that takes into account the points of view of our continent. I believe the concept of cultural complex is central to this endeavor. We consider that the color prejudice that took shape throughout Brazilian history represents one of the most important cultural complexes in Brazil.

## The Peculiar Racism in Brazil: The *Cordial Racism*

The daily paper *Folha de S. Paulo* conducted very careful and specific research on the prevalence of racial prejudice in Brazil. This research demonstrated the extent of racial prejudice among the general population. The research included all “races”: Whites, Blacks, Indians, Mulattos and Mestizos of all educational strata and income levels: richer classes, middle class, the poor, and the destitute. This important research was published in a small book entitled *Cordial Racism*.<sup>5</sup> I find the term *cordial racism* very useful and descriptive in understanding the peculiar nature of racial prejudice in Brazil.<sup>6</sup>

This curious name given to Brazilian racism was based on the notions of *Brazilian cordiality* introduced by the historian Sergio Buarque de Holanda. According to Holanda:

Brazil’s contribution to civilization will be cordiality. We will give out to the world *the cordial man*. The affability in dealing with other people, hospitality, generosity, virtues so praised by foreigners who visit us, represent, in effect, a defined feature of the Brazilian character, to the extent, at least, that patterns of human sociability formed within the rural and patriarchal milieu continue to exist.<sup>7</sup>

Holanda reminds us that it would be a mistake to understand cordiality as mere good manners or civility. According to him, the word *cordial* should be understood in its precise and etymological sense. Far from having a ritualistic and stylized or formulaic attitude to social life, in their cordiality Brazilians place a high premium on what is natural and spontaneous.

The author further explains that this cordiality, foreign in a certain sense to all formalism and social convention, includes not only positive feelings. On the contrary, *hostility* can be so *cordial* as friendship since both are born in the heart<sup>8</sup> (The word *Cordial* derives from latin: *Cor, cordis*, heart).

So, cordiality is a complex stereotype in Brazilian culture, showing two aspects: one apparent, easily seen, which flows according to social expectancy, another hidden, with strong feelings, not easily perceived, flowing underneath the surface.

Sergio Buarque de Holanda developed the notion of cordiality in Brazilian culture in 1936 in his book *Raízes do Brasil*. This is one of the most famous works in Brazilian social history and is required reading for Brazilianists, anthropologists, and sociologists specialized in Latin American culture. Among his many psychological gems, Holanda gives us a precise and vivid description of the archetype of the persona as it expresses itself in the collective psyche of present day Brazilian society. Holanda introduces us to the implications and contradictions contained in the word “cordial” which can function as a disguise for

violence, rejection, a superior attitude, and most importantly, closed doors to equality in jobs and education for Blacks, Mulattos, and Indians in Brazil.

The cordial man has difficulties in showing negative feelings of racial prejudice openly. After five centuries of crossbreeding, the integration of the non-White population hasn't yet occurred and good jobs and good salaries are still the prerogative of a social elite of the White population.

The racial factor is very present in the Brazilian collective psyche. Very recently there was an example of this in the Supreme Court. Two judges started a quarrel that reached the press. 9 The confrontation became harder and harder till one of them, a White man, said about the other, who is Black: "He is very unstable and fragile. He keeps asking himself whether he was chosen for this high post in the Supreme Court due to his skin color or due to his personal value". This odd confrontation confirms that there is a collective guilt resulting from the repression the Black population suffered for centuries (and still suffers in a cordial way), and illustrates how people try to find ways to mend this cultural error in an attempt to heal the cultural complex.

### The Whitening of the Race

The unique racial prejudice in Brazil involves a powerful fantasy about the *Whitening of the race*.<sup>10</sup> According to the American Brazilianist Thomas Skidmore, facilitating White immigration from Europe was not just an economic decision. The Brazilian intellectual elite was strongly influenced by European racist ideas and wanted a *Whitening of the race* as far back as the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>11</sup>

The *Whitening* thesis maintained that White genes were stronger than Black ones and that through repeated crossbreeding the White genes would prevail over Black or Indian genes. The theory held that, in time, a White population would predominate after various generations of Mestizos through the penetrating power of the White gene. *Brazil would reach ethnic purity through miscegenation!* These racist ideas are more comprehensible in the context of knowing that Brazil's intellectual elite looked for the prevailing ideas originating among Europeans and North Americans at the time. But the actual reality regarding color in modern Brazil is that the number of Mestizos and Mulattos has increased, not only by a Whitening of the Blacks but also by a darkening of the Whites....

This ideal led to the fantasy, among parts of the Brazilian elite in the years between 1889 to 1930, that Whitening the race would occur not by separation or exclusion, but, surprisingly enough, by crossbreeding. The first ethnologist to present this theory was Joao Batista de Lacerda during the first Universal Congress of Races in London, 1911. It was often presented as a scientific formula, but it was never adopted elsewhere.<sup>12</sup> This theory has been very unique to Brazil and deserves to be discussed in its symbolic aspects.

The *Alchemical idea* of Whitening of the race was opposed by another sociological movement started in Brazil in the 1930s: the *cultural anthropology* and *cultural syncretism* movement led by Gilberto Freyre, among others. Freyre strongly attacked the Whitening of the race idea, since cultural anthropology argued that environment and culture were the main issues and "races" in themselves were less important for sociology. From 1930 onward, with the rise of Nazi-fascism in

Europe and its fanatic overvaluation of the "race" factor, Freyre's emphasis on the environment proved to be correct. 13

The old ideas of race disappeared in Brazil and theories of scientific racism became an anachronism in South America. But the idea of the inferiority of non-White groups still remains in the cultural unconscious, under the potent influence of the cultural complex of racism. This complex has led to the odd idea that Blacks may come to a position of social prominence only through sports or music, but not through other professional avenues.

### Conclusion

Contrary to what many important ethnologists and anthropologists such as Gilberto Freyre wrongly concluded, Brazil is indeed a *racist society*. As sociologist Florestan Fernandes once said, "the Brazilian is ashamed of having [racial] prejudice", or as we would say from a psychological point of view: Brazilians have enormous difficulties to become conscious of their racial prejudice because it is deeply dissociated in the unconscious, as a powerful cultural complex. The result of this dissociation creates a tremendous tension between the sophisticated persona of the so-called cordial man and his cordial racism that carries a shadow of anger, superiority, and a subtle scorn toward those of the lower ethnic groups in the social pyramid.

We know that the *archetype of the shadow* shows its destructive aspects not only in projection, but also in its capacity to *contaminate* the collective psyche. In Brazil's large urban areas riots of violence and destruction have occurred recently, mainly in the cities of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. Various explanations have been offered for these violent upheavals, many of which are centered on the consequences of drug trafficking. Surely international drug trafficking is a main cause, but I believe that violence will not be controlled unless other problems in this very complex multiracial society are consciously engaged. High on the list of these problems is Brazil's cordial racism, which is related to social class differences.

### Notes:

1. Darcy Ribeiro. *O Povo Brasileiro*. (S. Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1995), p. 120.
2. In this paper the terms "race" and "racial" will always be used with quotation marks. This because it has been proven "that the term is entirely empty as a system of categorization" — Helen Morgan "Exploring Racism." In: *The Cultural Complex*, ed. Thomas Singer, Samuel Kimbles. (New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 212.
3. See the concept of *racial democracy* developed in: Gilberto Freyre, *Casa Grande e Senzala*. Preface by Fernando Henrique Cardoso. (S. Paulo: Global, 26th Ed., 2009)
4. Thomas Singer, Samuel Kimbles.- "Introduction". In: *The Cultural Complex*, ed. Thomas Singer, Samuel Kimbles. (New York, London: Brunner-Routledge, 2004), p. 7.
5. Folha de S. Paulo/ Datafolha. Racismo cordial. S.Paulo: Ática, 1998, 2nd Printing
6. I refer to cordial racism as typical of Brazil, because I did not make a systematic approach to racism in Latin America as a whole. Although I would guess that the attitude to

different “races” is very similar throughout the whole region.

7. Sérgio Buarque de Holanda, *Raízes do Brasil* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1936/1999), 26th ed., pp. 146 ff., free translation.
8. Sérgio Buarque de Holanda, *Raízes do Brasil* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1936/1999), 26th ed., p. 205, note 6 of chapter 5: *The cordial man*.
9. Daily Paper “*O Globo*”, April 21<sup>st</sup>, 2012.
10. See about the Whitening of the race idea: Thomas Skidmore - *Preto no branco*. Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1989, 2nd Printing, p. 55. [American Edition: *Black into White. Race and Nationality in Brazilian Thought*. Oxford University Press, 1974].
11. The concern with the absence of White European population in Brazil goes back, in fact, to the period of the arrival of the King D. John VI and the royal Portuguese family fleeing from Napoleon’s army. Already in the early nineteenth century the King authorized the immigration of many European families.
12. See the role played by the sociologist João Batista de Lacerda in the propagation of the Whitening of the race theory in: Thomas Skidmore - *Preto no branco*. Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1989, 2nd Printing, p. 81 ff.
13. Here we find the traditional controversy in science, the discussion of which is most important, “nurture or nature”. The racist idea argues that *nature* is the unique factor, since people are born with their definitive features, virtues and vices. The “superior race” ideology of nazi-facism emphasizes *nature*. According to the cultural anthropology of Bronislaw Malinowski and Franz Boas, cultural influences are the main factor in anthropology. Gilberto Freyre was the main representative of cultural anthropology in Brazil.