

BOOK REVIEW/COMPTE RENDU

Stanley R. Bailey, *Legacies of Race: Identities, Attitudes, and Politics in Brazil*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009, 304 pp. \$US 24.95 paper (978-0-8047-6278-6), \$US 70.00 hardcover (978-0-8047-6277-9)

Legacies of Race is a must-read for anyone who thinks they understand “race” in Brazil, since it successfully challenges many assumptions in the literature. It is also an important contribution to the literature on racial attitudes in the US, highlighting their distinctiveness. Finally, its discussion of the myth of racial democracy provides food for thought for debates on whether multiculturalist discourse can address emerging issues of racism in Canadian society.

For decades, foreign observers have wondered why the Brazilian Black Movement has had limited success mobilizing Brazilian blacks to fight for their rights, despite the existence of glaring inequalities correlated with skin color. Since the 1970s, social scientists have blamed this lack of black mobilization on the myth of “racial democracy” — the idea of Brazil as a unified mixed-race nation — used by Brazilian elites to downplay the extent of racial discrimination for most of the twentieth century. Scholars argued that black Brazilians failed to mobilize in large numbers because they were duped into thinking that racism was not a problem. Bailey demonstrates that this theory simply does not square with current survey data.

Bailey analyzes three major surveys of racial attitudes conducted in Brazil between 1995 and 2002, and compares their results with studies in Brazil in the 1980s and the US in the 1990s. The surveys ask Brazilians’ opinions about racial inequality, support for affirmative action policies, relationships to Afro-Brazilian culture, and racial classification and identity. Surveys since the 1980s have shown that the majority of Brazilians acknowledge the prevalence of racism in the country, and are willing to join anti-racist causes and support race-based affirmative action.

To address the question of relatively low levels of black mobilization in Brazil, Bailey problematizes the category “black” — in Portuguese, *negro* — and the assumption that blacks form a coherent “group” with group-based interests. This assumption only makes sense if one takes for granted the existence of bounded races, which due to its history of explicit racial segregation for the most part works for the US, but does not

transfer to Brazil. Bailey draws on his survey data to show how the category *negro* is problematic in the Brazilian case, particularly for racial politics and race-based policies. One such survey, for example, asked respondents to classify pictures of different people, showing how Brazilians understand the relationship between racial categories and physical appearance. While social scientists and activists often use the label *negro* to refer to all people of visible African ancestry, Bailey shows that ordinary Brazilians usually reserve it for people at the darker end of the color spectrum.

Bailey's finding has very important policy implications. Brazilians do not disagree with black activists and policymakers that discrimination against *negros* exists and that they deserve affirmative action. They do disagree on the set of people to whom the label *negro* should be applied. Since the commonsense understanding of this term applies more narrowly to darker skinned Afro-Brazilians, and affirmative action policies often rely on self-classification as *negro* to determine eligibility, large segments of the population that, according to findings on racial inequality, should have been included, are probably excluded. The book also argues persuasively that purely race-based policies in Brazil may create cleavages amongst the poor, compromising policies for achieving "racial" and social equality in the long run.

Bailey also suggests that racial democracy is a myth that helps to *dispel* racism. Although the evidence presented in the book leaves this question unresolved, to my mind, Bailey makes an important point: we should think of racial democracy not only by how much it corresponds to or obscures reality, but also in terms of the reality that it *creates*. This debate is relevant for Canadian scholars interested in whether multiculturalism helps dispel racism or serves to justify and obscure a racially oppressive system. To understand the realities that multiculturalism and racial democracy create, one must take Brubaker and colleagues' argument regarding "groupness" one step further than Bailey did, and examine *national* ideologies as processes of group-making and group contestation. Only then can we understand an important goal of the struggle of Brazilian black activists against racial democracy, and also an important defense of multiculturalism: by acknowledging the right to difference among citizens, one may counter the homogenizing tendencies of traditional national ideologies. Racial democracy creates a certain kind of nation, and multiculturalism creates a different kind.

Another valuable contribution of Bailey's work is to show "class" (or educational level) as a central cleavage in public opinion on race issues in Brazil. Two main findings are worth noting. First, unlike in the US, where political attitudes toward race-based affirmative action policies

are divided along racial lines, in Brazil racial divisions in this regard are not as strong, but there is a huge gap by educational level. The majority of the population supports these policies, but highly educated Brazilians seem to be overwhelmingly against them. Second, the data support the idea that Brazilians see class discrimination as more important than racial discrimination.

Bailey's emphasis on class adds much to our understandings of Brazilian racial attitudes and beliefs. An important question raised by his book is whether Brazilians attribute racial inequality primarily to contemporary racial discrimination or to social class and inherited racial inequality. Bailey posits "a societal consensus that much of the nation's inequality is to be blamed on racial discrimination" (p. 116). His data speak to the perceived *prevalence* of racial discrimination in Brazil, but it remains an open question whether Brazilians think that discrimination is the *main cause* of inequality between blacks and whites. Interviews I have conducted in Brazil suggest that many who agree that discrimination exists and is a problem do not explain racial inequality in these terms, because class inheritance is seen as a *sufficient* explanation for racial inequality.

If most Brazilians combine a belief in the reality of racism with predominantly class-based explanations of inequality, then their position remains in an important tension with that of Black Movement activists, who have long struggled to highlight the *autonomy* of racial explanations relative to class-based ones, and continue to insist on affirmative action policies using explicit *racial* criteria, regardless of whether class criteria would in practice include many black Brazilians in higher education. The Black Movement is struggling not only for material inclusion, but also for symbolic inclusion of the *negro* category as a distinct and valued identity in the Brazilian nation. *This* struggle cannot be easily reconciled with the myth of racial democracy.

University of Toronto

Luisa Farah Schwartzman

Luisa Farah Schwartzman is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Sociology at the University of Toronto. Her current research focuses on Brazilians' understandings of racial categories and how they are implicated in reproduction of racialized inequality, as well as in the design and working of race-based affirmative action policies in Brazilian universities. Recent publications include "Does Money Whiten? Intergenerational Changes in Racial Classification in Brazil" (*American Sociological Review*, 2007), and "Seeing Like Citizens: Official and Unofficial Racial Categories in a Brazilian University" (*Journal of Latin American Studies*, 2009).
luisa.fs@utoronto.ca