

### **Gender, Nation, Notions of Illness**

Tropicalistas: a group of doctors in Brazil, responsible for establishing and defining field of ‘tropical medicine,’ basically establishing how biomedicine will be implemented in Brazil

- Tropicalistas held neo-Lamarckian beliefs
- Believed that organisms adapted to environmental factors and pass those traits to their offspring (phenotype can affect genotype, as well as vice versa)
- However, they believed that race was not a changeable condition, although many other characteristics could be
- Had the task of defining tropical disease: uncertain whether tropical medicine would encompass only a limited range of diseases particular to tropical countries, or whether it was a larger field encompassing social conditions of specific tropical countries that could exacerbate diseases.
- Creating and legitimizing differences among populations in Brazil could justify the inclusion of Brazil in global spheres – Practice of medicine not only a measure for improving the lives of individuals in the population, but also a tool used by the state to prove Brazil’s degree of ‘civilization’ or ‘rationality’ for inclusion among Western countries

### **Historical Background**

- In tropical countries the reactions of Europeans in different climate used to establish ‘proof’ of the supposed superiority of Europeans
  - Their relative weakness in the tropics led to conclusion that they were superior (their mental faculties were overdeveloped, leaving them incapable of tolerating physical extremes)
  - Employed ‘just can’t win’ logic to continuously reinforce notion of European superiority:
    - Europeans were superior because they were weak in tropical climate, Africans were inferior because they were capable of tolerating (which the Europeans perceived to indicate that their mental faculties were underdeveloped)
  - Reminiscent of American Jim Crow laws, which used fallacious logic to justify position of white Americans
  - This is a psychological mechanism and even a conscious strategy to continuously reinforce status quo
- Even in 19<sup>th</sup>, even 20<sup>th</sup> century science the state of the science largely reflected the biases, anxieties, and concerns of the society. (same discourse in development discourse—role of environment, culture—the new way to label groups in overly essentialized, generalized, stereotypical way)
- Brazilians actively accepted and refuted these notions in developing their own set of ethical standards and guidelines

- Cartwright: African physiology—comparing African male slave to white male child—discourse of lung development parallels discourse on environment in that environment is seen to affect physiology
- Discourse about the Curse of Ham as the historical progenitor for African race. This notion reflects the competition between monogenism, which is the idea that there is a single source of humanity, versus polygenism, meaning that there are many different though similar points at which humanity developed separately, although in parallel for the most part. The Biblical idea of the Curse of Ham favors polygenism, hence that Africans are inherently a different species from Europeans, not from same ancestral stock. Emerges again in mid-19<sup>th</sup> century to later around issue of slavery and issues of human rights (Frederick Douglass)
- Haiti in 19<sup>th</sup> century was one of a few black independent nations followed by Liberia (established in 1816, and independent in 1847). However, Haiti was not formally recognized until post-slavery in USA.
- Cultural notions of women's bodies were linked to ideas of racialism and hygiene—look back at Fabian to what hygiene meant to explorers
- Nature v. nurture shift in discourse about the hierarchy of civilizations. There is still a perceived hierarchy, but rather than considering perceived defects to be the result of innate 'nature' it is now considered to be the result of having been 'isolated from civilized centers.' It's better than blaming on innate capacity, which implies impossibility of improvement, but still using Eurocentric standards of civilized.

### **Rationale**

- The productivity of laborers, mass of productive individuals, security of state, biopower— all these became focus of the new state, in particular to regulate a population. The application of scientific research methods necessary to categorize individuals by their respective attributes in efforts to produce most efficient labor force for securing the state. This was the reason behind concern to assure that environment, education changes can move forward, at least for a small racially mixed elite class. Much more racial mixing in Brazil than other countries
- Bodies-capacity-reason was different discourse in Brazil—different formulation of embodiment as it relates to ideas of progress and state
- Rejection of European 'racial science', whitening/bleaching; whites pulled down by blacks OR blacks pulled up by whites—a lot of mixing occurred. Mulattoes—a larger population—pulled themselves up—power in numbers?—turning the tables
- In Brazil, brutal and harsh conditions for the slaves meant that slave force could not reproduce itself, necessitating either more importation or relaxed views on labor force. Issue became importation v reproduction of slaves.

### **Racial hybridization**

- Legal—free w/black v. white mixing—attempting to adopt the dominant discourse/morals/cultural social patterns of the upper class to ally itself with more with Europe—Haiti citizenship rights in France—reinforce difference between

10 March 2005

them and blacks. 18<sup>th</sup> century laws emerged to make distinctions between whites and those colored

•

**James: 1<sup>st</sup> chapter of dissertation**

- Laws provide opportunity to create more distinction between social groups, especially in issues such as race-body-gender.
- Brings to question issues of citizenship, economics, power
- Can theories of biopower (Foucault) be applied outside European context?
- Racial “devolution” —less civilized at the level of the body than predecessors
- Social engineering-eugenics—more advancement—idea of perfecting humanity through technologies and practices and techniques
- Notion of hygiene (Fabian) that through practices oriented about body (routine, etc.) it is possible to perfect the human body in a particular environment
  
- Identity is not fixed—Franz Boas—anthropologist—plasticity of types—status of individuals
- Insalubrity—18<sup>th</sup> century—miasma—detrimental environmental factors: the extent to which scientific ideas in metropolises.
  1. Gilman—person’s backgrounds create their ideologies
  2. Nina Rodrigues—biological determinism, different species, polygenism; radical difference between slaves and himself
  3. Littlewood and Lipsedge—anxieties of other come from too much closeness

Why is there the perception of this radical difference—what does that have to do with power, still aspire to civilization as defined by the West—can progress with capitalism—debates about power

Figure as an ethnographer—focused on African traditions in Brazilian society to assess that they would impede progress of populace to become more ‘civilized’; an unintentional—an archivist

Haiti-1804 independence—question of its ability to function circulated throughout 19<sup>th</sup> century

Knowledge is power.

- Midwives are threat to tropicalistas, providing holistic care without training and with supposed lack of competence
- The poor are a supplier of practice bodies for use in medical settings
- Women as not allowed to seek higher education; a glass ceiling for gender advancement
- Tropicalistas are trying assert power over medicine –defining the identity of the proper Victorian family and woman; a class issue—identity of particular class and marker of its civilization—symbol of the nation—to discipline the family—productivity/reproductivity of the nation

Upperclass physicians try to assert/claim a similar status with the rest of Europe; upper class advocates adopting the model of the hygienic family