entering and leaving the “melting pot”: a history of brazilian indians in the national censuses

This article presents the results of a recently initiated research project on indigenous peoples. It focuses on Brazilian census data, or more correctly multiple censuses, and the ways in which the census questions and orientation manuals prepared census takers for the categorizations they used to reflect Brazil's problems of constructing a nation from a highly heterogeneous and highly stratified population residing within a very large territory. This analysis is historical, and it looks at the disciplinary mechanisms used by the state during different moments of nation building. The ways in which social classifications of race, including the Brazilian fable of the three races which was used, then reframed, first to valorize diversity and later to deny it, become crucial. The approach is introduced through an analysis of the use of the category pardo, and the emphasis on measuring “mixture” at
specific points in Brazilian history. This, I will argue, becomes distinct from the effort to define the Indian’s relationship to the construction of the new nation, and the changing political projects of the new independent state. I will examine crucial data on the way the Positivist administrative terminology (employed by the Indian government) changed from ancient colonial categories, distinguishing “tame” from “wild” (or seditious Indians who could be subjected to a “just war”) and those who fit the proposal for “fraternal protection” as jungle inhabitants. The historical shift toward defining and distinguishing Indians from groups of color reflects the changing character of the Indians’ rights and relationship to the state.

images and the past
The images of Indians in South America (and especially Brazil) were often crystallized in the accounts of travelers and chroniclers of the 16th and 17th centuries (Taylor 1984). Erudite European culture and, by extension, the
colonial elite produced interpretations of Indians that had little relation to their present state. The conditions of Indians’ lives and their cultural state were explained through references to the past. They were often seen as living fossils.

Even today inaccurate interpretations of Indians abound. Some studies see history as a vehicle that transports these cultures from their past condition (of plenitude) to the present, where they become subjects for ethnological studies. Often these studies are conducted after the Indians have been deprived of territories and when their social unity and worldview have been fractured. In many of these studies, history is seen as an obstacle to understanding deep structures, rather than as a factor for articulating and creating meaning—that is, a cognitive instrument with which one can observe the different ways that structures change through time.¹ A truly historical study of ethnic phenomena is not possible within this approach.

Earlier ethnological studies of indigenous societies in Brazil are often focused on recovering the cultural dimension. To avoid representing the Indians generically, they use specific indicators (such as language, practices, and customs) to mark their units of investigation—different ethnic groups that make up the indigenous population of the country. These authors create isolated sociocultural units and effectively restrict an analysis of the ways in which indigenous populations were treated as entities that confronted the state and Brazilian society. Therefore, it is not surprising that significant data, especially demographic data, are considered of little relevance for the advancement of ethnological knowledge.² There is only limited attention to it in the specialized literature.

The opposite viewpoint is supported in this article. This work is founded in the belief that research on indigenous peoples in the Brazilian censuses could be useful for increasing our understanding of the history and current characteristics of the indigenous population. It can offer important contributions to the analysis of indigenous policies and legislation, as well as to the analysis of the technical, or scientific, indicators through which ethnic and racial ideologies are expressed in Brazil.

In demographic terms, the indigenous presence in Brazil is relatively insignificant, in radical contrast to other countries such as Bolivia, Guatemala, Peru, and Ecuador (see Peyser and Chackiel 1994). In those countries, depending on the criteria adopted, the indigenous population can be quite large and may even predominate. In spite of its comparatively small numbers in Brazil, the indigenous presence has been of great importance in the formation of the Brazilian state and in the construction of a national identity. The questions relating to Indians’ current situation have attained an important role in national debates about territorial rights, environmental protection, and
international relations, as well as mining and power-generation policies. They are supported by legal settlements plus the existence and acts of special state institutions. We must rethink the notion that the political relevance of indigenous people in the construction of national units is quite simply proportional to their relative weight in the population.

brazilian-style racism

Before discussing the important problem of racism, allow me to clarify some points about the data in the censuses of this nation. This analysis of the official Brazilian census statistics on its indigenous population shows that it utilizes three distinct types of data: (1) specific data, which offer detailed information about a certain segment; (2) general data, in which certain segments of the population are included in broader categories, rendering their specific characteristics indistinguishable from those of other segments; and (3) universal data, in which that population is described and accounted for without any note of its particular characteristics, that is to say, its ethnic and racial variations.

The first type of data is found sporadically. It appears only in some censuses (1872, 1890, 1940, and 1950) and, by itself, does not allow for a consistent and well-grounded analysis of the demographic evolution of the indigenous population of Brazil. The second type, found in the censuses of 1940, 1950, 1960, and 1980, provides the basis for a systematic comparison that can be used in understanding historical processes, though the indigenous presence is diluted through the issue of mixture. The third type, represented in the census of 1900, 1920, and 1970, completely omits ethnic and racial questions and, through supposedly universal variables, tries to describe a modern and integrated country. The last two types of data contain homogenizing mechanisms that make certain portions of the population invisible. They originate in the belief—which they then further—that the indigenous question is merely a historical relic of contemporary Brazil. The third type is the most radical, applying these mechanisms to all ethnic and racial phenomena.

Before proceeding with an analysis of the data presented in the official censuses, an assessment of the census itself as a social action is in order. A census unites many actors and resources, has its own agenda, and operates within a part of society that has its own interests and representations. The questions and methods of investigation that are used in a census are dictated by the problem of the construction of the Brazilian nation. Or they are utilized to assure national unity in an expansive territory with a population that is entering and leaving the "melting pot"
highly heterogeneous—in terms of race, language, and culture—and highly stratified in economic and political terms. This task, begun by the agrarian, hierarchical, and monarchical elite that created the Historical and Geographic Institute of Brazil (IHGB, Instituto Histórico e Geográfico Brasileiro), was carried out by the young intellectuals of the republic who were influenced by the ideas of Positivism.

The national political imagination resolved the indigenous question by creating a myth about the origin of the Brazilian people. It was presented as a result of the intermarriage between Portuguese settlers, African slaves, and the native population. Positive valorization of this intermarriage and the conception of the Mestiço (mixed blood) as a synthesis of these three cultures are present in innumerable popular and erudite accounts (a more elaborate example of the latter may be found in the work of Gilberto Freyre). For the purpose of our analysis, the task of clarification of what Roberto da Matta (1981) called the “fable of the three races” can be broken down into two movements.

In the first, diversity is made absolute and is mythified and distorted. The three races, placed on a horizontal plane, are equally cited as founders of the Brazilian nationality. All are considered valuable, their particular virtues exalted, and serve to complement the absence of those characteristics in the other races. In this way, for example, the tenderness of the Indian and the sensuality of black people compensate for the dryness and rationality of the colonizers, eventually integrating themselves in the specific character of the Brazilian Mestiço (see Freyre 1933). These complementary elements form the basis of the myth of “racial democracy”: everyone, though distinct, recognizes their part in the creation of the Brazilian people.

In the second movement, representing an expression of the dialectics of mythical thinking, the valorization of this diversity is replaced by its denial. Racial mixture is praised as a fair and peaceful solution to racial conflicts and social contradictions. This approach to the formation of the Brazilian people justifies itself and the coexistence of social hierarchies and ethnic prejudices, even permitting the creation of a masked type of racism known as “Brazilian-style racism.” The intent is to represent the Brazilian as a “cordial man” (see Holanda 1970). In any case, when one recognizes the convergence of these elements, one ends up by creating a common platform, which removes cultural differences and temporarily abolishes social asymmetries. Emphasis is placed on mobility, assimilation, and miscegenation used as the medium for the growth necessary for a modern and democratic society.

The census category “pardo” (brown skinned) seems to be the channel through which this problem navigates, fulfilling a clear social objective. It replaces the current customs and uses in the Brazilian society with an
operational category, which is artificial and arbitrary but appears to be technical and scientific. The census is transformed into an inoffensive legitimator of the discourse on intermarriage; it becomes an impractical tool for a finer sociological analysis. This category reveals itself as an unproductive and misleading support for scientific inquiry. It classifies ethnic categories (that are effectively used by the Brazilian people in the definition of their identity and in their establishment of strategies and calculations for their collective performance) in an undifferentiated fashion and does not allow them to be distinguished afterward.

The definition of the three basic groups—white, black, and yellow—seems to create other problems, for example, with respect to the relatively recent immigrations. The 19th and 20th centuries in Brazil were marked by the arrival of Italian, German, Polish, Spanish, Japanese, and other immigrants. These peoples were not permitted to be identified by “race.” That term was strongly marked in connection with conservative ideologies in the political vocabulary of this century. Instead, they were identified by “color.” It supposedly corresponded to simple empirical evidence (see Carneiro 1922 and Costa 1974 for examples of this change of position). There is an additional consideration. The logic underlying the census shows that it continues to be based on the problem of national formation, with the immigrations and encounters that constitute the fable of the three races.

First, the numerical relevance of “yellow” people (Indians) is very small (0.6 percent) and did not occupy a special place in the myth of origin. This then transforms them into a secondary component of the basic structure of the system of classification.

Second, the category of pardo was developed by investigators to be used to classify that a “person did not satisfactorily fit into the other basic categories, including those such as ‘Caboclo,’ ‘Mulato,’ ‘Moreno,’ etc., or even being limited to the judgment of the census taker” (see the text presenting the methodology for taking the 1940 census). This category is not “generic,” in contrast to what was written in that census. It does not involve the three terms of the basic structure equally. On the contrary, pardo is a residual category, with an internal hierarchy. It is partially assimilationist, partially segregationist; it is instituted only through the mixture of two terms, white and black. The third term, Indian, is absent. In this sense, Indians, as distinct from blacks, would be excluded from the national “melting pot” expressed through the censuses of the 20th century.

Third, references to the Indians are always accompanied by a commentary about the complexity of including them in censuses because they live in remote areas or because they speak other languages and have other customs (see the methodological notes of the censuses from 1940 on). Both the
planners and the census takers share an image of Indians as elements external to the national society, thereby maintaining their characterization as primitives constituting a potential threat to national institutions. At the end of this article I will demonstrate how this representation is articulated in governmental policies, social classification, and patterns of domination already established at the beginning of Portuguese colonization. And it is the result of a long historical process that extends to the present.

Fourth, besides this manifested externality, any mention of Indians (always referred to as few in number with minimal repercussions on global data)—in contrast to those made of whites and blacks, which are included in the present categorization—always suggest only past facts or connections. This is what is suggested by the use of old terms (such as mamelucos [Indian-white mixture] and cafusos [Indian-black mixture]), instead of working with present social titles (such as “Indian” or “indigenous”) or the many other local designations (such as “remnant,” “descendant,” etc.). In this perspective, the inclusion and counting of the Indians as caboclos in the censuses of the past century and their substitution for pardo in this century serve to confirm their supposed disappearance and current insignificance.

mixture as fate and as factor of national unity

A comparison of the data on the “color” question present in the censuses of 1940, 1950, 1960, and 1980 would indicate that the number of black and white people has been diminishing in relative importance in the Brazilian population. In the case of blacks, there is a highly stable population. In 1940 they numbered 6 million individuals. Those numbers fell slightly in 1950 (5.6 million) but recovered in 1960 (6.1 million). They registered a moderate increase to 7 million 20 years later. In percentages, blacks fell from 14.6 percent in 1940 to 11 percent and 8.7 percent in the following decades, finally representing 5.9 percent in 1980. The white population, despite having doubled in those 40 years—from 26.1 million in 1940 to 64.5 million in 1980, also decreased percentage-wise from 63.5 percent to 54.2 percent in the same period.

The general data for Brazil inversely points to an increase in the pardo population—a category that must be approached with much caution (see Table 1). In 1940, pardos represented 8.7 million individuals; in 1950, 13.7 million; in 1960, 20.7 million; and in 1980, 46.2 million. In terms of their presence in the Brazilian population, they represented 21.2 percent in 1940, 26.5
percent in 1950, 29.5 percent in 1960, and 38.9 percent in 1980. Thus, in 40 years the population of pardos increased greatly, and their presence almost doubled, nearing two-fifths of the population.

Considering Brazil as a whole, the pardo category seems to have no other purpose than to serve as an instrument for denoting people of mixed blood and to be used to gather numerical evidence that reinforces the ideological suppositions about the “whitening” of the Brazilian population. At the level of regional analysis this causes confusion by putting together totally different ethnic phenomena. (From an ethnic and social point of view, the classification “pardo” indicates something completely different in the Southern Region than in the northeast and Amazonia.)

In the 1940 census, the Central-West Region most closely represented the national profile in the distribution of colors, with 64.5 percent white, 14 percent black, and 20.8 percent pardo. In areas where there were formerly many plantations dependent on slave labor, the declared population of blacks came close to one-fifth of the total, as in the Northeast (19.4 percent) and in the East (18.7 percent); whereas whites represented more than half the population (51.7 percent and 53.6 percent, respectively). The people who were a mixture of these two groups—and also the Indians who were not mentioned—were pardos, which by then already represented one-quarter of the total, greater than the black population.

Nonetheless, there are situations that were radically distinct. For example, in the Southern Region, which was marked by the influx of European immigrants, whites made up 87 percent of the population, while pardos represented 4.5 percent, even less than blacks (6.7 percent). On the contrary, in the Northern Region, in 1940, pardos made up the greatest part of the population, with 49.4 percent, while whites represented 41.1 percent and blacks 9.1 percent. The 1980 census showed an even greater difference between these two regions. While in the Southern Region whites constituted 84 percent of the population, in the Northern Region they were only 20 percent, while the overwhelming majority (76.1 percent) was classified as pardo.

Table 1. The Brazilian Population by Color in the 1940, 1950, 1960, and 1980 Censuses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Color</th>
<th>1940</th>
<th>1950</th>
<th>1960</th>
<th>1980</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>26,171,77</td>
<td>32,027,66</td>
<td>42,838,63</td>
<td>65,540,46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>6,035,869</td>
<td>5,692,657</td>
<td>6,116,848</td>
<td>7,046,906</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yellow</td>
<td>242,320</td>
<td>392,082</td>
<td>482,848</td>
<td>672,251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pardo</td>
<td>8,744,365</td>
<td>13,786,74</td>
<td>20,706,43</td>
<td>46,233,53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No information</td>
<td>41,983</td>
<td>45,205</td>
<td>46,604</td>
<td>517,897</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>41,236,315</td>
<td>51,944,347</td>
<td>70,191,370</td>
<td>119,011,152</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

entering and leaving the "melting pot" 197
Despite being a crude tool that does not allow one to isolate or estimate the size of its distinct internal components, the census category of pardo, initially justified as a residual category, is being increasingly used. This can be explained by its convenience for data collection and for its effect, that is, it reduces any stigmatizing (racist and segregationist) connotations. In many states, pardos already constitute the largest portion of the population and have high levels of demographic growth. To illustrate a few cases, in Rio Grande do Norte, in 1940, pardos were 43 percent of the total, but they became the dominant category in 1980, with 56.7 percent. In the same period, in Bahia, pardos passed from about half (51 percent) of the population to two-thirds (66.2 percent). In the State of Amazonas this number has also been increasing rapidly—in 1980 pardos represented three-quarters of the population.

The national rates do not change so quickly because of the Southern Region, with its large population and the great predominance of whites. Nevertheless, even in this region there was a significant increase in the pardo category, which in 1940 was less than blacks (4.5 percent) and nearly tripled in 1980 when it reached 12 percent.

Given the great internal heterogeneity of the pardo category, it is not possible to explain these variations exclusively through statistical analysis. It therefore becomes necessary to review historical facts and arguments. For each region, "pardo" has a distinct and singular historical and ethnic reality. In the Northern Region, where black slaves were not introduced in significant numbers and where there were few immigrants, the pardo category mostly and necessarily evokes Indian ancestry and identity.

**indians are not mestiços**

The pardo category is a generic indicator for the mixing of color groups. This contrasts with the category of "Indian," which is linked to a differentiated legal status, rather than to a situation of (supposed) internal homogeneity and external distinctiveness in relationship to color. In declaring themselves "Indian" or "indigenous," those interviewed do not intend to classify themselves in relationship to color but, rather, to declare their rights and relationship with the state. Because the person upholds a form of social organization and cultural traditions that she or he considers to come from pre-Colombian populations, she or he identifies her- or himself as "indigenous" and demands differential treatment from the state concerning land issues and assistance (see Oliveira 1994).
Indians have neither a chromatic homogeneity nor physical features that distinguish them from other segments of the population. There are some indigenous societies that could easily be classified as black or that, inversely, are closer to white standards than their regional mestizo neighbors. Furthermore, within each indigenous society, and even within every village, the differences registered in the racial components of each individual are great. The condition of being "Indian" does not have anything to do with biases about the unity of race or color.

The pardo census category intends, precisely, to indicate the mixture of the different groups of color to make measuring them possible. If its primary purpose is to point out the existence of mixture—that is, the intermarriage between different categories—then it is possible to understand the reason for not counting the different types of mestizos separately. Within this perspective, it is not relevant to distinguish between mulatos, caboclos, or cafuzos, for all these categories denote mixture equally. However, it is a necessary caution that the census takers' orientation manual includes them, for the qualification pardo is not a commonly used term. There is some discussion about replacing it with other terms that are more prevalent and more liable for categorical self-attribution, as some argue for the term moreno (see Harris 1970 on this question and subsequent critical appraisals in Hasenbalg 1979 and Silva and Hasenbalg 1993).

As I have mentioned, nothing similar happens with the self-attribution "Indian." Because it is a juridical status, there may be no compromise—either the person fits into it or not (even though the person still has the option of making use of her or his identity—ethnic or political—in some contexts and not in others). This ambiguity can be a consequence of the use of the term but is not constitutive of the category. It is a categorical self-attribution. It is therefore entirely irrelevant whether classification by color into the basic groups is more convenient because the self-attribution "Indian" cannot fall into any other category. In order to have a desirable conceptual strictness, the census color classification must consider the "Indian" as a distinct category and not as one of the multiple possible manifestations of the pardo category.

indians as subjects of the national census

In considering specific data about the indigenous population, we can focus initially on the two first national censuses (1872 and 1890). Both contained four "race" categories: "white," "black," "pardo," and "caboclo."
Table 2. Population by Color in Amazonas and Rio de Janeiro.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Color</th>
<th>Amazonas</th>
<th></th>
<th>Rio de Janeiro</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>11,211</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>303,275</td>
<td>38.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>1,943</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>270,523</td>
<td>34.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pardo</td>
<td>7,628*</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>201,074</td>
<td>25.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caboclo</td>
<td>36,828</td>
<td>63.9</td>
<td>7,852</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>57,610</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>782,724</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Of which 372 are slaves.

was no explicit conceptualization of these categories, which in the 1890 census were translated into the French language. The pardos were characterized as mestiços (métis), while the caboclos are indigenous (indiens).

The census of 1872 also proceeded with a general division of the population into “free” and “slaves.” As such, “blacks” (and also “pardos”) were divided into “free” and “slave”; whereas “whites” and “caboclos” were always characterized as “free.” This reinforces the impression that the caboclo category in that period and that census referred to Indians, who were protected from slavery by old colonial legislation.

In comparing the population distribution by “races” in two states with radically contrasting economic and ethnic profiles, it can be noted that the 1872 census referred to Indians (see Table 2). The province of Rio de Janeiro was one of the most populated, with 782,724 inhabitants, encompassing almost 8 percent of the population of the country and constituting its economic, administrative, and political center. At that time there still existed a population of almost 300,000 slaves, which corresponded to 37.4 percent of its population. With regard to “race,” the most numerous inhabitants were “white” (38.7 percent), followed by “black” (34.6 percent), and “pardo” (25.7 percent), while there were very few “caboclos” (only 1 percent). In comparison, in the province of Amazonas, with its small population (57,610), one of the smallest in the country (0.6 percent), the predominant population was classified as “caboclos” (63.9 percent), distantly followed by “whites” (19.5 percent) and “pardos” (13.2 percent), with only a small contingent of “blacks” (3.4 percent).

Table 3 records the indigenous presence in each province of the empire, indicated in absolute numbers and in proportion to the total population. There are six provinces where the indigenous population was significant, passing the 30,000 mark: Bahia, Ceará, Pará, São Paulo, Amazonas, and Minas Gerais. The indigenous participation in the total population stood out in Mato Grosso and Pará (where caboclos were almost half the number of “whites”), followed
Table 3. The Total Population of Brazil by Province and the Presence of Caboclos (Indigenous People) in the 1872 Census.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
<th>Caboclos</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amazonas</td>
<td>57,610</td>
<td>36,828</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pará</td>
<td>275,237</td>
<td>44,589</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maranhão</td>
<td>359,040</td>
<td>10,943</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Piauí</td>
<td>202,222</td>
<td>13,453</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ceará</td>
<td>721,686</td>
<td>52,837</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R. G. do Norte</td>
<td>239,979</td>
<td>11,039</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paraíba</td>
<td>376,226</td>
<td>9,567</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pernambuco</td>
<td>841,539</td>
<td>11,805</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alagoas</td>
<td>348,009</td>
<td>6,364</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sergipe</td>
<td>176,243</td>
<td>3,087</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bahia</td>
<td>1,379,616</td>
<td>49,882</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Esp. Santo</td>
<td>82,137</td>
<td>5,529</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Munic. Neutro</td>
<td>274,972</td>
<td>923</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rio de Janeiro</td>
<td>782,724</td>
<td>7,852</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>São Paulo</td>
<td>837,654</td>
<td>39,465</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paraná</td>
<td>126,722</td>
<td>9,087</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S. Catarina</td>
<td>159,802</td>
<td>2,892</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R.G. do Sul</td>
<td>434,813</td>
<td>25,717</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minas Gerais</td>
<td>2,039,735</td>
<td>32,322</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goiás</td>
<td>160,395</td>
<td>4,250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mato Grosso</td>
<td>60,417</td>
<td>8,524</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>9,930,478</td>
<td>386,955</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

by Piauí (approximately one-third) and Espírito Santo (approximately one-fourth). It is worth noting that in some of these provinces—such as Piauí, Ceará, and Espírito Santo—in the following decades the Indians were described as “extinct,” and their presence was ignored, and even denied, until very recently.

Table 4 presents a comparison between the censuses of 1872 and 1890, with absolute numbers and percentages of the total population for each census category. In the 1872 census, the Brazilian population approached 10 million, with a relative equilibrium between “pardos” (making up 38.3 percent) and “whites” (38.1 percent), and with “blacks” making up half of either of these populations (19.7 percent). Though in percentages the caboclo presence was small (3.8 percent), it may be noted that the indigenous category represented an appreciable population (nearly 387,000), though it went almost entirely unnoticed by historians and most intellectuals of the era.

In the 1890 census, the Brazilian population exceeded 13.5 million, with “whites” predominating (40.8 percent), followed by “pardos” (34.2 percent) and “blacks” far behind, with less than half the number of pardos (15.4
Table 4. The Brazilian Population by Color, According to the Censuses of 1872 and 1890.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Color</th>
<th>1872</th>
<th>1890</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$N$</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>3,787,289</td>
<td>38.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>1,954,452</td>
<td>19.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pardo</td>
<td>3,801,782</td>
<td>38.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caboclo</td>
<td>386,955</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>9,930,478</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

"Caboclos" represented a relatively high number (almost 1.3 million), that is, 9.6 percent of the total population of the country.

In comparing these two censuses, one notes that in two decades the total increase in population was 3.6 million. In absolute terms, all the categories show growth, most significantly the number of "whites" (1.7 million), followed by those of "caboclos" (close to 900,000) and "pardos" (770,000), whereas "blacks" only increased slightly (143,000). The participation of "blacks" and "pardos" in the total population declined 3.3 percent and 4.1 percent respectively; whereas "whites" rose 2.7 percent and "caboclos" rose 5.7 percent.

Along with natural demographic growth, it is possible to understand the great increase in the "whites" as a function of the arrival of European immigrants during this period. Antislavery laws and the proclamation of the republic surely explain the small increase in the "black" group, which is even smaller than the expected demographic growth rate.

The paradox remains, then, with the pardos and the caboclos. When the slaves were freed, it might have been reasonable to expect an increase in the intermarriages of blacks with whites and pardos, with this eventually leading to an increase in the number of pardos. On the contrary, the above data suggest that exogenous unions of former slaves showed a greater tendency toward intermarriage with Indians, with the resulting mestizos being classified as caboclos. This would justify a change in the criteria defining the caboclo category, thereafter including not only indigenous people but also their maternal or paternal descendants in unions with former slaves whether these were black or pardo. This would provide a partial explanation for the great increase in caboclos in the 1890 census. After the 1940 census, all mestizos (including Indians) were classified as pardos.

The 1940 and 1950 censuses made use of another item for data collection that may allow one to estimate the number of Indians existing in the country at
that time: the category of “people who speak another language besides Portuguese at home.” Among the choices of European, Asian, and other foreign languages, another category was offered for those who spoke “Guarani or any other aboriginal language.” This last category included 3.5 percent of the population and corresponded to an unequivocal population of 58,027 Indians. In the 1950 census, this number was reduced to 46,208. In the censuses that followed, this information was no longer collected.

What justified the inclusion of this question? It was the concern over the 1.6 million people (3.9 percent of the total population of the country) who presented the possibility of forming ethnic enclaves, especially among the Germans and Japanese in the south of Brazil. More than 1.3 million spoke European languages, while some 200,000 spoke Asian languages. In the following census (1950) the total number of people who did not speak Portuguese at home decreased to less than 1.3 million but, nevertheless, corresponded to 2.5 percent of the total population of the country.

The linguistic criteria are helpful for an initial approximation of the indigenous population. However, they should not be used exclusively if we want to avoid underrepresenting that population. Many indigenous societies have lost their languages or only use them on ritual occasions. In addition, given the negative stereotypes Indians regularly face from their non-Indian neighbors, they commonly hide their indigenous identity. This would surely have limited the results of the census, especially when one considers that the census taker often was a local person.

Finally, it must be noted that census takers always limited themselves to the Indians who were integrated into the larger society and who were easily accessible (or were, at least, considered as such). So, in the introductory comments to the above-mentioned linguistic category, one may read, “The investigation demonstrates the existence of aboriginal groupings which, despite contact with civilized people, maintain the use of their native language.” Despite the limitations of the linguistic criteria, which usually underestimate the indigenous population, it is regrettable that it was eliminated from consecutive national censuses.

demographic data in historical perspective

Given the interests of the state, as well as those of social groups that actively participated in the expansion and consolidation of the colonial order and the process of constructing the Brazilian nation, Indians were always entering and leaving the “melting pot”
classified according to their degree of integration into, or conflict with, the
dominant society. Thus, even during the first century of the Portuguese con-
quest, “indigenous nations” (the expression used at the time) were classified
in the polarized categories of *indios bravos* (wild Indians) and *indios mansos*
tame Indians). The latter were considered “subjects of the King,” having
regular obligations and the right to be protected. While the distinction be-
tween Tupi speakers and other Indian groups (generally known as Tapuias)
was nothing more than an ethnographic denotation of the Jesuits, it happened
to fit the division between Indians who allied themselves with the Portuguese
and those who fought against them (and who were supposedly allied with the
French, Dutch, and Spanish).

A double form of classification was maintained to identify the Indians in
accordance with their relationship to the state in the official initiatives for reg-
istering and controlling the population. They were classified either as a popu-
lation effectively removed from the daily reality of the country or as one inte-
grated with the local citizens and other inhabitants.

The survey conducted by Counselor Velloso de Oliveira, in 1817–18,
serves as an example of the first type of classification of Indians. The survey
of parishes and communities was made at the behest of the Provincial Assem-
bly when the country was raised to the status of United Kingdom to Portugal
and Algarves. On this occasion it was estimated that there were 800,000 “non-
domesticated Indians” among a total population of 3.6 million people (includ-
ing Indians that were integrated). In order to better contextualize the proceed-
ings and conclusions of this survey, one must not forget that a “just war”
(*guerra justa*) was waged against this sizable portion of inhabitants within the
national territory (representing more than 20 percent of, though not consid-
ered to be part of, the population of the country). “Just wars” were a legal tool
that permitted the destruction of villages, the enslavement of those deemed se-
ditious, and the subsequent distribution of their lands and riches. As one can
see, social statistics cannot be separated from governmental policies and so-
cial representations.

During the time of the Brazilian Empire (1822–89), the “just war” policy
was abandoned. At the time, the elites were more concerned with provincial
and republican revolts and later with the debates on slavery and European mi-
gregation. Conversion to Christianity and “civilization,” promoted by the mis-
sionary orders and by regular clergy in cooperation with the state and private
interests, were seen as the most appropriate ways to deal with the Indians. This
indigenous policy did not conflict with the expansion of economic frontiers or
the local practices, which established integration and national unity amid so-
cial hierarchies and asymmetries.
Within this framework, the first national census conducted in 1872 considered Indians to be part of the “free” population (separate from the black slaves) but also distinguished them from “whites.” They were classified as caboclos because of their indigenous origin. More than 380,000 people, representing about 4 percent of the population of the country, were included in this category.

The terms índios bravos and subjects of the King were renamed. The attention of the state was directed to those who were the latter, who were distinguished from other Brazilian citizens only by their origin (mestiços or ex-Indians), not by their rights or obligations. Some of the provinces (Ceará, Piauí, and Espírito Santo) that registered significant Indian populations were, at the time, declaring the Indian villages extinct and would, until very recently (the 1980s), consider themselves “states without Indians.” Nothing is mentioned about the índios bravos. They remain only a latent danger and are considered a problem of the past—a problem that had either been resolved or minimized through the lack of large-scale conflicts.

With the advent of the republic (1889), the patterns of state intervention in relation to the indigenous population began to be modified. Though the 1890 census preserved the same categories as before, the change in numbers reflected new views. There was a strong increase (though not satisfactorily explained) in the number of caboclos, who came to represent 9.6 percent of the Brazilian population. The total of 1.3 million indigenous people was incorporated into the official discourse about Indians during the first two decades of the 20th century. Rondon, the army engineer who directed the Telegraph Line Commission of Mato Grosso State (Comissão de Linhas Telegráficas do Mato Grosso) and later created (1910) and directed the Service for the Protection of Indians (SPI, Serviço de Proteção aos Índios) for several decades, made estimates of 1.5 million Indians (Garcia 1922). This was, undoubtedly, part of a strategy to push the state to fund the work of pacifying the Indians.

The political project of Positivist intellectuals and the military called for the “rational” and modernizing intervention by the state, so it would perform the tasks that it previously delegated to the local elite and to the clergy. The Indian issue gained visibility with the expansion of railways and new communication lines, as well as through conflicts with European settlers, thus justifying the maintenance of a specific governmental structure—the SPI.

There was debate about how to deal with the Indian issue. Rondon was against civilizing the Indians and converting them to Christianity, as was the practice of the missionaries in the 19th century. He criticized the imposition of religious doctrines that were “beyond” the Indians’ “evolutionary stage.” There was also the assessment that this would be ineffective, if not in all cases (i.e., for caboclos and índios mansos), at least for the remaining wild Indians.
who represented a threat to the advances of civilization. The wardship policy maintained the segregationist directive that was, paradoxically, similar to the separatist action of the missionary order (especially the Jesuits). It also inspired paternalistic and authoritarian practices.

To better understand the Rondonian proposal of "fraternal protection" of the "jungle dweller," it is necessary to compare it with other governmental policies that were applied to native populations who opposed the process of expansion of the national state. It was radically different from the "just wars" as well as the disguised ways of exterminating Indians carried out by individuals. The Positivists re-created the polarity between "friendly Indians" and "enemy Indians" (which, ultimately, is the dichotomy between "good" and "bad" Indians; with the former, alliances were possible, while with the latter, one could justify war). At this point, all Indians were placed in one evolutionary sequence, with their adhesion or resistance considered a result of the methods of intervention of the white man, not of the bad character of some Indians. This delegitimized any argument for justifying their extermination.

The Indians that were pacified by Rondon were not in any way "tame" Indians but, rather, were Indians that maintained direct control over significant portions of national territory and resisted the goals of the government. These groups, formerly subjected to "just wars," were, for humanitarian reasons, not to be exterminated for the present but, rather, transformed into a population directly controlled by the state through the establishment of wardship.

The republican state created the SPI as a special agency to deal with the Indians, handing over its management to military officials and establishing a standard of competence for those activities through the experiences of Rondon and his close collaborators (see Lima 1994). All issues related to Indians, and any administrative arrangements connected to them, were forwarded to this agency for Indian affairs. In this framework, the registration and control of the indigenous population became the specific task of the SPI.

The national censuses came to reflect this new approach by abandoning the method of grouping the Indians in a separate category. In the censuses of 1900 and 1920 a universalistic orientation predominated, arguing that blacks and Indians were equally Brazilian citizens and that it would be legally irrelevant and socially discriminatory to distinguish them from the others. Consequently, all references to race were removed, and the caboclo category, among others, fell temporarily into disfavor.

The 1940 census brought back the classifications of race and/or ethnicity, though disguised in the categories of "color." The caboclos were classified within the general category of pardo, which was previously only applied to
mestizos of black and white origin but then came to mean all types of mestizos. The Indians, therefore, were thought of as part of the Brazilian population—they were a mere subdivision of the mestizos. The Indians, however, were difficult to access, a task in which the SPI directly assisted the census takers.

In accordance with common thinking at the time, the only Indians registered in the census were those who were under the tutelary responsibility of the SPI. Implicit in this policy were two other situations: isolated Indians could not be counted as part of the Brazilian population until they came into contact with the SPI; and the Indians who were already integrated and who did not receive any special assistance were counted as being simply Brazilian.5

A relatively reliable estimate of the country’s indigenous presence is made possible through one question in the 1940 census that was included for totally different reasons. The number of people that reported that they spoke an indigenous language at home was 58,000 in 1940 and 46,000 in 1950. Considering that many Indians (including some under the tutelary control of the SPI) had already lost the use of their own language, these numbers are in relative agreement with the ones presented by Darcy Ribeiro (1957). Based on the reports done by the SPI, in 1957, Ribeiro estimated the Indian population to be between 68,000 and 99,000 (see also Cardoso de Oliveira and Castro Faria 1972).

These figures represented a drastic revision of the estimate published by the SPI in the 1920s (1.5 million). This gave rise to a revision of the state’s strategy, a change of public opinion, and a different relationship between Indians and private interests. Ribeiro (1970) re-elaborated and updated Rondonian principles. He formulated a doctrine of Indian affairs that was based on three interrelated affirmations:

1. due to epidemics and massacres the Indians that still exist in Brazil are very few;
2. private interests, as well as intervention by the missionaries, only contributed to the disorganization and loss of culture of the Indians;
3. it is a moral obligation of the state to not only provide dignified living conditions for Indians but also allow them to live according to their own cultural canons.

The statistics on the Indian population varied little from the 1950s to the 1980s, remaining steady at 0.2 percent of the Brazilian population. In initiatives for the defense of Indians, the emphasis was always placed on pressures for direct state intervention for protection and assistance. The small number of Indians was also used in rhetoric to assure that the purely humanitarian actions of the state would not affront powerful economic and political interests.
At the end of the 1950s, the creation of the Xingu Indigenous Park set a new standard for the recognition of indigenous territorial rights. This was based on the recognition of a relationship between a culture and a certain ecological niche. And it was seen as a way to guarantee adequate conditions for the physical and cultural reproduction of those Indians. During the military dictatorship of 1964–85, it fell upon the new agency for Indian affairs, the National Indian Foundation (Fundação Nacional do Indio, FUNAI) to continue this process of demarcation. FUNAI produced numerous studies and proposals for the delimitation of areas; they often languished for years, waiting for approval from higher governmental authorities.

In contrast to what Darcy Ribeiro defended, however, the state was not impartial in questions concerning Indians and private interests. It often directly participated in colonizing enterprises that affected indigenous lands (see Oliveira 1983). In addition, the private interests that conflicted with those of the Indians were of great economic and political significance. This allowed one to explain, in sociological terms, the stagnation, inefficiency, and even connivance of FUNAI. On the other hand, indigenous lands presently comprise an area of about 18 percent of the Legal Amazon Region and have important relationships with other public policies that affect the destiny of this region of the country.

The redemocratization process that took place in the 1980s opened new opportunities to debate the Indian issue. Nongovernmental organizations (along with many anthropologists, missionaries, and lawyers), indigenous movements, and international organizations joined in campaigns for the demarcation of indigenous lands, and they gained sympathy within national and international public opinion. In 1988, the new Federal Constitution was promulgated. It dedicated a chapter to Indians, recognizing their rights to land, to the use of their language, and to the management of their internal affairs according to their own culture. Indigenous organizations had their legal existence recognized, and the political space previously occupied by the state’s Indian wardship policy was reduced.

These changes help one understand why the technicians responsible for the 1991 national census decided to allow people to declare themselves as “indigenous” in the question regarding the person’s color. These are counted separately from those that are classified as pardo. As a political fact, this change was deemed quite promising and may open new spheres of recognition for the Indian presence in contemporary Brazil.

In general terms, the results of the 1991 census do not modify the analysis made here concerning the confirmed tendencies toward the distribution of the Brazilian population into ethnic and racial categories. With regard to the
indigenous population, the total number (306,245) diverges very little from the estimates made by FUNAI and by nongovernmental organizations, thereby reinforcing the impression of a major demographic recovery during the last four decades. Nevertheless, a more detailed and specific analysis of the 1991 census, one that uses data from states and municipalities, reveals many incongruities and limitations. (For example, mention of the presence of Indians where there is no historical or present record of them and the absence of Indians in municipalities where there are indigenous reserves or groups that have been unmistakably identified are probably erroneous.) While these irregularities are understandable given the novelty of this census experience, any use of data from the 1991 census would require a critical and circumspect reading, along with a comparison with other available sources concerning the current indigenous population.

**Summary**

Recent facts have demonstrated that Indians can no longer be thought of as transitory participants in the Brazilian nation who only have a relationship to the past or who are considered as a population on its way to extinction (see Oliveira 1995). The data show a sharp demographic increase in the indigenous population as a whole (now estimated to be approximately 325,000) and also an increase in the number of ethnic groups of intermediate size (over 2,000 members). Furthermore, many parts of the country have been experiencing a process of ethnic re-emergence, in which people who formerly masked their indigenous identity now place it at the center of a process of social reorganization and cultural re-elaboration (see Oliveira 1998a). This ethnic mobilization of the Indians in the oldest areas of colonization (i.e., the Northeastern and Eastern Regions of the country), in regions that had always been of secondary interest to anthropologists and to mainstream Brazilian policy for Indian affairs (e.g., Rondonism and its 1950s version), poses some important theoretical and political debates. But this is, unfortunately, beyond the scope of the present article.

The legitimacy and increasing competence of Indian leadership (whether of re-emergent Indians or not) in the debates about public policies and regional development alternatives are becoming important. Currently, the main concern in many sectors of public opinion is about the authenticity of those declaring themselves Indians. Stereotypes of “primitive peoples” are returning and demands are being made that Indians possess a markedly distinct cultural patrimony.
The current challenge for researchers on indigenous issues is clear: how to avoid allowing the dominant images of Indians to act as a straightjacket for new realities. The past images of Indians generated in colonial times yet rephrased in legal and colloquial discourse have to be addressed in a new context generated by the demands and mobilizations of Indians as well as a broad and diversified institutional framework.

notes

Acknowledgments. This article was translated from the Portuguese and first appeared in my book Ensaios de Antropologica Historica, edited by Editora UFRJ (Rio de Janeiro: Federal University of Rio de Janeiro Press, 1999).

1. For a more developed critique of these approaches in ethnological studies, see Oliveira 1998b.
2. See Silva 1994 for a thorough, schematic illustration of this approach to demographic studies.
3. Caboclo suggests the presence of physical or cultural characteristics that link the individual to Indians, but it can also be used to designate peasants and traditional populations. Mulato is used for individuals born from black-white intermarriage who have physical characteristics of both races. Moreno indicates any person with darker skin (whatever the reason) and is used as a euphemism for a racially mixed ascendance (in many contexts, however, both mulato and moreno are seen as offensive). Pardo also indicates the color of the skin, but it is not used in daily language, only as a racial classification in the censuses.

4. For one explanation of this ideology, see Glazer and Moynihan 1963. For a comparison between Brazil and the United States, where this exclusion of the Indian is notorious, see Degler 1976, Skidmore 1974, and Wagley and Harris 1967.

5. The classification criteria used by the “Estatuto do Indio” (Indian Statute), Law 6.001 of 1973, revived distinctions that were incorporated in the administrative practices of the now defunct SPI and categorize “indigenous communities” according to their degree of integration into the “national community.” Within this conception, the Indians are set on an evolutionary scale and are distinguished by the type and intensity of the contacts they maintain with the national society: namely, “isolated,” “in intermittent contact,” “in permanent contact,” and “integrated.” The Indian Statute therefore re-elaborates the dichotomy between “wild Indians” and “tame Indians,” thus representing a clear continuation of Portuguese colonial policies.

references cited

Cardoso de Oliveira, R., and L. Castro Faria

Carneiro, Carlos

Costa, Tereza Cristina de Araújo

Degler, Carl N.

Freyre, Gilberto