

Black Disidentification: The 2013 Protests, Rolezinhos, and Racial Antagonism in Post-Lula Brazil

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Abstract

This article explores dimensions of a foundational social antagonism that, the author claims, characterizes the Brazilian polis, by analyzing the ways in which the problem of Black presence manifested itself in the 2013 mass street protests and the rolezinhos (literally cruises, or little strolls). The author makes an initial analysis of the drastic policy changes brought about by the two Lula federal administrations, in particular their emphasis on addressing long-term and structural poverty. This is followed by an examination of white participation in and Black disidentification with the 2013 protests, establishing the grounds on which the heuristic proposition about the foundational Black antagonism vis-à-vis the nation is further elaborated and tested. The final section analyses the rolezinhos and the controversies they generated.

Keywords

2013 street protests, Black, Blackness, Brazil, racial antagonism, rolezinho

Introduction

By analyzing the ways in which the problem of Black presence manifested itself in the 2013 mass street protests and the rolezinhos (literally, cruises or little strolls), this article explores dimensions of a foundational social antagonism that, I claim, characterizes the Brazilian polis. The heuristic proposition tested here is that Black assertive and autonomous presence is antagonistic to dynamics of sociality, the working of the state machine (especially, but not only, the police), and more broadly, the Brazilian project of development. Because it destabilizes the structure of Brazilian social organization, Black presence in its current form – relatively empowered economically, formally backed by a host of pro-Black sweeping federal affirmative action policies, and often embraced by sectors of Brazilian Black movements – has the effect of bringing to the surface elementary forms and principles of social interaction that exclude Blacks from realms of conviviality, capitalistic transactions, and politics.

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To explore antagonisms whose principal elements are the gendered dynamics of racial identity, ascription, and performance, is to enter complex territory. For a start, Brazil and most Brazilians, Blacks included, still self-define themselves as exceptional in the realm of race relations, and claim to employ much less rabid forms of racial discrimination than those found in other parts of the world (e.g. Turra and Venturi, 1995). To further complicate claims of an underlying anti-Black antagonism, the current and previous two PT (Partido dos Trabalhadores [Workers' Party]) federal administrations have managed what even the most idealistic would have viewed as pipe dreams only a few years ago: a profound shift in both economic policy and the social composition of the state machine. The Brazilian state now targets the poor and the Black by making policy choices that seek greater social equality. Not only has poverty diminished by astounding proportions, but also the historical subsidies the middle and upper classes systematically received from the government in tax breaks and education have contracted, to name the most obvious features. Just as important, the Brazilian state is now populated by unprecedented numbers of those who originated from the impoverished and organized labor social sectors (e.g. Saad-Filho, 2013) – even though, analysts suggest (e.g. Boito Jr, 2006: 238), that the first Lula administration substantially improved the national industrial and agrarian bourgeoisie's position in the power bloc.

How are these recent transformations in state policy revealed in and impacted by, on the one hand, Black absence from street protests and, on the other, Black participation in the *rolezinhos*? Whereas a more direct answer for Black absence may be the economic improvements they have experienced since 2003, the troubling increase in violence against Blacks, much of it committed by agents of the state (i.e. police forces) registered in the same period (Waiselfiz, 2012) complicates easy analyses. After all, the same state that improves the lives of Blacks is also the one that disproportionately kills them while – and this is key when developing the thesis of Black antagonism vis-à-vis the polis – homicides among whites is *decreasing*.

A theoretical perspective on *anti-Black structural antagonism* provides a framework with which to make sense of these scenarios. Drawing from Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967), this framework emphasizes structural positionalities in order to explain meanings of blackness. 'Ontology', Fanon explains, 'does not permit us to understand the being on the black man. For not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man' (p. 110). The opposite, however, is not true since 'the black man has no ontological resistance in the eyes of the white man.' This peculiar semantic field structures anti-Black dispositions in such a way that the Black subject is the (non) subject according to which all other subjects define themselves. To be is to be not Black. From the perspective of the Black, this proposition suggests that, regardless of what the Black subject does, individually and collectively, the relational positionality remains as a foundational and structuring social fact.

Frank Wilderson (2010: 58) follows Fanon's formulation and suggests that anti-Black solidarity sutures a worldwide semantic field. This proposition adds specificity to works on global white supremacy (e.g. Barlow, 2003; Winant, 2002) as it renders anti-Blackness this global system's center of symbolic gravity. Drawing from what he categorizes as an Afro-pessimist ensemble of thinkers, Wilderson explains Black positionality through the 'afterlife of slavery', a concept Saidiya Hartman (1997, 2007) equates to the foundational and continued subjection/abjection of Blacks regardless of formal citizenship and equality. The afterlife of slavery engenders a unique and incommunicable Black positionality whose main trait is structural and gratuitous violence. This violence is structural because, according to Fanon's scheme, Blacks are positioned outside of (a) humanity, and (b) civil society which, from a Black perspective, constitutes a state of war (Fanon, 1963; Wilderson, 2005). Anti-Black violence is gratuitous since, contrary to what the non-Black experiences, it is not contingent on transgressing civil society's hegemony (Wilderson, 2010: 55). Gratuitous violence, as one of the pillars of social death, alongside dishonor and natal

alienation (Patterson, 1982), renders slavery an ongoing fact, present tense (James, 2008; Rodriguez, 2010). Such propositions on anti-Black structural antagonism will be elaborated when analyzing the place of Blacks in contemporary racial democracies such as Brazil.

The 2013 protests that swept Brazil's main cities had a troubling common characteristic: the absence of Black people participating as Blacks. Blacks, of course, participated, but as workers, students, as citizens. For the most part, when present, their racial identity was not the primary motivator, nor was it part of larger organized race-based efforts. If we focus on the cities of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, where the largest concentrations took place, Black absence was particularly vexing given the large proportion of Afro-descended people in the two largest Brazilian metropolises.

Rolezinhos gained visibility in the final days of 2013 in the city of São Paulo. Consisting of large gatherings of impoverished youths in shopping malls, where their presence en masse was not common, rolezinhos generated a domino effect of condemnatory reactions. Public opinion captured in surveys, the police, elected officials and their security advisors, and of course the news media reproached the actions of the young residents of the city's peripheral zones. Rolezinhos became a national fixation and, faster than they were being discussed by the greater public, intellectuals, pundits, and newscasters, spread to many other malls in the greater São Paulo metropolitan region, and shortly thereafter reached the states of Rio de Janeiro, Minas Gerais, and Espírito Santo, among others.

Because the 2013 rolezinhos were about the assertive presence of Blacks in (semi) public spaces of privileged consumption, and ultimately, therefore, Blacks' place in the national imaginary, they provide an interesting analytical contrast to that same year's massive street protests. While the youths of the rolezinhos often disavowed overt political motivation for their actions, they affirmed their excluded condition as members of the Black and impoverished classes, and, emboldened by their recent significant gains in earnings and access to credit, demanded their right to participate in spaces of leisure and commerce usually reserved for the affluent. Because poverty in Brazil correlates strongly with race, most of the rolezeiros – those who took part in the rolezinhos – were Black or identified with them. The widespread visceral negative reactions that ensued suggest that the rolezinhos' claims of membership touched a sensitive cultural nerve.

During the protests and the rolezinhos, in spite of the surface differences between the events, Blacks were confronted with the same dilemma: to what extent, if at all, are public (or semi-public, in the case of privately-owned shopping malls) spaces supposedly open to all citizens conducive to Black people's assertive visibility, political demands, leisure, and purchase? This question is symptomatic of a larger, structural, and historically rooted problem: that of the Black presence in the Brazilian polis.

To examine and provide (admittedly incomplete) explanations for the problem of the Black presence in Brazil, this article engages academic writers, news coverage, and ethnographic findings relative to the protests and rolezinhos. It starts with (a) an analysis of the drastic policy changes brought about by the two Lula federal administrations, in particular their emphasis on addressing long-term and structural poverty. In this context, Lula and the PT, at least nationally, lose a substantial part of their historical middle-class, student, and organized labor bases, and become, in effect, a party that electorally depends on what can be called the subproletariat – the unorganized, urban, mostly Black, informal laborers increasingly hailing from the impoverished northeastern states. However, despite all the recent economic gains, as well as aggressive affirmative action policies, as we will see, Blacks' relationship with the PT-led federal administration remains ambiguous. An examination of (b) white participation in and Black disidentification with the 2013 protests follows, establishing the grounds on which the heuristic proposition about the foundational Black antagonism vis-à-vis the nation is further elaborated and tested. Sections (a) and (b) set up the stage

for (c), where *rolezinhos* and the controversies they generated are analyzed. Why are *rolezinhos* so bothersome? What do the negative reactions against them say about the Brazilian models of sociality and development? By centering the problem of Black presence in times of expanded economic opportunity for those excluded from national policy priorities until Lula's presidency, this article focuses on a foundational problem to which there will be no easy solution. Black presence, while supported and improved by a litany of federally mandated affirmative action and redistributive policies, nevertheless suggests a seemingly intractable, foundational problem when approached via the angles of recent large-scale, popular events.

Lula and Dilma's Black Brazil

Among a series of measures intended to diminish poverty, the first Lula federal mandate instituted a cash-transfer program called Family Stipend (*Bolsa Família*). Between 2004–2008, it slashed the number of people living in poverty by almost 28 percent. Today, the program is the largest in the world of its kind; it benefits about 50 million people, roughly a quarter of Brazil's population. From Lula's inauguration to Dilma Rousseff's current mandate, which continues to expand the program's reach, it has diminished poverty by half. Persistent levels of inequality notwithstanding, the pro-poor political choices of PT become evident when data on income over the last decade is taken into account. Between 2001 and 2009, income increased 69.08 percent among the 10 percent poorer; it increased 12.80 percent for the 10 percent richer. Given the country's racialized structure of social inequality, which consistently correlates race to lower earnings, pro-poor policies translate into pro-Black policies. Considering the same time frame, income for 'negros' and 'pardos' (blacks and browns in Portuguese, who the Brazilian census and Black movement categorize together as negros, or Blacks) increased 43.1 and 48.5 percent respectively; whites had their incomes increased by 20.1 percent. In 2001, Black incomes were 53 percent of white incomes; in 2009, Black incomes jumped to 62 percent of white incomes (Neri, 2011: 9, 14, 15).

Changes of such magnitude in the country's earning structure were accompanied by equally dramatic transformations in PT's social base. From its inception, the party's core supporters consisted of trade union members, intellectuals, artists, college students, public sector functionaries, and members of the activist Catholic church, including proponents of the Liberation Theology. Reflecting PT's origins in the greater São Paulo metropolitan area, regionally its backing was stronger in the richer, more industrialized, urban, and whiter southeastern and southern regions. In spite of PT's progressive discourse and Lula's working-class background, the first presidential election after 25 years of military rule, in 1989, reflected the party's social base. In a result suggesting a marked class polarization – which would be so stark again only in the 2006 presidential election – Fernando Collor, Lula's opponent and the election's winner, carried the vote of the poor, the Black, the unorganized, and those of the disadvantaged states of the northeast.

Yet, analyses of electoral data show that, at least since 1996 (e.g. Singer, 2010: 95), large segments of the middle classes had been withdrawing their support from the PT, at the same time as the most vulnerable and impoverished electorate changed their allegiances to the lone red star party. Thus, for the first time in post-military presidential elections, in 2006 PT electoral support was inversely proportional to the electorate's income: the poorer the voters, the more likely they were to support Lula. In the runoff election against conservative candidate Geraldo Alckmin, while receiving 36 percent of the votes among individuals earning 10 or more minimum salaries per month, Lula amassed 64 percent of the vote among those earning up to two minimum salaries. Alckmin, by contrast, obtained his greater support among high earners (Singer, 2009: 85). Signaling a palpable shift, the majority of voters that gave Lula his second mandate were precisely those who had rejected him in previous elections: the poor and the Black.

The 2006 presidential elections happened at the same time as the most impoverished were experiencing substantial improvements due to targeted policies: unprecedented increases in the minimum wage, land rights for Maroon (formerly enslaved) communities, and expansion of consumer and first-time home-buying credit, among many others. It also followed a major vote-buying scandal, called *mensalão*, in which most of the high-ranking PT officials, including Lula's then chief of staff, José Dirceu, and the party's president, José Genoíno, were indicted – and in 2012 eventually received jail sentences – on corruption accusations. Even though Lula was spared formal accusations and reelected with 60 percent of the vote, the 2005–2006 period consolidates electoral trends apparent in the previous decade according to which the PT's traditional electoral base was radically transformed. *The most impoverished and Black segments of Brazilian society now constituted the party's national support base.* Alienated by a series of federally-mandated programs that were experienced as further diminishing their already challenged privileges, the middle classes realigned themselves away from Lula and his party. Formalization of unregulated sectors of the economy, such as domestic labor, which historically sustained middle-class privileges while maintaining rigid gendered and sexualized hierarchies of race (e.g. Goldstein, 2003; Kofes, 2001); affirmative action programs (which in 2012 Rousseff expanded to all federal universities) (Romero, 2012); and of course the Family Stipend that increasingly came to represent, as food stamps and welfare generally in the United States and Europe (Winant, 2002), undeserving government handouts: these measures compounded the middle-classes' sense of eroding privileges and incited their grievances against both the PT and those whom it was apparently single-mindedly benefitting. At the same time, although not uniformly, spaces of consumption and privilege became increasingly less white, more diverse. Airports, durable goods stores, car dealerships, and shopping malls, timidly but unmistakably, witnessed an unprecedented influx of formerly excluded, often non-white persons (Saad-Filho, 2013: 661, 662).

In spite of what sociologist Francisco Oliveira (2007) has termed the ideological ambiguity of the poor in Brazil, in 2010, Dilma Rousseff's successful presidential campaign produced results similar to that of Lula's 2002 and 2006 elections, winning with greater margins among the poor, the Black, the states of the north and northeast, and losing in the state of São Paulo.

These electoral and demographic shifts become even more telling of the current political moment when we consider the recomposition of the federal administrative machine since Lula's election. Five working-class people were appointed for Lula's first ministerial team: an unprecedented number. Dozens of trade unionists were nominated for high-level national administration posts. They in turn appointed fellow organizers who came from similar working-class backgrounds. As analysts have pointed out (e.g. Saad-Filho and Morais, 2014: 229), the state machine began to reflect more accurately the impoverished and working-class constituencies it privileged through its redistributive policies.

As transformative as the last decade has been in rendering the federal bureaucracy more attuned to, and in fact incorporating formally excluded impoverished and working-class representatives, the outcomes are more ambiguous when we consider Black effective presence, participation, and actual executive power in government spheres. Certainly, seasoned Black activists, and by extension their political and social networks, and some of their demands, have been incorporated into the federal administrative machine. In 2003, Lula instituted the Secretariat of Policies for the Promotion of Racial Equality (SEPPIR, Secretaria de Políticas de Promoção da Igualdade Racial), giving it ministry status. Luiza Bairros, the current minister, like Matilde Ribeiro, the first one (who resigned in 2006 following apparently spurious corruption charges), are both Afro-descended women who dedicated a significant portion of their lives to organized efforts closely connected to or from within Black movements.

Bairros' position is symptomatic of the dilemmas presented by the PT-led federal machine. On the one hand, continuing her previous activist work as an organizer, academic, and member of local government in the state of Bahia, Bairros has strategically used her ministry to push for the expansion of affirmative action programs. She has not shied away, at least in public events, from acknowledging the ongoing genocide of Black youth, thus supporting anti-genocide campaigns such as the São Paulo-based Committee Against the Genocide of the Black, Poor, and Peripheral Youth (Comitê Contra o Genocídio da Juventude Preta, Pobre, e Periférica). Indeed, SEPPPIR is one of the eight ministries operating the federal Plan Youth Alive (Plano Juventude Viva), which aims at reducing the astounding rates of homicide among male Black youth, who represent 76.6 percent of all victims of homicide in the country (Juventude Viva, 2014).

On the other hand, Bairros is constantly frustrated by, and often will publicly talk about, her ministry's toothlessness. She has remarked on how difficult it is, because of bureaucratic red tape, to operationalize her reduced budget – which indeed is the smallest among all ministries.¹ The ministry, she reasons, has little political use for PT. In the big electoral picture, the race question is not strategic, meaning that it is a topic that divides rather than draws in supporters. Although Lula and Rousseff have implemented aggressive top-down pro-Black policies, they have done so in a way that does not engage public opinion until the measures are actually on the books. Bairros and her ministry, then, are in a peculiar position: while the PT and its administrations have created significant openings for Black activists and indeed implemented policies that have been historic demands of organized Afro Brazilian groups, it has not given SEPPPIR much of a nationally-visible role nor sufficient autonomy, bureaucratic structure, and budget.

Still, the federal administration – and for that matter the nation's – contradictory relationship with Blacks has many other facets. In spite of PT's marked pro-Black efforts, Blacks are still grossly underrepresented in Brasília. In congress, for example, only 8.9 percent of its members declared themselves Black in 2013. In the senate, only Paulo Paim, former steelworker representing the state of Rio Grande do Sul, declares himself Afro Brazilian.

It is undeniable that Blacks have greatly benefitted from the redistributive policies such as the Family Stipend. Yet, SEPPPIR and indeed the PT's political and administrative limitations, allied to the continued national Black overrepresentation among those killed by the police and who die prematurely due to preventable disease or inadequate health care (Paixão et al., 2010) allows for the following formulation. While the PT-led state apparatus has incited profound pro-poor and pro-Black programmatic changes, it has been unable or unwilling to structurally affect areas that disproportionately impact the Afro-descended: public security, health, and political representation. As far as Blacks are concerned, the PT era in the federal machine has meant a peculiar dichotomy of programmatic change and structural permanence. It is the latter that allows us to further explore the thesis of an anti-Black structure of antagonism.

White Participation, Black Disidentification

The 2013 massive street protests began with the Free Fare Movement (Movimento Passe Livre, MPL), an independent and horizontal social movement pressuring for universal free public transportation (Movimento Passe Livre, 2014). Building on protests against bus fare hikes (Salvador in 2003, Florianópolis in 2004, and Curitiba, Porto Alegre, Brasília, Fortaleza, and Recife, among others, in 2005), MPL coalesced in 2005 during the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre (see, for example, Fonseca, 2013).

On 6 June 2013, in São Paulo, after organizing small rallies in the city's peripheral neighborhoods a few days earlier, MPL members led an estimated 2000–5000-people concentration in the city's central region. In front of the Teatro Municipal, they protested against the bus fare increase,

which went from R\$3.00 to R\$3.20. A violent confrontation with the Military Police resulted in 15 arrests. Disseminated via social media, the images ignited further protests throughout the country.

In line with the statements made by mayor Fernando Haddad and the state governor, Geraldo Alckmin (both on a visit to Paris), São Paulo's main newspapers, *Folha de S. Paulo* and *O Estado de S. Paulo*, criticized the movement for bringing havoc to the city's already chaotic traffic, for inciting public disorder, and for making unrealistic demands. *Folha's* first page on 7 June 2013, featured a color photograph of protesters burning turnstiles on the street. The accompanying article was headed 'Vandalism marks act for cheaper transport in SP' (*Folha de S. Paulo*, 2013).

However, following another MPL-led protest on 13 June in São Paulo, the dominant news media's perspective began to change. On that occasion, more than 200 protestors were arrested. The police had intensified their repression, and as in previous events, used rubber bullets and tear-gas bombs to intimidate the crowd. This time, the bullets struck seven *Folha* news reporters. One of them, Giuliana Vallone, white, was temporarily blinded in her right eye.

After the dominant media's realignment and their newfound support of the protestors and their demands, the manifestations quickly spread throughout the country. In the ensuing two weeks, the gatherings had brought together more than one million people in cities including Porto Alegre, Curitiba, São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, and Fortaleza. Analysts noted how, at that juncture, the demonstrations 'became much more white and middle class in composition' (Saad-Filho and Morais, 2014: 237).

According to research institute Datafolha, a survey conducted with São Paulo protestors revealed the following: 77 percent were college graduates (compared to 24% in the total population); 22 percent were students (vs 4% of the population), and 53 percent were aged 25 years or less (O Argonauta, 2013). Also interesting was that, according to polling company Ibope, 91 percent of participants heard of the protests via the internet, 77 percent of whom used Facebook (Pelli, 2013: 33). The great majority of young college graduates were not in the job market (De Paula, 2013). Given that the numbers about education and access to the internet reveal social advantage, the overwhelming and disproportionate presence of whites was unsurprising. White presence not only confirmed the historical correlation between whiteness and privilege, but also marked the protests as sites where this privilege was exercised publicly throughout the country. It is significant that many of this crowd's social characteristics were the same as those defining the electorate that clearly rejected both Lula and Dilma in the last two presidential elections.

So when protestors demanded political reform, the end of corruption, and better public transportation (CT, 2014) they inevitably made claims on the state, its agents, and society more broadly; they spoke as frustrated, educated, middle-class, white Brazilians. Even though their racial identity was not manifested as such, it nevertheless emerged in two ways. One, in the visual images of the protests, which can be traced back to images of the MPL's origin; and two, in the types of demands they formulated and the interlocutors to whom they chose to make them.

To better understand both the demands and the interlocutors, I propose that we think of them as part of a relational system. In this system, the protestors' demands gain full meaning when juxtaposed to Black disidentification. That is to say: the protestors' legibility (by the media, by the government, by society) draws from, and is therefore related to, a series of assumptions about who belongs and can engage in public spaces and politics, and who cannot. Even though the protestors opposed politicians and public policies, and actually were exposed to considerable violence from the police when voicing their discontent, they eventually got positive attention from the media, elected officials, and even President Dilma Rousseff. On 21 June 2013, at prime-time 9 pm, Rousseff appeared on national television, expressed her sympathy for the protestors, offered to meet their representatives, and laid out a sweeping agenda promising oil royalties to education improvement, the import of foreign doctors to fix the country's public health system, and a broad

political reform aimed at expanding popular participation. The protestors' demands, as the president reminded them, were heard; their presence and actions, after all, were perfectly legible.

Black disidentification from the protests, on the other hand, suggests Blacks' awareness that, unlike those who took to the streets, their presence and actions would not be as legible: their interlocutors in the state machine and in the broader society would not be as willing to understand and engage with their specific demands – demands derived from related yet much deeper experiences of economic marginalization compounded by present actualization of historical structures of racial inequality (Paixão et al., 2010). By signaling a refusal to enter normative spaces of public mobilization, Black disidentification disrupts assumptions about forms of politics that operate under the aegis of colorblindness or multiraciality (Sexton, 2008), which in supposedly racial–democratic Brazil, as in post-racial United States, are the unspoken norms.

Three basic facts of gendered Blackness are intimated in Black disidentification from the protests. First, as part of a 'white spatial formation', where 'São Paulo's white civil society – the middle class, NGOs, social movements – come together to exercise the rights of personhood and citizenry' (Alves, 2013: 11), the public square is not inviting or enabling of demands based on Black subjects' experiences. Considering that such demands spring from unique experiences, they are not translatable in the political grammar that is legible in traditional publics. Second, and in contrast to the strident disapproval of police violence inflicted on journalists, vulnerability to violence, and particularly lethal violence, produced by both the police and those deputized as such, is a constitutive, structural facet of Black experience (Human Rights Watch, 2009; Waiselfiz, 2012). That the violence against the protestors was eventually deemed unacceptable by the dominant media and elected officials reveals a fundamental difference in what Blacks and non-Blacks can expect. Would police brutality be the object of such raucous objection if it were perpetrated on Black bodies? From the perspective of Blacks, it is more prudent to assume that unprovoked violence will mark one's lifelong experience. The difference between the Black and non-Black experience of violence is that the former does not register as an outrage.

The third fact of gendered Blackness informing disidentification from the demonstrations is this: while the relationship between protestors and the state bureaucracies and representatives is one of articulated *conflict* (insofar as negotiation and dialogue, though fraught, are not only possible but, as the reversal of the bus fare hike and Rousseff's public address demonstrated, likely), the relationship between Blacks, on the one hand, and the state and its agents, on the other, is one of *antagonism*. This formulation brings us back to the relational yet fundamentally distinct positionalities the Black and the non-Black occupy. Protestors become legible precisely because the Black protestor, qua Black, is not. Non-Black protestors incite empathy in ways Black bodies, impacted by the contemporary effects of the afterlife of slavery, are intrinsically unable to produce (i.e. Hartman, 1997). Jaime Alves (2013: 14), an activist familiar with the 2013 manifestations in Brazil's largest city, put it this way:

Current demonstrations in São Paulo are illustrative of this double standard: even as the beating of middle-class students by the police has become a national outrage, my own experience as a black activist shows that similar police repression, when practiced against black demonstrations, is hardly condemned.

Collective analysis and accumulated wisdom based on experience produce Black disidentification. Readily acknowledged is how the state, and its ultimate control over public spaces, produces and reproduces anti-Black terror. 'This is to say, violence against Black people is ontological and gratuitous as opposed to ideological and contingent' (Wilderson, 2005: 5). Protestors encountered contingent violence: the violence was contingent on their counterhegemonic opposition to the ways in which officials managed public resources. For Blacks, violence is

of a different nature: it does not depend on circumstance; it is not contingent on anything but the fact of Blackness. Blacks experience state violence-as-terror as a fact of life; it is an ontological datum, and evidence of an antagonistic positionality. The increasing homicides of Blacks committed by agents of the state, at precisely the same time when homicides for non-Blacks wane, substantiate this claim (Waiselfisz, 2012). This Black experience of systematic death, especially of, but not restricted to, young male youth, compounded by the incommunicability of Black suffering, comprises an experience of social death (Patterson, 1982). For Blacks, public spaces where struggles over hegemony take place, as loci of politics, like Fanon's civil society, are war zones, zones of death.

Still, Blacks have participated, *qua* Blacks, in manifestations occupying well-known urban spaces. The Brazilian Black Movement (MNU, Movimento Negro Unificado) organized the 1995 Marcha Zumbi dos Palmares, and the 2005 Marcha Zumbi + 10. Each event gathered thousands of Afro-Brazilians and their allies in Brasília to affirm their position, as the subtitle of the second march stated, 'against racism, for equality, and life'.² More recently, Blacks and their allies have mobilized against the ongoing genocide of Black youth. In São Paulo, on 20 November 2012, during Black Conscience week, led by Mães de Maio, UNEAFRO and Fórum Hip-Hop, among other organizations, a large crowd marched along the Avenida Paulista under the banner 'Yes on Quotas, No Genocide!' ('Cotas Sim, Genocídio Não!'). On 22 November 2012, the Committee Against the Genocide of São Paulo's Black and Peripheral Youth (Comitê Contra o Genocídio da Juventude Negra e Periférica) organized a rally in the historic Praça da Sé in downtown São Paulo (see SPRESSO, 2012).³ Armed with their widespread experiential and transgenerational knowledge, confirmed by data from respected sources, such as the Map of Violence (Mapa da Violência, see Waiselfisz, 2012), the protestors demanded the end of systematic homicide of Black youth. In 2011, for instance, officially one out of five homicides in the city of São Paulo was committed by the police; in the state of São Paulo, Blacks experience violent deaths at a rate that is 70 percent higher than for whites (Alves, 2013: 5). State apparatuses have played a central role in these rates of homicide, either by directly perpetrating them, or by omission.

When a federal administration is as responsive to Black agendas as Lula and Rousseff's have been, the claim of a foundational antagonism between Blacks, the state, and society, can become opaque. If public spaces are defined by Black absence and indeed symbolize, when in fact they don't enact, Black death, what explains the Black-led, very public manifestations? And how would they be symptoms, and not negations, of the fundamental problem of the Black presence in Brazil? First, there is the issue of scale. Even though Blacks are more than half of the country's population, the MNU events were concentrated in one city, and were much smaller in scale than the country-wide and quite massive 2013 protests. Second, the very political platforms that mobilize Blacks *qua* Blacks are distinctively different, in nature, degree, and reach, than the plethora of demands made by the protestors. Rather than demanding adjustments (in transportation and education, for example), in 1995 and 2005, Blacks insisted on acknowledging and putting an end to the historical and structural phenomenon of racial discrimination. *Specifically, they stressed the urgency of stopping anti-Black genocide.* Quite evident in this type of plea is a diagnosis that only a definite rupture from a cultural dynamic that finds its way in modes of sociality and public management will suffice. This cultural dynamic, at bottom, excludes, diminishes, and kills Blacks, rendering Black presence unviable. Black unviability is normative. Black presence in public, thus, is anathema to the very workings of the public-political-social protocols and expectations defining the state and the nation. Black presence is an interruption, noise, unwanted. And while it may be argued that Black collective movements have been successful in pushing some of their key demands to the administrators in Brasília, there is a persistent gap between the formulation of policy and their effective outcomes. Blacks continue to die early and senselessly.

Claiming the Mall: Rolezinhos

In the final days of 2013, when the mass street protests were still fresh, and smaller related manifestations continued to erupt in many Brazilian cities, rolezinhos became a national fixation. Rolezinhos consisted of large gatherings of young, mostly Black (negros and pardos) impoverished residents of peripheral neighborhoods. Organized via Facebook and other social media, these gatherings took place in shopping malls where the young people's presence was not welcome. As school recess, summer, and the holiday season shopping began, this youth phenomenon presented a host of demands, and engendered public reactions, at first seemingly unrelated to that year's street manifestations. What could the apparently consumer-minded youth have in common with those who openly defied the state, and the police, and made compelling reformist demands? How could playful and apparently a-political Black youth, claiming spaces of privileged leisure and consumption, be related to the large-scale public-political phenomena that, as we discussed above, performed the very exclusion of Blacks?

Rolezinho, the noun, is the diminutive of *rolê*, or *rolé*, depending on regional pronunciation. It means a short stroll, drive, or ride. The ride can be by car, motorcycle, or bicycle. Even though they resurfaced in 2013 with renewed vigor, since at least the 1980s rolezinhos have been part of youth practice and vernacular, crossing boundaries of region, social class, gender, and race. A typical heteronormative and mostly homosocial dating ritual, from young men's perspective, the main objective of the encounters, was 'to get someone [pegar alguém] (Machado, 2014)'. The terms used to describe these affairs reveal young women's objectification (inasmuch as, from the young men's standpoint, they participate in the rituals as bodies to be gotten), and displays of macho swagger in which signs of conspicuous consumption are equated to one's advantage – or at least belonging – in the dating market.

In the recent rolezinhos, the youth claimed their right to collectively enjoy spaces of leisure and commodity consumption. Dressed in recognizable brand-name caps, flashy clothes, colorful sneakers, sunglasses and jewelry, these young men and women brought to the air-conditioned, shiny, squeaky, and artificially lit spaces their good-humored boastfulness cadenced in beats and lyrics of what is called 'funk ostentação'. This music, not unlike worldwide rap songs on conspicuous consumption, glorification of crime, women's objectification, and partying, provided some of the riffs the young people sang in chorus while walking, sometimes running, through the malls. In the 14 December gathering, young people sang 'Eita porra, que cheiro de maconha' ['dang, I smell pot', freely translated], part of the song 'Deixa eu ir,' by a recently-killed rapper, Mc Daleste (Santiago et al., 2013).

Collectively, these underprivileged, segregated young people (e.g. Vargas and Alves, 2010) state their hard-won insertion in the global consumer market. Rolezinhos test the degree to which Brazilian spaces of relative affluence are able to absorb large concentrations of Black people. In this very simple yet effective manner, rolezinhos become metaphors for Black integration. Rolezinhos dramatize Blacks' material gains brought about by PT's pro-poor redistributive programs in a social formation that historically and presently normalize Black exclusion.

Rolezinhos enacted São Paulo's deeply divided geographies of class and race – social geographies that have been described as Brazilian Apartheid (Oliveira, 2007; Vargas, 2005). On 8 December at the Shopping Metrô Itaquera, 6000 youths, mobilized via Facebook, gathered to socialize, walk around the mall, flirt, window shop, and most of all, exercise their presence in a space defined by its unsaid, invisible, but effective social barriers. On that occasion, the police were called and three people were arrested. Then, on 14 December, in Guarulhos, about 2500 young people came together in the Shopping Internacional; 22 youths were taken into custody, suspected of "about to start" a mass robbery'.⁴

Shopkeepers, mall administrators, and the middle and upper classes (e.g. Barbara, 2014) were swift and, because of their access to news media, quite vocal in their condemnation of rolezinhos. They were not the only ones, however. When it comes to gendered dynamics of race and their relationship to space, normative expectations about social boundaries, which are ways of naturalizing hierarchies of belonging, seem to be shared across a broad spectrum of people from São Paulo. A Datafolha survey with a sample of 799 São Paulo residents aged 16 and older, conducted on 21 January 2014, showed that, across income levels, age, years of formal education, and gender, 92 percent heard about rolezinhos, while 73 percent said they go to a mall at least once every month. Suggesting a broad, cross-class and age consensus (although there were some interesting variations),⁵ 82 percent of those interviewed were against rolezinhos; 77 percent thought rolezinhos were about causing gratuitous mayhem; 72 percent believed malls did not react based on skin color prejudice; 80 percent agreed that malls acted correctly when seeking injunctions against unaccompanied minors; 83 percent who have kids younger than 25 would not allow them to participate in rolezinhos; and 73 percent affirmed that the military police should be proactive in quelling rolezinhos (Leite, 2014).

Spatial boundaries are gendered racial boundaries. The massive, animated, confident, and in many ways defying presence of Black youth in spaces previously assumed and experienced as spaces of white privilege frontally challenges the foundations of Brazilian apartheid. Twenty-year-old Jefferson Luis, one of the organizers of a large rolezinho in São Paulo summarizes the relationship between race and space at play in these events:

If you look like a criminal ('cara de bandido') you can't go in [the malls]. For me, that's prejudice. There's color prejudice, there's prejudice against certain types of music ... If I had invited rich people, there would be no bad reaction. Do you think they'd call the police to expel those rich people? No way ... But because it's poor people, and black people, they are beating us up and kicking us out. (Maia, 2014)

Not unlike what happens in US cities like Austin, where large concentrations of Black people led to the closing of commercial establishments, roads, freeways, and shopping malls (Dunbar, 2009), when warned about impending rolezinhos, São Paulo mall administrators began to close early or preemptively shut down altogether. Some establishments, like the Shopping JK Iguatemi, obtained legal injunctions prohibiting the entrance of unaccompanied minors. Police presence became even more pronounced (G1, 2014). The negative reactions against rolezinhos seem to lament that, instead of Brazil becoming more mall-like, malls have become more like Brazil.⁶

Conclusion: Whose Malls, Whose Streets, Whose Country?

On 18 January 2014, appalled by what they considered blatant acts of racism against the rolezinhos, members of UNEafro (União de Núcleos de Educação Popular para Negra/os e Classe Trabalhadora, Union of Popular Educational Centers for Blacks and the Working Class) organized a protest in front of one of São Paulo's most well-known malls, the Shopping JK Iguatemi. Protestors strategically used the upcoming mega event to voice their critique: how can a country that aims to be a planetary example of economic improvement and social harmony tolerate discrimination of Black people? Douglas Belchior, UNEafro member and a history teacher, put it more specifically: 'The city is not there for our well-being, but for consumption. Our protest is political, against all forms of discrimination, especially against the Black' (*Folha de S. Paulo*, 2014a).

Here is the question underlying the dilemmas faced by Blacks in both the street protests and the rolezinhos: can and will PT's transformation of the state bureaucracy and its economic policies,

including sweeping affirmative action reforms, impact bureaucratically-entrenched and societal anti-Black modes of exclusion? If Wilderson's perspective stressing the constitutive aspect of anti-Black terror is applicable to current Brazilian social relations and statecraft, then UNEafro's protest does little more than restate a historical pattern that, because of its foundational cultural and cognitive quality, will inevitably continue to actualize itself. Thus, UNEafro's protest in some ways explains Black disidentification during the 2013 manifestations. When it asks for an end to anti-Black discrimination, it demands what cannot be achieved. Although policies may be put in place to address these and similar demands, the constitutive symbolic core that animates sociality seems impermeable to external pressure. Closed malls and infuriated representatives of the challenged middle classes attest to it. Ongoing patterns of disproportionate Black suffering and death by preventable causes confirm it. Were Blacks to participate in the 2013 protests as Blacks and link their demands to their specific experiences, they would be automatically confronted with these deeper, fundamental questions. Can society be rendered less anti-Black, or even anti-anti-Black? Can people's demands as Blacks be connected to other reformist demands concerning public services, education, and electoral politics?⁷ If the answer to any of these questions is no, then why bother to participate in multi-racial public-political demonstrations?

While PT's efforts and successes in addressing structural forms of anti-Black discrimination are indisputable, so are the persisting manifestations of a social order founded on Black abjection and exclusion. The examples are innumerable. In Rio, by far not the most violent among Brazilian large cities, a 15-year-old homeless Black kid was stripped naked, tied by the neck to a light post with a bicycle lock, and beaten repeatedly by a band of about 30 white motorcyclists, one of them armed with a gun, who then proceeded to threaten to kill him. 'He said he was going towards Copacabana beach, "for a role", when he was approached by the men ...' (Berta and Bottari, 2014; Bottari, 2014). A day later, on 2 February 2014, *Folha de S. Paulo* reported on a video showing another young Black man, 20-year-old Igor Veras de Oliveira Falcão, suspected of stealing, shot dead at point blank range while sitting in the middle of a street in Belford Roxo, in the greater Rio area (*Folha de S. Paulo*, 2014b). This time, however, the gunman was a Black man, allegedly a private security, who calmly arrived on a motorcycle and, in one continuous motion, pulled a gun from his waist and shot three times into Falcão's face. The cultural construction of Black life worthlessness is amply shared. Blacks are out of place in places of privilege, but they also seem to be out of place regardless of place.

Disidentification is therefore understandable from the perspective of those who occupy the structural positionality of worthlessness, of social death. Black subjects, while enabling formations of non-Black subjectivity and political life writ large, are nevertheless incompatible with the utopian principles of racial democracy, even under the sponsorship of an unprecedented pro-Black federal administration. Subjects of racial democracy define themselves by not being Black non-subjects: their pain, body, political voice, and belonging are as legible as Black pain, the Black body, Black political voice, and Black belonging are oxymorons.

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Notes

1. See the 2013 interview with Luiza Bairros by Ana Flávia Magalhães Pinto (2013). On the controversy about SEPPIR's alleged mismanagement of the budget, see Sergio Rossetto's arguments (AfroPress, 2013). See also senator Paulo Paim's (2013) response.

2. See the march manifesto in Zumbi + 10 (2014).
3. On 19 March 2013, the Committee Against Genocide occupied the state of São Paulo's Public Security Secretariat (Secretaria de Segurança Pública). See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rVd8riSAUVc> (accessed 28 January 2014).
4. While the 'about to start' justification may sound bizarre, it is indeed an anti-Black preemptive police practice that is diasporic and quite normalized (see Lipsitz, 1998).
5. For example, 18 percent among the younger interviewees, between 16 and 24, were in favor of the rolezinhos, while among those 60 and older, only 6 percent did so. Moreover, the greater the income, the higher the levels of support for rolezinhos: while among those who earned between 2 and 5 minimum salaries 10 percent supported the gatherings, among those who earned more than 10 minimum salaries 16 percent were in favor of rolezinhos.
6. This is based on Arnaldo Jabor's (2009: 8) useful formulation about an analogous area of privilege in Rio de Janeiro that now experiences an unprecedented presence of newly economically empowered Black people, 'Brazil did not become Ipanema, Ipanema became Brazil.'
7. On the possibilities, perils, and impossibilities of multiracial alliances, see, for example, Harney and Moten (2013) and Sexton (2010)

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