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Becoming Nordic in Brazil: Whiteness and Icelandic Heritage in Brazilian Identity Making

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In this article, we focus on whiteness as an historically shifting phenomenon by analysing Brazilian recent emphasis on Icelandic ancestry, demonstrating the intersection of whiteness, class and ethnicity. A small group of Icelanders were among the millions migrating to Brazil around the latter half of the nineteenth century. The Icelandic migrants did not emphasise their Icelandic identity but affiliated themselves with Germans and other favoured immigrant groups. More than 130 years later, a group of Brazilians of Icelandic descent founded the Iceland Brazil Association to celebrate the Icelandic part of their ancestry. Since then, both their membership and interest in Iceland have grown. We ask how this emphasis on Icelandic ancestry intersects with an increased reification of Icelandic identity as 'white' identity. The discussion shows that the emphasis on Icelandic ethnic markers is new in Brazil and needs to be understood within the theorisation of Brazilian national and racialised identity.

Keywords: Nordic; Brazilian; Whiteness; Heritage movement; Migration

I. Introduction

It is widely recognised that notions of race intersect with the ideas of gender and class (Crenshaw 1989) and that racism consists not only of beliefs in racial hierarchies but also of historically constituted systems of structural discrimination and privilege (Bonilla-Silva & Tyrone 2000). Theorising racism continues, however, to be a challenging task (Grosfoguel, Oso & Christou 2015). In the last decades, many scholars have asked for a more nuanced sense of racialisation, in particular for moving beyond the black and white binary that strongly characterised US scholarship on racism for a long time. Scholars have analysed how notions of whiteness take shape in the European context (Garner 2010; Loftsdóttir 2014; Ponzanesi & Blaagaard 2011), as well as in situational contexts in the Americas (Hartigan 1999; Wade 2010). In relation to Brazil, scholars have stressed the need to analyse more deeply the intersection of the ideas of whiteness with nationalistic understandings of Brazilian identity of mixture and

the role of class in such conceptions (Turner 2014a; Turner 2014b), with discourses on race in Brazil constituting an important part of 'the politics of nation-building' (Fry 2000: 85).

In this article, we seek to contribute a nuanced and historically grounded perspective on whiteness by stressing that, even though some groups can more easily claim whiteness, whiteness has to be recognised as a historically shifting and unstable phenomenon. We analyse this through contrasting contemporary and historical meanings of Icelandic ancestry in Brazil, showing how whiteness has intersected at different times with class and ethnicity, and how certain groups – in this case Icelanders – can move closer or further away from being associated with whiteness depending on the historical context.

In 1863 and 1873, two small groups of Icelanders migrated from Iceland to Brazil. They were not followed by other groups in Iceland in the nineteenth century, and for over a hundred years, these Icelandic immigrants neither made serious efforts to celebrate their Icelandic ancestry in Brazil nor did they attempt to create a cohesive community that would foster a sense of shared ancestral unity. At around the turn of a new millennium, however, Icelandic ancestry became important to a number of individuals in Brazil (Eypórsdóttir & Loftsdóttir 2016), reflected in the establishment of Icelandic heritage movement in 1996. The interest in Icelandic ancestry started snowballing after a Brazilian of Icelandic descent began gathering those seeing themselves as descended by Icelandic settlers, as well as arranging meetings on regular occasions. Our goal here is to understand how identification with a certain ancestry in Brazil is shaped by the racialised ideas of Brazilian national identity that intersect with class, as well as highlighting how this emphasis on Icelandic ancestry connects with a recent reification of Icelandic and Nordic identities as 'white' (Hübinette & Lundström 2014; Loftsdóttir 2019).

Although this group studied here stresses Icelandic ancestry through a heritage movement, we follow scholars who see heritage as a process that is actively made rather than found (see f.e. Kirshenblatt-Gimlett 1995), meaning that heritage is not necessarily passed on but made meaningful within particular circumstances. In this case, such understanding is even more acute when considering that historically there has been no tangible heritage of Icelandic settlers in Brazil. The making of heritage in this movement is thus strongly clustered around claims to common ancestry, which intersects with the ideas of race and class (see also Eypórsdóttir & Loftsdóttir 2016). Heritage movements in general revolve around interests and understandings rooted in the present (MacDonald 2013). One of the reasons for the appearance of this particular heritage movement is that individuals within different national contexts are increasingly a part of the same global mediascape (Appadurai 1991), where race becomes enacted through different media stories in the present (Loftsdóttir 2014).

Our discussion shows how one aspect of Brazilian discussions of race engages with globalised discourses of nation branding, and how particular nationalities are seen as embodying whiteness (see also Brah 2000: 281; Loftsdóttir 2017). Scholars stress that the relationship between the concepts of race and ethnicity is complex (Bulmer & Solomos 1998), and our article likewise warns against the reification of whiteness. We stress that whiteness intersects with other dimensions of identity, where the ideas of race, nation and ethnicity are in constant 'flux' (Bulmer & Solomos 1998: 824).

After explaining the methodology, we start by briefly sketching current and past discourses of race in Brazil and then move to our specific case study. We give a brief background of Icelandic migration to Brazil in the mid-nineteenth century, stressing Iceland's weak geopolitical position at the time. The discussion then focuses on the creation of the Icelandic heritage movement in Brazil and how it reflects the specific ideas of race and class. The emphasis on identification with Icelandic ethnic markers is new in Brazil and needs to be studied within the framework of Brazilian national and racialised identity but also more globally in terms of exposure of Iceland as a white and exciting country.

II. Methodology

The data utilised for this article is based on ethnographic fieldwork in Brazil by the second author. The fieldwork period lasted from December 2011 until January 2012, and from July until September 2014. As a part of the fieldwork, historically important locations of Icelandic settlements in Brazil were visited, and considerable time was spent with research interlocutors. A total of 30 semi-structured interviews were taken with 36 Brazilians (19 women and 17 men) of Icelandic descent, aged 18–98 years old. The majority of the participants are classified as part of the upper middle class, with some being part of the upper class, thus having high status in their society. Fewer of the individuals interviewed belonged to the lower middle class. All of the interviewees had previous knowledge about their Icelandic ancestral past, but their level of interest and knowledge of their Icelandic ancestral background differed quite a lot.

Finally, research material was also collected through historical sources in both Iceland and Brazil. These include articles and published letters from Icelandic migrants in Brazil in Icelandic nineteenth-century periodicals. While these are not referred to directly in this article, they still inform our analysis of the subject matter.

III. Racism in Brazil and Beyond

Bourdieu and Wacquant (1999) have claimed that 'the American tradition arbitrarily superimposes on an infinitely more complex social reality a rigid dichotomy between whites and blacks' (p. 44). They ask how this dichotomy is imposed on countries where the principle divisions of ethnic differences are different from the United States (p. 44). Stressing also the hegemony of US scholars in analysing race, Wade (2012) points out that although there is an extensive scholarly analysis where racism and blackness in Brazil are compared to those of the United States, Brazil is much less frequently contextualised than other Latin American countries (ibid 2012: 35). As stated earlier, within European scholarship on race, scholars have also questioned the predominance of the US black vs. US white model, such as through claims that racialisation takes place not only in terms of the opposition of black and white but also strongly through association with other concepts such as civilisation and modernity (Ponzanesi & Blaagaard 2011: 6). Whiteness can be seen as a 'floating concept' (Essed & Trienekens 2008: 68) that engages strongly with the ideas of progress and civilisation.

Scholars' calls for a more nuanced analysis of whiteness in Europe require positioning whiteness as distinct within particular histories while engaging with global images and structures of power in which racism is embedded (Garner 2010: 19; Loftsdóttir 2014). Pinho's work (2009: 42) similarly shows that the European ideas of scientific racism seated in eugenics and social Darwinism were certainly imported into Brazil, where they were, as elsewhere, adapted and reformulated. We find it important to recognise that placing an emphasis on the ideas of blackness and race in a particular context, which can be different from the United States, does not imply that racism is non-existent. Such emphasis does, however, foreground a need to ethnographically analyse how race is produced historically within localised contexts and to show how global inequalities are made meaningful and reproduced (see also Hartigan 1999: 4).

Analysis of racism in Brazil has, for decades, been entangled with disputes about theorising racism in general. Until the 1940s, Brazil was celebrated both within Brazil and elsewhere as a 'racial democracy' characterised by tolerance and harmony between people of diverse colours and races (Fry 2000: 90). This emphasis on racial mixing, appearing in particular after 1920, was incorporated into the ideas of Brazilian racial exceptionalism where no racial inequalities existed (Pravaz 2003). After the Second World War, UNESCO funded a pilot project that showed that, despite the ideas of racial democracy, racial discrimination existed in various sectors of the Brazilian society (Fry 2000).

According to Fry (2000), this research did not necessarily deny the importance of the myth of the racial democracy but revealed an existing tension between the idea of a racial democracy and Brazilian-style racism (Fry 2000: 91). The existence of racial inequality in Brazil is reflected in statistics that showed, for example, a 30% higher mortality rate and 50% higher illiteracy among African-Brazilians in the 1990s. Only 13.6% of this group completed high school and their income was only 44.1% of what white Brazilians earned (Willson 2010). The new Brazilian constitution banned racial discrimination in 1988 (Telles 2004).

One key component of nation-building in Brazil has been the idea of racial mixedness (Turner 2014a). This implies different concepts of racialised bodies from the United States, where the idea of one drop (i.e. that one drop of so called black blood would make a person black) revolved both around the ideas of purity of the white race and of stark a binary between black and white (Khanna 2010; Baptist 2016). More African slaves were brought to Brazil than any other country during the trans-Atlantic slave trade (Rout 1976). They were forcefully placed alongside indigenous populations who were enslaved by Europeans in the 1500s, when the first Portuguese colonists settled on Brazil's north coast. Dávila's (2003) research on education in Brazil in the beginning of the twentieth century shows whiteness as intrinsic to understanding Brazilian identity at the time, when whiteness was extensively integrated with ideas about Brazil's modernisation and future progress.

After the abolition of slavery in 1888, there was an emphasis in Brazil on whitening the Brazilian population through immigration (Lesser 2013). Dávila (2003) points out that, in such a context, the idea of blackness was associated not only with negative traits such as criminality and laziness but also with the past and backwardness, indicating again the intersection of class and race. As stressed by Wade (2010: 12–13) in the context of Latin America in general, those as having traits identified as more 'European' have more flexibility toward self-identification, whereas those who are dark are boxed in within a black identity. This essentially means that mixed people who are lighter and with stronger social capital in terms of wealth can more easily identify themselves as white (Dávila 2003). This shows the importance of analysing race in relation to class in Brazil, with the middle class in Brazil overwhelmingly being identified as white (Telles 2004: 221). Pinho's analysis of white middle-class women in Brazil points out that, in addition to racism against dark-skinned people, privileging lighter racial mixture also devalues physical traits that are associated with blackness. Pinho argues that 'degrees of whiteness' are created in the Brazilian society (Pinho 2009: 40).

Oliven (1996) stresses the importance of regional and national identity in the Brazilian context. Up to 85% of the population in the southern part of Brazil were identified as white. This number goes down to 20% in areas in the northern part of the country, and statistics show that the whites in the south are privileged in the Brazilian society, whereas those who are categorised black or brown tend to reside in the less developed areas of Brazil (Telles 2004). For example, in the most southern state of Brazil, Rio Grande do Sul, the population differentiates itself from the rest of Brazil by identifying as descendants of European settlers and many identify with the Gaúcho identity (Kent & Santos 2014). As such, regional identity becomes important for people in Rio Grande do Sul in establishing themselves more firmly as a part of the national identity (Oliven 1996). As Oliven (1996) points out, the emphasis on Gaúcho identity began in the 1980s with middle class urban descendants of Germans and Italian immigrants making it a very white identity.

IV. Historical Background

In this section, we briefly outline the migration of Icelandic people to Brazil in the nineteenth century, demonstrating how they tried to associate themselves with other ethnic categories. The migrations to Brazil in 1863 and 1873 predated a much more extensive migration to North America (see Kjartansson & Heiðarsson 2003). The massive migration from Iceland

took place in the wider context of 55 million Europeans migrating to non-European countries between 1820 and 1914 (Mohanram 2007). About 4.3 million Europeans migrated to Brazil (Míqez 2003) for the same reason as they migrated elsewhere: poverty and the lack of land and opportunities in their home countries. Icelandic migration to Brazil took place in the context of such widespread poverty.

Although Iceland was comparatively isolated and economically marginalised in the late nineteenth century, it was still part of transnational networks. Iceland was under Danish rule with Denmark constituting an empire with colonies in the north Atlantic, the Caribbean and Africa (Jensen 2012). Even at this time, literacy was high in Iceland, with reading societies established in different parts of the country based on Enlightenment ideals of educating the general public (Sverrisdóttir 2005).

Through Icelandic texts, written and distributed within Iceland by Icelandic intellectuals, the ideas of racial hierarchies formed in Europe were dutifully reproduced and disseminated locally. The some what disparate views of blackness evident in early nineteenth-century Iceland became more coherent at the turn of the twentieth century (Loftsdóttir & Pálsson 2013). These ideas, however, were not only passively re-produced. They provided an important counter-identification with an emerging sense of European superiority for the impoverished Icelandic population. This occurred at a time when Iceland's situation under Danish rule made Iceland's position ambiguous, both as part of Europe and as under foreign rule. As Loftsdóttir has claimed, discussions of racial difference in Iceland are required to be contextualised within a system where Icelandic intellectuals felt that they had to negotiate and reinforce their own status as part of the civilised world (Loftsdóttir 2008).

After an extremely harsh winter in 1859–1860, a small group of people established the Brazilian Migration Company (*Hið brasilíska útflutningsfélag*) in Iceland (Þorsteinsson 1937–1938). Brazilian authorities promoted immigration at that time through advertisements, with agents placed throughout Europe, by travel expenses and by offers of state-owned parcels of land to migrants with the aim of populating the three southern-most regions of Brazil (Lesser 2013; Schulze 2014). Between 150 and 200 people signed up in the beginning, and according to the biography of Einar Ásmundsson, the main ignitor of Icelandic migration to Brazil, some began preparing themselves by studying German and acquainting themselves with Catholicism (Sigurjónsson 1957).

The Icelandic colony that these people aimed to establish in southern Brazil was envisioned as similar to the German colonies already there (Dutra 2007). The Icelanders who migrated to Brazil likely shared the ideas of racial geographies with the other European populations while simultaneously seeking to enhance their own somewhat fragile position as civilised European subjects.

The first Icelandic migrants who arrived in Brazil in 1863 settled in the German colony of Dona Fransisca but were later directed to the growing town of Curitiba in the state of Paraná, north of Santa Catarina (Þorsteinsson 1937–38). When the rest of the Icelanders arrived in Brazil in 1873, they were also allocated land in Curitiba. Between 1829 and 1911, it was estimated that 83,000 European immigrants were settled in the state of Paraná (Nadalin 2001), with a total of 304,000 immigrants arriving in Brazil between 1860 and 1880 (Schulze 2014). Only 39 Icelanders were migrated to Brazil in the nineteenth century within these two waves.

After settling in and around the city of Curitiba in 1873, the communication within Icelandic immigrants began to fade. In 1887, an Icelandic immigrant claimed in the media that there was little communication between the Icelanders because of their scattered population (Bjarnason 1914). Other sources suggest that the Icelanders did not get along, thus seldomly seeking out each other's company (Þorsteinsson 1937–38). Regardless of personal relationships, it is unsurprising that such a small group of people did not manage to preserve

their native tongue and traditions. A part of the group were, however, young people under the age of 18. Among the adults, three of the women and six of the men were single when arriving in Brazil. Most of these found spouses among non-Icelandic immigrant groups, usually of European origin.

It is likely that Icelandic nationality had less importance within the Brazilian society at that time and, consequently, Icelandic immigrants probably had more to gain by negotiating their identity in relation to the larger Northern European immigrant groups in the area. According to written sources, many Icelandic migrants strongly affiliated themselves with German immigrants, assimilating German identities and associating closely with other Nordic migrants (Þorsteinsson 1937–38). This was also confirmed by many of those interviewed during fieldwork. Many remembered their Icelandic ancestors, both first- and second-generation immigrants, speaking German. Þorsteinsson (1937–38) states that many of the Icelandic immigrants either learned German before learning Portuguese or learned both languages at the same time. Letters sent to Iceland from the Icelandic migrants in Brazil further support this (see Þorsteinsson 1937–38). For instance, one of the migrants wrote that he regularly participated in a German reading group (Guðleifsson 2002). Such groups were important in celebrating German ethnic belonging (Seyferth 2013). Icelanders were of the same Lutheran-Protestant faith as the Germans, which meant they could attend the same churches.

It is interesting to contextualise this prioritising of German neighbours with the writing of Brazilian anthropologist Seyferth (2013), which claims that people from specific areas of Europe were seen as favoured immigrants. These included Germans, Austrians, Swiss, Northern Italians, Basques, Swedes, Danish and French, whereas other migrants, from countries such as Poland and other Eastern European countries, were seen as less favourable. Moreover, Lesser (2013) points out that competition between groups was important, where each of the European groups believed that they were superior to others.

Still, there were examples of flexibility in spite of a clear separation between those considered as whites and those considered as indigenous blacks. Arabic and Jewish immigrants, and particularly their descendants, were, for example, able to manipulate ideas about race by changing their names (Lesser 2013: 140). Moreover, in early twentieth century, Japanese immigrants in Brazil created their own agricultural fazendas instead of being employed by others and were thus seen as whiter (Lesser 2013: 174).

Migrants from Poland had a significant cultural impact in the state of Paraná, as it is estimated that 40,000 Polish people migrated there between 1870 and 1914 – more than to any other states in Brazil (Oliveira 2009). They were the largest group of migrants in the state of Paraná, in particular in the city of Curitiba (Martins 1989), making them more visible than German migrants in that location. Icelandic settlers lived in a Polish neighbourhood in the beginning of their stay in Curitiba, and some of the immigrants later married immigrants from Poland (see Þorsteinsson 1937–38), but very little documentation exists about the relationship between Icelandic and Polish migrants. In a letter to Iceland from 1874, one of the Icelanders complained about being around Polish migrants, who the Icelander called ‘the outcasts of the world’ (Guðleifsson 2002). This Icelander’s writing about his/her Polish neighbours, and more interestingly the lack of Icelanders writing about the Poles, underscores how the Icelanders identified with the Europeans who they thought were more favoured than others. This is supported by the fact that Icelanders positioned themselves with Germans, the most favoured migrants at the time (see Seyferth 2013 on Germans). It is quite clear that, as early as the time of settlement, Icelanders affiliated themselves with what they most likely perceived as better Europeans, which could have influenced how their descendants negotiated their identities within Brazil.

Although Germans were seen as the most favoured immigrants during the nineteenth century, they were later stigmatised as unassimilated migrants, particularly during the Vargas era of 1930–1945 (Seyferth 2013). The Brazilian president, Getúlio Vargas, banned German-speaking schools and ordered everyone to adjust to the Brazilian national identity. Well into the twentieth century, the immigration scheme in Brazil emphasised assimilation and integration into the Luso-Brazilian national identity, although this was primarily based on the ideas of miscegenation with white immigrants (Seyferth 2013, see also Skidmore 1992). Interestingly, as Guimarães (2012) points out, this new Brazilian national identity was based on *mestiçagem* (a mix of indigenous, European migrants and descendants of African slaves), which, in some sense, diminished the importance of the whitening of the population. Moreover, Telles (2004) suggests that, despite vast regional differences in Brazil, the highly industrialised southern part is seen as 85% white. This does not, however, preclude the existence of strong class divisions and deep-seated racial inequality in the south (Monk 2016). The European hegemony that existed in Brazil in that era has shaped how Brazilians understand themselves today and can, at least in part, explain the recent emphasis some of these Brazilians put on their Icelandic ancestral past.

IV.1. 'There is No Square Celebrating Descendants from Africa, Is There?'

Increased globalisation and neoliberalisation since the 1990s have led to a strong global reification of ethnic origin (Comaroff & Comaroff 2009). Neoliberalism, as scholars have stressed, is strongly based on a reification of the idea of culture, which has historically intersected with the ideas of race or heritage (De Cesari 2012). The neoliberal states increasingly accept the presence of different ethnic or cultural communities as a part of the state. According to some sources, this is due to the fact that governance is facilitated by creating clear and manageable subjects (Brandtstädter, Wade & Woodward 2011).

In this global commercialised atmosphere, Nordic and Scandinavian identities have been strongly branded and celebrated, leading to increased reification of the sense that Nordic means white (see, for example, Andreassen 2014; Hübinette & Lundström 2014). Similar processes of reification of ethnic identity have characterised Iceland. Since the early 1990s, Icelandic-ness has been strongly associated with, and even promoted as, Viking ancestry, as well as being strongly associated with whiteness (Loftsdóttir 2019), engaging with a growing interest in Viking heritage in general globally (Halewood & Hannam 2001).

Heritage has also become part of neoliberalisation of governmentality. In the EU, for example, there has been an increasing trend of emphasising common culture and heritage (Hansen 2000). Simultaneously, heritage discourses and management also help to create particular subjectivities (Coombe 2012). In recent years, various ancestral backgrounds that were not seen as relevant before have become interest to Brazilians (see Kent & Santos 2014; Oliven 1996). One example is the affiliation of the inhabitants in Rio Grande do Sul with the Gaúcho identity. The contribution of both existing indigenous peoples and people of African descent is, however, mostly neglected (Kent & Santos 2014).

The establishment of The Iceland Brazil Association (AISBRA) in 1996, by a group of Brazilians of Icelandic descent, simultaneously reflects a globalised environment of heritage making and much stronger popularisation of Icelandic-ness globally through various means (Loftsdóttir 2019). The identification with Iceland suddenly becomes relevant to a group of people who had not earlier emphasised this ancestral past. In such an environment, association with Icelandic ancestry can be seen as becoming a type of cultural capital that can be used to enhance one's social status (Eypórsdóttir & Loftsdóttir 2016).

At its inception, AISBRA was mainly based on the work of one person, Adriana, who had tried for years to connect Icelandic descendants in Brazil with each other. For years, she organised meetings for her own extended family of Icelandic descent. In 1996, Adriana decided to publish an advertisement in a newspaper about a meeting for Brazilians of Icelandic descent where AISBRA was to be formally established. One of the interlocutors, a woman in her 40s, said that around 30 people showed up for this meeting, much to Adriana's surprise. This group included descendants from most of the Icelandic families that migrated to Brazil in the nineteenth century.

Interest in the work of AISBRA has continued to grow. In 2013, when the association celebrated 150 years of Icelandic settlement in Brazil, 150 people attended. One of the participants said that, since then, the number of those who overtly identify as of Icelandic descent in Brazil has risen to a few thousand. The attendance figure reflects, however, that spite of increasing interest in AISBRA and Icelandic heritage, only a relatively small percentage of Brazilians of Icelandic descent are joining or participating in events.

When asked what the Icelandic identity meant to them, several of the interviewees claimed that having Icelandic ancestry made one special. Thiago, an educated, middle-class man in his 40s, stated that, '[w]hen I stay with my friends they all say, "I am German", "I am Italian", so I am the Icelandic guy. I like to be the special guy [...] it makes me different from my friends'. Similarly, Eduardo stated that his

father was a descendant of Icelanders but my mother not. She was Brazilian. And my grandfather was indigenous. But when I am asked where I have descended from, I always say Iceland. Why? Even my children that are also of Japanese descent, I say that they are of Icelandic descent rather than Japanese.

A large majority of those interviewed were self-identified as descending from Iceland rather than somewhere else. It is interesting that, although this identification with Icelandic ethnicity markers is quite recent, no one described other ancestral roots as being as important as Icelandic. Marco, a well-educated man who belongs to the upper middle class, for example, said that:

We are the sons of Icelandic ancestry, and the stories of our ancestors are heard by us, so we feel like that is what we are.

The growing number of AISBRA participants and their increasing interest in their Icelandic past support the heightened importance of ancestral roots in the present as well as suggesting the changed meaning of Icelandic-ness (see Eyþórsdóttir & Loftsdóttir 2016).

In the interviews, we also see in various manifestations how Icelandicness is associated with 'whiteness'. Livía, another person interviewed, reflects this association quite clearly. She starts by saying that a part of her is Icelandic, furthermore associating it with Iceland as a particular space. She says: 'I think a part of me will find itself in Iceland [...] I would never say that I was Icelandic. No, I am Brazilian. But you know, something is missing. Maybe I am not completely Brazilian'. After wondering in the interview if she would see herself a part of Iceland, she asked if 'people in Iceland accept me as Icelandic? I don't know, I don't have blue eyes. I don't have white skin'. After a little pause, she added, 'and I am not as tall as they are'. Although Livía positioned herself as not having white skin when compared to Icelanders, she would be categorised as white within the Brazilian national context. Livía would not even be considered *morena* (brown), a popular designation that includes near-whiteness in Brazil (Nascimento 2006, see also Guimarães 2012)

and that represents one of many middle categories between *preta* (black) and *branca* (white).

Another instance is when the second author first met with Pedro, an elderly man from the upper middle class, for an interview, one of the first things he said was: 'I am not this dark-skinned. I am white. I am like this because I have been spending time at the beach'. It is almost as if he was excusing himself to the interviewer, who is a PhD student, white Icelandic person. Later in the conversation, he was asked if he thought that Brazilians of Icelandic ancestry differed from Brazilian of other ancestries. He nodded and responded, '[o]nly the bright eyes and white skin'. Pedro's comments clearly demonstrated that he found it important to position himself as white.

It should be noted that identification of a particular person as light or dark varies between regions of Brazil. A person who would be categorised as dark skinned in the southern part of Brazil could be seen as light brown or even white in the north (Monk 2016). Livía appeared to be flexible with her positionality with regard to her skin colour. Although she would have been identified as white in Brazil, she was self-identified as *morena* in relation to the Icelandic context. Her speculation with regard to being accepted as an Icelander when she had darker skin and brown eyes, which she imagined as situating her outside of the Icelandic context, demonstrates her racialisation of ancestral origin very clearly. Her comments reflect the words of other descendants who stressed that their skin colour was darker than native Icelanders. This could also be understood as an act of placing themselves lower in socio-economic status in comparison with Icelanders, as Iceland is now seen as a wealthy country with well-educated inhabitants. This sense of relative superiority of Iceland over Brazil, where Iceland has strong economic position and high general standard of living, whereas Brazil has much more disparities in terms of wealth and class, was often and clearly referred to in the interviews.

The ideas about *mestiçagem* (mixture) and racial democracy also appeared when many of the interviewees pointed to their diverse European origins to demonstrate their mixed ancestry. In all cases, however, they claimed that Icelandic origin was the most important one. Pedro explained that:

Here in Brazil, I am a descendent of Icelanders but in my blood flows the blood of indigenous. I also have blood from Spain from my mother's side [...] so here in Brazil, exist miscegenation which means that if you are white you will want to marry someone darker skinned. This is automatic. This is part of Brazilian culture.

Fernando also spoke along these lines when he said that, 'Brazilians are unique [today] because all the races have melted into one new one'. However, DaMatta (1991) has specially addressed the persistence of this view as a kind of elitist blindness (p. xi). Pedro and Fernando both hold an upper-class position in the Brazilian society, which indicates that Brazilians who hold a good socioeconomic position can more freely point to those parts of their other ancestral origins that are considered more prestigious.

Another interviewee, Fabio, claimed that only Brazilians of European and Japanese descent identify themselves according to ancestral roots in the southern part of Brazil, but not those who have African or indigenous ancestry. Fabio continued by saying that it was difficult for Brazilians to identify with the indigenous or African ancestral origin because it was neither possible to claim privileges on those grounds nor was such ancestry celebrated in southern Brazil.

He then asked if the interviewer had 'noticed all the squares commemorating different ethnicities?' When the interviewer answered that she had noticed the many squares and parks

in Curitiba that celebrated the different European, Japanese and Arabic groups, which all hold good economic positions in Brazil, Fabio asked in return: 'There is no square celebrating descendants from Africa in Curitiba, is there?'

In discussions with the descendants with regard to different Icelandic and Brazilian economic positions, it was clear that Brazilians of Icelandic descent considered Icelandic-ness and Nordic or Scandinavian-ness as linked to having a good socioeconomic position or as stimulating an ambition to learn and work. This is similar to what Lundström points out with more recent migrants from Sweden in the United States, where they are associated with whiteness, modernity and prosperity (see Lundström 2010).

An important determinant of middle-class status in southern Brazil is a university education (Turner 2014a). For example, when the interviewer asked Roberto if his grandfather, a second-generation Icelandic immigrant in Brazil, had been educated at a university, he replied: 'Yes, all of them [all generations of forefathers of Iceland descent] studied at universities [...] All of them finished higher education'. Similarly, Gabriela described her grandfather of Icelandic descent as having left a legacy. 'My grandfather had a lot of presence. He was the type of person that took part, for example, in politics and more [...] All his children, for example, graduated from a university level'.

Marco, a middle-aged man of Icelandic-Brazilian descent who belongs to the upper middle class, emphasised that he and other descendants from the Icelandic immigrants still had some 'Scandinavian values left' and that these values were the main drivers for their economic success. When asked what he felt was the reason for the success of his family, Paulo similarly claimed that:

I am very proud of my Scandinavian side [...] I like transparency, hard work, honesty, you say what you think, and I like the Scandinavian way of being. I have always liked it.

Later he added that 'my mother's values are very much in line with the way I think. It is Scandinavian, and I like it. I have always liked it. I feel myself a little bit Scandinavian because of this [...]'. He added, laughing: 'I am not blue eyed [...] but it's because of my mother's roots and the way that I accept and like the Scandinavian values in general sense'. Similarly, Alfonso, a young student at a private university, said that he liked the educated mind of the Europeans and thought that 'European people like to read a lot, and the culture is pretty different. And that is what I have, and I don't see that very often in other people around here in Brazil'.

The importance currently placed on Icelandic ancestry demonstrates as well how, in Brazil, whiteness intersects with class and ethnicity and suggests that Icelandic-ness has become an embodiment of social and economic success. This is particularly evident in a comment by João, who talked about Icelandic-Brazilians who he saw as having lower economic status in Brazil than he, as 'simple people' (p. *povo simples*). He explained that 'they have become too Latin'. This reference to poorer and more rural Brazilians of white Nordic and Icelandic origin as simple people sheds light on how fluid the definition of racial difference and status in Brazil is. This brings up questions with regard to whether a lack of money and education darkens people?

Hence, identification with Icelandic ancestry appears to be more useful for those who are already economically successful. This is in line with Dávila's (2006: 6) claims that people's association with whiteness can degenerate through exposure to poverty and disease. The upper-middle-class Brazilians of Icelandic descent refer to the non-elite Icelandic-Brazilians as simple people (p. *povo simples*), indicating that they were mostly from outside the city, uneducated and in the lower middle class or upper lower class. This definition of simple people echoes Karam's (2007) research on Brazilians of Syrian descent, a population, Karam suggests,

that has gained a higher position in society through economic prosperity. Karam's analysis supports the claim that socioeconomic status is important to the discourse of race in Brazil, continuing that the 'idea that "money whitens" has been a classical topic in sociological literature on race in Brazil' (Schwartzman 2007: 940).

V. Conclusion

Brazilians of Icelandic descent are a diverse group of people with varied educational backgrounds and socioeconomic positions. Their racial classification within the Brazilian society also varies, and only a minority emphasise their Icelandic ancestral roots. It is clear that, for those who do, originating from Iceland has become important in the Brazilian context. They claim that emphasis on their Icelandic heritage associates them with specific personal traits such as honesty, strong work ethic and ambition.

The way that the first-generation Icelandic-Brazilians affiliated themselves with the nationalities of the most favoured immigrants of the nineteenth century, such as with those from Germany, indicates that their own identity as Icelandic did not seem to provide strong social capital at the time. This corresponds with how Icelanders in Iceland and Europe in the nineteenth century tried to position themselves alongside the civilised Europeans (see Loftsdóttir 2008) to elevate their status, as Iceland was a dependency of Denmark. Now, however, for those Brazilians who were interviewed in relation to this research, claiming Icelandic identity is a way of affirming their white ancestry and enhancing links with prosperity.

Our research affirms the importance of recognising whiteness as an historically shifting phenomenon to some extent that has to be understood as becoming meaningful within particular circumstances. The difference between Iceland's past and present positionality underscores the danger of reifying whiteness, assuming that it remains constant through time or that whiteness intersects always with the same boundary markers (Staunæs 2003). The shifting ancestral self-identity of Icelandic-Brazilians demonstrates how the ideas of race, nation and ethnicity are in constant 'flux' (Bulmer & Solomos 1998: 824). Despite Brazilians of Icelandic descent use Icelandic ancestry to enhance their Brazilian-ness (Eyþórsdóttir & Loftsdóttir 2016), there exists great variation in how they are positioned in relation to class and education. Having Icelandic ancestry is not automatically a marker of being a better Brazilian but always has to be recognised as intersecting with socioeconomic position, education and class. Identifying as being of Icelandic origin can be situational and context dependent, with a connection to Icelandic ancestry being used by some Icelandic-Brazilians to position themselves better with regard to both social and economic status.

Competing Interests

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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