YOUNG'S SOCIABILITY, COLOR, GENDER AND SEXUALITY ON THE CHARM'S BALL IN RIO DE JANEIRO

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ABSTRACT

The article analyzes the dynamics of social interaction among young people who attend the Charm´s balls in Rio de Janeiro, an night leisure environment characterized by the positive view of the black aesthetic. Based on ethnographic observation and on interviews with youth of diverse colors, we aim to understand the means of color and gender in the sexual and affective interactions of men and women. The findings indicate that prevails in the Charm´s balls an style of virile masculinity, which contrasts with other styles indentified in leisure spaces of youth sociability in Rio de Janeiro.

GENDERS RELATIONSHIP • RACIAL RELATIONSHIP • SEXUALITY

STUDIES FOCUSING ON THE DYNAMICS of youth socialization and culture in metropolitan contexts have focused on the importance of race/color in social interactions. Data shows that the impersonal spaces of the street, commercial establishments, and contacts with the police are areas where racial prejudice and discrimination are most visible, particularly affecting young *blacks, browns and Negroes (pretos, pardos*, *negros)*[1], often in the shape of violence (see ZALUAR, 1994; RAMOS, MUSUMECI, 2005; CECCHETTO, MONTEIRO, 2006). These findings, overall, show the persistence of racial discrimination in Brazilian social relations and highlight specificities of racism in the Brazilian situation[2]. This contrasts in some leisure spaces with the growing appreciation of black esthetics and the consumption of styles linked to American musical culture (see SANSONE, 1993; GIACOMINI, 2006), which represent a peaceful alternative for sociability, above all for young people from the poorer sections of urban centers.

To take this discussion deeper, this article[3] addresses forms of sociability among frequenters of Rio de Janeiro's so-called *bailes Charme*—literally 'Charm dances'—a type of nocturnal leisure activity that is perceived socially as a cultural space where a black esthetic is given positive values, allowing social recognition. We assume that there is a relationship between the dynamics of use and appropriation of these spaces and these symbolic and effective meanings of the interactions between those frequenting them. This study thus seeks to analyze the distinctive signals of color and gender in affective-sexual interactions among young people frequenting *bailes Charme cariocas* ('carioca' being the adjective meaning 'of Rio de Janeiro'). The reflection we propose uses the ethnographic observation of two spaces where such dances

1 Faced with the diversity of categories used in classifying color/race, the terms will be given in italics in this article, whether they have come from the quoted literature or from the self-categorizations of interviewees.

2 Relations between social class, color and social mobility have been discussed on the basis of sociological analyses of the indicators of schooling and professional training within the Brazilian population, as Ribeiro reflects (2009).

3 The study is part of a broader project entitled: Relations among "race", sexuality and gender in different local and national contexts, originally planned by Laura Moutinho, Omar Ribeiro Thomaz, Cathy Cohen, Simone Monteiro, Rafael Diaz and Elaine Salo. The study was carried out in nine centers: USP (São Paulo), CLAM/IMS/UERJ (Rio de Janeiro), CEBRAP (São Paulo), IOC/FIOCRUZ (Rio de Janeiro), SFSU/ CRGS (San Francisco),

are held, and in-depth interviews supplemented by a questionnaire without statistical value. Field work took place throughout 2006 and data analysis resulted from the information gathered from these different types of approach, based on a social-anthropological focus.

Analysis of interactions at the *bailes Charme* is underpinned, among other things, by George Simmel's concept of sociability (2006), which corresponds to carefree and relaxed ('ludic') autonomous forms of interaction that "take on their own existence" and become free of links with the contents of concrete reality. The notion of the circuit (MAGNANI, 2005) equally guides the discussion of the conception of sociability by emphasizing connections between the individual and physical spaces, without restricting itself to the individual, including the meanings constructed collectively in the interaction process. This analytical perspective was considered because in the circuit under analysis, meanings referring to color make up one of the explanatory dimensions of sociability that have scarcely been explored in classical studies on youth. We therefore believe we can push forwards with a reflection on the relations between color and gender based on the analysis of this circuit of sociability and leisure in the city of Rio de Janeiro.

The article is structured along three axes. The first entails methodological considerations of the study, followed by a description of the socio-economic profile of the universe studied. The second axis analyses what makes up the '*charmeiro*' style on the basis of the perceptions of frequenters. The third discusses the links between color and gender in affective-sexual interactions among the group surveyed.

REMARKS CONCERNING THE METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The region selected for the study was Madureira, a neighborhood on the outskirts of Rio de Janeiro (*subúrbio carioca*)[4] where music plays a core role as entertainment and cultural expression. Samba stands out owing to the historical importance of the samba schools in the neighborhood, as well as *jongo* (a popular manifestation bringing together music, dance and religion) and dances (*bailes*) playing *funk* and *charme*. Easy access thanks to railway lines and abundant alternative transportation attracts people from outlying cities and different regions of the state of Rio de Janeiro, above all because of the commerce in the neighborhood of Madureira[5]. Another feature of the region is the intense use of spaces such as city squares, streets and sidewalks as nighttime leisure areas, which is the decisive factor for young people with restricted purchasing power seeking affordable entertainment in urban public spaces, since their financial restrictions limit their access to certain establishments or nightclubs in the better-off regions of the city.

In the first phase of the survey, ethnographic observations were carried out in two places in Madureira where dances are held: the

Center for the Study of Race, Politics and Culture (Chicago), AGI/UCT (Cape Town), WITS and OUT (Johannesburg). The group of researchers were Laura Moutinho (overall coordination), Simone Monteiro (coordination in Rio de Janeiro), Júlio Simões (coordination in São Paulo), Elaine Salo (coordination in Cape Town), Brigitte Bagnol (coordination in Johannesburg), Cathy Cohen (coordination in Chicago) and Jessica Fields (coordination in São Francisco). The study is funded by the Ford Foundation and supported by CNPq.

4 The term *subúrbio* ("suburb") is used as a marker both of socio-economic status, and of lifestyle. The suburban *ethos* is thought to correspond to a valuing of face-to-face contact, neighborhood networks, affective blood kinship and the celebration of proximity (Heilborn, 1984).

5 From the perspective of Social Development Indicators (SDIs), Madureira has an index deemed low. SDIs use the smallest geographical unit, enabling identification and comparison of intra-urban differences in terms of such indicators as income, basic sanitation, schooling and quality of dwelling. The indices at the extremes – 0.854 and 0.277 (0= lowest score; 1= highest score) – belong respectively to the Lagoa and Grumari neighborhoods. The South Side of Rio de Janeiro, including the Barra da Tijuca area, has the city's best SDI results: over 0.640. The Madureira Administrative Region ranks 17th, with an index of 0.579 (Instituto Pereira Passos, Prefeitura da Cidade do Rio de Janeiro, 2008).

"Viaduto" ball and the "Portelinha" ball. The first used to be staged in a space under an elevated section that was used at weekends as a dance floor. Huge speakers would be set up, there would be a wide range of electronic equipment and stalls selling food and drink, catering to more than three thousand people, and charging five Reals to get in. One could find a more heterogeneous audience in this space, in terms of age and color, with people coming from all over the city.

The "Portelinha" ball more is much less well-organized, with a small mixing desk set up on the sidewalk outside a snack bar. This space – holding approximately 200 people – was the sidewalk of one of the neighborhood's busiest roads being used as a dance floor. The crowd frequenting this *baile* could be defined as more homogeneous than at the Viaduto in terms of age and style.

In the second stage of the study, 18 young people of both sexes, aged from 18 to 26, and heterogeneous in terms of color, were chosen; six in-depth interviews were carried out and 12 questionnaires were applied exploring the life histories of the individuals, focusing on socio-demographic data, family background, school and professional backgrounds, the dynamics of sociability, sexual and affective experiences, and any experience of social discrimination. The group was selected on the basis of a network of contacts built up during ethnographic fieldwork. In the present article we shall address data concerning color, gender, the dynamics of sociability, and affective-sexual interactions in these *bailes*; however, the names given are fictitious.

The group of participants in the study were mainly inhabitants of the city's North Side and the so-called Baixada Fluminense (Rio's low-lying hinterland) living with their birth families, declaring monthly incomes ranging from 1 to 4 minimum salaries. In terms of schooling, most had completed secondary school, an educational threshold mentioned as being superior to that of their parents. In the survey universe, it was found that young people who had already taken or were currently taking higher education, mainly in private establishments – only one was at a public, racial quota university – reconcile their studies with work, generally in administrative and/or operational areas (store assistants, administrative ancillary staff, managers of shops, and so on). While the increased schooling of these individuals suggests that the expansion of access to public education in Brazil has favored more recent generations, it cannot be seen as an element that assures quality training, a fundamental item for a good position in the job market in terms of occupational status and substantial income (VALLE SILVA, 2003; SPOSITO, 2005).

In terms of sexual orientation, participants in the study reported sexual experience with people of the opposite sex, and defined themselves as heterosexual. As to self-classification for color/race, the study recorded the use of the following categories – 'black/Negro' (*preto/negro*), 'brown' (*pardo/parda*), 'white' (*branco/branca*) as well as these expressions: *escurinho*, *negão*, *branquinho*, *clarinho*, (respectively: 'darkie', 'tall black guy', 'whitey',

'blondie') "branca por fora, preta por dentro" (i.e. "white on the outside, black on the inside"), *índio*, *mulato*, *marrom*, *morena-clara* and *moreno*, (respectively: 'Indian, mulatto, brown, light dark and dark') indicating the Brazilian population's use of a gradient of colors and the non-adoption of a fixed or bipolar system (*white* versus *black*) in classifying skin color (MAGGIE, 1996).

The field team comprised one senior researcher and social sciences students. This female team, of heterogeneous skin color, produced different reactions and responses during interactions in the field. Gender marks, for example, facilitated contact between researchers and interlocutors of both sexes, making the field work less formal. However, in some cases a clearly flirtatious atmosphere occurred when the responders were men. This counted as a piece of research data, insofar as participatory observation mainly began in this way. It is worth noting that when two of the researchers defined themselves as mixed-race (*mestiças*) in the field, some women were surprised. Especially among those who were 'brown' or 'mixed-race' (*pardas/mestiças*) and took positions against the more positive perspective of miscegenation (*mestiçagem*), using a more polarized racial classification. What we heard was: "there is no such thing as the color brown (*parda*), we are black in fact". This episode illustrates one aspect we observed during the ethnographic phase, related to the prestige that black (*preta/negra*) women acquired in this context.

The contextual dimension of color classification may also be observed in conversations with dance-goers about the color of their partners and the other participants, which was an occasion when the term 'black' was used (*preto/preta*). Despite being considered an offensive term in daily life, as several Brazilian racial studies have described (HASENBALG, 1979; FAZZI, 2006), this word was used as positive praise among *habitués*[6] of the space in question. Variations in the uses and appropriations of color/racial categories according to the situational contexts shows how important it is to make explicit in the study methodology how such classifications are collected and interpreted.

THE BAILE CHARME: RHYTHM, STYLE AND PEACEFUL SOCIABILITY

Since the 1980s, in the courts of samba schools, on the streets and below elevated sections, the *Baile Charme* circuit of Rio de Janeiro's North Side has brought together a large number of people who enjoy a specific type of American music that some define as *black music*[7]. The invention of *Charme* as a musical genre is ascribed to a disco owner who used to save the last minutes of dances for the audience to dance more slowly, producing an atmosphere more conducive to couples getting together in the city's clubs.

Esthetically and musically, the *baile Charme* comes close to *Soul*[8] dances, seen as a movement that changed the values and behaviors of a

6 Variability in color classification was noted in another sociability circuit in the same geographical region typically frequented by young people who defined themselves as homosexual, where the categories *preto/negro* were rejected by them.

7 There are controversies about *black music* as a musical style. As Baldelli (2000) notes in a study on hip hop parties in Rio de Janeiro, there is no way to classify a type of music by ethnicity, although the term is valid 'emically'.

8 *Soul* is the result of a long process in American musical history beginning in the 1930s and 1940s, when waves of blacks from the South migrated to the major urban centers of the North. Country music, the *blues* sung in the working fields, was brought to the cities, electrified, and gave rise to *rhythm and blues*. The fusion of *rhythm and blues* with black Protestant music—gospel—gave rise to *soul*, the most successful rhythm of all the "blends", and which spread around the world as the soundtrack to the American civil rights movement. After a process of commercialization, *soul music* ceased to actually express revolutionary ideas (see Vianna, 1988).

whole generation of young Rio blacks (MONTEIRO, 1991). In the 1970s, *Soul* was a political and cultural project in the opinion of young people, affirming blackness. At that time, people were keen to incorporate the slogan *black is beautiful*, launched by the American black movement, so as to produce a counter-hegemonic register within the color black (GIACOMINI, 2006). On the walls of *carioca* clubs where these balls took place, phrases and photos of the participants themselves were projected alongside those of Brazilian and international black actors and political leaders, seen as icons in terms of a new model for racial positioning to be followed by young people. The high point of *Soul* dances were the "*Shaft*" nights[9], where dancers were invited to feel and celebrate the magic produced by cohesion between partners.

However, the style of the Charmeiros does not exactly correspond to the exaltation of certain diacritical symbols, which captured the essence of the Soul look at other moments, such as the clothes they wore (tight shirts and trousers, and leather shoes) and the men's 'Afro' hairstyle (called *black power* in Brazil), which sought to establish a connection with American blacks. This Soul format was a self-presentation typical of the militant vanguard of the black movement at a time when it exalted a feeling of belonging to a broader black community. Artists like Steve Wonder, Barry White, Ray Charles, and James Brown conveyed the sentiment of a *black* soul (ver GIACOMINI, 2006, p. 203).

Today's *bailes Charme* therefore have a dynamic that differs in certain aspects from patterns characterizing *Soul*. The men dress more casually, often sporting shaved heads, and what the women wear today is far from formal, clad in tight clothes and showing their legs. There are several types of hairstyle including straight hair (resulting from chemical treatments) and more sophisticated Afro hairstyles. One might say that the black esthetic, or blackness per se, is positively promoted at Charme, although most of the frequenters dissociate leisure from the political and militant component that was present in the case of the *soul* movement.

More recently, the young *hip hop* subculture, whose lyrics explore social criticism, is increasingly present on the *Charme* circuit. Songs by 'carioca' rappers MV Bill, Marcelo D2 and the São Paulo group Racionais M.C. are iconic in today's hip-hop scene. The emergence of *hip hop* revitalized the interactional dynamic of the balls, introducing a faster rhythm and individualized choreography. As we saw during our ethnography, *hip hop* attracts an increasingly young audience from several areas of the city, including white people, who are made welcome at this place, although representing a clear minority in that territory.

The blending and sharing of these rhythms and styles has been noticed in the case of the Viaduto ball, whereas at Portelinha it is still melodic music and collective choreography that dominates, and this is what some people like to call the "genuine" *Charme* (OLIVEIRA, 2007). We should add that the view of authenticity at *Charme* is also linked to the presence of old-school frequenters (*charmeiros da antiga*) who stand out

9 *Shaft* was a black cop in a television series, the stereotype of the virile hero (Giacomini, 2006).

at these traditional balls. On these occasions people stand around in a circle, in the midst of which the dancers are urged on by the audience to execute the spins and pirouettes typical of the *Soul*/Charme choreography. The veterans' performance enables Charme to reinforce bonds of kinship, symbolizing a meeting of generations: parents and uncles and aunts are mentioned with affection by children and nephews and nieces, as role models to be followed in terms of leisure and sociability. In this process the old and the new are blended, in other words traditional formats with the values of a global society, in terms of styles and identities.

Additionally, whatever the context, dancing is the first and foremost activity for most of those frequenting *bailes Charme*, and has specific meanings and rules. It is a relaxed and carefree form of social interaction and its operation connects to a classification scheme, as mediation in courtship rituals. Being a good dancer is therefore a highly valued attribute, especially among men. However, the ability must be exercised in a domain where emotions are controlled, and explicitly eroticized exhibitions must be avoided: they are seen as morally unsuitable to that setting.

In this, it can be seen that the Charmeiro audience does not share its domains with those who appreciate *funk.* In all the statements made in this survey there is an overt or veiled criticism of *funk.* Beginning with the rapid rhythm, taking in the violence associated with what used to be known as 'fighting dances' or *bailes de briga*, and including the strong erotic appeal in present-day compositions, which are also known as porno-*funk*[10]. The way in which *funk* is used as a point of contrast to the Charme circuit is clear in the testimony of one young university student from Caxias, a region under the violent control of militias. In his opinion, there are very few leisure spaces for people like himself who do not like *funk*. He shows his preference for Charme on account of its different rhythm and the type of sociability occurring there:

> I met a guy, he must have been in his early thirties, and he said: "man, when I was young that's where I used to go". So I tried it out, I saw what the *baile Charme* was all about, I liked it, and now you'll always find me there. Whenever I can, I go there. It's a relaxing place. Where I live there is this nearby square which is absolutely full but they don't play *black* music, just *funk*, *funk* all the time (SOLANO, BLACK, 21)

The keyword in defining the ball is 'tranquility' and violence is defined as an anomic state, an event that is foreign to the moral universe of the Charme space. The ball, in the dominant discourse, is a space devoted to enjoyment and is set apart from the typical 'trouble' attributed to *funk*. This view blends in with the feeling of shared familiarity in that territory, which is seen as a carefree space, suitable for friendship and fun, as the following statement emphasizes:

10 According to Cecchetto and Farias (2002), the emergence of the porno-*funk* style in dances intensified the view of *funk* as a morally decadent and devalued setting.

> You've got this friendship at Charme, this connection, you don't have that readiness to start a fight just because someone steps on your toes, know what I mean? OK, there are groups, there's rivalry, but nothing serious, and that's what makes it a good place, you feel safer there. (GIL, WHITE, 18)

In several accounts, the ball is mentioned as an extension of the home, where certain relationships that prevail in the domestic space are reproduced. As one responder puts it: "everyone is like cousins here, everybody knows everybody else". Apart from emphasizing their admiration of this familiarity, interviewees acknowledge that Charme is an affordable type of leisure when compared to places of entertainment in the south side of Rio de Janeiro, which are too expensive for most of the young *carioca* suburbanites. As another young man argues about the atmosphere at Portelinha: "the Madureira Charme is the best place. You have everything that they have in the South side right here. Why go anywhere else? Just to pay more and end up a long way away from home? The people here are like me: they're not stuck up. Everyone knows everybody else here, you can chill". In this narrative, the *ethos* of proximity is evoked to describe a type of interaction that is nurtured in that setting, and seen as specific to the location[11]. This aspect is present in several statements, and shows the singularity of the *baile Charme* as a collective experience combining a relaxed atmosphere and a welcome among relatively unknown peers in a public space.

Nonetheless there are specific rules and a specific logic to be followed, as has been mentioned. Observance of local norms is the necessary support in the process of social distinction for *charmeiros*. There is no formal ban on the presence of other groups. But there is a set of tacit standards and rules of etiquette, acknowledged and accepted as specific to that space. This recalls the arguments of Bourdieu (1998) about the conception of physical space as *locus* of social differentiation and helps think through the dimensions of the space as a significant socio-cultural yardstick for individuals. The following statement illustrates this movement toward demarcation of identity, based on the socio-educational differences and the clothing of the participants:

> What I like at Charme is that you get another type of person, they dress better, their conversation is better, they know more, study more, they are a better social class. I think their clothes are... I'm not going to say square... their clothes are smarter than what people wear at *pagode* and *funk*. The conversations [at Charme] are different, it's other people with a better social level. *Charmeiros* are, sort of, classier when they speak and act. (LIS, BLACK, 26)

11 As indicated in footnote 4, the perception of differences between patterns of sociability among the groups is widespread in everyday Rio life, which emphasizes that the traditional Brazilian culture of sympathy, hospitality and *warm* relations remains strong in the suburbs, as opposed to a more individualistic stance among the inhabitants of the city's South Side (see Heilborn, 1984).

Using the category 'class' as refinement helps reflect on strategies for social differentiation actuated by Charme fans to ensure their symbolic capital. The distinction is produced both in relation to groups deemed socially distant ('stuck up'), and in relation to peers belonging to the same social group, which bears out what Machado (1996) says about the construction of the *carioca charmeiro* identity. Her ethnographic study shows that the *charmeiros*' affirmation of identity was in order to demarcate a style adopted by *blacks* who possessed a certain status as good-looking, well-dressed, well-educated people from the suburbs. Within this setting one may also suggest emphasis on the deletion of marks seen as stigmatic and projected onto *blacks*. As Nogueira (1998) noted in his classic study, when skin color is a stigma, as in the case of brand prejudice, manipulation of appearance is a compensation mechanism that seeks to offset or toned down negative elements ascribed to the fact of having black skin[12].

More explicitly, the color of the people going to the ball emerges as a marker of difference to a young person who also evokes a generational reference:

> What strikes you at Charme is the quality of the people, that is, those who share my skin color, black people. I see myself as, I suppose, different, I really like going to places where there are black people, music with black roots. My father was a *charmeiro*, actually he was the person who brought me to Charme. (ELIAS, BLACK, 26)

It could be said that Charme is experienced as a smooth area, *suave*, as Sansone (1993; 2004) puts it, to describe social domains where the color black does not represent the risk of discrimination for individuals with dark skin. Although most of the people at these balls are *blacks*/*Negroes*, the setting is not understood by frequenters as a space exclusively for *black* leisure or for *blacks*, along the lines of a club formed for groups of a given skin color. In fact, most of the statements underscore how democratic the ball is, how everyone has access to such dances and can move freely in them, and this has to do with the inclusive ethos of the place.

In general any idea of racial segregation is rejected. This does not mean that color, in the baile Charme, is not important in shaping frequenters' subjectivities, since in this context the color *black* is uniform, which hardly ever happens in other leisure spaces such as *funk* and samba. This feature suggests configurations challenging the view that Brazil lacks homogeneous leisure spaces in terms of color/race.

The dimension of color in relation to the construction of social identities was observed in one young person's statement, a volunteer working in the University Entrance Exam Program for Blacks and the Needy (*Programa de Vestibular para Negros e Carentes*):

12
This type of strategy, as shown in the above mentioned study by Sonia Giacomini (2006) was used by black middle-class families in Rio de Janeiro, insofar as the economic and educational position they had achieved was not sufficient to win them acceptance to the hierarchical position to which they aspired, in the context of sociability and leisure.

> So talking about race today, owing to everything I've lived through, I declare myself black. I think that some years ago I would not have recognized myself as such, people would call me *moreno*, or I don't know, Indian... But today I see myself as black. Well, the color issue, I don't think I'm that white, that *moreno* thing, the hair... perhaps I should exploit this, this *moreno* thing, I don't know, but I find it difficult to talk about race in Brazil. I am not a negro, but, man, I can identify, there's the historical issue, the same stuff, man, my friends, you know... Those people who are called *neguinho* and *negão*, I think I'm ... man, I'm one of them, I'm black, I see myself as black... I guess I can't explain it properly. (SOLANO, 21)

This statement reveals changes in self-classification of color that can occur over the course of a person's lifetime because of situational factors. It might be said that one of the elements that influences these variations has to do with the incorporation of the discourse of policies for the affirmation of social identities. In other words, the statement above suggests the possibility of appropriating discourses that affirm a racial identity, that are present in the black social movement and in government policies hinging upon racial classifications (MAIO, MONTEIRO, 2005). These discourses have been visible in Brazil through coverage in the media of cases of racism in different segments of society, and of the public debate on racial social policies, such as a quota system for black students that some Brazilian universities have adopted in recent years.

Although social identities are founded on attributes that form frontiers, such as language, religion, origin, sexual orientation, and ethnic-cultural or phenotypical marks such as skin color, the statement above shows how identity processes are dynamic and contextual. In other words, identity processes stem from a social construction bringing together groups around given features coming out of a certain social anchor or a project, but they may undergo change over the course of the trajectories of individuals owing to a range of factors (VELHO, 1994; BAUMANN, 2005).

Given the goals of the present study, it is worth pointing out that demarcation of social identities may on the one hand be an element of cohesion of a group, but may on the other hand likewise contribute to the reinforcement of stereotypes, legitimizing patterns that are equivalent to the rhetoric that treats identity as fixed and takes it for granted. Thus, for example, the representation of the *baile Charme* as the locus of peaceful sociability through dance, practiced by good-looking, refined and sensual blacks, may simply lead to reiteration of the association between blackness and sexuality. This is clear in statements made by ball-goers of a range of colors about affective-sexual interactions, as will be discussed below.

COLOR AND AFFECTIVE-SEXUAL INTERACTIONS AT THE BALLS

If the responders share a single perception of the ball as a moment for meeting friends, flirting and having peaceful fun, they differ when talking about the advantages and disadvantages of color in affective-sexual encounters. One young black man refers to the *baile* as a collective experience which is extremely positive for the self-image of black people, expressed by the notion of black pride:

> At the *baile Charme*, where you get a large number of black people together, everyone's relaxed. You can see that everyone in the place is proud of being black. [How can you see that?] The way they dress, the way they look at each other. Even the way you notice someone else, like, 'that guy over there is looking good', you can see it, that's why I like it. I like the rhythm, I like black music. I'm not ashamed of being black, I'm really proud of it, I really like being black. Without prejudice, I'm not prejudiced, but I really like it, I'm really proud. When we are just talking and messing around, normally, we say: "Black guys... There are women who really prefer blacks". (ELIAS, BLACK, 26)

Once again, the difference is translated as a stance of investing in the polished, well-turned out look of the black *charmeiro*. In the case of this young man, this feeling is also associated with a condition that in his view arouses women's erotic interest: being a 'tall black guy' (*negão*). This category is particularly suited for reflection on representations of the virile masculinity of black men, which recurs both in men's and in women's statements. The power of these representations has been discussed by Moutinho (2004, p. 353) in a study of the narratives associated with affective-sexual 'inter-racial' relations in Brazil and South Africa. In the perspective put forward by this author, what stands out is the profusion of aesthetic and virile metaphors about the *black* man, whose sexual desire and performance as a partner is deemed far superior to that of the *white* man, a figure nearly always described in his 'opacity' or, so to speak, lack of eroticism.

A white informant stressed her taste for black men, adding to their attraction by the sensual atmosphere of the Viaduto *baile*. However, the speakers insisted on a distinction between sensuality and eroticism at the baile Charme:

> Viaduto is great in every way. The music is great, the people. There are so many beautiful black guys. I love black men, they're beautiful, I think their color is the most beautiful thing. Ever since

> I was young I've loved them, I've only ever had black boyfriends; I think it's beautiful. My last boyfriend was *negão, negão, negão*. But it's not sex appeal, a person dancing, the dance is sensual, it's not erotic, it's sensual. (CAREN, 24)

The same young woman, soon afterwards, used the expression *amarela-genética* ('genetically yellow'—a variation on the category white that is little referred to in the literature), to reinforce her predilection for what she calls black culture, although in the process she plays down the weight of color:

> I am genetically yellow, because, inside, I think I'm black, I like everything about black culture, Afro culture, I like braided hair, I like dating black guys, I like *hip hop*, I like the type of clothes the girls wear, I think it's beautiful. [...] So I say I am only white genetically; and that inside I'm black. People say, "wow, you like those huge black guys"... Sometimes I look at a guy in the street, he doesn't look back. Perhaps that's not because he doesn't think I'm pretty, perhaps he thinks: "she can't possibly be looking at me". You know, I think that's how they feel? I think that skin color is simply a detail, just a detail...

The speaker's use of genetics to justify a supposed contradiction between phenotypical features ("I'm white") and her taste for "black culture" may partly be attributed to the visibility of genetic studies, as analyzed by Santos et al. (2009). It is worth pointing out that the strategy of racial reclassification, used by the speaker in her self-presentation, may be understood as a way of struggling against the limits of the *white*-woman configuration in the Charme space, insofar as the make up of loving partnerships is concerned. It is also striking that in justifying black men's avoidance of her, this speaker mentions the issue of assumption of prejudice among black people, which has already been discussed in the literature on racial prejudice in Brazil (FRY, 2005; TELLES, 2003).

Another point of view in light of the preponderance of black people in the Charme ball was given by a 'brown' (*parda*) woman who expresses a certain discomfort with the configuration of the space.

> At Viaduto, everyone there, what you see is that most of them are colored, the color black, you know, there are no whites, unlike when you go to a beach. Dark-skinned people frequent Charme, but I don't think they should do like that, you know, that place is only for colored people, I don't think it should be like that. But anyway the vast majority are black, but when you go to a beach, it's not

> only blacks on the beach, there are a lot of white people, like, the beaches aren't only for white people, but it's visible there. (FERGIE, BROWN/PARDA, 21)

This young woman recognizes the privileged position held by black people at Charme: "They rule there, they are kings", and she reveals her current involvement with "a dark person". However, by contrasting the ball with the beach, she regrets the homogeneity of the *baile Charme*, and enunciates the usual discourse that the beach is a democratic type of leisure space[13] and therefore prone to the 'mingling' of people of different colors, without the distinction of a group.

It it should be pointed out that in the narratives of all the speakers, there was a perception that the negative signals often associated with the color black are inverted in the *baile Charme* space. It is as if the responders were recording that in other contexts the color black is a discrimination factor, whereas in the baile Charme it emerges as a valued attribute. Such was the perception of a *black* woman, a small entrepreneur. Upon describing her preference for black men, she mentions prejudice as a factor discouraging interaction with white men:

> Personally I like blacks; I think black guys, the way they touch, the way they relate to you, the way they charm a woman, is all different from white men. [Have you ever dated white men?] Yes. Although in our case we were a white man and a black woman, I don't know if it only happened this way with me, it was very loving, but there wasn't that chemistry, whereas with the black guy [...] And also in relation to the family, I think since there's still a lot of prejudice, when you start dating a white person, when he introduces you to his family it's like, wow, you're dating a black woman! His mother hated me because I was black. It would have been all right for me to be his maid, but not his wife. (LIS, BLACK, 26)

The speaker's discomfort shows how interracial couples may have negative status in the private setting of family and conjugal relations. Variations in the role of color in interactions are clear in the accounts of young white people of both sexes. They can freely frequent the bailes Charme and feel welcomed by peers of the same age bracket and youth style, but they acknowledge the weight of color in affective-sexual interactions, as this statement from a young white man who goes to Viaduto shows. In his view, the women prefer black men because of their sexual performance. His statement reproduces the conventions and expectations of virility associated with black men: "all the women, they say they prefer black men because of the size of their sexual organs".

13 For an interesting discussion on color and social classification in the city of Rio de Janeiro, against a backdrop of racial relations on the city's beaches, see Farias (2006).

It is worth reflecting on this young man's statement because it is relatively exceptional. Gil is the adopted son of a black couple. The interviewee says the uses the expression "I was born in the morning" whenever he is faced with prejudiced questions about his parents' color, as often happened in his childhood. He went out of his way to stress that he has had black friends ever since. However, his statement does not mention any discrimination for being white in the *baile Charme*. Gil comments on how he is made welcome in this space:

> [At Viaduto, do you ever feel discriminated against because you're white?] No, no, there is no kind of discrimination there. [And do the blacks treat you differently because you're white?] No, there it's... different from what you see in the street, know what I mean? For example, the first day I went, I didn't know anybody, and everybody spoke to me. I showed up, I didn't know anybody, I was in a group of five people, myself and four friends, out of the blue, and three black kids showed up and started talking to us, just throwing some ideas around, working on a conversation, building that friendship. I thought that was cool, cool, the guys here are different from in other places! It's cool here, it's the best place to make friends.

In this statement, male friendship stands out as making all the difference at the *baile Charme*. What one can see from this narrative is that men of different color get along without major conflict, when it comes to following the rituals of male (homo)sociability, although hierarchy soon appears when talking about the roles people play in the ball itself. In other words, that black men, who outnumber other races, stand out because of their dancing ability in the *charme* setting. Here, bodily performance acquires importance in affective-sexual interactions, in other words excellent dancers are held to be a model of masculinity envied in this configuration as a mark of distinction and prestige[14].

FINAL REMARKS

The data we have analyzed showed that the *baile Charme* is, par excellence, a moment of sociability for young men and women, owing to the positive effects of closeness among couples, the relaxed carefree atmosphere and peaceful coexistence, and there are constant references to the unique setting of this party in the collective life and in the subjectivity of these individuals. In this regard, it can be seen that adherence to the *charmeiro* style by different generations and people of different color, makes this a real alternative for youth interaction in the city, and an opportunity to meet friends and form affective and sexual partnerships. We perceived, in several statements, this need to get away from stereotypes associated

14 With regard to social representations of the female universe, ethnographic observations show that in the context of the *baile Charme*, gender patterns are brought up to date regarding women being sensual and not too forward, in contrast to the characteristic eroticism of *funk*.

with followers of styles deemed of low value from a moral, behavioral and stylistic point of view, above all *funk*.

The *baile Charme* contrasts still more with other domains such as the impersonal spaces of the street, and commercial establishments, where color is still a barrier to circulation, above all for young black men who have to cope with prejudiced looks of avoidance, and even violent treatment by private security workers and police, as described in a previous study (CECCHETTO, MONTEIRO, 2006). The *baile* also seems to function as a setting bringing together men and women of different color, a counter-position to the still-existing barriers to the formation of conjugal partnerships, deemed a 'hard' area for so-called inter-racial relationships.

However, one may infer that the *charmeiro* style has a direct link to the values of the surrounding society, in a dialog with global youth fashion, particularly that of American blacks, taking it as a benchmark to which it seeks to approximate. Simultaneously, the style actuates elements that stand out because of the originality of the *baile Charme carioca*: an interaction context hinging upon the relaxed and carefree aspect of the dance and of flirtation.

It would be reductionist to speak of the *baile Charme* merely as a space for relaxation, free of material contents, as Simmel's definition of sociability prescribes. One can say that pure enjoyment of the encounter, making the essence of symbolic life, in the case of the group we have studied, emerges interlinked with affirmation of black aesthetics. Although the *baile* does not present directly and explicitly a proposal for political practice, its frequenters devise and exhibit signals that allow recognition and establish marks of distinction by other means. The baile Charme is therefore dense in meanings in the demarcation of social identities, allowing another type of positioning in the interplay of current racial relations.

Analysis of the interactions of those going to the *baile Charme* shows how differences and social hierarchies are updated in at least two directions. On the one hand, there is much to say about the importance of these symbols of so-called black culture, above all American black culture, as indicated by Sansone (1998; 2004), who has studied transformations in the relations between color and youth in some Brazilian and European cities over the last 20 years. The author believes that the consumption of global styles in fashion and music is an opportunity for young black people locally to re-signify the difference. Likewise, Gilroy (2001), a British researcher of black youth, has argued that transnational benchmarks that have developed in the modern age are core factors for understanding the outlines that so-called blackness has assumed in terms of being a cultural and political project. For these authors, such global configurations are responsible for the growing change in the value signal of color/race among present generations of blacks in several countries.

On the other hand, sexuality-related differences in gender and color have been hierarchized. One may say that some stereotyped patterns relating to the sexual potency of black men have been updated, both in female and in male narratives. However, it must be pointed out that the interactional dynamics of the *baile Charme* are closely linked to a particular expression of masculinity. In the setting of the baile Charme, men are normally acknowledged and valued as creators of a prestigious style of masculinity, removed from the aggressiveness and sexual behavior of followers of other youth styles, such as frequenters of *bailes funk* and *pagodeiros*. Undoubtedly, a specific construction of masculinity interlinked with color and bodily performance is made dynamic in the context of encounters in this circuit. Such images certainly bring a reductionist view of the hypersexuality of black men, based on conceptions that fix desire and sexuality in the domain of taken-for-granted attributes, perpetuating hierarchies and forms of domination, including violent ones. However, one essential point is that black men are not passive faced with this standardization of their masculinity. They devise alternative discourses, by means of which they manipulate and invert stereotypes that they would otherwise completely reject. It is no accident that black youth styles are increasingly admired and imitated by non-black youths in a range of countries including Brazil.

The construction of the male *charmeiro* style may be understood as a way of dealing with racial and gender stereotypes, based on educational distinction, elegance and refinement—attributes that in other contexts would be deemed feminizing. To sum up, a unique notion of virile masculinity prevails in the *baile Charme carioca*, contrasting with competitive and aggressive forms found in other leisure spaces and youth sociability settings in Rio de Janeiro.

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Received: DECEMBER 2010 | **Approved for publication:** JANUARY 2012