

Nerds and Barbarians: Race and Class Encounters through Affirmative Action in a Brazilian University

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Abstract. This ethnographic article discusses how race emerges between discourses of class and space at the University of the State of Rio de Janeiro. Following a legal decision, this academic institution was required to implement racial quotas to combat social exclusion and raise the number of ‘black’ students in public higher education. A crucial question is whether such racially based policies help redress social inequalities, or whether they actually increase discrimination by reifying ‘racial’ differences in Brazil. I argue that the social diversity promoted by quotas at the university stresses certain urban tensions and unequal dynamics that come to be reflected within the university. However, it also reveals novel and positive paths by which policies can negotiate these contrasts.

Keywords: Brazil, race relations, affirmative action, higher education, racial quotas, class, urban inequalities, urban space

Introduction

In 2003, the public universities of the State of Rio de Janeiro had to implement a law that reserves a quota of places for students who self-identify as black (*negro*) and for other vulnerable social groups. The law allows quota applicants to win places on undergraduate courses with lower scores on the university admission examination (*vestibular*) than those required from other students, and was devised to increase the traditionally low number of black students in higher education in Brazil. This article explores, through ethnographic fieldwork, how race and class relations intersect and have been changed in the Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro (University of the State of Rio de Janeiro, UERJ), which became the first Brazilian public

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university to establish racial and other social quotas for undergraduate students.

In the middle-class neighbourhood where I lived during my fieldwork in Rio de Janeiro, I noticed that the people I considered 'black' were mostly service providers such as unskilled workers, cleaners and carers for the elderly.¹ Black residents in my district were exceptions that might surprise other local inhabitants, or easily get mistaken for servants.² Interracial relations follow rather hierarchical patterns of the servant–employer type in Rio de Janeiro, especially in wealthier environments.³ Similarly, until 2003 black people at UERJ were visible chiefly as cleaners or security guards on campus, or as students on the undergraduate courses that the middle class had deserted because they offered only modest job prospects.⁴ The quotas ended up diversifying the typically white and middle-class pool of students that have monopolised Brazilian public universities, especially on the most prestigious courses of study.⁵ Students of different colours and social backgrounds now mix more consistently as 'equals' in the academic space. The introduction of quotas across all UERJ undergraduate courses thus implicitly questions the automatically assumed link between the black phenotype and its urban clustering in marginal spaces and roles.

However, these race-based quotas have fired a heated debate in academia and in public opinion. Most critiques centre on the way that these measures address a 'black' group, implicitly reifying race in a country that has founded much of its national identity on the idea of racial mixing (*mestiçagem*) between people of indigenous, African and European descent. Critics also suggest that racial affirmative action seems to infringe the 'democratic' principle of merit and equality between citizens, reinforcing

¹ The concept of 'middle class' is used here in its Brazilian sense, where it is widely considered part of the 'wealthy' or 'upper middle class', or the 'dominant' group. See Jessé Souza, *Os batalhadores brasileiros: nova classe média ou nova classe trabalhadora?* (Belo Horizonte: UFMG, 2010). In working-class metropolitan areas and *favelas* in Brazil the population is phenotypically more diverse, although 66 per cent of favela households are still headed by *preto* (black) and *pardo* (mixed-race) women or men. Institute for Economic and Applied Research, 'Retrato das desigualdades de gênero e raça' (2008), available at www.ipea.gov.br/sites/000/2/pdf/livreto_retrato_3edicao.pdf.

² See Michael G. Hanchard, 'Black Cinderella? Race and the Public Sphere in Brazil', in Hanchard (ed.), *Racial Politics in Contemporary Brazil* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999).

³ Donna Goldstein, *Laughter out of Place* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003).

⁴ Such courses are social work, education and social sciences, as observed in Daniela Valentim, 'Políticas de ação afirmativa e ensino superior: a experiência da UERJ na perspectiva dos professores da Faculdade de Direito', unpubl. MA thesis, Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro, 2005.

⁵ Fulvia Rosemberg, 'Acción afirmativa para negros en la enseñanza superior en Brasil', *Alteridade*, 14: 28 (2004), pp. 65–74.

racism against black people in universities and in Brazilian society at large instead of redressing it.⁶

Since 2003, in addition to academic and public discussion about the ethics and logic of racial quotas in Brazil, empirical studies have examined the impact of the quotas. For instance, the academic performance of 'cotistas' across the country has been relatively high, and dropout rates among this group have been lower than among other categories of students.⁷ Some studies have discussed how the colour/racial categorisations produced by quota implementation may interfere with the everyday colour/racial identifications of university students.⁸ Others have examined how certain students may feel encouraged to self-identify as 'black' and to reinforce their black identity through the use of racially based affirmative action policies.⁹ Institutional research has observed the social transformations that quotas have produced in academic spaces, especially in undergraduate courses such as law, journalism and medicine, which have traditionally been viewed as prerogatives of the Brazilian elite.¹⁰

⁶ Quotas were temporarily suspended in the State of Rio de Janeiro in 2009 following claims that they were unconstitutional (see www.colegioqi.com.br/blog/fim-das-cotas-nas-universidades-do-rio). However, in November 2009 the Court of Justice of Rio de Janeiro reconfirmed their constitutionality. The state deputy Flávio Bolsonaro undertook legal action against quotas because he felt that they infringed on 'equality'. The Brazilian media reported that the deputy had been informed by 'some' students that quotas had created distressing situations for their beneficiaries, and also increased levels of racism at university.

⁷ 'Cotistas' is an emic term consistently used by quota and non-quota students, academic staff and black organisations in Brazil to refer to quota students. On dropout rates, see José Ricardo Arruda (org.), *Políticas de ações afirmativas na Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro* (Rio de Janeiro: Rede Sirius UERJ, 2007); André Cicalo, 'What Do We Know about Quotas?', *Vibrant*, 5: 1 (2008), pp. 65–82; Dayane Santos, 'Para além das cotas: a permanência de estudantes negros no ensino superior como política de ação afirmativa', unpubl. PhD diss., Universidade Federal da Bahia, 2009; Valentim, 'Políticas de ação afirmativa e ensino superior'; Sales A. dos Santos, 'Movimentos negros, educação e ações afirmativas', unpubl. PhD diss., Universidade de Brasília, 2007, pp. 519–20.

⁸ Luisa F. Schwartzman, 'Seeing Like Citizens: Unofficial Understandings of Official Racial Categories in a Brazilian University', *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 41: 2 (2009), pp. 221–50. Schwartzman shows that many pardo students at UERJ do not self-identify as negro, thus problematising the affirmative action approach that lumps pardos and pretos together as negros.

⁹ Andrew Francis and Maria Tannuri-Pianto, 'Endogenous Race in Brazil: Affirmative Action and the Construction of Racial Identity Among Young Adults', Working Paper (2010), available at <http://userwww.service.emory.edu/~afranc5/Endogenous%20Race%20oin%20Brazil.pdf>. According to these authors the racial quotas in the University of Brasília have increased 'black' (negro) self-identification.

¹⁰ Valentim, 'Políticas de ação afirmativa e ensino superior'; Maria P. Nery, 'Afetividade intergrupala, política afirmativa e sistema de cotas para negros', unpubl. MA diss., Universidade de Brasília, 2008. Nery approached this subject through a socio-dramatic experiment carried out with a group of students.

In this article I explore how quotas affect the socialising of first-year law students at UERJ, placing special emphasis on the experience and perspective of quota and lower-class students. My main objective is to explore whether quotas end up narrowing or widening the social distance between students of different backgrounds. I show how the way that students socialise is the product of the interaction of variables such as class, race and space that operate in academic settings as well as in wider society. I also point out the consistency between students' social lives in an academic setting where quotas are implemented and social patterns that are historically crystallised in the city. In doing so, I complement other studies in the field of affirmative action, enriching the debates on quotas through ethnographic data.

The article begins with some background on affirmative action in Brazilian universities, outlines the methodology used, and introduces my research setting and its historical genesis in Rio de Janeiro. I then present the classroom space of first-year law students and show how it reflects the city's structural patterns of social inequality and racist dynamics. Here I refer to the widespread argument that race allegedly plays a secondary role in the explanation of inequalities in Brazil,¹¹ to the silence that permeates race-related topics,¹² and to the imperfect correspondence of race and class in shaping Brazilian social inequalities.¹³ On a contrasting note, I suggest that the social inequalities that quotas 'bring' to the university space should not lead to the conclusion that affirmative action is automatically 'perilous' or 'divisive' for Brazil.¹⁴ The social mixture produced by quotas is, in fact, appreciated by many non-quota users and teachers as a democratising tool that enhances social awareness about other realities and promotes social encounters between different urban sectors. In this way, the quota system opens up interesting paths by which policies can negotiate social distances, both in the university setting and in wider Brazilian society.

'Black' affirmative action in Brazil

As Rosemberg notes, education in Brazil represents a serious paradox.¹⁵ Free higher education, which is quite prestigious in Brazil, has traditionally

¹¹ Folha Online (2008), '113 Cidadãos anti-racistas contra as leis raciais', available at www1.folha.uol.com.br/folha/educacao/ult305u401519.shtml.

¹² Robin Sheriff, *Dreaming Equality: Color, Race, and Racism in Urban Brazil* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001).

¹³ Edward Telles, *Race in Another America: The Significance of Skin Color in Brazil* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004).

¹⁴ Peter Fry, Yvonne Maggie, Marcos Chor Maio, Simone Monteiro and Ricardo Ventura Santos (eds.), *Divisões perigosas: políticas raciais no Brasil contemporâneo* (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 2007). See also Peter Fry, *A persistência da raça: ensaios antropológicos sobre o Brasil e a África Austral* (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 2005).

¹⁵ Rosemberg, 'Acción afirmativa para negros'.

excluded most lower-class people, the majority of whom are black or brown-skinned. Lower-class students typically attend poorly resourced public schools, where they are not given enough competitive training to pass the selection process for public universities. Most higher education places in the public sector have been taken by upper- and middle-class students, who are predominantly light-skinned or white and come from excellent private high schools. According to figures published by the Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (Brazilian Institute for Geography and Statistics, IBGE), the percentage of non-whites with a university degree before the introduction of quotas in Brazil was just 2.2 per cent in 1997, compared to 9.6 per cent of whites.¹⁶ Such distribution does not proportionally reflect national demographic data, where non-white people represent 50 per cent of the Brazilian population.¹⁷

The quota system in Brazilian universities fits into the wider sphere of affirmative action policies aiming to redress racism. These measures, the theory of which largely developed in the United States, envisage differential rights for sectors of the population that traditionally have been marginalised in the process of redistribution, such as women, racial or ethnic groups, religious minorities and disabled people. Such an idea recalls the theory of 'Justice as Fairness' proposed by John Rawls, and occupies an important place in theories of 'equality through difference' popular in liberal multiculturalism.¹⁸ As Htun observes, the United Nations World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance held in Durban in 2001 played (among other factors) a crucial role in the adoption of 'black'

¹⁶ IBGE data for 2007, available at <http://noticias.terra.com.br/educacao/interna/o,,OI3205059-EI8266,00-IBGE+n+de+brancos+com+diploma+e+vezes+maior+que+o+de+negros.html>. See also Florestan Fernandes, *The Negro in Brazilian Society* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969); Oracy Nogueira, *Tanto preto quanto branco: estudos de relações raciais* (São Paulo: T. A. Queiroz, 1985); Luiz Costa-Pinto, *O negro no Rio de Janeiro: relações de raça numa sociedade em mudança* (Rio de Janeiro: UFRJ, 1998); Carlos Hasenbalg, *Discriminação e desigualdades raciais no Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro: Graal, 1979); and Nelson Valle do Silva, 'Updating the Cost of Not Being White in Brazil', in Pierre M. Fontaine (ed.), *Race, Class and Power in Brazil* (Los Angeles, CA: UCLA Centre for Afro-American Studies, 1985), pp. 42–55.

¹⁷ In the 2008 Pesquisa Nacional por Amostra de Domicílio (National Research by Household Sample, PNAD) by the IBGE, 48.8 per cent of the Brazilian population self-identified as *branco/a*, 43.8 as *pardo/a* and 6.5 as *preto/a*, while the remaining categories of *amarelo/a* and *indígena* together represented less than 1 per cent of the Brazilian population. See <http://noticias.uol.com.br/especiais/pnad/ultnot/>.

¹⁸ Charles Taylor, 'The Politics of Recognition', in Amy Gutmann (ed.), *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 25–73; Will Kymlicka and Wayne Norman, 'Citizenship in Culturally Diverse Societies: Issues, Contexts, Concepts', in Will Kymlicka and Wayne Norman (eds.), *Citizenship in Diverse Societies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 1–41. On 'Justice as Fairness', see John Rawls, *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2001).

affirmative action in Brazil.¹⁹ In addition, the country's democratic opening and increasing liberalism through the 1980s favoured the proliferation of 'new social movements' based on group identities such as race, ethnicity, religion and gender.²⁰ These movements and their transnational connections have served as important lobbying actors for the implementation of affirmative action policies in Brazil.²¹

By May 2008, 69 of the federal, state and municipal higher education institutions in Brazil had already established racially based affirmative action of some sort, in addition to or as an alternative to other socially inclusive measures.²² While the debate is still open in terms of the urgency of racial quotas in several spheres of Brazilian social life, from mass media to the job market and medical care, affirmative action in higher education reached the private sector in 2004, through the federal Programa Universidade para Todos (University for All Programme, ProUni), which funds fees and gives small scholarships to black and needy students enrolling in undergraduate programmes at private universities.²³ Other kinds of racially and socially based affirmative measures implemented in Brazil do not rely on a 'quota' logic. An example is Law 10639, which has made the teaching of Afro-Brazilian culture and history compulsory in public and private schools. Although the state is a central actor in establishing affirmative action by law, religious organisations and NGOs also play an increasing role in this arena.²⁴ Some of these groups run preparation courses to train black and economically needy applicants for the vestibular;²⁵ other organisations promote aspects such as black culture, black rights and entrepreneurialism.²⁶

Methods for selecting black-quota candidates differ substantially across Brazil. In fact, a number of articles appeared in a Brazilian anthropological journal in 2005 protesting against the methods that the Universidade de Brasília (University of Brasília, UnB) had adopted to select black-quota

¹⁹ Mala Htun, 'From "Racial Democracy" to Affirmative Action: Changing State Policy on Race in Brazil', *Latin American Research Review*, 39: 1 (2004), pp. 60–89.

²⁰ Sonia Alvarez and Arturo Escobar (eds.), *The Making of Social Movements in Latin America: Identity, Strategy and Democracy* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1992).

²¹ Dos Santos, 'Movimentos negros, educação e ações afirmativas'. See also Shirlena Amaral, 'A política de cotas e o acesso do negro à universidade pública', *Confluente*, 1: 2 (2009), pp. 227–43.

²² *120 anos de luta pela igualdade racial no Brasil: manifesto em defesa da justiça e constitucionalidade das cotas* (2008), available at www.ifhc.org.br/files/pdf/manifesto-em-defesa-da-justi%C3%A7a-e-constitucionalidade-das-cotas.pdf.

²³ <http://siteprouni.mec.gov.br/>.

²⁴ Rosana Heringer, 'Mapeamento de ações e discursos de combate às desigualdades raciais no Brasil', *Estudos Afro-Asiáticos*, 23: 2 (2001), pp. 1–43.

²⁵ Amongst these, the Catholic organisation Educafro and the organisation Prevestibulares para Negros e Carentes (PVNC) were relevant. ²⁶ For example, the NGO Palmares.

applicants. Such methods, which used photos and psychological interviews to assess 'blackness', were heavily criticised by Maio and Santos, and Maggie, for representing a sort of 'racial tribunal'.²⁷ Even though the system implemented at the UnB is rather atypical, as most universities select black-quota candidates on the basis of the students' own self-declarations, the notion has spread that the introduction of racial quotas will necessarily racialise the university and wider society by reinstating ideas of biological 'race' that have already been scientifically refuted.²⁸

In contrast to this critical approach, other social scientists have adopted a more optimistic view of racial affirmative action policies in public universities.²⁹ Building on qualitative and quantitative studies conducted by Silva and Hasenbalg, these authors suggest that black affirmative action has not caused or entrenched Brazilian racism, which was already present in society and was never properly redressed by universalistic policies.³⁰ Consequently, racism should be unmasked and addressed through specific actions. While acknowledging that race is a social construct, these thinkers generally agree that Brazilians should be racially identified for statistical and policy reasons. A positive view of racial affirmative action is also supported by the Brazilian black movement. According to black activists, these measures represent a form of historical reparation for past wrongs perpetrated during and after slavery as well as a way of favouring the integration of black people into spaces of power, while also being a resource for reinforcing black consciousness.³¹

²⁷ Marcos Maio and Ricardo Santos, 'Política de cotas raciais, os "olhos da sociedade" e os usos da antropologia: o caso do vestibular da universidade de Brasília (UnB)', *Horizontes Antropológicos*, 11: 23 (2005), pp. 181–214; Yvonne Maggie, 'Políticas de cotas e o vestibular da UnB ou a marca que cria sociedades divididas', *Horizontes Antropológicos*, 11: 23 (2005), pp. 286–91.

²⁸ Juliana Alves-Silva, Magda Santos, Pedro Guimarães, Alessandro Ferreira, Hans-Jürgen Bandelt, Sérgio D. J. Pena and Vania Prado, 'The Ancestry of Brazilian mtDNA Lineages', *American Journal of Human Genetics*, 67: 2 (2000), pp. 444–61; Luigi Cavalli-Sforza, *Genes, povos e línguas* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2003).

²⁹ Carlo A. Medeiros, *Na lei e na raça: legislação e relações raciais, Brasil-Estados Unidos* (Rio de Janeiro: DP&A Editora, 2004); José J. de Carvalho, 'Usos e abusos da antropologia em um contexto de tensão racial: o caso das cotas para negros na UnB', *Horizontes Antropológicos*, 11: 23 (2005), pp. 237–46; Livio Sansone, 'O bebê e a água do banho – a ação afirmativa continua importante, não obstante os erros da UnB!', *Horizontes Antropológicos*, 11: 23 (2005), pp. 251–4; Antonio S. Guimarães, 'Entre o medo de fraudes e o fantasma das raças', *Horizontes Antropológicos*, 11: 23 (2005), pp. 215–17.

³⁰ Nelson do V. Silva and Carlos Hasenbalg, 'Race and Educational Opportunity in Brazil', in Rebecca Reichmann (ed.), *Race in Contemporary Brazil: From Indifference to Inequality* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), pp. 53–65.

³¹ The idea that black racial policies might raise black consciousness comes from a broadly accepted view within the black movement that considers that the category 'black' (negro) used for policies should include pardo (brown-skinned) and preto (dark-skinned) census groups, both discriminated against in Brazilian society (see Edward Telles, *Race in Another America*). In this way, affirmative action would be encouraging a biracial view of Brazilian

The presence in academia of these competing arguments about quotas is reflected in the ambivalent ways in which public opinion has reacted to the topic. According to Datafolha figures for 2008, 62 per cent of the Brazilian population believe that racial quotas are essential for expanding access to education. At the same time, 53 per cent of Brazilians believe that quotas are humiliating for the beneficiaries, and 62 per cent believe that these measures might encourage racism.³²

The university setting and the quota system at UERJ

UERJ is a 12-storey concrete building located close to the middle-class section of the Zona Norte area of Rio de Janeiro, relatively close to the city centre.³³ Its construction was completed in 1976 following a long negotiation process that had started in the early 1960s, and involved the costly demolition of a well-known *favela*, Esqueleto. This planning process followed ideals of urban modernisation that envisaged the establishment of extensive urban infrastructure and the simultaneous removal of the poor from the city centre.³⁴ Esqueleto's dwellers were mostly resettled in remote areas of the predominantly working-class suburbs, particularly in the metropolitan area known as the Baixada Fluminense. According to many informants from the UERJ administration department, the university project had served lower-class people very little, if at all, while 'cleansing' the nearby middle-class neighbourhoods of the 'maldita favela'.³⁵ This explains why some black militants referred to quotas as a way to occupy a 'space of power' ('espaço de

society similarly to the system in the United States. On the need to raise racial consciousness in Brazil, see Michael G. Hanchard, *Orpheus and Power: The Movimento Negro of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, Brazil, 1945–1988* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994); Howard Winant, 'Racial Democracy and Racial Identity: Comparing the United States and Brazil', in Hanchard (ed.), *Racial Politics in Contemporary Brazil*, pp. 98–115; Abdias do Nascimento, *O negro revoltado* (Rio de Janeiro: Nova Fronteira, 1982).

³² Forty-nine per cent of brancos and 44 per cent of negros hold this latter belief, along with 52 per cent of white men, 55 per cent of people with high school educations and 63 per cent of people with household incomes equal to 10 or 20 times the minimum Brazilian wage (the minimum legal wage was Reais\$ 415 in 2008). The figures are basically reversed among people with low education levels and incomes, as well as among black people (Datafolha, 2008).

³³ Zona Norte is a relatively working-class area, despite the presence of some wealthier districts within it.

³⁴ Marcos Alvito, *As cores de Acari: uma favela carioca* (Rio de Janeiro: FGV, 2001); Mauricio Abreu, *A evolução urbana do Rio de Janeiro* (Rio de Janeiro: Iplanrio, 1988); Andreilino Campos, 'O planejamento urbano e a "invisibilidade" dos Afrodescendentes', PhD diss., Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, 2006.

³⁵ An expression used in Haroldo Cunha, *Contribuição à memória histórica da Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro* (Rio de Janeiro: UERJ, 1988), p. 41.

poder') for black people, an expression that I heard several times during my fieldwork at UERJ.³⁶

At present, Rio de Janeiro's law reserves 20 per cent of places on any course for students self-identified as 'negros' and a further 20 per cent for students from public schools, while a remaining 5 per cent are allocated to indigenous ethnic minorities, disabled people and other residual categories taken in combination.³⁷ Quota applicants at UERJ are not automatically admitted when applying for a place; they must achieve a minimum score in the vestibular. If they fulfil this requirement, applicants are actually admitted on the basis of their position in the rankings within each quota category. Since 2004, all kinds of quotas at UERJ have followed financial criteria: quota applicants, independent of their colour and situation, must provide proof that they are *carentes* (in need) on the basis of their family's per capita monthly income.³⁸

Methodology

Between August 2007 and July 2008 I carried out ethnographic fieldwork at UERJ.³⁹ I initially conducted research within several undergraduate programmes, but eventually decided to focus on the Law Department. Law was one of the undergraduate programmes that, according to informants, had been widely popular with the ('white') middle class and was therefore changing substantially with quotas; this undergraduate programme was consequently a relevant context in which to explore the effects of affirmative action.⁴⁰

My fieldwork primarily involved attending classes with UERJ first-year law students during the morning shift (between 70 and 80 students), and spending time with them during their breaks and leisure time over the course of a year. Ethnographic methods included participant observation as well as formal and informal interviews and socialising both within and outside the

³⁶ However, several informants noted that UERJ has always had a less typically middle-class status than other public universities, especially in courses that have gradually been abandoned by the middle class. This traditionally less elite profile of UERJ is also shown by the presence of evening undergraduate programmes, which cater for those who work during the day. See also Moema Teixeira, *Negros na universidade: identidade e trajetória de ascensão social no Rio de Janeiro* (Rio de Janeiro: Pallas, 2003), p. 186.

³⁷ To this 5 per cent, Law 5074/2007 also added siblings of firemen, policemen and other state security workers whose death or disability was due to service activities. In spite of the spreading institutional and activist habit of understanding 'negros' as both 'pardos' and 'pretos', neither the law nor the university offer any explanation or interpretation of the term 'negro' within university policies.

³⁸ This was raised from R\$ 300 in 2004 to R\$ 630 in 2007.

³⁹ The study received formal permission from the university administration.

⁴⁰ There were 9.29 applicants for every place in the law programme (vestibular data, UERJ, 2007).

academic setting. Among this group of freshers, I focused mostly on lower-class and quota students of different skin colours, who represented almost half of the classroom.⁴¹ These students had managed to get a place at university despite having their merits and skills automatically called into question; I was thus very interested in how they adapted to the new environment. Despite privileging lower-class first-year students in the Law Department for my study, I also socialised with and interviewed academic and administrative staff, as well as quota and non-quota students within several departments at UERJ, during this year. This allowed me to compare my findings on a wider scale, including different undergraduate programmes and course years. My fieldwork also involved formal and less formal interviews with black movement student activists, although such activists were more common in less popular departments such as education, social work, history and the social sciences, and not present at all among the first-year law students who were the main object of my study. The absence of black activists among these students increased my curiosity about this group. While I was already quite familiar with the political discourses about black identity and quotas expressed by black militants in Rio de Janeiro, I wondered how black quota students who were not so racially politicised experienced the quota system in their academic life. After all, black people with no involvement in the black movement represent the vast majority of black people in Rio de Janeiro and Brazil, though their voices remain underrepresented in the literature concerning black politics.⁴²

My findings highlight class and racial dynamics that can be observed in several courses with a reasonably diversified pool of users at UERJ, in other Brazilian universities, and in Brazilian society at large. Examples of such dynamics are the phenomenon of spatial separation between different class groups, the ‘aggravating’ role played by race in each one of these groups and the general silence (or cultural censorship) that characterises many of the ways in which people deal with race in Brazil. Having said this, not all the findings in this article can be automatically and fully used to generalise about race and class relations in Brazilian universities and society. In this regard, it is important to take into account that different systems of racial and social quotas or affirmative action are used throughout Brazilian academic settings, while patterns of race relations and urban racial distribution in other Brazilian

⁴¹ The research used for this article is part of a wider research project whose objective was primarily to document the experience of affirmative action amongst quota and lower-class law students at UERJ. The fact of focusing on this group prevented me from equally constant access to the middle-class students’ social space, as these students largely associated me with the lower-class social group in the classroom. Having said this, I was able to access the law freshmen’s middle-class environment enough to collect important data about this group.

⁴² See John Burdick, *Blessed Anastacia: Women, Race, and Popular Christianity in Brazil* (London: Routledge, 1998). Burdick researched the racial politics and thoughts of black women who were not linked to mainstream black activism in Rio de Janeiro.

states may differ significantly from those in Rio de Janeiro. Also, as mentioned above, the change in student composition seen in the Law Department is less striking in other departments where the social background of the collective is generally lower-class and rather homogeneous in this sense.⁴³

Nerds and Barbarians: Urban Geographies Reflected in the Classroom

Cones are those things that you sometimes find when there are roadworks, to show drivers exactly where they should pass. We [the cotistas] are called ‘cones’ because we are diligent in class . . . cones are those who do everything very conscientiously [*os que fazem tudo direitinho*].⁴⁴

When I first joined the first-year law classes in September 2007, socialising patterns were clearly evident in the classroom. When I explained the objectives of my research to the students, many of them automatically asked me whether I had noticed the clear socio-spatial divide between two different groups of people that rarely interacted with each other: the lower-class cones (meaning here, ‘nerds’) and the wealthier *barbárie* (literally, barbarians). Students tended to generalise this division as one between ‘cotistas’ and ‘non-cotistas’ respectively. The equation between these pairs of categories was indeed somewhat imperfect, but was informed by rough generalisations that students shared quite widely. What this division implied, at a deeper level, was a division between ‘poor’ and ‘wealthy’, and ‘suburban’ and ‘urban’ – all stereotypes that these students already held and which reflected social dynamics typical of Rio’s wider society.⁴⁵

Students explained that the cones were those sitting in the front half of the classroom, closer to the lecturer. Because of this, they were often referred to and defined themselves as ‘os da frente’ (literally, those at the front). The other students (the ‘barbarians’) generally occupied the remaining rows and, consequently, were identified and referred to themselves as ‘os de atrás’ (those at the back). When I asked quota students why they clustered in that particular location in the classroom, they justified it by their weaker educational background: they needed to focus on the lessons more than the other students in order to take notes properly and do well. The cones also claimed that the barbarians (who are by and large from the Zona Sul, a wealthy area in Rio de Janeiro) and other middle-class students were noisy and disturbed their concentration. This socio-spatial division within the classroom

⁴³ Statistics from the UERJ socio-economic database show that the social status of non-quota students in courses like education and social work can be also considered lower class.

⁴⁴ Cristine, first-year law quota student.

⁴⁵ The socio-economic gaps between quota and non-quota students in the Law Department are highlighted by the vestibular data divided per undergraduate programme: see www.vestibular.uerj.br/portal_vestibular_uerj/2008/dados_socioculturais/dados_socioculturais.html.

was not only typical of first-year law students; it was widely visible across all departments and in other 'elite' programmes, while it appeared more ambiguously in less prestigious courses where the majority were more consistently lower-class.⁴⁶ The observed pattern sometimes occurred with different terminologies and spatial distributions in other law groups. Among the second-year students, for example, lower-class students were not called 'cones' but 'nerds', borrowing the English word directly.⁴⁷ In some law groups, in addition, students described the spatial division as occurring between the right and left sides of the room.⁴⁸

The first-year law students perceived the cones–barbarians division primarily as a class divide but also as a spatial one, since all the cones were from lower-class neighbourhoods in Zona Norte, Baixada Fluminense, Zona Oeste and São Gonçalo. The barbarians, in contrast, were by and large from the wealthier Zona Sul (Laranjeiras, Flamengo, Botafogo, Copacabana, Ipanema and Leblon, among other neighbourhoods), Barra da Tijuca, and middle-class sectors of Zona Norte and Niterói, a city on the other side of Guanabara Bay. Unlike the cones, who were easily imagined as coming from deprived public schools but who had also attended low-standard private institutions, most barbarians had gone to exclusive private high schools and had managed to pass the admission exams without being affected by the reduction of places resulting from the quota system. The division, therefore, also came to reflect educational background and performance. During the first year, the barbarians scored the highest marks in the class, despite their apparent lack of dedication to the course and the mischievous allusions implicit in the 'barbarian' label.

Although a number of social and academic parameters were used in the process of differentiating between cones and barbarians, I realised that informants did not immediately make references to the dominant phenotype within each group. I observed this pattern despite the fact that the barbarians were predominantly white-looking, whereas a high number of the cones looked 'brown' or 'black'. What I am describing here is obviously a generalisation, but it still reflects my views and those of most of my informants. Although students preferred to attribute the limited social interactions between the barbarians and cones to class and space rather than to

⁴⁶ See Valentim, 'Políticas de ação afirmativa e ensino superior'.

⁴⁷ See also Maria A. Holanda, 'Trajetórias de vida de jovens negras da UnB no contexto das ações afirmativas', unpubl. MA diss., Universidade de Brasília, 2008.

⁴⁸ In the evening shifts, according to informants, the *frente–atrás* pattern observed among the morning group was reversed. In the evening programmes, quota and lower-class students tended to sit at the back because most of them worked full-time and arrived late at university, or needed to leave class earlier to catch the last train home. This is a further example of how patterns of urban social inequality may be reflected in the classroom.

race, in fact, the cones very often referred to their barbarian peers as if they were members of a homogeneous 'white' collective. At the same time, to my question of whether or not race was a reason for the division of the classroom's space, some lower-class informants observed that the racial distribution within the cone group was not really random:

Black students sit 'at the very front'. However, some of them sit on the edges of the class, by the door, or even hidden at the very back of the room, right behind the barbarians . . . then, there is a group of three black girls who sit together by the window and – I can't say why – they don't relate to anybody else.⁴⁹

Black-quota student Jamerson reinforced this view by defining the students at the very front and the peripheries of the classroom, which he also occupied, as being generally dark-skinned, poor and shy. He added that even when these students sat 'at the back', they were naturalised as cones ('todo mundo acha que são cones') since they socialised only with this group, while being largely ignored by the spatially closer barbarians.

Although two social groups were rigidly identified in the classroom, my impression was that students tended to overemphasise differences through a simplified process of categorisation. In particular, I observed that both groups were quite heterogeneous, intercut by variables such as neighbourhood, school of origin, levels of dedication to the course and gender. The *barbárie* group, for example, included some quota students, among them a black student. However, the cones tended to consider these students fake *cotistas* because they looked – inexplicably for their quota status – middle-class. The idea that all cones were very studious and all barbarians were not was another false assumption. Having observed these incongruities, I found the process of group polarisation deployed by first-year law students very insightful. This was not only because their observations were not completely random or wrong, but also because this process reflected how certain stereotypes may be created and reproduced in everyday life, along with their implicit burdens of errors, drawbacks and risks of essentialisation. Similar processes of essentialisation, in the end, may be used to explain why a black person living in a middle-class space can often be mistaken for a servant or a thief, or why somebody with a look identified as *suburbano* or *favelado* might easily be expected to be intellectually deprived or involved in illicit activities. What struck me even more was how the social divisions observed in this and other classrooms quite faithfully reflected the social structures and distribution within the city. Even this is a generalisation, however, as while the quota students were typically lower middle-class or even very lower-class, they were never completely deprived in terms of social, educational or financial capital. In order to be at

⁴⁹ Gabriel, lower-class student, self-identified as white.

university, quota students needed to have a high school degree and enough knowledge to pass the difficult entrance exam.⁵⁰ These students also had to count on supportive networks in their families or neighbourhoods and, even more crucially, had to be exceptionally motivated for their studies and/or for social ascension.

How Cones Socialise and Differentiate Themselves from Barbarians

When I asked cones and barbarians why they tended to socialise only with people from their 'own' group, they pointed out that this was due to a process of internal affinities (*afinidades*) playing out within each collective. Consistent with previous sections of this article, these affinities also mirrored the kinds of physical and metaphysical places that students already occupied in Rio de Janeiro and which were reflected in the classroom's spatial distribution. These places related primarily to class, but phenotype also played a crucial role that class cannot explain on its own; it might imply an attraction, a sharing of common interests, or perhaps a 'natural' empathy or sympathy. The students experienced this as something coming from deep inside that did not need to be carefully thought through, as if it were a naturalised discourse of class, space and race.

Gabriel argued that transport was one of the many representations of these affinities or differences, because 'students with money don't go by train . . . the train is what poor people take [*trem é o que pobre pega*]. Those with money go by car, by tube or, perhaps, by bus.' Such references to transport as a segregating element were also made by students in less popular courses, such as education, where the classes were far more socially homogeneous and typically less affluent than those in the Law Department.⁵¹ Milena, a student on an education course, said:

I don't see many divisions in my classroom . . . but sometimes wealthier people react in a strange way when I say that I go by train . . . when I said that, a colleague stared at me, almost horrified . . . she then wanted to point out to me that she goes by car instead . . . you know, it's as if she wanted to distance herself from me.

Lower-class students offered additional reasons for the lack of socialising with wealthier colleagues. On several occasions, for example, cotistas mentioned that non-quota students go to very expensive clubs, and can even spend Reais\$ 150 in a single night.⁵² 'Some guys were saying that they go to clubs

⁵⁰ On a scale between A (top grade) and E (failing), quota students in the Law Department at UERJ usually have to score a B (more typical) or at least a C in the vestibular.

⁵¹ For differences between social patterns in law and those in the less elite courses such as education, see Holanda, 'Trajetórias de vida de jovens negras', p. 146.

⁵² €1=approximately R\$ 2.6 at the time of my fieldwork.

where drinks cost R\$ 15 ... this is much more than my daily expenses for transport to university!' Jamerson stated. Interestingly, Yara and Murillo made a detailed list of all the clubs where wealthy students would go in Zona Sul, including all the related extra costs such as admission fees, drinks and transport. In a similar vein, Regina and Yara joked about the fact that some female non-quota students had spent their Christmas holidays in France and others had travelled abroad with their families.⁵³ With some irony, these students remembered how, at the last moment, they (and I with them) had had to cancel a trip to Petrópolis (a nearby historic town) because some of them could not find the money for the coach ticket. As for having meals at university, most quota students used the Restaurante Popular do Maracanã, a state-run canteen near the popular football stadium, charging only R\$ 1 per meal. Alternatively, some lower-class students would wait until they were back home in the evening and have their main meal then.

Although I will partially modify this image later, lower-class students perceived their wealthier counterparts as people with easy lives who lived in Zona Sul, had studied at the most exclusive high schools, did not need to work in order to pay for their studies, studied several undergraduate courses at once and, indeed, did not use the train. The parents of these wealthier students were imagined as highly skilled and highly paid professionals in the field of law, such as public prosecutors (*procuradores públicos*), lawyers that defended society against major social offences (*promotores de justiça*) or high court judges (*desembargadores*).

All of these aspects were presented as naturalised reasons explaining the limited social interactions between the cones and the barbárie. However, a number of quota students also admitted that people in their group tended to feel excessively 'paranoid' in overemphasising feelings of indifference or hostility from wealthier students. As quota student Aninha argued, self-isolation and shyness also represented a 'defensive strategy [*atitude*] by students who [were] ashamed of being poor', to avoid interacting with wealthier classmates because they were afraid of being discriminated against.⁵⁴ These insecurities are understandable, since many quota students entered university with the feeling of being in a place of which they were unworthy and where they were not welcome.⁵⁵ In this sense, it may be that quota students tried to subvert certain expectations about themselves by being extremely well-behaved and dedicated in class, feeling the need to demonstrate that they were deserving of a place at UERJ.

This might also explain why my lower-class informants made a greater effort to dress more formally at university. In contrast, many non-quota students

⁵³ On different law students' lifestyles, see *ibid.*, pp. 136–7.

⁵⁴ See also Nery, 'Afetividade intergrupala'.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

seemed to dress quite casually, and it was not unusual to see wealthy boys attending class in Bermuda shorts and flip-flops.

Cristine: Something you'll see for sure in the class is that the poor dress better . . . whereas people from Zona Sul [generally known as a rich area] don't bother at all . . . They go very informally dressed [*largados*], wearing flip-flops and Bermuda shorts . . . all beach stuff [*roupa de praia*] . . . Have you seen Paulo? Have you seen how [badly] dressed he is? He lives in Copacabana [a wealthy area]! And Laura . . . have you seen her? She's from Zona Sul as well. The poor go out better dressed [*de outro jeito*]. For example, look at how well-dressed Jocyleide is. She's from Nilópolis [a poor area].

Interviewer: So, do you have any explanations for this?

Cristine: Of course! It's enough that we are poor. . . can you imagine if we also were dressed badly? What would people think of us? [In a very playful tone.]

What Cristine pointed out is that quota students had to make an effort to overcome a number of stigmas when starting university; clothes were therefore used by cotistas to balance prejudices and to add legitimacy to their presence in the academic setting. However, it is important to understand that efforts to challenge expectations were not usually very successful. I have already noted, for example, that despite the quota students' application in class, the apparently non-diligent barbarians systematically scored higher marks. In addition, other lower-class students radically reinterpreted Cristine's impressions of the 'better' outfits of the quota students. According to them, a more formal clothing style did not necessarily balance the status gap between wealthy and poor students because the actual cost of these outfits ineluctably marked social distance:

What Cristine told you is only what it seems like! They [the Zona Sul boys] might even wear Bermuda shorts and flip-flops . . . but it's all name brands [*roupa grifada*]. I can clearly see the difference between those who buy in proper shops [*nas lojas*] and those who do so in the *feirinha* of São Gonçalo [a lower-class market in a poor area]! These [Zona Sul] girls have better-quality clothes . . . but it's not just that . . . they are lighter-skinned; they have good skin [*a pele é boa*] . . . and finer features. They look better. If you can't see that, you're blind!⁵⁶

Glória's account also suggests that phenotype, as well as outfit price, could represent an important difference in delimiting boundaries between the cones and the barbárie. It could also, somehow, create immediate sympathy/antipathy or connections/disconnections among and between these groups of students. Glória supported her point by concluding that the cotistas automatically identified with each other not only through their outfits or

⁵⁶ Glória, law quota student. On the costliness of students' outfits as a factor of social division in the classroom, see Holanda, 'Trajetórias de vida de jovens negras', pp. 125–6.

because they looked 'shy' and 'out of place', but also because they were darker-skinned ('mais escuros').

The fact that 'race' played an 'aggravating' role in the construction of group affinities/differences among students could also be seen in the fact that the only black student among the barbarians, formally a cotista, was frequently the subject of gossip by cones of all colours. This student was visibly not poor, starting with his outfit and ending with the fact that he was part of the barbarian social group. As well as questioning how this middle-class student could have achieved a quota, some cones gossiped about how in his profile picture on Orkut, a popular Brazilian online social network similar to Facebook, he was sitting on a very expensive motorbike, something he proudly described as 'his' ('a minha moto'). Even though some other students in the barbárie group had achieved university access through quotas, they were 'white' and, probably because of this, much less gossiped about by the cones. In some cases, lower-class students referred to this classmate as 'o negro da barbárie' ('the barbarians' black'). On one hand, the cones must have felt a special and inexplicable 'affinity' with this classmate – otherwise, I cannot explain why they seemed to be less affected by being ignored by the few white Barbarian cotistas than by somebody who was much darker (*mais preto*) than most of them. On the other hand, lower-class students might have perceived something bizarrely wrong and disturbing in the 'anomalous' location of this black student within the wealthier student group. In semi-private conversations within the cone space, the student in question was sometimes referred to as the 'slave' ('o escravo') of the other barbarians. Some cones also commented that this student was the one who carried things ('o que carrega as coisas'), drove the car ('o motorista'), put the music on at parties ('o DJ') and did everything to please and amuse ('o palhaço') his (white) barbarian friends. Some students even joked that the other Barbarians accepted this black peer as a kind of pet ('bichinho de estimação'), so they could show the world that they were 'cool' ('legais') and tolerant. These comments only partially reflect the class-based distance referred to by the cones as the reason for social divisions within the student collective; in the eyes of lower-class informants, in fact, there was something about this classmate that did not make him a 'genuine' middle-class person, while at the same time he was still not a genuine cotista.

The case of the 'negro da barbárie' challenges the popular saying that 'money whitens' in Brazil. Telles demonstrates that this rule often works imperfectly, especially when a phenotype does not look 'mixed' or racially ambiguous enough to make a person's life as easy as that of his or her white counterparts from the same class.⁵⁷ In a similar vein, it could be said that

⁵⁷ Edward Telles, *Race in Another America*, p. 98; Hanchard, 'Black Cinderella?'. In particular, see Hanchard's point that 'blackness taints' (*ibid.*, p. 75); see also Peter Wade, *Blackness and*

whiteness can make people look richer, but only if this whiteness is white 'enough' and is supported by the right clothing, educational background and lifestyle, evoking middle-class models. Gabriel, for example, was the only lower-class student in the class who was consistently invited to middle-class classmates' events. This student, I should acknowledge, was a brilliant young man with a charismatic personality; however, I cannot disregard the fact that he was also 'a blond, blue-eyed guy' ('um loirinho de olhos azuis'), something he jokingly liked to stress as a factor that 'helped in life' ('algo que ajuda'). Whiteness was a factor that likely made this student more easily naturalised and desired as a member of the wealthier social group. The point here is not that phenotype is more crucial than class in shaping student socialising. In fact, Gabriel could not actually participate in middle-class extra-academic activities, as he had no money to pay for them, and he very soon ended up spending most of his academic time with students from a similar background. It was striking that after only one month of being on the course, this first-year student physically 'migrated' from the barbarian back rows to the front of the classroom, the cone space. Having said this, Gabriel's case recalls complaints I heard from black activists at UERJ about the fact that 'although white lower-class students also have to struggle in order to be accepted by middle-class peers . . . at least they are more readily considered than black ones'.⁵⁸

Preserving and Breaking Racial Silence in the Law Department

I have suggested that the social mixture produced by quotas at UERJ cannot automatically delete the hierarchies and dynamics that have been historically naturalised in the city space. While these dynamics and hierarchies are challenged by the increased heterogeneity of the university collective, they are also reflected within the academic setting. This fact would explain why some problematic aspects considered typical of Brazilian race relations can also be observed at UERJ, including the 'silent' ways in which people tend to deal with race in Brazil. This kind of silence, as Robin Sheriff illustrates, is no less effective than language in shaping (unequal) political and cultural landscapes.⁵⁹

Race Mixture: The Dynamics of Racial Identity in Colombia (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993). Wade argues that black people in Colombia are typically regarded as 'black' no matter how wealthy they are.

⁵⁸ I have mentioned the widespread opinion that white quota students easily 'pass' as non-quota at UERJ.

⁵⁹ Robin Sheriff, 'Exposing Silence as Cultural Censorship: A Brazilian Case', *American Anthropologist*, 102: 1 (2000), pp. 114–32. Sheriff defines this silence as a form of 'cultural censorship', which she separates from state-sponsored censorship as it does not rely 'on explicit coercion or enforcement'.

I have mentioned that although race was constantly present in people's awareness, it did not immediately emerge as a factor in the cones' reflections on the reasons behind urban social inequalities in the classroom space. Among middle-class UERJ students, I heard even fewer references to race, especially in public, and I often found this omission so paradoxical as to make race extremely salient. During one of their courses, for example, first-year law students had to organise group presentations on the topic of 'culture and rights'. This was a promising research opportunity for me, especially considering that two groups of middle-class students chose to present about 'hip-hop', and I wondered how they would deal with the racial aspects implicit in their subject. Both groups described hip-hop as having emerged from ghettos in the United States, highlighting the social contestation value of this musical genre. To my surprise, however, both groups cleverly managed to bypass concepts and words such as 'race' or 'black' in their presentations. It was also interesting that, perhaps in order to make their talk more authoritative, one of these groups had invited a speaker from outside the university, a black hip-hop musician whose blackness was strengthened by copious dreadlocks and a reggae outfit. In the second group of presenters, racial silence was instead paradoxically downplayed by a different fact. All of the members of this group sat on the stage except for the aforementioned 'barbarian's black' student. This boy remained on the sidelines, working with the stereo equipment and changing the hip-hop music that functioned as a soundtrack for the presentation. This 'racial' situation might have been random and was probably unintentional on the part of the other participants, but within the general framework of Brazilian race relations in which it was inscribed, this scene sent a powerful message that made any language fairly superfluous: the only black student of the group stood out as an expert able to select tracks of a somewhat racialised musical genre, while he emerged less clearly as a resource for the intellectual aspects of the presentation.

In leaving racial issues implicit, middle-class students were probably trying to be polite to their black classmates, or perhaps they did not feel legitimated to talk about a reality perceived as not really theirs. Most black students, in fact, had entered university through quotas and carried the stereotype of being less capable. It would therefore be inappropriate, if not cruel, to remind them of this, especially since this fact might hint at something supposedly wrong in their biology or ancestry.⁶⁰ After all, defining hip-hop as having come from US ghettos and bringing a black speaker onto the stage might have sufficed to compensate for the careful omission of racial terms by the speakers.

Silence about 'race', I emphasise, was not only typical of middle-class students in public situations. In fact, none of the quota students pointed out

⁶⁰ See also Valentim, 'Políticas de ação afirmativa e ensino superior', p. 121.

the oddity of racial silence in these presentations, showing that there was an implicit contract of ‘courtesy’ that made further explanations superfluous and undesirable to all participants. In this vein, Sheriff rightly observes that silence differs from speech by requiring the ‘cooperation’ of a plurality of actors who enforce its maintenance without any formal coercion. However, actors’ cooperation in silence is driven by different reasons and unequal power relations, since, according to Sheriff, this cultural censorship is inevitably governed by the political interests of dominant groups.⁶¹ To middle-class students, the silence was an expression of ‘politeness’ and ‘tact’, presumably working to hide the subaltern’s vulnerable situation, although it also worked to conceal the speakers’ enjoyment of social privileges.⁶² In the case of black quota students, on the other hand, the silence fulfilled their wishes for invisibility. Such a wish, as mentioned above, can be explained by the fact that most black quota students felt they were in the wrong place at university, since they made use of a policy advantage that ambiguously hinted at academic incompetence, social theft and racial inferiority.⁶³ Silence, I observe, does not necessarily imply a lack of consciousness or knowledge. According to Sheriff, in fact, the practice of silence can be ‘simultaneously a public form of accommodation and a private (if at the same time communal) form of resistance’.⁶⁴ In any case, the silence of black students could be seen as a passive form of this resistance, a means to avoid both suffering and active contestation. Resistance from the audience certainly would have been quite different had there been members of the student black movement attending these presentations.⁶⁵ As I realised from interviews during my fieldwork, black activists openly contested situations of racial silence, targeting them as relatively common ways in which racism in Brazil perversely worked and was automatically reproduced in the university space.

On a contrasting note, references to race suddenly became striking when I asked middle-class students and teachers throughout the university how they managed to identify quota students. Although class factors such as dress, parlance and knowledge of the students’ neighbourhoods of provenance were also used, the most typical answer was that there were now a lot of ‘black’ students (negros) at the university.⁶⁶ When I reminded the interviewees that racially based quotas represented less than half the quota places at UERJ

⁶¹ Sheriff, ‘Exposing Silence’, p. 114.

⁶² This point has already been supported theoretically by Oracy Nogueira, ‘Skin Color and Social Class’, *Vibrant*, 5: 1 (2008), pp. xxix–li.

⁶³ Santos, ‘Para além das cotas’; Holanda, ‘Trajetórias de vida de jovens negras’, p. 136.

⁶⁴ Sheriff, *Dreaming Equality*, p. 83. ⁶⁵ Holanda, ‘Trajetórias de vida de jovens negras’.

⁶⁶ For more on the class factors mentioned here, see Valentim, ‘Políticas de ação afirmativa e ensino superior’.

(taking into consideration public school and other quotas),⁶⁷ many confessed that while white students might have been admitted through quotas, it was not so readily assumed of them; a particular black student might not have been offered a place through quotas, but it was easier to think that he or she had. In this light, it is possible to understand the ironic comments made by some black students and activists at UERJ that it did not really matter whether they were cotistas or not, since people at university would see them as cotistas anyway. By the same token, there were widespread feelings that white students from the quotas 'passam batidos', meaning that they tended to 'pass' disguised within the rest of the (still supposedly naturalised as 'white') student collective. Such feelings, once again, stressed the different processes by which blackness and whiteness interact with class in Brazil.

Middle-Class Students and their Appreciation of Social Mixture at UERJ

The accounts from lower-class informants generally depicted non-quota law students as rich and spoilt individuals whose social distance largely hampered inter-group socialising with less affluent colleagues. Most students across the university confirmed that separation between groups was still observable in later years and still explicable by the concept of affinities internal to each group, as discussed above. However, this was a fairly narrow and unfair way of seeing things. My interviews revealed that non-quota students did not choose UERJ just because its law course was free and highly regarded. Other factors were also mentioned, including the university's mixed and diverse student body and its ability to offer the challenges and skills necessary for adapting to a 'rough' environment and decaying infrastructure. The appropriation of the name 'barbarians', their location at the back of the classroom and their (apparently) simpler outfits, after all, may not only have represented a jocose inversion of reality by certain social actors; these elements may also have expressed a more or less conscious attempt to question social boundaries and stereotypes and to enjoy the social mixture promoted by inclusive policies. This mixture is arguably well matched to a pool of meanings that are crucial to Brazilian national identity and cultural ideals of social and racial democracy.⁶⁸

Most barbarians declared themselves to be middle class or on the way to becoming upper middle class ('classe média' or 'classe média pra média-alta'), and denied being the 'rich' people that their lower-class counterparts imagined they were. 'I don't think there are particularly elite people here', non-quota student Mariana said. 'Some people might be relatives of lawyers who already

⁶⁷ A black self-declaration does not imply that black quota users actually self-identify or are identified by others as phenotypically black.

⁶⁸ Gilberto Freyre, *O Luso e o Trópico* (Lisbon: V Centenário Morte Infante D. Henrique, 1961).

have a good name, but I guess there are not many people here whose parents are high court judges [*desembargadores*] . . . my father, for example, is the first person in his family to have a university diploma and is just a common solicitor.' As with Mariana, most non-quota students pointed out that the rich people were not at UERJ but at the Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro (Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro, PUC), the most exclusive private university in Rio de Janeiro, while the very rich were probably not even studying in Brazil but instead studying in places such as the United States. Middle-class student Luciana provided a similar account of why she had opted for UERJ:

My mum could have made the effort to send me to PUC, but why pay up to R\$ 2,000 per month if I can study here for free? However, most of my friends went to PUC . . . they said I was crazy because this place is far from Zona Sul and the area is 'dangerous'⁶⁹ . . . they also said that the prestige of the law course at UERJ would go down because of *cotistas* . . . Anyway, it's enough that I live in Ipanema and I studied all my life at the Santo Ignácio school, one of the most exclusive here . . . can you imagine if I were studying at PUC as well, now? Well, that would mean completely fitting the stereotype of the *patricinha* [spoilt rich girl]!

Despite being aware of their advantageous status within the UERJ social collective, these students resisted considering themselves upper-class, and would not have felt represented in extremely elite spaces like the PUC. It was actually in direct opposition to the PUC that middle-class UERJ students often built their identities. Luciana and other informants commented that PUC students did not bother studying hard because they paid the university for their studies, and, as an aggravating factor, their parents would find them a good job anyway in some prestigious legal office. Law courses at expensive private universities and public universities without quotas were seen as places for spoilt students who made little effort to understand Brazilian reality and its social contrasts. Along these lines, several non-quota first-years actually referred to the quota system as a positive experience; equally interestingly, some of them declared that they had shifted from an initially pessimistic view of quotas to a supportive one after having joined the socially mixed environment of the university. I cannot deny that, in private conversations, some first-year non-quota students had made ironic comments about the fact that quota colleagues were less capable and constantly tried to show off by coming out with irrelevant questions and comments during the class. These sentiments should not be generalised, however, since numerous wealthy students, especially in their later years, contradicted them. One said: 'I can tell you that I'm now in the third year and I don't see any real difference between

⁶⁹ Here Luciana refers to the fact that UERJ is surrounded by a violent area, several favelas and general street criminality.

the marks of quota and non-quota students. Many cotistas do very well, and they definitely deserve to be here; this fact has made me change my [negative] opinion of quotas in the last few years.⁷⁰

The reason for this benevolent attitude was not just an empathic consideration that cotistas managed to do relatively well academically and had the chance for social mobility: many middle-class students stated that the quotas added something to their own academic experience ('uma experiência enriquecedora'), and even made them better professionals in the law field. Mariana and Marcela, for example, stated that the presence of socially disadvantaged (and black) students in their classroom was making them more aware, for the first time in their lives, of different 'realities', and that this was crucial to becoming good judges and lawyers. Similar conclusions also emerged from interviews with law teachers. Even though the majority of teachers did not share the idea that racial policies were the best means for democratising race relations in Brazil,⁷¹ many of them appreciated that racial quotas had contributed to democratising the academic space by more faithfully representing the complexities of Brazilian society.⁷²

Furthermore, I observed that some non-quota students seemed rather open to inter-class socialising and, particularly between lessons, spent time chatting with lower-class students about academic topics that had emerged during class. Within this framework, quota students Aninha and Glória had borrowed expensive textbooks from wealthier colleagues and were visibly pleased about this fact. Aninha also appeared very happy when a female Zona Sul classmate addressed her in a friendly manner in the head of department's office. Although many students had felt discriminated against or uncomfortable in certain situations during their academic life, as in society, there is no doubt that most of my quota interviewees had expected more confrontational and racist attitudes from the wealthier students at university than they actually experienced, especially considering the alarmist information spread by the mass media and fomented by some literature in this regard.

⁷⁰ Rogério, third-year non-quota student from Zona Sul. This quote is extracted from a discussion between Rogério and a first-year non-quota student at a student party, where the latter student had expressed sarcastic comments about the low academic skills of his first-year quota colleagues.

⁷¹ Also see Valentim, 'Políticas de ação afirmativa e ensino superior'. The majority of teachers and students stated that the best strategy would be to improve the standards of public schools, and that quotas should be accepted only as a temporary solution until this objective was achieved. However, most interviewees seemed very sceptical about the idea that any improvement of public education would be likely to happen in Brazil.

⁷² In research carried out by José Luis Petrucci with 557 university teachers across several Brazilian universities, 77 per cent of interviewees said that race relations did not change at university after the introduction of quotas, and 80 per cent thought that it was important or very important to have racial diversity in their courses. Cited in dos Santos, 'Movimentos negros, educação e ações afirmativas', pp. 519–20.

Most quota and non-quota students in later years admitted that inter-group sociability, although it remained courteous (*cordial*), was never very deep and was usually bounded within the university walls due to lifestyle and spatial distances within the city. These feelings were confirmed amongst my main group of informants in interviews carried out in 2011 as these students were approaching graduation. According to most students, the divisions between the cones and *barbárie* were still consistent but for the fact that, as students spend long hours in job internships and take different disciplines in their final course years, the group was not as compact as the one I had been able to observe between 2007 and 2008. Having said this, some interviewees ended up contradicting themselves by stating that they had managed to socialise with some wealthier colleagues outside the university and had even visited or spent the night over at these colleagues' houses on special occasions such as birthday parties or exam preparations. These wealthy colleagues interested in deeper socialising with *cotistas*, it should be said, were described as a minority but still represented crucial examples of how inter-class and interracial socialising can be substantial between students of different backgrounds. Quotas, undeniably, are a promoting factor for this socialising to happen. I should also add that from the time of my fieldwork, there were several situations in which middle- and lower-class students would interact outside the university. Among these were the *choppadas* (beer parties) and barbecues organised at the start of each semester, as well as extra-university get-togethers organised by the academic staff, such as visits to legal institutions in the city. After leaving my fieldwork in 2008, I had already noticed on Orkut (and more recently on Facebook) an increasing number of photographs picturing smiling law students from varied social backgrounds standing next to their teachers in the stylish bars of Rio de Janeiro. I also noticed increasing numbers of online 'friendships' between lower- and middle-class students, and the entire first-year law collective during the time of my research had already been contacting each other about administrative and academic aspects of their courses through mailing lists and Orkut. Finally, the organisation of socially mixed presentation groups by teachers, according to some interviewees, proved very helpful in increasing social interaction and reciprocal knowledge between students from different backgrounds, even though this was a personal initiative of individual teachers more than a response to policies emanating from the university.

Concluding Remarks

This article has discussed ethnographically the introduction of quotas in favour of 'black' and other disadvantaged categories of students at a Brazilian public university. A first impression is that quotas create social diversification

at university, but also stress, in often disturbing ways, social inequalities and dynamics that are already typical of the urban space. This fact may explain not only why quotas are often seen as divisive measures, but also why certain dynamics of Brazilian race relations, such as the collective silence about 'race', have become even more visible at UERJ since the introduction of quotas. Similar considerations may reinforce doubts about whether affirmative action helps redress or worsens racism and racial inequality. On a different note, this article has shown that quotas represent, at least potentially, a valuable tool for promoting social encounters, solidarity and reciprocal knowledge between groups of different colours and social backgrounds. These groups can interact in spaces of excellence such as the Law Department at UERJ, not according to traditional servant–employer relations but on equal terms, as classmates. This in itself challenges many of the doom-mongering views about the divisive impact of quotas and affirmative action policies within Brazilian universities.

UERJ and its Law Department, I acknowledge, represent only a limited section of Brazilian society; consequently, these experiences cannot automatically be used to predict the success or failure of societies that have made racial and other social quotas an integral logic applicable to other spheres of social life. Nonetheless, the case study may enrich the debates about inequalities in Brazil in several ways. Firstly, analysing the dynamics generated by the implementation of certain policies in a specific urban context may encourage new, creative strategies for dealing with social inequalities on a larger scale. Secondly, the study of the UERJ case questions whether university (or education in general) should prioritise academic excellence and merit, or should also look towards social inclusiveness as a crucial goal. The role of teachers and other academic staff is in this sense essential, as many students and teachers suggested that certain pedagogical and socialising strategies used at university may positively or negatively affect the social inclusiveness of the learning collective.⁷³ Thirdly, this article adds some ethnographic elements to the debate about whether policy measures that address racial inequalities should be race-based or exclusively class-based. As Appiah and Gutmann argue, and my ethnography suggests, 'class' is not experienced in the same way by people of different colours.⁷⁴ If this is indeed the case, public policy should address class and race by looking at the relations between them, as well as the specificities of class and race variables, combining them in multi-sided and flexible ways according to the context of possible implementation and the intended aims.

⁷³ Nery stresses how a psychological approach through group activities encourages social interactions between students of different backgrounds – see Nery, 'Afetividade intergrupala'.

⁷⁴ Anthony Appiah and Amy Gutmann, *Color Conscious: The Political Morality of Race* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998).

Spanish and Portuguese abstracts

Spanish abstract. Este artículo etnográfico discute cómo la raza emerge entre los discursos de clase y espacio en la Universidad del Estado de Río de Janeiro (UERJ). Tras una decisión legal, se le pidió a este centro académico implementar una cuota racial para combatir la exclusión social y elevar el número de estudiantes ‘negros’ en la educación superior pública. Una cuestión crucial es saber si tales políticas sobre la raza ayudan a compensar las desigualdades sociales, o si de hecho incrementan la discriminación al cosificar las diferencias ‘raciales’ en Brasil. Sostengo que la diversidad social promovida por las cuotas en la UERJ muestra tensiones urbanas y dinámicas sociales desiguales que se vienen a reflejar al interior de la universidad. Sin embargo, ésta también revela senderos novedosos y positivos en donde ciertas políticas pueden negociar tales diferencias.

Spanish keywords: Brasil, relaciones de raza, acción afirmativa, educación superior, cuotas raciales, clase, desigualdades urbanas, espacio urbano

Portuguese abstract. Este artigo etnográfico discute como a raça emerge entre discursos classistas e de espaço na Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro (UERJ). Seguindo uma decisão judicial, a referida universidade foi obrigada a implementar cotas raciais para combater a exclusão social e aumentar o número de estudantes ‘negros’ na educação pública superior. Uma questão crucial é se tais políticas raciais contribuem para reduzir desigualdades sociais ou se elas na verdade aumentam a discriminação ao reificar diferenças ‘raciais’ no Brasil. Argumento que a diversidade social promovida pelas cotas na UERJ reforça certas tensões urbanas e dinâmicas desiguais que acabam se refletindo na universidade. Entretanto, caminhos novos e positivos também são revelados pelos quais diretrizes poderão negociar estes contrastes.

Portuguese keywords: Brasil, relações raciais, ação afirmativa, educação superior, cotas raciais, classe, desigualdade urbana, espaço urbano