

# 3 Cycles of Democracy and the Racial Issue in Brazil (1978–2019)

*Flavia Rios*<sup>1</sup>

## 1. Introduction: When and How Did Claims Against Racism Enter the Public Agenda?

In the last quarter of the 20th century, Brazil has built its democracy by extending political, civil, and social rights crystallized in the constitutional reform of 1988. At the end of the military dictatorship in 1985, the country had an authoritarian legacy marked by strong hierarchies of gender, race, and class, which sustained enormous and persistent social and political inequalities. In addition to these lasting and categorical inequalities, the authoritarian regime would leave to the new government a strong repressive apparatus capable of promoting serious human rights violations and perpetuating inequalities, both territorial and racial in nature.

Even so, the confrontation with the military regime left a legacy of powerful connected networks and a myriad of collective actors, strongly active in civil society. Under different banners, these movements and collective organizations were unified within an encompassing campaign – the return to democracy – a system interrupted in 1964 by the coup d'état. During the military period, racial democracy became the dominant national ideology, the foundation of which sat atop a type of nationalism that denied the existence of racism and racial inequality in the country.

The struggle for the distribution of political and symbolic power within the state in the rising democracy took place in roughly two ways: on the one hand, by party pluralism, which ensured that both the interests of capital and the interests of workers could be represented (Singer 2012); on the other, by the strong interaction between civil society agents and the state, guaranteeing a representative participation or a pluralism of participation (Lavalle et al. 2006), making it a strong feature of the democratic politics that was established in Brazil. The return to democracy did not put political actors on an equal footing, but allowed underrepresented groups in parliamentary politics to create new mechanisms and forms of interaction with the state. Through these mechanisms – such as councils, secretariats, commissions, and other bodies of control or public policy formulation – agents from social movements, associations, and non-governmental organizations established agreements and

pacts with democratic governments, making the state a true arena of interest conflicts that went beyond the traditional mechanics of the capital-labor relationship. Broadly speaking, an expressive part of these struggles in the state area involved disputes over conceptions of life, over the recognition of historically stigmatized social groups (such as Indigenous peoples and descendants of enslaved people), as well as social and civil rights. In fact, the state became a battlefield among political actors seeking greater democratization and expansion of rights as a way to reverse the country's gigantic inequalities, while seeking to deepen democratic values in a nation with a strong history of authoritarianism based on latifundia and economic hierarchies, whose foundations can be located in the patriarchal and colonial system, in the reproduction of these mechanisms in the free market society that succeeded it.

On the party and electoral policy side, the great novelty of the democratic cycle marked by this re-democratization was the emergence of two political organizations, each in its own way, that presented the innovation of national party politics: the Workers' Party (PT) and the Brazilian Social Democracy Party (PSDB), created in 1980 and 1988 respectively. In general terms, the two party associations were responsible for the democratic stability that lasted 20 years, that is, from the election of sociologist Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1994) until the end of Dilma Rousseff's first mandate (last day of 2013). Both parties were founded in the largest industrial center of Brazil, São Paulo,<sup>2</sup> a territory marked by large population concentration and urban conflicts (such as living costs, housing, struggles against police violence, access to public health, etc.). From this context of great clamor for citizenship and basic social rights, these two parties emerged (Sader 2001).

During this period, the Workers' Party identified as having distinct characteristics from traditional political parties. The strong interlocution with a wide range of social movements, the foundation of trade unionism, in addition to the link with the basic nuclei of the Catholic Church, were the most expressive indications of the popular base of the young PT. In a public declaration of 13 October 1979, when it was not yet a legally established party, the Black movement was presented together with the other social movements (landless workers, women, urban movements, Indigenous, among others) as one of the bases of social mobilization and legitimation that supported the idea of a party association marked by class heterogeneity and political pluralism.

PSDB – founded by liberal professionals and middle-class intellectuals, with little acquiescence to civil agents and the demands of the popular classes and Black Brazilians – was created roughly a decade later, in 1988, under the still-unfolding developments of the constitutional construction. The few Black people linked to this party were associated with Fernando Henrique Cardoso, mediated by his experience at the University of São Paulo (USP), which had an intellectual tradition of empirical research focused on racial relations, studies which sought to confront the ideology of racial democracy.

The constitutional reform was decisive in building an intense relationship between social movements and political parties, as well as highly relevant for

the establishment of a hybrid dynamic within the state, in which civil society actors entered the political sphere through participatory mechanisms. From the point of view of antiracism in Brazilian legislation, it is important to note that, in the Constitution of 1988, the reservation of land to *quilombolas* (Arruti 2000) and the criminalization of racism were codified and ensured. In the *quilombola* case, due to the strong mobilization of the Black movement, the *quilombola* question became part of Brazilian public policies. Article 68 of the Transitory Constitutional Provisions Act (ADCT) states: “To the remaining communities of the quilombos that are occupying their lands, definitive ownership is recognized, and the State must issue the titles to these ethnic groups.” According to information from Fundação Cultural Palmares, the state agency responsible for certifying *quilombola* communities, there are now 3,386 territories in Brazil recognized by the state.<sup>3</sup>

According to the constitutional principles of the 1988 Charter, the Brazilian state will “promote the good of all without prejudice of origin, race, sex, color, age or any other form of discrimination” (Art. 3, VI). In addition, legislation designates legal action and punitive sentencing for people who are found guilty of crimes of racism (Machado et al. 2015).

The objective of this chapter is to analyze the three cycles of democracy in Brazil, namely: democratization (already presented in its dominant features in this introduction of the chapter), democratic establishment (second section) and de-democratization (third section). The first corresponds to the period from 1978 to 1989; the second from 1994 to 2014,<sup>4</sup> and the third period refers to 2015 to 2020. This investigation seeks to examine the relationship between social movements, political parties, and the state, with the issue of race as its central consideration. This is a longitudinal sociological approach that seeks to understand the trajectory, types, and quality of socio-state interactions. The main hypothesis is that the social movements experienced three moments, that of contesting inequalities; the institutionalization of mediation spaces with the state; and, finally, de-democratization defined as the de-institutionalization of the agenda that marks the weakening of a structured relationship between social movements and public institutions, through the redefinition of the political ties, the expulsion of agents representing civil society, and the breakdown of work routines in agencies within the state, on the one hand; on the other, through the delegitimization of the demands and interests of groups underrepresented in institutional policy.

## **2. The Institutionalization of Racial Equality in the Brazilian Public Agenda**

The modern language adopted to refer to the racial equality agenda in Brazil is affirmative action. Affirmative action policies gained prominence within the public agenda right after the 3rd International Conference Against Racism, Xenophobia and Related Intolerances in South Africa, 2001. While

under the Fernando Henrique Cardoso administration, diplomacy agents, antiracist organizations, and intellectuals and leaders formed an expressive and articulated delegation at the world meeting. From this great international event on, Black activists returned to Brazil with an agenda for racial equality based on policies of positive discrimination in order to reduce the strong historical legacies and modern manifestations of racial inequalities, especially in the education system and in the labor market (Telles, 2016). During this period, the debate grew especially strong in higher education, where there were notable inequalities between white students and Black students (Lima and Pretes 2018).

The Brazilian sociologist Antonio Sérgio Guimarães (2008, 84–85) presents the educational structure against which the popular and Black social movements struggled significantly. In his analysis, the university expansion of private higher education, associated with the relative stagnation of public universities and the precariousness of basic education, limited educational opportunities, and, consequently, the expectation of upward mobility of young Brazilians whose income bracket did not allow them to pay for a place in private third-degree establishments. This came as a direct result of the incredible competition for places in public universities, recognized for greater prestige, overwhelmingly occupied by the children of the middle classes, whose financial conditions allowed them to pay for secondary schools with a higher approval rate in the public universities.

This socioeconomic structure determined an absolutely peculiar bias in the Brazilian educational system: roughly speaking, positively privileged students paid for basic education and enjoyed free public higher education, while the negatively privileged, graduates of public schools, were pushed into the private system through the restricted educational credits, funded by government loans which require repayment, or even discouraged from attending this type of education completely. Within this context characterized by social injustice, agents of both popular movements and social movements, as well as community entities took advantage of this reality to build their discourses and political platforms with few economic resources in defense of a more inclusive system envisioned through changes in public policy.

Due to these strong distortions in the education sector and because schooling is a determining factor for social mobility, Brazilian public universities have become the focal point of affirmative action (Feres Jr. et al. 2018). Although these higher education institutions did not reflect the totality of Brazil's third-grade education system, they are internationally recognized for their quality of education and their research contribution. Moreover, the substantial racial inequalities within these institutions had turned them into the destination for the nation's middle class and white elites, being almost impenetrable to the poor and Black Brazilians from public high schools. Given this problem of racial inequality and social injustice, quotas were adopted for public school students in the country, and within this, a percentage was allocated to Black, brown, and Indigenous people.<sup>5</sup>

The result of these quota policies in higher education has been extremely positive (Cicalo 2012). Almost 20 years of affirmative action in Brazil have shown that confronting the nation's severe and persistent racial inequalities within education only became feasible once the country began to produce and disseminate institutional data on color and race in a transparent, periodic, and systematic manner. Not by chance, it has been one of the political strategies of the Black movements, antiracist intellectuals and academics to collect information about color/race in various Brazilian institutions. Once in possession of this information, it became possible to demonstrate – both qualitatively, as well as quantitatively – the nature and size of inequalities in various sectors, such as the labor market, income distribution and housing conditions, education, violence, and political representation.

The most recent data have shown a significant transformation in the profile of the student population, represented by more Black Brazilians, more women, and more Brazilians from popular classes (BRASIL 2019). Despite advances made in recent decades in relation to the introduction of the color/race question in official state documents (for example, registration of the health system, the educational system, the justice system, monthly labor market surveys, among others) and the dissemination of this collected information, it is still possible to find great gaps that impede the struggle against systemic racism, and this is particularly notable when considering and analyzing the career prospects within higher education institutions.

In terms of institutional labor policy, Brazil has not adopted quotas for Black and Indigenous people, only for women. Regarding elections and political representation, only very recently did the Superior Electoral Court insert a question considering color and race into its own registration forms, thereby generating a certain amount of academic production on the subject of political inequalities. The most recent data have shown how underrepresented Afro-descendants, Indigenous peoples, and women are in institutional politics, especially in parliament, despite the balanced number of candidates from these social groups. Research shows that the financial and educational conditions of Black candidates are signifiers of this underrepresentation; however, political parties also present significant barriers to the mobility of this profile of these candidates in the electoral competition, as they are dominated and controlled by white men with greater economic power (Rios et al. 2017).

This broader picture of social and political transformations in Brazil during this cycle of democratic institutionalization saw a great swell of Black political activism in relation to the issue of racial equality in the public sphere. One of the achievements of this period was under Lula's administration, beginning in 2003, when the Secretariat for Policies to Promote Racial Equality (SEPPPIR) was created, with administrative and political autonomy from a ministry, but with few economic resources. Since then, the country has witnessed a series of measures aimed at reducing racial inequalities, which have come to exist at the federal level. Promoted by SEPPPIR, municipal and state agencies also began to

develop policies to combat racism. The implementation of affirmative actions was one of SEPPIR's main goals.

In the Ministry of Education, important actions were also developed, both at the executive and council levels. From the political point of view, there were great advances in legislation that impacted the lives of Afro-Brazilians, such as Law No. 10,639/2003 and Law No. 11,645/08, sanctioned by the federal executive power, in strong interaction with civil society, mediated by state agencies created during the Lula government to promote racial equality. The two laws deal with the introduction of teaching Afro-Brazilian and Indigenous cultures and histories, respectively. Both were fundamental to guarantee the revision of the didactic material distributed in schools, considered inadequate within the new parameters that sought to present the contributions of Black and Indigenous populations to the Brazilian social formation in a positive way. Furthermore, the two laws provided for training for teachers and other education professionals in which they learned new pedagogical forms to combat stereotyping, prejudice, and racial discrimination in the school environment.<sup>6</sup> These legal gains also demonstrate the ways in which Black mobilization played an important role in the changes made to the Brazilian higher education system, substantially changing the profile of its students.

Another legislative success within the executive branch, a joint effort by Black congresspeople and civil organizations, was PEC No. 66/12, also known as the domestic workers' Constitutional Amendment Proposal, which was sanctioned by then-President Dilma Rousseff. As a result, domestic workers, the majority of which being Black women,<sup>7</sup> won legal right to a regulated, eight-hour working day and, consequently, the right to overtime pay. Domestic workers also became entitled to the Severance Premium Reserve Fund (FGTS), unemployment insurance, and an additional rate for night shifts. This was an incredible struggle and thus, an historic win. Over the decades, domestic work had been incredibly precarious work, with characteristics resembling those of enslavement, as workers were hyper-exploited, oftentimes having to sleep in the homes of the families for whom they worked, and even being required to work entire weekends. Domestic work within Brazil spoke to a very specific class dialogue: domestic workers were typically from a working subclass, constantly and consistently targeted by social humiliation, while employers were usually from the middle classes, where having a domestic worker served as an indicator of social distinction. This legal success – and legislative guarantee – of the labor rights of domestic workers also speaks very directly to gains and protection of Black women, as they are the dominant group represented within this professional occupation in Brazil.

Finally, it is essential to highlight the legislation that guaranteed the quotas for Black Brazilians in public sector employment. Ratified until 2024, Law No. 12,990/2014 reserves 20% of the vacancies in federal public service employment for self-declared Black candidates, aiming to reduce the strong racial inequalities in public sector careers. This antiracist educational

legislation resulted from a set of actions and interactions involving civil society, Black parliamentarians, the secretariat for racial equality (SEPPIR), and the federal executive, under Rousseff's management at that time.

During the entire cycle of democratic establishment, there have been strong advances in some crucial areas for Brazilian society. Even though there are racial inequalities in parliamentary politics, the Black movements have acted strongly, with the state bureaucracy and in the executive arenas of the state, guaranteeing legislation and institutional spaces, and this activity has been pursued in strong interaction with the federal executive, especially during PT governments (Rios 2019a). In addition to policies focused on racial equality, there have been improvements in the living conditions of Black Brazilians, guaranteed by public policies on income transfer, which have especially affected poor populations within which Black Brazilians are in the majority. In addition to this, there was a real increase in the minimum wage, especially impacting the working classes.

### **3. De-democratization: Delegitimization of the Racial Equality Agenda and Retraction of Spaces and Measures to Ensure Rights**

Since the so-called *Jornadas de Junho* in 2013, when a great cycle of protest began in Brazil (see Chapter 6, by Pedro Luiz Lima and Jorge Chaloub, this volume), many political transformations have rapidly presented themselves within the public scene. Although the political agendas of June were diffuse and plural, using agents from multiple ideological spectra, it cannot be denied that those great political manifestations gave impetus to the strengthening of conservative and liberal movements, which appeared more often in the streets (Alonso and Mische 2016). Multiple factors have converged in the formation of these protests, which ran in cycles from June 2013 to the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff in 2016. These factors have been synthesized by urban planner Omena de Melo (2019): the widespread use of new communication technologies (Internet, live broadband transmission, social media); the production of alternative narratives, temporarily out of the control of traditional media intermediaries; the partial and temporary delegitimization of large institutions (politicians, police, media, FIFA); claims directly related to urban problems (transportation, public investment priorities in infrastructure, health and education), as discussed by Maricato and Colosso in this book (Chapter 10), and their connections with the impacts of mega sporting events; groups linked to autonomist and anarchist traditions and the intensified use of direct action, i.e. political acts guided by criticism of political parties, traditional associations such as trade unions. Since the democratization and impeachment of President Collor (1992), Brazil had never seen such numerous and expressive movements as those in June of 2013. The great mobilizations brought novelties and with it political forces capable of changing the political scenario, as long as it was well used by political actors well positioned in the sphere of power.

With the impeachment of President Rousseff moved by politicians from parliament and the Senate – supported by economic forces, like the Federation of Industries of the State of São Paulo (FIESP) – the articulation between the judiciary (through the operation *Lava Jato*) and the mainstream media, Brazil under Michel Temer (President Rousseff’s vice-president who took power following her impeachment) experienced tense moments and great political instability. The Temer government took a conservative turn, especially with regard to the pension reform. Its illegitimate position on account of the parliamentary coup against Dilma Rousseff left him in a relatively fragile position, especially as his political decisions were not supported by popular vote. Similarly, he had very low popularity among Brazilians. In regard to the issue of race, the Temer government was marked by the exit of technical profiles from the government, which had been developing policies aimed at improving racial equality. In general terms, the Temer administration feared substantive proposals to tackle racism and did not change the measures that were already underway. It should be noted that his government made no progress on the issue of racial equality.

This crisis of political representation expressed in the impeachment of President Rousseff and the low popularity of the subsequent President Temer, in addition to the loss of credibility of the major parties that alternated power – PT and PSDB – provided enough instability for the extreme-right-wing movement to take advantage under the leadership of Jair Bolsonaro, who presented himself as a candidate in this period. Throughout the presidential campaign, Bolsonaro continuously made racist statements against Black Brazilians, *quilombolas*, and Indigenous peoples. In a speech at the Jewish Association, he said that Afro-descendants of rural communities do nothing, in addition to using terms referencing slavery when referring to *quilombolas*. In derogatory statements made about the daughter of musician and former Minister of Justice Gilberto Gil, Bolsonaro declared that he would never let his son marry a woman like her, because she was Black.<sup>8</sup> On several occasions, the then pre-candidate said that if he were elected president of the republic, he would not make land demarcations for Indigenous and *quilombolas*.

After elected, the extreme-right government put at risk Brazilian democracy and all of the social, political, labor, civil, cultural, and land rights won since the re-democratization of the nation in the 1980s. Bolsonaro’s mode of government rests on two pillars: the first being the delegitimization of the demands of underrepresented and socially marginalized social groups. All critical debate in regard to issues of gender, race, and class inequalities in the country is now interpreted and declared as victimization by Bolsonaro and his followers (see Chapter 11, by Rangel, Dultra, and McCoy, this volume). With rhetoric based on denying the victim, Bolsonaro provokes and promotes the significant corrosion of democratic values based on the rule of law in Brazil.

The second strategy of the Bolsonaro government effectively involves the withdrawal of rights or the weakening of state mechanisms and agencies aimed at confronting social and racial problems. In the case of the rights of the *quilombola* population, the president has fulfilled his campaign promises. In 2019,



according to the Palmares Cultural Foundation, only 11 *quilombola* communities were recognized, compared to 166 communities recognized by the state in the previous year. Land conflicts have increased and human rights analysts see in presidential declarations incentives to increase agrarian conflicts, especially since the president openly declares his support in favor of economic exploitation of Indigenous lands by private agents, as explained by Ana Guggenheim Coutinho in Chapter 12 (this volume). These conflicts have increased tension throughout the nation's countryside. The pastoral care of land has registered at least seven murders of Indigenous people in agrarian conflicts in 2019, in comparison to two deaths the year before.<sup>9</sup>

The increase of political conservatism and the emergence of politicians openly opposed to the policies of affirmative action, to the demarcation of *quilombola* lands, and to policies contrary to gender equality have placed women and Black Brazilians in quite different institutional, cultural, and political contexts. It was an experience of civil reaction, in the form of organized protests, which questioned the meaning of state public policies, social transformations, and moral values in a strong transformation of the country. These protests were generated in part by the great strength of progressive social movements as heirs of the democratization process, which brought about the cultural transformation in daily life and in the non-state public sphere, seen through public policies in the areas of education and health, which guaranteed the production of data on inequalities and by the design of policies with a view to overcoming disparities found in research conducted by both the academy and government agencies.

The course of such transformations, however, has been called into question by the great democratic crisis in Brazil. With the dismissal of the first female president in Brazilian republican history, with the accusations brought against her having little legal basis, the spaces for the management of racial and gender equality became smaller, with a low presence of feminist and antiracist movements in government. In addition, conservative civil movements began to question the public policies implemented by the previous governments. In this context of a strong regressive state engagement, traditional feminist and Black movements are mixed with movements formed by younger generations who work in civil society exercising control and public denunciations, in addition to street mobilization against state violence, as the most important case in the country today, which is the fight against lethal state violence, referred to as the genocide of the Black population. This campaign has now moved to the public scene by both young Black men and women engaged in Black feminist mobilization.

In the 2018 presidential elections, the issue of race appeared in public debate, especially with the derogatory statements of candidate Jair Bolsonaro, calling for the destruction of *quilombola* communities, the use of pejorative language that associated them with slaves and openly presenting himself for the titling of *quilombola* lands. Bolsonaro's statements led these social movements to

accuse him in the Superior Electoral Court (TSE) of racism, but the Supreme Court ruled at this time that it was not a crime of racism. With reactions and campaigns from social movements – women, Black Brazilians, Black women, and other movements in the context of re-democratization and that had links with the state during the democratic cycle – Bolsonaro adopted a strategy of keeping Black figures at his side, in particular the candidate Hélio Bolsonaro (also known as Hélio Fernando Barbosa Lopes), who is now a member of the president’s political party, the Social Liberal Party (PSL). To him, Jair Bolsonaro lent his surname, ensuring that he was elected through a loan of both social name and party support (financial and campaign structure). Congressman Hélio Bolsonaro was responsible, for example, for signing an article opposing affirmative action in Brazil, on the grounds that the speeches of Black activists were victimists. According to him, “*Cota racial*,<sup>10</sup> just like various actions taken by the ‘black movement,’ are mere partisan programs.”<sup>11</sup>

In this new turn to the extreme-right, several negative effects can already be seen on the democratic agenda in general and on the racial equality agenda in particular. The most notable actions are those aimed at de-legalizing and delegitimizing the agenda in favor of equality between Blacks and whites in the country. The most widely used strategy is the emptying of portfolios, bodies, and councils focused on the issue of civil rights. Two recent cases deserve highlighting. The first was the appointment of the president of the Palmares Cultural Foundation, an institution created in the context of the democratization of Brazil and which aims to combat racism; more specifically, this body is responsible for identifying the *quilombola* communities. In November of 2019, the Month of Black Consciousness, a symbolic period in Brazil since the 1970s, a Black person was appointed to the highest office of this organization who openly defended the non-existence of racism in Brazil and who was explicitly opposed to the very existence of Black social movements and affirmative action policies. In other words, there is a deliberate attempt by the Bolsonaro government to delegitimize the claims and symbolic forms of confronting racism in Brazil. Unlike previous governments, the Bolsonaro government appointed a person who was not technically prepared to his position. In addition, there was no compatibility between his ideas and the institutional mission of the state agency. He lacked support from Black social movements and civil organizations. This is a break with the democratic strategies and routines established since re-democratization, when social movement collectives were consulted and formed their own representation within state spaces.

Second, the case of the Racial Equality Council deserves reflection, as it is also one of the spaces where attacks by the Bolsonaro government have been observed. The National Council for Policies on Racial Equality (CNPIR) is a collegial advisory body and part of the basic structure of the Ministry of Human Rights/National Secretariat for Policies on the Promotion of Racial Equality (MDH/SEPPIR). Its main mission is to propose policies to promote racial equality, with emphasis on the Black population and other racial and ethnic segments

of the Brazilian population. In addition to combating racism, CNPIR's mission is to offer alternatives for overcoming racial inequalities, from an economic approach, as well as from a social, political, and cultural point of view, thus expanding the processes of social deliberation within these policies. Various historic organizations from the Black movement, like Educafro – a fundamental association in the implementation of affirmative action in Brazilian universities – as well as the historic organization of the Unified Black Movement (MNU), created in 1978 to denounce racism in a nation still under a military regime, were expelled from the Presidential Council by presidential decree.<sup>12</sup>

Today, many Black leaders have diagnosed that the current attacks on public institutions are especially harmful to Black students who enter university institutions in a fragile economic situation, and therefore depend on grants and other forms of financial aid, which have been affected by cuts made by the Ministry of Education. Additionally, there are several proposed bills aimed at ending quotas for Black Brazilians and Indigenous people in public universities. Two draft laws are currently being processed in the legislature: Bill No. 1,531 and Bill No. 5,303, both presented by representatives from the party that elected Jair Bolsonaro.

In this new scenario, social movements have again become oppositional to the government. Activists have reorganized themselves within the sphere of civil society and have started to oppose government declarations, to struggle against its regressive policies and denounce the boycotts by the Bolsonaro government to public policies for racial equality. In particular, the most important agenda item in this context has been the fight against police violence. With very high murder rates, the current positions and public policies of the federal government systematically weaken human rights organizations and foster violent actions by the state. In this moment of democratic crisis, political violence has also been escalating, especially against Indigenous and *quilombola* leaders in Brazil's rural regions. This scenario of de-democratization, therefore, is marked by a rhetoric that denies the egalitarian values and collective, social, labor, and affirmative actions that have been consolidated in Brazil since the process of democratization itself.

#### **4. Final Considerations**

The institutionalization of the racial equality agenda in Brazil depends strategically on executive and participatory bodies (politically created within the state) and their capacity to promote public policies – maintained through social and state interaction between public agents and social movement activists, especially in establishing a process of broad democratization. During the political crisis, that institutional path was broken by the Bolsonaro government. Social movements for racial equality rights lost access and legitimacy to the spheres of power, especially in the federal executive arena.

From the ideological point of view, during the democratization cycle, Brazil was built as a multi-racial and multi-ethnic nation, which had been questioning

the myth of racial democracy based on data analyzing racial discrimination and inequality. During the period of democratic stability, a political consensus was formed that there was racism in Brazil, that racial democracy was an ideological farce – a myth, rather than fact – and that the country needed focused policies to combat racial discrimination. Under Bolsonaro, the colorblind ideology (re)emerges. This is the period in which the country's de-democratization (Tilly, 2007) has become most evident. According to this ideology assumed by the extreme-right, above all is the nation itself, above everything and everyone, perpetuating a rhetoric of homogenous national identity. Above the nation, only the Christian god. All speeches about racism, discrimination, and racial inequalities would be forms of victimism invented by the political Left. According to this view – which is not based on scientific literature or on statistics produced by respected institutes nationally or globally –, even Atlantic slavery should be questioned. The combination of these discourses that delegitimize demands, social actors, and entire groups that struggle to ensure social, political, and civil rights – in addition to the practices of emptying state agencies and implementing measures to weaken institutions and ministries that are dedicated to the expansion of the state of rights to the neediest population with fewer resources, where Black people, Indigenous people, and women are found – reveal a regressive scenario marked by policies of austerity I have called de-democratization.

Against all these official and governmental speeches, new civil actors, a new Black generation – especially of Black feminists – use social networks as important spaces for political action, where they guide changes in values and conceptions of life, while denouncing cases of racism, machismo, and lesbophobia among other symbolic and physical violences that target the civil rights of Black Brazilians and women. These women work in the squares, on public transportation, in the peripheral areas doing cultural and political performances. An example can be found in Slam, a form of collective action that involves performance and poetry in public spaces. Collectives organized in universities to combat racial discrimination in the academic environment, to monitor the application of affirmative action and to welcome young Black people entering higher education are the hallmarks of this new generation of activists. Finally, it is worth mentioning its strong performance in social networks, where they guide the public debate against racism, reporting experiences of discrimination while spreading experiences of overwhelming racial violence.

This new generation seems to act with more intensity for the interactions between social movements and legislative power. To a certain extent, in the 2018 elections, despite the expansion of political conservatism in the legislative and executive spaces, women and Black Brazilians achieved political representation in the legislative space, with qualitative prominence for Black women, constituting expressive minorities engaged with social movements. Perhaps this is the new, though tenuous, political direction of a democratic alternative in Brazil.

## Notes

1. This work is the result of the research ‘Socio-state interactions and institutionalization processes at the federal level: a post-2016 balance sheet,’ financed by the CNPQ Universal call for proposals. A version of this chapter was presented at the Summer School of Harare, Zimbabwe in January 2020. I thank Paris Yeros, Givania Silva and Marcelo Rosa for their critical comments. This chapter received English language technical reviews from Carlyn Rodgers (University of Cambridge), to whom I am immensely grateful. I also thank Professor Frieder Otto Wolf for his valuable suggestions.
2. Located in the south-central region of the country.
3. *Quilombolas* is the term used for particular Black populations, especially in rural areas. The origins of these communities can be traced back to slavery. Their presence in the Constitution of 1988 arose from debates regarding their origins as marginalized and disenfranchised peoples, thus resulting in the constitutional guarantee of their cultural and land rights. In the 2020 demographic census, the *quilombola* communities in Brazil will be included for the first time in the database of the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE). From this data, it will become possible to know the size of this population and its living conditions.
4. The first democratic elections after the military dictatorship elected an outsider from a small party with no parliamentary base. This period from 1989 to 1994 was characterized by great political instability, leading to the impeachment of the then-President Fernando Collor. For more information see Sallum Jr. (2015).
5. *Preto* (Black) and *pardo* (brown) are official categories that refer to all Brazilians of African descent. These categories are both officially recognized through censuses, as well as acknowledged as socially acceptable within Brazil. According to data from PNAD Continuous (2018) the Black population (“pretos” + “pardos”) in Brazil is 55.8%; in contrast, 43.1% declared themselves whites.
6. For more information, see Silva (2010); Rios (2019b).
7. According to a household sample survey, domestic employment represents 18% of the total workforce of Black women, while for white women it represents 10% (BRASIL, 2016). According to IBGE, in 2016, Brazil had 6.158 million domestic workers, 92% of whom were women. Based on 2010 data, the ILO, when comparing the number of people who were domestic workers in the world, identified that Brazil topped the list with more than a hundred countries as the country with the most absolute numbers of domestic workers. See: [www.ilo.org/brasilia/temas/trabalho-domestico/lang--pt/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/brasilia/temas/trabalho-domestico/lang--pt/index.htm). For more information, see Lima and Prates (2019).
8. This case was taken to the Superior Electoral Court, but Bolsonaro was acquitted for lack of substantive evidence, for ambiguity in the interpretation (sexual or racial discrimination) and for the fact that he had parliamentary immunity. See <http://g1.globo.com/politica/noticia/2015/05/stf-arquiva-inquerito-contra-bolsonaro-por-falas-sobre-preta-gil.html>, accessed on 7 February 2020.
9. See Human Rights Watch World Report 2009 in [www.hrw.org/world-report/2019](http://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019), accessed on 6 February 2020.
10. The quota program for Blacks was approved in 2012. That law has a term of ten years. It is important to say that there are no quotas exclusively for Blacks in Brazil. The model adopted in the country requires that applicants for quotas have attended high school in the public system. Blacks who studied in private schools are not allowed to compete for quotas, according to the law.
11. This opinion article was published in an important Brazilian newspaper in the month of Black Consciousness. See Bolsonaro, Hélio (2019). Nossa Cor é o Brasil. *Folha de São Paulo*. In <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/opiniao/2019/11/nossa-cor-e-o-brasil.shtml>, accessed on 8 December 2019.

12. Several other important Black and *quilombola* organizations have been prevented from remaining on the council, such as Educafro, Unegro, Apn's, MNU, Enegreer, Conaq, Abpn, Fepal. Besides these, the National Union of Students and the Central única dos Trabalhadores (CUT) were also left out of participation in this institutional arena. It has become common in Bolsonaro's management to empty state control agencies. By decree, the president extinguishes the participation of civil society in the councils, following the example of the Council for the Protection of Child Rights in 2019 and the Environment Council in 2020.

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