

Seeing Like Citizens: Unofficial Understandings of Official Racial Categories in a Brazilian University*

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Abstract: This paper investigates how students at the State University of Rio de Janeiro (UERJ), one of the first Brazilian universities to adopt race-based quotas for admissions, interpret racial categories used as eligibility criteria. Considering the perspectives of students is important to understand the workings of affirmative action policies because UERJ's quotas require applicants to classify themselves. Students' interpretations of those categories often diverge from the interpretations intended by people who shaped the policy. Students' perspectives are formed by everyday experiences with categorisation and by their self-assessment as legitimate beneficiaries of quotas. In contrast, the policies were designed according to a new racial project, where black consciousness-raising and statistics played an important role.

Keywords: race, Brazil, affirmative action, categorisation

Introduction

Brazil has a long history of discrimination based on skin colour and a well-documented association between people's racial category and their access to resources, patterns of socialisation and family formation.¹ At the same time,

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¹ See Edward Telles, *Race in Another America: The Significance of Skin Colour in Brazil* (Princeton and Oxford, 2004).

recently implemented affirmative action policies, designed to address these social injustices, have generated a heated debate over whether it is possible (or appropriate) for such policies to rely on racial classification. Some commentators claim that accurate categorisation is impossible in Brazil because Brazilians are a mixed-race people with no clear racial boundaries. Others suggest that classification is difficult due to 'fraud': people can dishonestly declare their racial category in order to benefit from the policy. This paper argues that indeed potential policy beneficiaries often classify themselves differently from how policymakers and advocates would expect them to, but not simply for the above-mentioned reasons. More importantly, there is mismatch between the worldviews and knowledge that policy beneficiaries (those who are able to define whether official categories apply to themselves) and policy designers (who have determined or influenced the shaping of the policies) bring with them when considering the appropriate rules for classifying people for affirmative action purposes.²

In this paper I investigate, first, the origin of the knowledge of policy designers on the meaning of racial categories and how these are transformed into a set of categories used in the policy; second, how potential beneficiaries of the policy acquire their own knowledge of 'race' and translate it into decisions about how they should classify themselves for the policy; and third, the nature of communication between these two sets of actors, and what factors render communication more or less successful. The paper investigates these questions using the case of one of the first universities in Brazil to implement racial quotas for admissions, namely the State University of Rio de Janeiro (UERJ). I contrast the perspectives of students (who were at some point applicants for admissions and potential beneficiaries of quotas) with those of black movement activists and social scientists who have influenced the policy (policy designers).

The first part of the paper looks at the source of racial categories used in the quotas and their intended interpretations. These categories were chosen in the context of a new *racial project*:³ an effort by black movement activists, with the aid of some social scientists, to change Brazil's racial order, using a particular diagnosis of what this racial order looks like. I therefore briefly review the literature on how the new racial project developed and how

² As far as I know, all Brazilian institutions that have implemented affirmative action require self-classification. The University of Brasília has until recently 'verified' eligibility by having students' photographs analysed by a committee, but students could still opt out of qualifying for quotas.

³ I borrow the term 'racial project' from Howard Winant, 'Rethinking Race in Brazil', *Journal of Latin American Studies*, vol. 24, no. 1 (1992), pp. 173–92; and Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s* (New York, 1994).

policies at UERJ were made gradually consistent with it. I show how the increasing involvement of the new racial project with state bureaucracy and quantitative social science leads policy designers to ‘see like a state’, that is, through categorical and statistical simplifications of social reality, taking into account only a limited set of criteria that fits the goals of doing social policy from a distance.⁴ I then turn to explore students’ perspectives, and the factors influencing these. To do so, I analyse interviews I conducted in the autumn of 2005 with 28 students at UERJ. I examine how students explain their decisions about racial classification for admissions, and how these relate to their understandings of ‘race’ in other realms of life.⁵ In contrast to policy designers, students *see like citizens*. First, they rely on a view ‘from below’, taking into account highly contextualised and flexible uses of racial categories in everyday life. Second, by being asked to self-classify, students are made active participants in this official categorisation process and thus need to make sense of the policy and their own relationship to it. They take into account not only what they ‘are’ but also how they fit relative to the goals of the policy. This makes them citizens and not simply subjects. This last step requires *reflexivity*, that is, a conscious examination of the structure and workings of society and one’s place in it.⁶ This involves an attempt by some students to understand the motivations of policy designers; an understanding that is not always complete. Many students have only partial access to the worldview advocated by the new racial project. They combine pieces of this with their own life experiences and with alternative worldviews previously perpetuated by older racial projects – most prominently the ‘racial democracy’ project from the mid-twentieth century. Since students often mix-and-match ideas from different racial projects, the influence of these projects on students’ understanding of racial categories and affirmative action is often partial and unexpected. Some students, who have been directly involved with

⁴ James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven and London, 1998). For a discussion on the bureaucratic and social uses of statistics and how they simplify and sometimes shape social reality, see also Theodore Porter, *Trust in Numbers: The Pursuit of Objectivity in Science and Public Life* (Princeton, 1995).

⁵ Most students I interviewed entered the university after the implementation of racial quotas. Of those, 14 studied Law, four studied Education (Pedagogia), four studied Social Work, four studied Nursing and two studied Medicine. The students’ ages varied from 18 to 44 years. Before the interview I gave all but one of them a questionnaire, where they had to fill out their ‘cor ou raça’ (colour or race) using the same options as those in the census, nine classified themselves as *branco*, seven as *preto*, nine as *pardo* and two students refused to answer. Fifteen were male and 13 were female. Most lived in lower-middle class neighbourhoods of Rio (in Zona Norte and Zona Oeste).

⁶ Giddens’s account of the reflexivity in modern social life suggests that social practices are constantly informed by new knowledge about those very practices. This includes ‘expert’ knowledge about social life, part of which is generated by social science. Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford, 1990).

black movement organisations, make sense of racial categories and affirmative action using a more coherent system of beliefs and practices taught by activists. Even then, they may adapt those beliefs to fit their particular life experiences and goals.⁷

My findings have several implications for current debates on affirmative action in Brazil. One implication is that the previous presence of discrimination and social relationships based on race and colour does not automatically translate into self-classification for affirmative action. For students to make this translation, they must acquire more macro-level knowledge about those realities, the policy, and their own relationship with the policy. Efforts to monitor this self-classification through surveillance methods such as taking pictures or doing interviews with candidates may work for dealing with ‘fraud’. However, such methods are usually contingent on students’ prior self-selection and make this self-selection more risky. They may, therefore, contribute further to keeping the benefits away from candidates who suffer from racial discrimination but do not see themselves as ‘black enough’ for quota purposes.

I conclude by discussing what racial quotas may teach students about ‘race’. By contrast to what some analysts have suggested, quotas do not simply teach students an American or a black activist perspective on racial categories and racial inequality, although they are raising a *debate* about racial inequality and forms of addressing it. Participation in black movement organisations seems to play a much deeper role than quotas in changing students’ understandings of ‘race’.

Policy Design

A new racial project

The implementation of racial quotas in UERJ can be understood as part of a new racial project that began to change the interpretation and uses of racial categories since the late 1970s. Winant defines a *racial project* as ‘simultaneously an explanation of racial dynamics and an effort to reorganize the social structure along particular racial lines’. He notes that racial projects are ‘both a discursive or cultural initiative, an attempt at racial signification

⁷ One could say that racial projects influence the cultural resources available for students to understand racial categories and colour-coded life experiences. Students’ use of those resources is consistent with Swidler’s description of ‘culture as a “tool kit” of symbols, stories, rituals, and world-views, which people may use in varying configurations to solve different kinds of problems.’ Consistent with Swidler’s account, only in specific circumstances (usually in times of cultural change and when involved with social movements that seek to promote this change) do people use those ‘tools’ as a coherent system of meaning, or ‘ideology’. Ann Swidler, ‘Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies’, *American Sociological Review*, no. 20 (1986), pp. 305–9.

and identity formation on the one hand; and a political initiative, an attempt at organization and redistribution on the other'.⁸ Brazil's new racial project results from an allegiance between black movement activists and quantitative social scientists that studied racial inequality in Brazil.

This new racial project can be contrasted to an older racial project, which influenced government policy from the Vargas regime in the 1930s and 40s to the military dictatorship up to the 1970s. This earlier project aimed to promote the idea of Brazil as a 'racial democracy' and Brazilians as the cultural and biological fusion of three 'races': whites, blacks and Indians. This project supplanted an even older one, with its roots in the transition from slavery to freedom in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This early project portrayed 'African blood' as inferior to 'European blood', promoting immigration policies to 'whiten' and thereby 'improve' the population.⁹ Today, though many Brazilians still share many ideas associated with the older racial projects, discourse promoted by advocates for the new racial project have gradually reached mainstream debates and government agencies, and provide an alternative understanding of Brazilian society.¹⁰

The roots of the new racial project can be traced to the beginnings of the Black Movement in the early twentieth century,¹¹ and to the social scientific studies in the 1950s.¹² Until the 1970s, the project primarily focused on 'racial signification and identity formation' – in this case, the forging of an Afro-Brazilian identity and the debunking of the racial democracy myth. From then on, the project gradually became 'an attempt at organization and redistribution', through an involvement with the state apparatus in measuring racial disparities with statistics, and designing policies to address them. In the late twentieth century the project became increasingly mainstream, influencing debates in the media and government policies. This involved an intensified collaboration between black movement activists, the state apparatus and an increasingly quantitative social science.

⁸ Winant, 'Rethinking Race in Brazil'.

⁹ Thomas Skidmore, *Black into White: Race and Nationality in Brazilian Thought* (New York, 1995); Melissa Nobles, *Shades of Citizenship: Race and the Census in Modern Politics* (Stanford, 2000); and Reginald Daniel, *Race and Multiraciality in Brazil and the United States* (University Park, 2006).

¹⁰ Graziella Moraes Dias da Silva, 'Ações afirmativas no Brasil e na África do Sul', *Tempo Social, Revista de Sociologia da USP*, vol. 18, no. 2 (2006), pp. 131–165.

¹¹ Michael Mitchell, 'Racial Consciousness and the Political Attitudes and Behaviour of Blacks in São Paulo, Brazil', unpubl Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 1977; Kim D. Butler, *Freedoms Given, Freedoms Won: Afro-Brazilians in Post-Abolition São Paulo and Salvador* (New Brunswick, 1998); and Antônio Sérgio Alfredo Guimarães, 'Intelectuais negros e modernidade no Brasil.' *Working Paper* CBS-52-04, Centre for Brazilian Studies, Oxford University, 2003.

¹² See Peter Fry, 'Politics, Nationality and the Meanings of 'Race' in Brazil.' *Daedalus*, vol. 129, no. 2 (2000), pp. 83–118; and Telles, *Race in Another America*.

The slow transition from the military dictatorship to democracy during the late 1970s and 1980s allowed for a revival of the Black Movement, influenced by the civil rights and ‘Black Power’ movement in the United States. The new *Movimento Negro Unificado* (founded in 1978) gave rise to a series of grassroots black movement organisations.¹³ Agencies in the United States, such as the Ford Foundation and the Inter-American Foundation, provided funding for these organisations¹⁴ and increasingly privileged organisations that addressed racial inequality rather than those focusing on recovering an African cultural identity. Over time, especially since the 1990s, Black Movement organisations became increasingly organised as NGOs, and some existing NGOs have added race issues to their agenda.¹⁵

In the late 1970s, sociologists Carlos Hasenbalg and Nelson do Valle Silva finished their PhD dissertations¹⁶ in the United States and returned to Brazil, inaugurating a new line of race research that was based on statistical analysis of racial disparities.¹⁷ They found that people classified as *preto* (black) and *pardo* (brown) had similar socio-economic outcomes, which were in turn different for those of *brancos* (whites). This conclusion was used as a justification to group pretos and pardos together in statistical analyses and description of data. Though Hasenbalg and Silva called the sum of these categories *não-brancos* (non-whites), it later became common among social scientists to call this group *negros*. As we will see later, in everyday language the word negro (literally another word for ‘black’) is often restricted to people with darker skin colour.¹⁸ However, Black Movement activists have adopted a broader definition of negro, which includes Afro-Brazilians with

¹³ Michael Mitchell, ‘Blacks and the Abertura Democrática’, in Fontaine, Pierre Michel (ed.), *Race, Class and Power in Brazil* (Los Angeles, 1985), pp. 95–119.

¹⁴ Ollie Johnson III, 2005 ‘Black Politics in Latin America: An Analysis of National and Transnational Politics’, in Wilbur C. Rich (ed.), *The State of the Political Science Discipline: An African American Perspective* (2005).

¹⁵ Michael George Hanchard, *Orpheus and Power: the Movimento Negro of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, Brazil, 1945–1988* (Princeton, 1994); Laura Moutinho, ‘Negociando Discursos: Análise das Relações entre a Fundação Ford, os Movimentos Negros e a Academia na Década de 80’, unpubl. Ph.D. diss., UFRJ, 1996; Mala Htun, ‘From “Racial Democracy” to Affirmative Action.’ ‘Changing State Policy on Race in Brazil’, *Latin American Research Review*, vol. 29, no. 1 (2004), pp. 60–89; Marcio André de Oliveira dos Santos, ‘A Persistência Política dos Movimentos Negros Brasileiros: Processo de Mobilização à 3ª Conferência Mundial das Nações Unidas Contra o Racismo.’ unpubl. Masters Thesis, UERJ, 2005.

¹⁶ Nelson do Valle Silva, ‘White-Nonwhite Income Differentials: Brazil,’ unpubl. PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1978; and Carlos Hasenbalg, ‘Race Relations in Post-Abolition Brazil: The Smooth Preservation of Racial Inequalities,’ PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1979.

¹⁷ See Fry, ‘Politics, Nationality and the Meanings of “Race” in Brazil’; and Telles, *Race in Another America*.

¹⁸ Stanley Bailey, ‘Unmixing for Race-Making in Brazil’, *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 114, no. 3 (2008), pp. 577–614.

lighter skin tones, in order to promote black consciousness among a larger constituency.¹⁹ This move from *não-branco* to *negro* reflected a desire by some social scientists to be aligned with the discourse of the black movement, and to influence social policy. For example, Ricardo Henriques – an economist whose work influenced the media’s framing racial inequality and the writing of Brazil’s report for the World Conference Against Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance (held in Durban, in 2001) – told me in an interview that he decided to use the *negro* label instead of *não-branco* when, while talking with the Black Movement in the preparations for the conference, he found that the label *negro* resonated better with them.²⁰

During the democratisation period of the 1980s and 1990s, an increasing number of Black Movement activists were elected as local, state and national congress representatives. Since 1995, pressured by black movement activists, but also under a president who had begun his career as a sociologist of race in Brazil, the federal government started working with those activists to decide on the country’s official stand at the 2001 World Conference in Durban. The Brazilian delegation presented an official report at the conference that contained a series of relatively radical proposals to combat racial inequality, including race-based affirmative action in universities.²¹

The conference and its media coverage influenced the design and passing of the state legislation that introduced race-based affirmative action at the two universities run by the State of Rio de Janeiro – the State University of Rio de Janeiro (UERJ) and Universidade Estadual do Norte Fluminense (UENF)²² – followed by similar initiatives in other public universities across

¹⁹ Guimaraes, ‘Intelectuais Negros e Modernidade no Brasil’.

²⁰ The new interpretation of the label *negro* as a statistical category also allowed for Black Movement activists to attach a ‘scientific’ legitimacy to both the broader definition of the term ‘negro’ and to claims about the existence of race-specific disadvantages in Brazilian society (i.e., controlling for class). The new use of statistics encouraged activists to become involved in pressuring government agencies such as the Brazilian census office (IBGE) to persist in and expand its collection racial statistics. See Nobles, *Shades of Citizenship*.

²¹ Michelle Peria, ‘*Ação Afirmativa*: Um Estudo sobre Reserva de Vagas para os Negros nas Universidades Públicas Brasileiras: o Caso do Estado do Rio de Janeiro’, unpubl. Masters Thesis, UFRJ, 2004; Telles, *Race in Another America*; Htun, ‘From “Racial Democracy” to Affirmative Action’; and Elielma Ayres Machado, ‘Desigualdades “Raciais” e Ensino Superior: Um Estudo sobre a Introdução das “Leis de reserva de vagas para egressos de escola públicas e cotas para negros, pardos e carentes” na Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro (2000–2004)’, unpubl. PhD thesis, UFRJ, 2004.

²² Peria, ‘*Ação Afirmativa*’; Carla Ramos ‘“Nem tão pobres, nem tão negros”. Um estudo de caso sobre os alunos indeferidos no vestibular/2004 da UERJ’, unpubl. Masters Thesis, UFRJ, Rio de Janeiro, 2005; Lília Gonçalves Magalhães Tavolaro, ‘Race and Quotas, “Race” In Quotes: The Struggle over Racial Meanings in Two Brazilian Public Universities’, unpubl. PhD thesis, New School for Social Research, 2006.

the country.²³ The Movement's influence within the Cardoso government also resulted in affirmative action in three ministries.²⁴ The subsequent election of President Lula, whose government includes many Black Movement activists, led to an increasing number of race-targeted policies, most notably the requirement that private universities give scholarships to students according to income and racial criteria. As of 2008, Congress is discussing many new race-based laws, including a federal law requiring racial quotas in public universities throughout Brazil. It is also discussing a Statute of Racial Equality which proposes race-based affirmative action in all public universities, in private companies and in the public sector; the collection of racial statistics by several government agencies; and policies promoting Afro-Brazilian culture, identity and health.

Racial quotas in UERJ

In 2001, the Rio de Janeiro state legislature approved a law that would institute a 40 per cent quota for negros and pardos in the two state universities, UERJ and UENF. Though the law was conceived and approved without much debate, subsequent changes in the law were influenced by several organised sectors of society, notably the universities, black movement organisations and the courts.²⁵ This debate was also indirectly informed by official statistics and their social scientific interpretations. The racial quota law was implemented together with another law, approved a little earlier, which required state universities in Rio to have a 50 per cent quota for students from public high schools, who would be admitted through a separate entrance exam. The universities would reserve 50 per cent of the places for students from public schools²⁶ with the highest grades, then count how many negros and pardos were admitted without the racial quota. If this number was less than 40 per cent, the remaining negros and pardos with the highest grade should be admitted, regardless of the type of school they came

²³ Silva, 'Ações Afirmativas no Brasil e na África do Sul.' Public universities in Brazil have more competitive admissions than private universities. People who can afford to go to private schools have a better chance of getting into public universities.

²⁴ Htun, 'From "Racial Democracy" to Affirmative Action'.

²⁵ Peria, '*Ação Afirmativa*'; Ramos 'Nem tão pobres, nem tão negros'; and Machado, 'Desigualdades "Raciais" no Ensino Superior'. Many Movement activists were at the Durban conference during the approval of the law and were caught by surprise when the law was approved.

²⁶ Here what is meant is a public high school, which refers to a government-run, tuition-free schools (as opposed to private schools). In this sense they are more equivalent to US public schools than to British public schools.

from, until the quota was filled. The quota would work separately for each programme at the university.²⁷

After many lawsuits against UERJ which challenged the eligibility criteria and the policy as a whole, the university administrators proposed a change in the quota law, suggesting 20 per cent for negros and pardos, 20 per cent for public school students, and five per cent for disabled people and members of 'other ethnic minorities'. The proposal was accepted, but with a modification: in a meeting with the Secretariat of Science and Technology that involved black movement activists and other organisations from UERJ the category pardo was eliminated.²⁸ When it was up for approval in the state legislature, the 'New quota law' was altered again: candidates who wanted to qualify for either the public school or the racial quota also needed to show that they were *carentes* (needy), based on family income. Students who entered UERJ during the second year of quotas already followed the new rules.

Influential in this process of changing the law – and later in pressuring other universities around the country to adopt affirmative action – was Black Movement activist and priest Friar David dos Santos (known as Frei David) and his NGO Educafro, an organisation that prepares negro and carente students to take university entrance exams, while also giving them lessons about citizenship and black consciousness (*consciência negra*).²⁹ Educafro is a split from *Pré-vestibular para Negros e Carentes* (PVNC), a similar organisation that has existed since 1993. In the early 1990s, PVNC successfully persuaded Rio's elite Pontifical Catholic University (PUC) to give scholarships to all PVNC students who passed the university's entrance examination. Educafro and PVNC were also the black movement organisations that most influenced students I interviewed, a few of whom had been students in these organisations while preparing for the entrance exam.

Misunderstandings and 'Mis-classification'

Much debate on the practical feasibility of racial quotas in Brazilian universities focuses on the possible incongruence between how policy designers intend the quotas to be used and how students implement them. Two kinds of arguments have been made. The first is that students mark their 'race' for admissions based on their *identity* that is inconsistent with the policy's categories or intentions. The second is that they mark their 'race' based on a rational calculation of the material benefits that will accrue if they qualify for the quota.

²⁷ Machado, 'Desigualdades "Raciais" no Ensino Superior'. Students apply to specific undergraduate programmes and do most of their coursework in the departments responsible for the programmes.

²⁸ Peria, 'Ação Afirmativa.'

²⁹ Ramos, 'Nem tão Pobres, nem tão Negros'.

Claims about the difficulty of racial classification based on identity focus on the notion that Brazilians are (or see themselves as) racially mixed, whereby racial boundaries are imprecise and the classification between negro and branco is impossible. Brazilian social scientist Cezar Benjamin expresses a typical assertion of this public debate:

The fusion of human subgroups, accelerated in modernity, was more radical in Brazil than in any other parts of the world [...]. As a result, we are neither brancos nor negros – we are *mestiços* [mixed-race] [...]. The racist ideological and cultural elements that persist among us did not interrupt nor will be able to interrupt the process of building a mestiça society, which has maintained its unity through its great ability to create a culture of synthesis. Even so, those [racist] elements need to be fought against. But is defining quotas the best way to do this? Should we freeze what is not frozen, separate what is not separated? Who is negro and who is branco in Brazil? Where is the boundary between them?³⁰

Not all Brazilians see themselves as mixed, and the pardo category could in principle serve to capture ‘mixed’ identities.³¹ Nonetheless, recent research supports the claim that racial boundaries and identities are unstable and blurred.³²

Some defenders of racial quotas claim that in Brazil most people know who is negro and who is branco, but argue that classification for quotas carries the possibility of ‘fraud’. Black Movement activist Carlos Medeiros, for example, claims that:

In the case of the Rio de Janeiro universities [UERJ and UENF] the law used the criterion of self-classification, through which the person herself declares what her race/colour is. This ended up generating fraud, as we saw in the news, with people who are phenotypically brancas, which had obviously never seen themselves or presented themselves to the world as anything else, suddenly take out of the closet [*do fundo do baú*] a forgotten – and often despised – negro great-grandfather just to guarantee a benefit which was originally intended for those who face the obstacles imposed by racism.³³

³⁰ Cezar Benjamin, ‘Tortuosos Caminhos’, in Peter Fry, Yvonne Maggie, Marcos Chor Maio, Simone Monteiro and Ricardo Ventura Santos (eds.), *Divisões Perigosas: Políticas Raciais no Brasil Contemporâneo* (Rio de Janeiro, 2007), pp. 27–34, my translation. Here I present a more simple anti-quota argument, based on a descriptive account of today’s Brazilian reality. A more sophisticated argument is that making identities more salient can result in racial conflict, and that the racial democracy, though not a reality, is a useful myth. See, for example, Peter Fry, *A Persistência da Raça. Ensaio Etnográfico sobre o Brasil e a África Austral* (Rio de Janeiro, 2005).

³¹ See João Feres Júnior, ‘Aspectos Normativos e Legais das Políticas de Ação Afirmativa.’ In João Feres Júnior e Jonas Zoninstein (ed.), *Ação afirmativa e universidade: experiências nacionais comparadas* (Brasília, 2006).

³² Lívio Sansone, *Blackness Without Ethnicity: Constructing Race in Brazil* (New York, 2003); Nelson do Valle Silva, ‘Uma Nota Sobre “Raça Social” no Brasil’, *Estudos Afro-Asiáticos*, vol. 26 (1994), pp. 67–80; Telles, *Race in Another America*.

³³ Carlos Alberto Medeiros, *Na Lei e na Raça: Legislação e Relações Raciais, Brasil-Estados Unidos* (Rio de Janeiro, 2004), my translation. Medeiros recognises that sometimes there may be

Table 1. *Classification for Quota Purposes as % of Classification in Socio-Economic Questionnaire*

		Percent that Self-Declared as negra/parda for Admission through the Racial Quota		Total Absolute Numbers	
		Regular Exam	State School Quota Exam	Regular Exam	Public School
Classification in socio-economic questionnaire	branca	8%	2%	1,430	873
	negra	93%	93%	232	317
	parda	69%	84%	749	727
	amarela	26%	5%	39	56
	indígena	61%	21%	33	19
	did not answer	35%	43%	282	152
	Total	35%	47%	2,765	2,144

Source: Departamento de Seleção Acadêmica (DSEA), Subreitoria de Graduação, UERJ.

Note: Only valid answers from students who were admitted via the exam are represented in this table.

For Medeiros, then, classification in the UERJ system can be difficult because people who would be treated in most social situations as brancos may be cynical and strategic about displaying their negro great-grandfather when convenient.³⁴

To begin to tackle these two accounts of the challenges of racial classification for racial quotas and the limits of these accounts in the UERJ case, it is instructive to look at Table 1. The rows in the table represent how students declared their ‘race’ in a socio-economic questionnaire that would *not* be used to make decisions on admissions. The columns represent what they chose in the ‘self-declaration’ that would allow entrance to the quota system. Both questions were asked before admissions, though there are only data for students who were admitted. In this self-declaration, students had to state ‘under the penalties of the law’ if they were negro or pardo. If they were neither, they were told write an ‘N’ or leave it blank.

difficulty in identification. However, he argues that imprecision does not in itself justify the elimination of race-targeted policies, since imprecision is common to any policy that targets specific categories of people (income or age are also imprecise measures of being ‘old’ or ‘poor’). I agree with him on this point, and would add that the risk of essentialisation of categories and their stigmatisation is not exclusive of racial categories. However, I think it is still worth investigating the potential limitations and challenges of particular methods of selection according to race.

³⁴ Medeiros’s solution is to require some kind of official documentation (such as a birth certificate) where colour is marked. For those without such documents, there would be the option to include racial status on their birth certificate, which would prevent opportunism by forcing candidates to commit long-term to stigmatised racial labels. As I argue in the conclusion, such measures may exclude more legitimate beneficiaries than illegitimate ones.

A non-negligible number of students, especially among pardos from private schools, switched categories between the two kinds of questionnaires. Some of this instability can be explained by self-interested, rational calculation consistent with the fraud explanation. Greater incentives seem to generate an increased adherence to non-white labels: a larger percentage of private school students than public school students who had chosen branco in the socio-economic questionnaire (8 percent versus 2 percent) chose pardo or negro in the self-declaration form, where admissions were at stake. Because there was a quota for all public school students, those students had less of an incentive to claim negro or pardo. However, fraud cannot explain all inconsistencies in classification. In fact, the great majority of brancos classified themselves consistently. In contrast, a larger percentage of students who self-classified as pardo in the socio-economic questionnaire did not take advantage of the quotas, reacting *against* their self-interest: about 30 percent of pardos from the private school entrance exam chose not to qualify for racial quotas, compared to about 15 percent of pardos from public schools.

The inconsistencies between how policy designers expect students to classify themselves for quota purposes and how students actually self-classify are not simply the result of students' identity nor their attempt at fraud. Rather, there are misunderstandings between students and policy designers regarding criteria for racial classification. To investigate these misunderstandings, we need to examine more closely how these two sets of actors perceive the relationship between social reality and the policy. From the previous section, we already know how policy designers look at these issues. Below I show how the logic of policy makers clashes with students' perceptions, and suggest reasons why this happens.

I start by telling the story of a student I call Antonio, which challenges many assumptions made in the debate outlined above.³⁵ I then raise some important issues involved in students' decisions about how to classify themselves for affirmative action, and provide additional examples from other interviewees that will help to illustrate these issues.

³⁵ To ensure confidentiality the names of all students mentioned in this paper are pseudonyms. I drew my sample from a combination of e-mailing class lists (in the case of law students), announcing my project in lectures (for education students), and trying to convince people in the corridor to talk to me (for students of Medicine, Social Service and Nursing) and also through some limited snowballing. I told them that I was interested in knowing how students at UERJ viewed the quotas. Self-selection meant that the full range of perspectives may not be represented in my sample, though I obtained a variety of views on the policy and on race in general. Few white, upper-middle-class students were included since my sample was generally biased toward students incorporated by the quota.

Antonio's story

Antonio, who had heard from Frei David a similar version of Medeiros's fraud story, told me about how he undertook the entrance exam and how he decided to mark *pardo* on the form that would be used to determine if he was eligible for the racial quota.

Antonio: They had there: 'declaration', what are you, you are ... negro, *pardo*, branco [...]. What happened is that I didn't consider myself branco. I still don't consider myself [branco] until today. Even though today I have a different view of what *pardo* means. Then I thought that it meant something that was not simply branco [...]. It was, so to speak, an understanding that they left in the air. Why? Because they classified the thing in such a simplistic way, negro, *pardo*, branco, if you are not at the extremes you are in the middle, which is wrong, it's not like that. That was not really the intention of the legislator, nor of the people who fought for the quota. But that was what ended up happening. So, what happened, I put there that I was *pardo*.

Antonio understood *pardo* as something that did not fit either the branco or the negro labels. Later, he explained to me how he read about Frei David's opinion, and that made him think that he should not have marked *pardo*.

Antonio: For him the issue was the following: it was whether your appearance would lead to discrimination [...]. If in a situation, for example, such as employment, would someone avoid hiring you because you were ... do you understand? Then I thought that in this criterion of his I should not have taken the place.

Then he talked in more detail about what Frei David had criticised, the student whose great-grandmother was negra but that looked branco. Frei David had argued that this person should not have qualified for racial quotas. And how about you, I asked.

Antonio: Not in my case, my mother is almost negra. Because my mother is the daughter ... what we call *mulato*, she is the daughter of a branco with a negra, but she is closer to negra. My father is very branco, because he is the son of Portuguese, you see? [...] So what happened? Of course, me and my brother came out lighter than my mother since ... my mother was not pure negra anymore; she was only the daughter of negros. But she is very close to this. So, what happened ... I felt closer to this reality than that guy. And he declared himself [*pardo*], so, I mean, this generated a big polemic. I was already feeling guilty for having declared myself, but then I noticed that there were lots of people who had done this and were much further away from this situation. But the guy understood that *pardo* is someone who is not branco. And many people understood this, the truth is that it was not ... No wonder this term disappeared. Now the quotas are for negros.

Though Antonio does not believe that he is discriminated against, his situation cannot be easily described as fraud. He does not just have a distant negra great-grandmother: he has close relatives that he defines as negro, branco and *mulato*, making it difficult for him to claim either the branco or the negro labels.

Antonio sees his family history as intimately tied to the history of negroes and their disadvantage. However, later in the interview, he said he did not understand the argument that quotas should benefit those who suffered from discrimination: for him poverty, not discrimination, was the main source of negro disadvantage. When I asked him why negroes were poor, he talked about how negroes had been exploited since the formation of the country, by coffee growers, then by industrialists who had been part of the agrarian elite. The disadvantage was inherited. It was inherited by some brancos too but mostly by negroes. Then he connected this story to his own family history, in a way that I had not expected.

Antonio: Unfortunately this is a reality. My mother, for example [...]. Her mother was a maid in a family's home, and her boss had a relationship with her, you see ... and she had her [my mother] and afterwards she ... obviously the boss did not recognise [the child] [...] and she did not even have the means to raise my mother. My mother was raised by her godmother, I mean, exactly in this process of discrimination of the negro, all of this [...] So, I mean, this clearly shows how this situation of the negro in Brazil, that there is not, there was not that business of separation, like they had in the United States [...] that the guy says: 'Get into the bus! This is your place, for negroes. This one is for brancos.' [...]. Here it was the following: the branco drove the car and the negro took the bus. [...] What happened was that the social process here created such a huge economic abyss between the two classes that there was no need to mark a separate place for the branco [...]. So there was always racism in Brazil, the negro always came out worse off in this story. So what happened, I didn't really create a very perfect identity in this story because of the whole mixing that happened, and because my mother is almost negra and my father is branco.

For Antonio, being negro or pardo is related not only to facing discrimination, but also the long history of economic and sexual exploitation that has resulted in poverty.

Antonio's connection to the label pardo is neither opportunistic nor a consequence of a natural 'fact' of his identity. Rather, he uses his family history and his ties to his relatives to decide his racial status, which he sees as 'something that is neither negro nor branco' which, he has learned, is what the category pardo is supposed to mean. Because Antonio's classification is based on a conscious reflection upon the meaning of this category, he can adapt this classification based on new considerations. As he learns about affirmative action, he tries to understand and incorporate policy designers' rationales. In his view, the elimination of the pardo option for quotas provides a potential solution to Frei David's account of the great-grandmother problem.

Antonio: [...] those that they wanted to get in the beginning were that pardo who was almost negro, you see? But they did not describe ... this was a mistake. Now they took it out, the word now in the law is negro. So [...] if you feel like you are almost negro you declare yourself ... negro. You are not really negro, but a very dark pardo,

you have all the phenotype of a negro you declare yourself. [...] But a person that is much closer to branca, they will not ... [...] only if they are very cynical.

Indeed, the category pardo was eliminated as a criterion for entering through the quota system. However, it did not happen for the reason Antonio imagined. Peria describes the changing of the categorisation scheme the following way. In February 2003, the State government held meetings with representatives of the Universities (UERJ and UNENF), professors, university staff and representatives of black movement organisations (including Educafro) to change the legislation in time for the next entrance exam. Peria says that the decision to exclude the category pardo was suggested by a representative of the Black Movement, who argued:

A segment of the Black Movement and a segment of academia, based on statistical data, consider that it is legitimate to join pretos and pardos in another category – that of negros. Why? Because the distance between pardos and brancos is a large distance and the distance between pardos and pretos is always small, measured by indicators such as infant mortality, wages, education, etc., etc [...]. If you talk about negro you talk about pretos and pardos together, forming negros, afro-descendants. Carlos Hasenbalg prefers não-brancos, in sum, the name you want to give. The law got this, one category from one family that is negro, which is the sum of pretos and pardos, and then got another category, pardos, which is a traditional category from IBGE. If UERJ adopts this criteria, it will contribute to perpetuate this confusion [...] The Black Movement and this segment of academia defend a single category for afro-descendants, and also says that this category represents almost half of the population.³⁶

According to Peria, after this activist spoke, the university representatives and the government secretary accepted the modification without problems and sent it to be approved by the Governor. Thus, the black movement, informed by social scientists, has defined negro to mean the sum of pretos and pardos. This, in turn, was the definition that prevailed when new criteria for the quota were introduced.

Antonio's story shows a transition from a more naïve decision-making process, based on the question '*What am I?*', which stems from his experience with race in everyday life, his physical appearance, his family history and his place in Brazilian society, to a more sophisticated one, where he asks '*Are quotas for me?*' and tries to assess the goals of the policy and the legitimacy of his claims given those goals. Antonio's story shows that neither of these questions have straightforward answers, or answers that would necessarily be consistent with policy designers' expectations. Furthermore, it suggests that Antonio has only partial exposure to the ideas that have guided the design of the policy, and therefore he fails in his effort to adjust to policy designers'

³⁶ Cited in Peria, '*Ação Afirmativa*', my translation.

expectations. Below, I discuss how other students at UERJ answer the questions ‘What am I?’ and ‘Are quotas for me?’

Making Sense of Racial Categories, Deciding on Eligibility

What am I?

When answering the question ‘What am I?’ students combine experiences with racial classification in everyday life with their understanding of what official categories mean. Students usually understand the label negro based on their previous everyday experiences with racial categorisation or on contact with black movement organisations such as Educ Afro. The current official meaning of the label negro ... the sum of pretos and pardos ... is often ignored. Although some students use the label negro more broadly, in a way that includes Afro-Brazilians of lighter skin tones, they often do so to denote origin, ethnic identity or class exploitation rather than to demarcate potential victims of discrimination.

In contrast to their use of the label negro, students rarely report using the label pardo outside interactions with bureaucracies. However, through these interactions, students have learned what this category is ‘supposed to mean’. Sometimes – like Antonio – they understand pardo as ‘something that is neither branco nor negro’, or as synonymous with the more commonly used categories that indicate racial mixture, such as mulato or moreno. This paper does not describe the entire universe of students, since I omit interviewees whose categorisation is unproblematically branco, in a context where a clear-cut, uncontested identification as branco is fairly common among UERJ students, especially in the more prestigious departments. Instead, I focus on individuals who make some claim to the labels negro or pardo. Though many students have flexibility in their self-definition, family ties and physical appearance do constrain the legitimately defensible ‘options’ for self-classification.³⁷

Translating from everyday life

Research on racial categories in Brazil has found that racial labelling of the same person in everyday life varies according to the nature and purpose of the interaction (whether it is formal or informal, friendly or conflictual, joking or serious) and the physical and social distance between the classifier and the classified.³⁸ My data confirms these findings. Contextual variation in

³⁷ I build here on the concept of ‘ethnic options’ from Mary Waters, *Ethnic Options: Choosing Identities in America* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1990).

³⁸ Robin E. Sheriff, *Dreaming Equality: Color, Race and Racism in Urban Brazil* (New Brunswick, 2001); Sansone, *Blackness Without Ethnicity*; Yvonne Maggie, ‘A Ilusão do Concreto:

the labels that students apply to themselves can be explained by two factors. First, as some of the students come from 'multi-racial' families and/or have an ambiguous physical appearance, they can legitimately claim association with different racial categories when talking about different realms of life. Second, students may want to use *hard* or *soft* terms depending on the context. Hard terms stress difference, and are often used to offend or to joke. Soft terms downplay difference and are often deemed less offensive.³⁹

Because of relatively close interaction among people of different skin colours,⁴⁰ Brazilians who discriminate have an interest in keeping their classification system flexible enough to spare their friends and relatives. When I asked Andreia how she came to think of herself as *negra*, she told me the following story:

I was friends with this girl, [...] both from her paternal and her maternal grandparents, they came from Italy. So they were very *brancos* and everything. So I remember that we were talking and all, and then I told her: 'Oh, my father is *negro*.' Then she turned to me and [said]: 'No, [Andreia], your father is not *negro*, what are you talking about, he is *moreno*!' As if I were devaluing [*desqualificando*] my father by calling him *negro*. But look, *negro*, when you call a person *negro*, you are not devaluing anyone. On the contrary, you are affirming the race of this person. Right?

As Andreia points out, there would be no need for her friend to reject the use of *negro* for Andreia's father if that label did not have a negative meaning. By calling Andreia's father *moreno*, Andreia's friend is making an exception for one person while keeping the status of the label 'negro' unquestioned. Andreia, on the contrary, is tying her father back to other *negros* and thus advocating for the 'group' as a whole, friends or strangers. Similar to Andreia, Black Movement activists often fight against this ambiguity that exempts specific individuals while maintaining a racist status quo.

The messiness of everyday racial categorisation, however, is the result not only of the flexible morality behind it, but also of the different uses of categories. My interview with Julia illustrates the multiple uses of 'race', even though she uses the term *negra* (or, less often, *preta*) to describe herself. Having dark skin and a middle-class background, and having entered UERJ through racial quotas herself, Julia favours racial quotas because of her experience of being the only *negra* person in several environments in which she has been. She has a very strong *negra* identity, not liking when people who 'are *negra* like myself' call themselves *escurinha* (diminutive of 'dark') or *moreninha*. (diminutive of 'morena'). 'It seems like they make use of

Análise do Sistema de Classificação Racial no Brasil', Tese de Professor Titular, UFRJ, 1991.

³⁹ Brazilians' use of 'soft' and 'hard' racial terms has been identified by Sansone, *Blackness Without Ethnicity*.

⁴⁰ See Telles, *Race in Another America*.

euphemism when they say “I am *escurinha*,” she says, ‘And this is horrible. I think that it is a lack of identity, of ... I don’t know, of cultural identity.’ For Julia, then, calling herself *negra* is important for recognising one’s cultural heritage. It is also clear from other parts of the interview that being a victim of discrimination has been very important in her ‘self-recognition’ as *negra*. She said that she began to think of her colour as a child, when an older student told her to get out of the school bus because ‘*preto* didn’t sit in the bus’.

Even though Julia often stresses the need for people to take on their negro identities, she also invokes the idea of the Brazilian nation as resulting from a mixture of *brancos*, *negros* and *índios*:

Julia: I had a history teacher, and ... she was an older lady [*uma senhora*], that was very, very funny, very cool. Because she embraced the issues. Each history topic, especially when the topic was Colonial Brazil, she would do a project around this. And once in school she did peoples that helped form the Brazilian matrix, etc., etc.. And then there had to be *índios*, there had to be *negros*, and so on. And the *negros* in the school did not want to take part. Then I participated and was the only one.

Here Julia recounts a moment when two seemingly contradictory topics were being taught to her at school: one, that Brazilians are mixed, the other, that she was *negra* herself, and thus represented one pure element that was later to form this mixture. This is a familiar narrative from the old ‘racial democracy’ project, being propagated by the Brazilian educational system. She, however, integrates it into a narrative of black pride, which is consistent with the discourse of the new racial project.

The simultaneous borrowing from ideas associated with the two projects appears again when I ask Julia whether Camila Pitanga, a famous TV actress, was *negra*. Camila Pitanga does not look *negra* according to most of my interviewees, but most agree that her father – also an actor – is *negro*. Being connected to the Black Movement, she has publicly declared herself *negra*, and many of my interviewees knew about this. Here is Julia’s reply:

Julia: Camila Pitanga is a daughter of a negro father and her mother is ... I don’t know her mother, but ... she has strong elements of the negro. Even though, at the same time, she has features that are characteristic of the *branco*, the hair, etc. I think that she can call herself *negra*. The Brazilian is very pluralistic, he is negro at the same time that he has much of *índio*, much of *branco*, a lot of things mixed.

Therefore, although Julia always classifies herself as *negra*, she recognises that, for some people, being *negra* may be a matter of choice. She uses two images of Brazilians, allowing them to be negro and, at the same time, ‘mixed’. The ‘mixed’ category, however, never applies to her, although as a child she was happy to participate as one component of this mixture.

Differently from Julia, Joana views her own status as *negra* as optional, an option that she chose not to exercise for quota purposes. Differently from

Julia and Antonio, Joana was admitted after the quota law had been changed, so she had to choose which quota she wanted to go through. She decided to enter through the public school quotas instead of the racial quotas. I was curious why:

Author: And you didn't want to do this, you don't consider yourself *negra*?

Joana: It's like this [...]. I think that, if a *negra* person wants some policy [...], it is because they feel discriminated against. Even though I don't have good hair, I never went through [...] when looking for a job, I never felt discriminated against *because of my colour*. At some moments [...] because of my financial condition, but not because of my colour, because of my appearance. I know that it exists. Doesn't it? So I think like this: if I felt disadvantaged by society, I think it's an option.

Author: But not in your case.

Joana: But I didn't feel [disadvantaged], even though ... To say that I'm not *negra*? My grandmother is *negra*. Right? Certainly, I could, I think that ... they should accept it. They could not refuse it.

Joana sees herself as a *potential negra*, having the right to call herself *negra* if she wants to. However, she does not think that she is discriminated against, nor, as a consequence, that the racial criterion for the quotas should apply to her. She chose the class-based criterion (the public school quota), where she feels disadvantaged. She later said that she likes to joke that she is *cor-de-burro-quando-foge* ('the-colour-of-a-donkey-when-it-runs-away'), a popular expression that means an indefinite colour. When talking about members of her family, she says that some are *brancos*, some are *negros* and she is somewhere in-between. Clearly, the label *negro* not only has multiple interpretations: it also covers a different set of people depending on the interpretation.

At the same time, Joana says that she has 'bad' hair. This means that she has options regarding how to label herself, but her hair is still visible to people and still subject to negative evaluative judgments, which she seems to have internalised. The degree to which specific racial labels are optional for people like Joana depends partly on whether the situation allows her to control or negotiate those labels, and how much she is aware of the way that she is treated by others *because of her colour*. The possibility that Joana is not aware of discrimination against her is therefore an important challenge for this kind of affirmative action policy, a point that I will come back to later.

Learning from official categories

While some students answer the '*What am I?*' question based primarily on their everyday experiences, others, especially those that end up classifying themselves as *pardos*, try to find out how they are 'supposed to be classified' from previous classificatory encounters with bureaucratic institutions.

'I don't consider myself negro, I only consider myself pardo', says one of the students, André, only to later question the pardo category, saying that 'biologically, regarding genotype, pardo doesn't exist. It's branco, three kinds of mulato and negro. So what is pardo? Is it light mulato, is it medium mulato, is it dark mulato?' Though he does not see the category pardo as real, he has learned that pardo applies to different kinds of mulato, which he sees as a biological category. When asked if he had ever marked his colour before the quotas, he said:

André: No. I didn't, but when I enlisted in the army, the person who did my file put pardo.

Author: Did they ask before? They just put it?

André: They look and *they* classify.

Thus, one way that André has learned that he should classify as pardo is through his previous interaction with bureaucratic institutions, where he was not always in a position to choose.

Similarly, Carla learned the meaning of pardo through an interaction with her brother, whose job as a doctor included classifying people. When asked if she had ever discussed the issue of colour with her family she recounted how her brother had told her that she should classify herself as parda in the university entrance exam.

Carla: When I did the enrolment for UERJ I went to talk to my mother, my father and my brother. To discover what colour I was ... I said '[Brother's name], what colour am I?' Then he said 'When a patient goes there and I have to', you know, he does anamnesis [medical history], he said he had to put the colour of the patient. He said: 'When someone like you shows up I put pardo.'

When Carla took the university entrance exam, her family already had experiences with official racial classification in other instances, where the term parda had been institutionalised. After learning the 'right' answer, Carla classified herself as parda in the quota form.

Are quotas for me?

As Joana's and Antonio's stories illustrate, students do not simply classify themselves for quotas based on their 'identity', but also based on whether they see themselves as legitimate beneficiaries of quotas. Some take a more pragmatic approach to quotas, but are still concerned with classifying themselves within bounds of the law. Others try harder to fit within the policy's goals. It becomes important for those students to know the goals of the policy and to decide if they share those goals. Moreover, even if students agree with Medeiros and Frei David that quotas should be targeted toward those who suffer discrimination, students may still not know if they are discriminated against.

Who are quotas for?

Students do not always agree among themselves or with policy advocates about the goals of affirmative action. Julia came through the quotas for negros because she believes that it is important to have more negros in the university, since she was the only negra in many situations in her life. Joana on the other hand, thinks that, for quota purposes, negro should be defined by being discriminated against. Antonio thinks that the disadvantage of negros is a matter of class inheritance and thus could in principle be addressed by helping those of lower socio-economic status.

This lack of consensus also shaped the design of the policy, which was a product of an interaction between different actors with different goals. The public school quota and the change in law that added an income limit to the quota reflects a common interpretation at the Rio state legislature that the quotas were addressing class disadvantage.⁴¹ Some Black Movement activists that influenced quota systems such as that of UERJ also see quotas as tools for raising black consciousness.⁴²

Not all students have deep moral dilemmas about classifying themselves for quotas: some, like Ana, take a more pragmatic approach. Though Ana supports public school quotas as ‘an emergency measure’, she opposes quotas for negros because she thinks it ‘segregates’ them and because she thinks it contradicts their efforts to be equal. Nevertheless, she took advantage of the racial quotas ‘just to be sure [*pra garantir*]’, because she wanted to be admitted ‘whichever way [*de qualquer jeito*]’. She classified herself as parda because, she claimed, classifying herself as negra would be too hypocritical. When I ask her if she is negra, she says that her family is ‘all mixed’ and that in Brazil it’s hard to say who is negro. That she talks about negros in the third person, suggests that she does not see herself as negra. Though ambivalent about having classified herself through racial quotas, she noticed during enrolment that some people ‘much lighter than me’ were classifying themselves for quotas, which served to reassure her of her *relative* right to that benefit. Although her approach was pragmatic, it was not fraud: she still felt justified to be within the bounds of what the law had established, given the law’s imperfect design.

Am I discriminated against?

If one agrees that the purpose of affirmative action is to compensate for discrimination, one is left with the question of exactly who suffers discrimination. Joana claims she is not discriminated against despite her ‘bad’ hair,

⁴¹ Ramos, “‘Nem tão pobres, nem tão negros’”; Fry, *A Persistência da Raça*.

⁴² Silva, ‘Ações Afirmativas no Brasil e na África do Sul.’

but can we rely on her perception? As we have seen, there is a difference of opinion between Antonio and policy designers about which categories of people are discriminated against. Antonio distinguishes between pardos and negros, thinking that only the latter suffer discrimination. The proponents of the change in the law, based on social scientific statistical research, see pardos as being enclosed within the negro category, and suffering the same amount of discrimination.

This disjuncture between Antonio's and policymakers' perceptions is the result of two methods by which people learn about discrimination: by directly observing discriminatory *processes* or by deducing its existence from observation of patterns in the *outcomes* of discrimination. Impersonal forms of discrimination are more difficult to be perceived directly than the more personal forms, where processes are more visible. Gabriel, an older student who used to work as a teacher, and who is very politically engaged with the negro cause, describes his experience with *institutional* discrimination the following way:

The thing [racism] is so hidden that the negro sometimes doesn't get offended. Sometimes he has to stop to analyse what happened so that he notices that he is being discriminated against. [...] He doesn't notice this, as for example, when he looks for a job. I suffered this a lot. I was only able to do well professionally when I went through exams to work in the public sector. Because then there is no colour. You do the exams, get the highest grade, get classified in the first place, and nobody can kick you out. But in private schools, I never worked in private schools more than two years. Always by chance, it happens by chance, the class got smaller [...] the class always gets smaller, someone always takes my place.

Gabriel cannot observe the process of discrimination directly, but has to deduce it through its effects. In what he calls his 'civil life' discrimination becomes more directly visible. He continues:

I go into a bank, the door gets stuck. I wear braids ... the stereotype of the negro, so ... people look sideways. If I am in a place where there are only negros people get more [...] with a certain fear.

Here he refers to a common procedure in many Brazilian banks for security guards to block the entrance of 'suspicious' people by locking revolving doors.

Deducing discrimination in employment requires an observation of patterns, and a theory about the unobserved processes that affect those patterns. This method is also used in statistical research, which informs black movement activists and those who design race-targeted policies about the prevalence of racism against pretos and pardos.⁴³ Statistical research shows

⁴³ Black Movement activists also deduce discrimination from their life experience, but statistical research is powerful tool for legitimising the movement.

discrimination by controlling for possible confounding variables that can be measured, and deducing discrimination from the residual. Using this method, social scientists have concluded that pretos and pardos are equally discriminated against, while brancos are less discriminated against in the labour market and the educational system. Using the same method, social scientists concluded that there is more discrimination against pretos than pardos in the marriage market and in residential segregation. These findings imply that pardos suffer similar impersonal forms of discrimination (in the job market and the educational system) than pretos, but suffer less interpersonal discrimination (such as marriage).⁴⁴ Since interpersonal processes of discrimination are easier to notice, this means that it may be harder to notice discrimination against pardos. Interviews with students and survey research alike suggest that most Brazilians do not believe that pardos are discriminated against or deserve race-based affirmative action.⁴⁵

Two main sources inform students about this more 'hidden' form of discrimination: the Black Movement (especially organisations such as Educafro and PVNC) and the media. Both sources use statistical research in social science to show how there is discrimination but, for political reasons, they refer to it as discrimination of brancos against negros, including pardos within the negro category. Such use of terms ends up reinforcing some students' beliefs that pardos are not discriminated against.

Direct Engagement with the New Racial Project

The new racial project presents students with subtle messages on how to interpret and use racial categories. Such messages are not always fully understood by students who often only gain access to the project's discourse through exposure to the media, through the institutional design embedded in the law and through contact with acquaintances that are involved with the Black Movement. Often students get bits and pieces of that message, together with ideas of the older racial projects, and assemble this information in their own ways to make sense of particular situations where they need to deal with issues of race or colour. Some students, however, are exposed

⁴⁴ See Telles, *Race in Another America*. Telles explains this difference in terms of 'vertical' versus 'horizontal' relationships. France Winddance Twine notes that Brazilians were more likely to perceive interpersonal than institutional discrimination in her ethnography in *Racism in a Racial Democracy: The Maintenance of White Supremacy in Brazil* (Rutgers, 1994). In *Blackness Without Ethnicity*, Sansone describes 'hard' (more formal and distant relationships) and 'soft' areas of life (more intimate relationships) where race is experienced differently.

⁴⁵ See Bailey, 'Unmixing for Race-Making in Brazil'.

to more complete ‘packages’ of the new project’s ideology.⁴⁶ Rejection of intermediary categories such as pardo, mulato or moreno is explicit, and embracing the category negro in its broader sense is seen as part of a larger goal of debunking the ‘myth of racial democracy’. ‘Gustavo’ has embraced the new project in this way, though he gives it a larger class connotation than some of the advocates might have liked.

Gustavo first tried the UERJ entrance exam in 2002, the first year of the quotas. He tried to apply for the public school quota, but at the time of enrolment the university challenged his eligibility because some of his primary education had been in a private school. Gustavo found this unfair, since he had gone to private school with a scholarship paid by the state government. He decided to get legal assistance from Educafro, which was helping students whose eligibility to quotas had been questioned. This did not get him a place at the university immediately but connected him with the organisation. He started attending their classes to prepare for re-taking the exam the following year, where he decided to go through the quota for negros. This is what he says he learnt from their citizenship classes (*aulas de cidadania*):

Gustavo: Look, I learned a lot of things, yes, a lot of things that I didn’t have an understanding of, I started having one.

Author: For example?

Gustavo: For example, black consciousness [*consciência negra*].

Author: You had never thought about this, these things?

Gustavo: No, I *had* thought about it. But I didn’t have a systematic view of how you can put this in practice in your life. How you can seek for your rights [...]. So Educafro helped me a lot, even in this search for self-esteem, for you to accept yourself as negro. Because in Brazil, the negro doesn’t recognise himself as negro. So, this question, even when I fill in a socio-economic questionnaire, or something like this, I always put, well what is your colour? Preto. Because pardo was a legal invention that was created to detach this negro mentality, this mentality from the negro. In countries like the United States, if you have someone in your family that is of a race other than the Anglo-Saxon, you are considered negro or Latino or Arabic. There isn’t this question of skin colour, there it is a question of blood, do you understand? And in Brazil, you are seen as negro or not by the colour of your skin. If you are a little bit branco, a little bit claro, your ancestors don’t matter, you are considered branco. So if you are not preto, in the material sense of the colour, you are considered, ‘oh, no, he is pardo, he is moreno, he is mulato’. Precisely to try, let’s put it this way, to take this focus off race.

Educafro teaches people to reject intermediary categories, and to attach pride and self-esteem to the category negro (or even preto). It has taught Gustavo to focus on *race* – which is based on ancestry – and not on

⁴⁶ I use the term ‘ideology’ to refer to a coherent and highly rationalised system of ideas. I do not use it to mean ‘false consciousness’, and do not attempt to discern the extent to which different ideologies correspond to reality.

colour – which is based on physical appearance, and to privilege the former relative to the latter.⁴⁷

Educafro was not the first place where he was confronted with issues of ‘race’ or ‘colour’. Gustavo had tried the entrance exam at another university in the early 1990s, which did not have quotas but had a socio-economic questionnaire that asked about his race. He says he put pardo at that time, because it was in his birth certificate. With regard to when he first thought about his colour, he said as a child he had difficulty accepting himself because of his hair. Being on a scholarship in a private school in his early school years, all the other children had straight hair, and were wealthier than him. He says that, at the time, he didn’t think of himself so much as negro, but as poor. When talking about his family he says they have ‘mixed’ background (negro, índio, Portuguese, Italian), but ‘what prevailed was the negra colour’, which he traces from both sides of his family. But, he says, his family did not have ideas about *cidadania negra* (black citizenship), Black Movement, etc. According to Gustavo, he himself only got this black consciousness when he went through Educafro.

In the quote above, Gustavo also distinguishes between negro and ‘preto in the material sense of the colour.’ This second category has a much more ‘common sense’ connotation.⁴⁸ Similarly to less engaged students I interviewed, Gustavo adopts *both* a broad and a narrow concept of blackness. However, Educafro has taught him to view the broader category of negros as people who share a common struggle and a common burden of discrimination, and to explicitly reject mixed-race labels. Nonetheless, Gustavo’s understanding of negros as participating in a common struggle for social justice is not only about racial discrimination, but also more generally about class exploitation. When discussing the importance of black consciousness in his own experience, he says:

You live your whole life preparing to obey, to be the servant of your father’s boss, you understand? [...] Then the poor youngster, the negro youngster, not just the negro youngster, but the poor youngster, he does not have this idea that he has the intellectual capacity to seek something bigger. And in the Black Movement [...] I really understood how to value this capacity that everyone has. That everyone has the conditions to seek, to be equal, given the opportunities, the *negro*, the poor, the rich, they end up becoming equal, right?

Similar to other students I interviewed that went through PVNC or Educafro, Gustavo talks about *race* consciousness that is intimately tied (and more or less equivalent) to a *class* consciousness. It is therefore natural

⁴⁷ This contradicts with Frei David’s discussion of ‘fraud’ in racial quotas, where skin colour starts to matter again.

⁴⁸ See Swidler’s definition of ‘common sense’ and its relationship with ‘ideology’ and the ‘culture as a toolkit’ metaphor.

him to apply the lesson that he learned at Educafro to poor people *in general*.⁴⁹

Gustavo's story shows that, even for students who are intensely exposed to black movement discourse, this does not necessarily make them understand and use racial categorisation and racial quotas in ways that activists would expect them to. To be incorporated by students, Black Movement ideology often has to compete (or 'cooperate') with other ideologies, worldviews and 'common sense', which are interpreted variously by students according to their particular life experiences.

Conclusion

This paper has examined how students at UERJ make sense of the categories used for affirmative action in the context of their views about 'race' and 'colour' in everyday life and in interactions with bureaucratic institutions. Consistent with recent research, I find that the views of Brazilians of race cannot be described as essentially 'bi-racial', 'mixed-race', or 'multi-racial'. Rather, multiple forms of racial classification coexist.⁵⁰ Furthermore, at least for my interviewees, classification is embedded in a changing and negotiated cultural context and a complex set of social and institutional relationships, all of which affect the categories used and the meanings attributed to them. Students bring resources from this complex cultural and social context to understand their own role in a bureaucratic classification process that will affect their educational opportunities. However, by contrast to discriminative and everyday uses of 'race' and 'colour', students at UERJ often self-classify

⁴⁹ PVNC was already a compromise between race-centered and class-centered views of its members and students, reflected in the name 'negros e carentes'. See Yvonne Maggie, 'Os Novos Bacharéis: A Experiência do Pré-Vestibular para Negros e Carentes', *Novos Estudos CEBRAP*, no. 59 (2001), pp. 193–202. It is likely that Educafro also inherited some of this perspective.

⁵⁰ See Sansone, *Blackness Without Ethnicity*, Maggie, 'A Ilusão do Concreto'; and Telles, *Race in Another America*. Some recent ethnographic literature claims that bi-racial discourse resonates with everyday experience of discrimination and of class divisions between *brancos* and *negros*. For example, Sheriff, 'Dreaming Equality'; Cecília McCallum, 'Racialized Bodies, Naturalized Classes: Moving through the City of Salvador da Bahia', *American Ethnologist*, vol. 32, no. 1, pp. 100–17 (2005); 'Women out of Place? A Micro-historical Perspective on the Black Feminist Movement in Salvador da Bahia, Brazil', *Journal of Latin American Studies*, vol. 39, (2007), pp. 55–80. Although bi-racial categories and the black movements' ideology resonate with some students' experiences, alternative cultural frameworks resonate with other students' experiences – such as being from 'mixed' families. In addition, the experiences that this framework resonates with are not necessarily those intended by activists (e.g., the broader interpretation of negro may resonate with common ancestry or common class background and not common discrimination).

for affirmative action *reflexively*, that is, according to a conscious assessment of their place within the policy and within the structure of Brazilian society.

In order to make this assessment, students draw on what they learn from personal experience in everyday interactions, from prior contact with bureaucratic institutions (such as schools, the military and the census office) and from the media. Their ideas about 'race' and 'colour' can be traced to different racial projects, but they usually do not receive those ideas as full-blown ideologies: that is, as coherent systems of meaning and values. Rather, they often receive them as partial stories and symbols that they adopt and combine selectively to make sense of particular situations. Only some students, primarily those who have been involved with Black Movement organisations such as Educafro, incorporate the ideology of the new racial project consistently, using it to reject previously held ideas.

In contrast, the policy makers' view of the legitimate criteria for classification for affirmative action have been strongly influenced by the new racial project, and shaped to fit a bureaucratic rationality of state policy. Official categories and their 'official' interpretation were influenced by a diagnosis of discrimination that relied on statistics, which simplifies and homogenises social reality, though it finds patterns that students may not be aware of. The rejection by black movement activists of intermediary categories in their struggle to raise black consciousness also impacted policy designers' interpretations of official categories. These two factors have resulted in a re-definition of the meaning of the label negro and an agreement that the purpose of affirmative action should be to target those who are likely to suffer racial discrimination.⁵¹

Since policy designers 'see like a state' (and are aligned with a particular racial project) and students 'see like citizens' (and are influenced by more than one project), they do not agree typically on the criteria for allocating people into the categories used in the quotas. Students' views are most consistent with those of policy designers when students have had direct contact with black movement organisations such as PVNC and Educafro. Nevertheless, even in those cases they interpret the worldviews they learn from those organisations in light of their own experiences and previously held understandings.

An important remaining question is the extent to which racial quotas and the debates about them are changing students' views of themselves and of social reality. Maio and Santos write about the 'pedagogy' of racial quotas at the University of Brasilia (UnB), a university that until recently had a highly

⁵¹ Certainly, the UERJ policy was the result of a conjunction of expert and non-expert views. However, the 'racial' criteria that were adopted in the end were consistent with the views of 'race experts' (activists and social scientists), while non-experts influenced 'class'-based criteria, such as the public school quotas or the additional income limit.

contested selection process: a committee of ‘experts’ (composed of social scientists, black movement activists and a student) was assigned to analyse pictures of candidates to prevent so-called ‘fraud’. The authors conclude that the UnB policy and its legitimation by ‘experts’ would pose a risk that ‘we will turn toward the construction of categories that are essentialised, fixed, belonging to the normative power of the laws, to the purposes of public policies.’⁵² In two separate responses to Maio and Santos’s paper, Carvalho and Guimarães defended racial quotas, but also disagreed with UnB’s pictures. Carvalho and Guimarães, however, opposed the picture method due to its *lack* of pedagogy: quotas were supposed to teach Brazilians to take on their negro identities, a goal that could be better achieved through self-classification.⁵³

My interviews with students at UERJ suggest that the pedagogical effects of quotas that use self-classification are much more complex than they may seem, at least in the short run. The policy at UERJ and the debates surrounding it seem to be teaching students to take a stance on race issues and on racial quotas. The requirement for self-classification is teaching them that they are not only subjects of these policies, but also, to some extent, active *participants* in them. However, the simple presence of the policies does not inform candidates *how* they are supposed to participate and classify themselves racially, nor *why* these policies make sense.

A much deeper pedagogy seems to occur in sites like Educafro, where students are learning to see quotas within the context of a new ideology that challenges commonly held worldviews. If these policies have long-term pedagogical effects this will probably happen indirectly by increasing the strength and influence of such social movements. Regardless, given that students often re-adapt their received wisdom, it is not clear what views of race they will develop in the long run. Paradoxically, the concern with fraud and emphasis on discrimination as a criterion for affirmative action may be re-enforcing some students’ view of negro as a category that is restricted to Afro-Brazilians with darker skin colour. This may potentially lead some people who suffer discrimination and who inherited disadvantages associated with their ethnic background – who might normally classify themselves as *pardo* or have a weaker attachment to the label *negro* – to exclude

⁵² Marcos Chor Maio and Ricardo Ventura Santos, ‘Políticas de cotas raciais, os “olhos da sociedade” e os usos da antropologia: o caso do vestibular da Universidade de Brasília (UnB)’, *Horizontes Antropológicos*, vol. 11, no. 23 (2005), pp. 181–214. Though Maio and Santos’s article focused specifically on UnB, they have publicly opposed racial quotas more broadly for the same reasons.

⁵³ Antônio Sérgio Guimarães, ‘Entre o Medo de Fraudes e o Fantasma das Raças’, *Horizontes Antropológicos*, vol. 11, no. 23 (2005), pp. 215–7. José Jorge de Carvalho ‘Usos e abusos da antropologia em um contexto de tensão racial: o caso das cotas para negros na UnB’, *Horizontes Antropológicos*, vol. 11, no. 23 (2005), pp. 237–46.

themselves from the benefit. Attempts to prevent fraud with pictures, interviews and official documents may exacerbate rather than correct this problem, leading an even greater number of disadvantaged and discriminated students to exclude themselves.

Although official racial classification in Brazil is inherently imprecise, a better communication between students and policymakers regarding the meaning of the categories in use and a greater awareness of discrimination patterns could lead to some improvement in the extent to which quotas are targeting their intended beneficiaries. Perhaps, however, imprecision should be viewed not as a problem but as an inherent part of a (somewhat) participatory process. It seems contradictory that students are being expected to participate in the classification decision making process while at the same time being expected to make a single, 'right' choice from policymakers' perspective. Alternatively, policymakers could use more indirect methods for increasing access of nonwhites into universities, such as socio-economic criteria, and a more flexible admissions process.

Spanish and Portuguese abstracts

Spanish abstract. Este artículo investiga cómo los estudiantes de la Universidad Estatal de Río de Janeiro (UERJ), una de las primeras universidades brasileñas en adoptar cuotas para la admisión basadas en raza, interpretan las categorías raciales utilizadas como criterios de elegibilidad. El considerar que las perspectivas de los estudiantes es importante para entender cómo funcionan las políticas de acción afirmativa se debe a que las cuotas de la UERJ requieren que los solicitantes se clasifiquen a sí mismos. Las interpretaciones de los estudiantes de tales categorías con frecuencia divergen de las interpretaciones de las personas que configuran dichas políticas. Las perspectivas de los estudiantes se forman por las experiencias cotidianas de categorización y de su propia autoevaluación como beneficiarios legítimos de las cuotas. En contraste, las políticas fueron diseñadas de acuerdo a un nuevo proyecto racial, donde el incremento de una conciencia negra y las estadísticas han jugado un papel importante.

Spanish keywords: raza, Brasil, acción afirmativa, categorización

Portuguese abstract. Este artigo investiga como alunos da Universidade Estadual do Rio de Janeiro (UERJ), umas das primeiras universidades brasileiras a adotar o sistema de cotas raciais, interpretam categorias raciais utilizadas como critérios para acesso à vagas. Considerar as perspectivas dos estudantes é importante para que o funcionamento das políticas de ações afirmativas seja compreendido, já que o direito às cotas da UERJ depende da autoidentificação dos candidatos. As interpretações dos estudantes pertencentes às categorias consideradas pelos programas de cotas frequentemente divergem das interpretações daqueles que formularam a política.

As perspectivas dos alunos são influenciadas por experiências cotidianas e pela sua autoavaliação como legítimos beneficiários das cotas. Por outro lado, as políticas foram pensadas de acordo com um novo projeto racial no qual um papel importante foi desempenhado pelo estímulo à consciência negra e pelas estatísticas.

Portuguese keywords: raça, Brasil, ações afirmativas, categorização