BOLIVIAN IMMIGRANTS IN SÃO PAULO: METAPHORS OF SLAVERY AND REPRESENTATIONS OF ALTERITY

By Dominique Vidal

Consolation Street, São Paulo, July 24th, 2009. Early in the afternoon at the Serviço Social do Comércio Amphitheater (SESC), a structure belonging to the powerful local employers' federation, around fifty people are meeting. They represent, variously, the federal government (National Immigration Council, Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Labor and Employment), the City and State of São Paulo, the Department of Labor Administration and Inspection, the Catholic Church's migrant ministry, several industrial and trade groups active in the textile sector, some labor unions, three NGOs as well as a handful of Korean entrepreneur and Bolivian and Paraguayan migrant associations. All of these individuals have come for the presentation of the *Pact against Job Insecurity and for Employment and Decent Work in São Paulo*, which sets out the measures necessary to "eradicate degrading and/or forced, insecure, irregular and/or formal immigrant labor"[1] in the State of São Paulo's clothing industry. Drafted after two years of difficult negotiation, the *Pact* was issued by a working group consisting of the various actors mentioned above together with representatives of major retail companies. It reiterated the refusal to employ undocumented workers and those not declared with social security and the need to respect regulations governing remuneration, the work

[1] Mimeograph.

day, hygiene and safety. One after the next, around fifteen speakers, each representing one of the parties present, mounted the podium. All insisted on the need to put an end to what they called “slave work” among migrants employed in clothing industry workshops. Yet each presented the theme in his or her own way. The representative of the Department of Labor Administration insisted on the importance of social rights and ended his speech with “Comrades, let’s continue the combat!” A member of the employers’ association expressed delight with measures that will allow “an end to be put to what sullies São Paulo” and claimed that his organization defends “the dignified work that generates the peace that generates the success that makes for a ‘great nation’”. The priest responsible for ministering to migrants put the Church’s action in the context of over a century’s assistance. A high-ranking official underscored the fact that, at a time when the wealthiest countries are closing their borders, Brazil is receiving a growing number of immigrants and proceeded to enumerate the recent moves made by the federal government to facilitate the stay of foreigners. A leader of the Koreans’ Association thanked Brazil for the “welcome” that it had offered his “community”. While he also expressed his commitment to respecting the law, he warned the audience against the risk of “stigmatizing” owners of textile workshops on the grounds that, according to him, it is not always easy to distinguish between “legal” and “illegal”. NGO activists then took the floor to express their hope that the *Pact* would not remain a dead letter but would instead inspire the supplementary measures necessary to once and for all eliminate degrading labor conditions. Finally, as the hall emptied, the president of a Paraguayan association, accompanied by a Bolivian, mounted the podium. The latter subsequently told me that he owned a garment workshop and said that he was pleased with the Pact, which shows that “we are equal, for we are all human beings… immigrants [are] workers, not tramps or slaves”.[2]

Disagreement over how to go about eliminating this “slave labor”, which subsequently led most of the participants to refuse to sign the *Pacte*, is of little importance here. It is

[2] The study on which this article draws was carried out between 2009 and 2012 in the course of various trips, totaling eighteen weeks in Brazil and Bolivia. The material was collected by way of observation, interviews and informal conversations with migrants, Brazilians residing or working in the same neighborhoods, owners of garment workshops and clothing stores, Labor Administration and Inspection officials, union representatives, associational leaders and members of non-governmental organizations.

the place accorded the metaphor of slavery in all speeches to describe working conditions that grabs one's attention. Whether they denounced the lot of international migrants in the clothing industry, calling for concerted action on the part of the authorities and civil society to improve it, or played down the extent of what was being denounced, all were in agreement in saying that the situation of foreigners in this sector must change as it tarnishes the image of São Paulo in Brazil and abroad. Indeed, over the past decade, denunciations of "slave labor" in the clothing industry, particularly in what concerns Bolivian migrants, have come to feature ever more prominently in television news broadcasts (especially on the occasion of "liberation" operations conducted by the police).[3] It has become commonplace to hear the inhabitants of São Paulo claim that Bolivians work "like slaves" in the thousands of workshops of the metropolis, whether these inhabitants live next to the aforementioned workers or have never laid eyes on them.

Yet the metaphor is far from reality. As hard as it may be, life in the garment workshops in no way resembles the historical reality of slavery. Of course, it happens that some new migrants are only housed and fed by a workshop's owner. This situation, however, is only provisional, corresponding to the time necessary to learn how to use the sewing machine. In general, after a few weeks, the garment maker begins to be paid on the basis of the number of pieces he or she has produced or for other work carried out in the workshop (ironing, packing). If the employer does not offer better conditions after three months, the garment maker has sufficiently mastered the use of various machines to find work in a more highly paid workshop. Far from being slaves subject to the will of their masters, Bolivian garment makers are workers who freely negotiate their labor power depending on the labor needs of the clothing industry. In periods of heavy production, they work up to sixteen hours per day, six days per week, and thus earn around 300 € each month in addition to housing and three meals a day – significantly higher remuneration than the 100 € / month they earn in Bolivia (in the best of cases).

[3] According to the estimates of Sylvain Souchaud, there are today between 80,000 and 200,000 Bolivians living in the São Paulo metropolitan region, most having arrived over the course of the last decade. Sylvain Souchaud, "A imigração boliviana em São Paulo", in Ademir Pacelli Ferreira, Carlos Vainer, Helion Póvoa Neto, Miriam de Oliveira Santos (eds.), *Deslocamentos e reconstruções de experiência migrante*, Rio de Janeiro, Garamond, 2010, pp. 267-290.

One thus understands why Bolivians have flooded into the workshops of São Paulo. There, by dint of hard work, they hope, not only to feed the families that have remained behind, but also put enough money aside to one day return home and open their own workshops. And while work in confined premises where they must submit to the commands of an owner worried by the idea of not honoring an order on time does not resemble the rosy picture that had been painted of what awaited them, the migratory networks that supply these workers have nothing to do with the "trade" spoken of by opponents of "slave labor".[4] All have come with the intention of working as garment makers and no employer has the means to hold them captive.

Moreover, the failure of references to slavery to properly describe the most advanced forms of labor exploitation in the contemporary world is today a matter of broad consensus in the social sciences.[5] With the exception of some small and geographically very isolated populations, slavery as it existed in the ancient world, Africa and the Americas has disappeared from the surface of the planet. The same holds for Brazil, the continent's last slave owning country, where the anachronism of this vocabulary, while it allows one to denounce the extreme domination of workers (in Amazonia and the rural world in particular), offers a sordid image that reduces them to the rank of passive victims deprived of agency.[6]

It is therefore useless to insist on the heuristic weakness of the metaphor of slavery. By contrast, the frequency with which it is employed by the population of São Paulo in discussions of Bolivian clothing industry workers merits attention. In my view, this metaphor would not be so broadly spread among the population if it did not coincide with the image of a modernity built on the rubble of slave society, an image that established itself with the growth of this region of Brazil in the second half of the 19th-century. Indeed, against the backdrop of the abolition of slavery in 1888, the self-

[4] For an overview of work on the question and a stimulating discussion of the subject, see Milena Jaksić, "État de littérature. Déconstruire pour dénoncer: la traite des êtres humains en débat", *Critique internationale*, 53, October-December 2011, pp. 169-182.
[5] Alain Morice, " 'Comme des esclaves', ou les avatars de l'esclavage métaphorique", *Cahiers d'études afriaines*, XLV (179-180), 2005, pp. 1015-1036; Julia O'Connell Davidson, "New Slavery, Old Binaries: Human Trafficking and the Borders of 'Freedom'", *Global Networks*, 10 (2), 2010, pp. 244-261.
[6] Eduardo França Paiva, "Travail contraint et esclavage. Utilisation et définitions aux différentes étoques", *Cahiers d'études africaines*, XLV (179-180), 2005, pp. 1123-1142.

representation of the province of São Paulo – and, even more, of its eponymous city – insists on the arrival of millions of European immigrants between 1876 and 1930 as a decisive moment in its economic development. In São Paulo, the ideal of *mestiçagem* (miscegenation or racial mixture) occupies a less important place than in Rio de Janeiro and the towns of the Northeast, where much more emphasis is placed on the decisive contribution to local history of African slaves and their descendants. The social relationship to immigration is, as we know, among the analytical keys to understanding a society: it reveals what shapes it in even its most hidden dimensions, in the fictions that supply its foundations as well as the fears that traverse it.[7] In this respect, the use of the slavery metaphor in regards to Bolivians reveals both the never effaced trace of a slave-owning past that still constitutes a horizon of meaning and the power and fragility of the ideal of *mestiçagem*, which seeks to move beyond this past in the Brazilian national imaginary. In doing so, it gives access to the political dimension of the country's ethno-racial structure and some of the dilemmas to which it today gives rise in a democratic framework. I propose to consider this political dimension by focusing on the central neighborhoods of São Paulo, where large numbers of Bolivian migrants live and work. I will begin by more closely considering the figure of the slave as a category serving to classify social relations. This figure, I will argue, draws its meaning from the social world born of European migrations and the establishment of a limited form of social citizenship. I will then examine the social state upon which everyday comparativism – the process by which Bolivians evaluate social relations in Brazil vis-à-vis those familiar from Bolivia and Argentina – sheds light. Finally, I will note the extent to which the salience of ethnicity, illustrated by the case of Bolivian immigration to São Paulo, reveals the tensions that cut across references to *mestiçagem*.

The Shadow Cast by the Slave-Owning Past

In Brazil, the slavery metaphor used in regards to Bolivians reflects a fundamental division between those who can claim to be full members of society and those whose

[7] Maryse Tripier, "L'immigré, analyseur de la société", *Terrains & travaux*, 7, 2004, pp. 173-185.

situation of dependence pushes them to its margins in conditions reminiscent of a slave's relationship to his master.

To grasp the extent of this division, one must understand the specific sociopolitical context in which a particularly potent imaginary of the free worker emerged in the region of São Paulo beginning in the second half of the 19th-century. It seemed to the local elites of the time that the rapid growth of the coffee economy had created needs which could no longer be satisfied by a servile labor force. On both sides of the Atlantic, abolitionist ideas had the wind in their sails. One after the next, European powers and the young nations of America put an end to slavery. And the black revolt on Saint Dominique strongly reverberated throughout the region, feeding landowner fears of an uprising among slaves and free men of color. Moreover, Brazil was slowly heading towards the end of slavery.[8] In 1850, the country outlawed the slave trade; in 1871, what was known as the "Free Belly" law freed all children born to slave mothers. By the time Princess Isabel signed the law of abolition on 13 May 1888, the slave-owning system was already all but dead.

Yet, recourse to European immigration was not solely a response to the coffee *fazendeiros*' labor needs. It was also at the center of the elites' political project to supply Brazil with a people whose qualities would be comparable to those of Europe and the United States. The influence of the period's racist biological theories convinced them that the African origin of a significant portion of the population was a factor of degeneration.[9] Besides immediate demographic change, they therefore hoped that the establishment of Europeans on their soil would bring about a long-term modification of the country's racial structure – according to neo-Lamarkian authors, the superiority of white genes over black ones would expunge the black components of the population in the space of a few generations. *Mestiçagem* was thus conceived only in the framework of a "whitening policy", the ultimate aim of which was to bring about the disappearance of the black "race" associated with slaves.

[8] Armelle Enders, *Nouvelle Histoire du Brésil*, Paris, Chandeigne, 2008.
[9] Thomas E. Skidmore, *Black into White: Race and Nationality in Brazilian Thought*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1974; Anthony W. Marx, *Making Race and Nation: A Comparison of the United States, South Africa, and Brazil*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998.

The Brazilian state's migratory policy, which encouraged the arrival of Europeans by paying their transport fees and installation costs, was therefore both an effort at ethnogenesis and a response to the problem of labor shortfalls. Between 1879 and 1939, nearly 2,500,000 immigrants, mostly from Europe, moved to the province of São Paulo, which grew in population from 837,000 inhabitants in 1872 to more than 3,450,000 in 1910.[10] Large scale social upheaval was the result. Like the freemen of color who shared their physical characteristics, former slaves found themselves marginalized in a world on the threshold of industrialization in which many doubted the capacity of people of color to integrate into modern society. In rural areas, European immigrants developed an ideal of working the land that rejected the subjection of those who exhausted themselves on behalf of a landowner or indebted themselves to him.[11] In an urban context, they held the local proletariat in low esteem, with the anarchist and socialist press that arrived with Italian immigrants presenting the latter as apathetic – indeed, sometimes going so far as to describe them as not fully human.[12] In the same way, the received image of Bolivian garment makers in São Paulo depicts them as an undifferentiated mass of passive individuals who, after agreeing to allow them to finance their migration, have become the captives of small employers. Moreover, if comparing their lives in the garment workshops with slavery comes so easily, it is because, in the popular social imaginary, their situation of personal dependency evokes what could potentially be the fate of workers unprotected by social law. The remarks of Felipe, a small shopkeeper in the Brás neighborhood, are thus frequently heard elsewhere: "The Bolivians are the slaves of the Koreans [who, having arrived in Brazil in the 1960s, own many garment workshops]. They are not free like Brazilians. In Brazil, the era of slavery is over. Brazilians are no longer slaves, Brazilians have rights." Such references to "rights" (*direitos*) are yet another way of distancing one's self from the slave condition: the possibility of benefitting from these rights characterizes the "free" worker, even when he does not actually possess them. If Bolivians are seen as "slaves", it is also because they are not covered by labor law. As much research has shown, the form of social

[10] S. Souchaud, "Le soutien politique à la plantation de café et à l'immigration internationale dans l'État brésilien de São Paulo, 1850-1930", *Problèmes d'Amérique latine*, 75, 2010, pp. 13-35.
[11] José de Souza Martins, *O cativeiro de terra*, São Paulo, Contexto, 1979.
[12] Jacy Alves de Seixas, *Mémoire et oubli. Anarchisme et syndicalisme révolutionnaire au Brésil. Mythe et histoire*, Paris, Éditions de la MSH, 1992.

citizenship that was established in the 1930s under the authoritarian regime of Getúlio Vargas represents a caesura in the eyes of poor Brazilians between the time when slavery still existed, though officially abolished, and its true end. In what has become a classic book, Wanderley Guilherme dos Santos speaks of this professional legislation (the creation of a minimum wage, insurance against illness and accident, retirement systems, work day regulation), which was passed at a time of restricted political rights, as "regulated citizenship" (*cidadania regulada*). The roots of this concept "are to be found, not in a code of political values, but in a system of professional stratification, which is, moreover, defined by a legal norm. In other words, all members of the community who find themselves located in any activity *recognized* and *defined* by the law are citizens. […] Citizenship finds itself inserted into [one's] profession and the rights of citizenship are restricted to the place, as it is recognized by the law, occupied by the worker in the productive process. Those whose activity is not recognized by the law thus become pre-citizens."[13] That not all of the lower strata of the population benefited from this collection of social rights is of no great importance. For a portion of them, this legislation resulted in significantly improved living conditions and thereby gave rise to a promise of social incorporation, which to this day forms the basis of a powerful social imaginary. The promise, however, is far from being realized. As Adalberto Cardoso underscores in his survey of inequality in Brazil, the *cidadania regulada* does not distinguish between those who are "included" and those who are "excluded". Rather, it represents a status that each worker hopes to reach or conserve.[14]

The resonance of this social imaginary explains why Brazilians who hear about labor conditions in the garment workshops conclude that those who appear to resign themselves to them live "like slaves". Of course, for the majority of Brazilians – and in particular the members of the lower classes who live alongside the Bolivians – access to social citizenship is had by way of employment that often supposes acceptance of significant subordination. As in the time of Vargas, however, full integration into society

[13] Wanderley Guilherme dos Santos, *Cidadania e justiça. A política social na ordem brasileira*, Rio de Janeiro, Campus, 1987 (1979), p. 68.
[14] Adalberto Cardoso, *A construção da sociedade do trabalbo no Brazil. Uma investigação sobre a persistência secular das desigualdades*, Rio de Janeiro, Editora, FGV, 2010.

today resides in legal recognition of the status of worker, which offers protections and is constructed in opposition to the forms of personal dependency evoked by slavery. What's more, this sociopolitical representation is part and parcel of the modern image of the region of São Paulo, an image that arose in tandem with transformations in the world of work at the time of the European migrations.[15] In particular, it corresponds to an ideal of labor relations regulated by the state in the framework of a corporatist system that arbitrates between and manages relations between the various parties in the world of labor. The joint condemnation of "slave labor" on the part of the public authorities, the Catholic Church, large employers, labor unions and various trade associations reaffirms and maintains the idea of São Paulo's specificity – that is, as a place that carried out its socio-economic transformation against the backdrop of rupture with the slave era. The unanimous disapproval of labor conditions in the garment workshops thus expresses the existence of an "us" born of moving beyond what is recalled by the slave's condition and independently of whatever differences there may be between those who constitute this "us". Far from invalidating it, denunciations of the gap between this ideal and reality reaffirm what all consider as being the foundation upon which society is based.

The Everyday Comparitivism of Bolivian Migrants

There is nevertheless a striking contrast between the slave stigma afflicting Bolivians and what they have to say about the Brazilians who underscore their alterity in this way. By reiterating that they for the most part hold thankless jobs refused by nationals, they forcefully reject what they take to be both an erroneous representation and a derogatory and hurtful name. This does not stop them from finding Brazil to be a "welcoming country" whose people are not "racist". These judgments will surprise those familiar with the history of São Paulo and so merit examination. Indeed, under various forms depending on the era, nearly all immigrant groups have been confronted with more or

[15] In this connection, the historian Boris Fausto speaks of a "new Paulist society consisting of nationals, immigrants and their descendants possessing its own characteristics and relatively differentiated from other regions of the country" and claims that "it is possible to conceive of a 'Paulist ideology' of labor constructed on the basis of the efforts of immigrants and the mental representations that are associated with them." See Boris Fausto, *Historiografia da imigração para São Paulo*, São Paulo, Editora Sumaré?FAPESP, 1991, p. 38.

less overt hostility on the part of the Paulist population, including foreigners who have only resided on Brazilian soil for a short while.[16] Such was the experience of Italians in the late 19th-century, followed by the Japanese, the Poles and the Syro-Lebanese. Moreover, this history was written against the backdrop of racial prejudice and discriminatory practices against those who could not lay claim to European ancestry.[17] After having long been denied in the interests of an imaginary of a nation born of *mestiçagem*, racism is today recognized as a real problem by both the vast majority of Brazilians and those in power.[18] The social sciences, for their part, have lately begun to reveal the discrimination that certain categories of foreigners – among them, Bolivians – experience in the labor market.[19] Yet the question remains: how is one to understand the a priori counter-intuitive remarks of Bolivian migrants regarding those who see them as slaves?

In my view, the response is to be found in the everyday comparativism practiced by the Bolivians when they consider their relations with Brazilians. These are in effect evaluated relative to what the Bolivians have experienced in Bolivia or Argentina. While mockery of their accent, the aspersions cast on their hygiene and claims concerning the superiority of Brazil over a poor country like Bolivia serve to regularly remind them of their foreign origin, São Paulo is for them above all a universe in which individuals of very different physical appearance – sometimes even considered distinct "races" – interact without major difficulty. The phenotypic diversity of the inhabitants of neighborhoods where Bolivians reside is for them the best illustration of this. "You find everything in São Paulo and everyone lives together, whites, blacks, brown-skinned people."

In other words, it seems that nothing they see in Brazil compares to the hostility between the *cambas*, the inhabitants of Santa Cruz de la Sierra who like to think of

[16] Jeffrey Lesser, *Negotiating National Identity: Immigrants, Minorities, and the Struggle for Ethnicity in Brazil*, Durham, Duke University Press, 1999.
[17] George Reid Andrews, *Blacks and Whites in São Paulo, Brazil, 1888-1988*, Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1991.
[18] Stanley R. Bailey, *Legacies of Race: Identities, Attitudes, and Politics in Brazil*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2009.
[19] Elaine Meire Vilela, "Desigualdade e discriminação de imigrantes internacionais no mercado de trabalho brasileiro", *Dados*, 54 (1), 2011, pp. 89-128.

themselves as of European origin, and the *collas*, a generic category that refers to the populations of the high planes and extends to those with indigenous traits.[20] And this despite the fact that the many immigrants of Andean type denoting Indian ancestry regularly come up against the distrust and contempt of those who pride themselves on having European forebears. Many have also adopted elements of Bolivian President Evo Morales' discourse of identity and claim to descend from the Indians despoiled by the Spanish conquest who his Movement Toward Socialism (MAS) seeks to unite against elites in the service of foreign interests.[21] As social relations in Brazil are not traversed by an ethno-political cleavage of this type, simple comparison leads them to infer that, despite socioeconomic inequalities relating to skin color, Brazil is a country characterized by racial tolerance, in contrast to their own.

Yet, when they compare life in São Paulo to that in Buenos Aires, Bolivians particularly emphasize that, in contrast to Argentines, Brazilians cannot be described as racist. While only a few of them have ever lived in the Argentine capital, all have heard talk of the "racism" rampant in this country, which has also been the foremost migratory destination among Bolivians for over a century. In particular, the rise of xenophobia towards poor foreigners has in the past twenty years been reflected in rising levels of violence and acts of discrimination against the citizens of neighboring countries.[22] In recent years, migrants identified by their Andean traits have been the victims of several deadly attacks, extensively reported in the Bolivian media. The highest authorities of Bolivia have regularly denounced these attacks as the expression of unacceptable racism and several political actors have gone so far as to compare them to the violence suffered by those of indigenous appearance on Bolivian soil. Bolivian migrants, for their part, contrast "the Argentinan, who thinks he is European and superior" to "the Brazilian, who is made up of all races". In the representation of the development of the Argentine

[20] On the genesis and uses of ethnic categories in Bolivia, see Jean-Pierre Lavaud, Isabelle Daillant (eds.), *La catégorisation ehnique en Bolivie: labellisation officielle et sentiment d'appartenance*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2007.

[21] During the 2006 presidential election, in which he was running for reelection, Evo Morales received the votes of more than 13,000 Bolivian voters residing in São Paulo, or 95% of all votes cast there, a level much higher than the 63% he received in Bolivia.

[22] Alejandro Grimson, "Nuevas xenofobias, nuevas políticas étnicas en Argentina", in Alejandro Grimson, Elizabeth Jelin (eds.), *Migraciones regionales bacia la Argentina. Diferencias, desigualdades y derechos*, Buenos Aires, Prometeo, 2006, pp. 69-97.

nation, *mestiçagem* has certainly played a less important (and weaker) role than in the rest of Latin America.[23] Some discourses have even denied it altogether in order to offer a culturally and ethnically homogenous, European-origin image of Argentina.[24] The essential place accorded to migrations from the Old Continent has long rendered invisible the part of the population that does not have white skin, whether the descendants of African slaves or the people of indigenous phenotype who inhabit the country's north. When the social tissue seemed on the point of coming undone during the economic crisis of the 1990s, Bolivian, Paraguayan and Peruvian immigration was nevertheless seen as a threat to employment and public order.[25]

In comparison, the slave imagery used to depict them, however stigmatizing it may be, has much less significant consequences for the Bolivians residing in São Paulo. While they are out of place in the idealized representation of a modern society put forward by regional ideology, they encounter little hostility in the neighborhoods where they live and are not constantly reproached for having stolen the work of nationals or being vectors of criminality. It is true that the Bolivians only rarely enter into direct competition with the national labor force: most of them are steered towards the garment workshops, the harsh conditions of which render them unattractive to many job seekers.[26] Moreover, they appear to be hard-working, honest and discreet workers who inspire less fear than many Brazilians in a city where violence feeds fear of the other.[27] Far from incarnating the despised figure of the "marginal" – a vector of disorder and source of insecurity – these migrants are part of the equilibrium, as fragile as it is ordinary, that constitutes everyday life in poorer neighborhoods. "It's a hardworking people, I have nothing to say

[23] José Luís Romero, *Situación e ideologías en América latina*, Buenos Aires, Sudamericana, 1986.
[24] Daniel Veron, "La construction politique de la 'collectivité Boliviana' en Argentine: entre assignations identitaires et identifications résistantes", *revue Asylon(s)*, 9, June 2012 (http://www.reseau-terra.eu/article1244.html) (consulted on 11 August 2012).
[25] Eduardo E. Domenech, "La 'nouvelle politique migratoire' en Argentine: les paradoxes du programme 'Patria Grande' ", *Problèmes d'Amérique latine*, 75, 2010, pp. 37-59.
[26] This represents a notable difference with the economic insertion of Bolivians in Argentina who, in addition to supplying agricultural labor, are in competition with the national labor force for unskilled service, construction and housekeeping jobs, sectors which, in São Paulo, are occupied by internal migrants from the country's northeast. See in particular Patricia Vargas, *Bolivianos, paraguayos e argentinos en la obra: identitades étnico-nacionales entre los trabajordores de la construcción*, Buenos Aires, Editorial Antropofagía, 2005.
[27] Teresa P.R. Caldeira, *City of Walls: Crime, Segregation, and Citizenship in São Paulo*, Los Angeles, University of California Press, 2000.

against the Bolivians, they are quiet and keep to themselves," says Paulo, a travelling salesman originally from the northeastern state of Pernambouc whose immediate neighbors in the little room he rents in Brás consist of several Bolivian families. Their mode of sociability moreover encourages them to spend their free time amongst themselves and, while they are sometimes mentioned in the police blotter, it tends to be as victims, reinforcing their image as passive and easily fooled individuals.

The Ideal of *Mestiçagem* and the Salience of Ethnicity

When they observe that social interactions in São Paulo are not determined by racial identifications, Bolivians are ultimately led to reach the same conclusions as those reached by most scholars who have conducted research in Brazil on relations between people of different colors.[28] No "color line" – to borrow W.E.B. Du Bois' famous expression[29] – separates whites from blacks. In contrast to the United States, the abolition of slavery was not followed by legal segregation.[30] The significant presence (including within the elites) of individuals of mixed-race traits would have rendered any such project – which once had its defenders – difficult to realize without risking significant conflict. Yet the process of recognizing the contribution of African slaves to the development of the Brazilian nation only began once *mestiçagem* stopped being seen as a means for diluting the black "race" in the early 1930s. Since then, the idea of the population's generalized *mestiçagem* – the basis of Brazil's national imaginary – has been constructed in opposition to any biracial classification, with the range of skin colors in the mestizo nation varying from "white" to "black" along a continuum running from fairer to darker.

The meaning of *mestiçagem*, however, can vary with the notion's use.[31] It can be a means for minimizing the effects of racism just as it can express the ideal of a society

[28] Edward E. Telles, *Race in Another America: The Significance of Skin Color in Brazil*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2004.
[29] W.E. Burghardt Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, New York, Penguin Books, 1996 (1903).
[30] A.W. Marx, *Making Race and Nation. A Comparison of the United States, South Africa, and Brazil*, *op. cit*.
[31] There is doubtless no better proof of this than the various readings of *Casa grande e senzala*, Gilberto Freyre's major work, which presents what he refers to as "Brazilian civilization" as resulting from miscegenation (*miscigenação*) – a term that in his case refers more to the mix of cultures than the mix of genes – of Indians, Portuguese and Africans. Gilberto Freyre, *Maítres et esclaves. La formation de la*

where skin color should not organize social belonging and relations.[32] Once again, the ordinary sociability in which Bolivians participate in São Paulo is instructive. When they insist on the common humanity of all individuals, regardless of phenotype, social position or nationality, Brazilians from working class districts (where most of their interactions take place) are affirming their adherence to this latter interpretation of the imaginary of *mestiçagem*. Support for this ideal of social relations is in particular characterized by the notion of the "respect" (*respeito*) owed to those who show respect towards others by observing the rules of civility necessary to the maintenance of the social fabric.[33] Organized around work and turned towards the private sphere, the lifestyle of the Bolivian immigrants employed in the clothing industry allows them to insert themselves without difficulty into this model of sociability which, when genuinely observed, ensures each person a minimally stable place in the social order of working class neighborhoods.

Yet the absence of xenophobic reactions and the massive arrival of Bolivian migrants in São Paulo also reflect tension between the imaginary of *mestiçagem* as affirmation of the common social condition of those who constitute the nation, whatever their skin color, and the primacy accorded the European contribution in the creation of modern Brazil. In the discourse of national identity that was imposed after having first been formulated within the elites, *mestiçagem* was indeed conceived more as a union of distinct identities than as the result of a mixture of various peoples.[34] The result was a recurrent difficulty in finding a place in discussions of national identity for those of doubtful European ancestry. Such was (and still is) the case of Middle Eastern and Asian immigrants, whose ethnicity contrasts with the Brazilian national imaginary. Several decades and generations after the arrival of the first Japanese, Koreans and

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société brésilienne, Paris, Gallimard, 1974 (1933). Scandalizing those who only saw the African element as a factor of degeneration at the time of its publication, later praised as an unparalleled portrait of the specificity of Brazil and its "racial democracy", this book is considered by others as an ideological construction intended to conceal the reality of racism.

[32] Lívio Sansone, *Blackness without Ethnicity: Constructing Race in Brazil*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.

[33] Dominique Vidal, "Le respect: catégorie du social, catégorie du politique dans une favela de Recife", *Cultures & Conflits*, 35, 1999, pp. 95-124.

[34] J. Lesser, *Negotiating National Identity: Immigrants, Minorities, and the Struggle for Ethnicity in Brazil*, *op.cit.*

Syro-Lebanese, the Brazilians who have retained their traits are still called “Japanese”, “Koreans”, “Arabs” or “Lebanese”. The extraneous character of the inhabitants of São Paulo who cannot lay claim to European ancestry is also expressed in the feeling that those issued from internal migrations from the country’s northeast threaten the city’s identity – and this despite the fact that they best incarnate the “racial mixture” celebrated by the ideal of *mestiçagem*. Most Brazilians with whom Bolivian migrants interact on a daily basis have an ethnicity that distinguishes them from the city’s exclusively European-origin population. The salience of ethnicity constantly expresses itself in everyday social interactions, as demonstrated by the frequency with which one encounters categorizations referring to geographic origins beyond the state of São Paulo. One thus uses “Pernambucano” to refer to those who come from the state of Pernambouc, “Ceará” or “Cearense” for those who come from the state of Ceará and “Bolívia” for those who are categorized as “Bolivian”. Of course, it is always possible to distinguish “nationals” from “foreigners” but the fact is that those whose physiognomy reflects non-European ancestry constantly find themselves set apart as Other and this independently of whether or not they are of Brazilian nationality.

There is thus nothing surprising in the fact that, constantly reminded of their alterity, Brazilians from the northeast never appeal to autochthonous status to contrast themselves with recently arrived foreign migrants.[35] Whatever pride they may have in calling themselves “Brazilians”, they are constantly reminded of their difference by the nativist discourse of the *Paulistas* who attribute a major role to European migrants in the region’s development.[36] While it has often been observed that the arrival of new migratory waves can generate a feeling of autochthony among populations issuing from earlier immigrations, nothing indicates that a process of this type is today occurring in

[35] A claim of autochthonous status was nevertheless expressed at the end of the 19th-century among local elites who, confronted with the massive arrival of European immigrants, claimed to represent the *bandeirantes*, the pioneers who left São Paulo starting in the 17th-century to conquer ever more remote territories.

[36] The regional identity of São Paulo was what’s more largely created in the 1930s in opposition to the country’s northern regions. In a racialized discourse that marginalized the role played by the descendants of Africans in the construction of the nation, the themes of civilization and modernity were closely associated with the whiteness (*whiteness*) of the *Paulistas*. Barbara Weinstein, “Racializing Regional Difference: São Paulo versus Brazil, 1932”, in Nancy P. Appelbaum, Anne S. Macpherson, Karin Alejandra Rosemblatt, *Race and Nation in Modern Latin America*, Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press, 2007, pp. 237-262.

the São Paulo neighborhoods where Bolivian migrants reside. What is interesting about this observation, it seems to me, is that it reveals the point to which, after several decades of intense northeastern migration to São Paulo, the ethnically European identification of a large part of the middle and upper classes of São Paulo continues to play a fundamental role in social classifications and feelings of belonging in this city.

It is only now, as the economic development of Brazil once again makes this country a major migratory destination, that the Bolivian presence in São Paulo has begun to receive serious scholarly attention.[37] The social relationship with these new immigrants reflects the vigor of the structures and elements of identity classification that appeared more than a century ago with the growth of the city under the impact of European migration. The manner in which the Bolivians who work in the clothing industry are perceived demonstrates that the specter of slavery, upon which one had formerly turned one's back, still weighs on representations of social inclusion. And while it is true that, in Brazil, the black/white opposition never structured a racial cleavage as in the United States, it is no less true that the state of dependence and inferiority historically associated with blackness still constitutes a condition to be overcome. The flexible role played by skin color in determining group membership and the forcefulness with which anything reminiscent of the condition of slavery is rejected have always constituted a paradox of Brazilian political history. Thus, organizations that identify as black have never enjoyed much success among the population of color they have sought to unite and there is today broad support for the denunciation of discriminatory practices and inequalities relating to skin color. Far from giving rise to strong identity movements, the presence of "race" in the social realm more clearly manifests itself in a refusal to allow a reified black identity symbolizing the slave's absolute inferiority to be assigned. The value placed on *mestiçagem* in the Brazilian national imaginary is evidence of this, both limiting the appeal of calls to mobilize around an ethnic or racial identity and making it difficult to fully recognize the tensions associated with ethnicity and racial prejudice. For this reason, racism is overwhelmingly condemned but its effects tend to be minimized. The various meanings assigned the ideal of *mestiçagem* and the manner in which it is

[37] For a recent appraisal of the question, see the contributions brought together in Rosana Baeninger (ed.), *Imigração boliviana no Brasil*, Campinas, Nepo-Unicamp, 2012.

given political expression also distinguish Brazil and Bolivia. As a result, the nationals of these two countries do not bring the same grammar to bear on their understanding of alterity.[38]

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[38] For a discussion of the place of alterity in the imaginary of Latin American countries based on the ideology of *mestiçagem*, see Paula López Caballero, "Altérités intimes, altérités éloignées: la greffe du multiculturalisme en Amérique latine", *Critique internationale*, 51, 2011, pp. 129-149.