

Some Considerations about European Concepts of Race since the Renaissance

In a census taken by the Brazilian government (IBGE) in 1976, choices were: black, white, red, brown, or yellow but you were also allowed to describe your own color – there were 134 additional skin colors suggested.

1. *Acastanhada* (cashewlike tint; caramel colored)
2. *Agalegada*
3. *Alva* (pure white)
4. *Alva-escura* (dark or off-white)
5. *Alverenta* (or aliviero, 'shadow in the water')
6. *Alvarinta* (tinted or bleached white)
7. *Alva-rosada* (or jamote, roseate, white with pink highlights)
8. *Alvinha* (bleached; white-washed)
9. *Amarela* (yellow)
10. *Amarelada* (yellowish)
11. *Amarela-queimada* (burnt yellow or ochre)
12. *Amarelosa* (yellowed)
13. *Amorenada* (tannish)
14. *Avermelhada* (reddish, with blood vessels showing through the skin)
15. *Azul* (bluish)
16. *Azul-marinho* (deep bluish)
17. *Baiano* (ebony)
18. *Bem-branca* (very white)
19. *Bem-clara* (translucent)
20. *Bem-morena* (very dusky)
21. *Branca* (white)
22. *Branca-avermelhada* (peach white)
23. *Branca-melada* (honey toned)
24. *Branca-morena* (darkish white)
25. *Branca-pálida* (pallid)
26. *Branca-queimada* (sunburned white)
27. *Branca-sardenta* (white with brown spots)
28. *Branca-suja* (dirty white)
29. *Branquiça* (a white variation)
30. *Branquinha* (whitish)
31. *Bronze* (bronze)
32. *Bronzeada* (bronzed tan)
33. *Bugrezinha-escura* (Indian characteristics)
34. *Burro-quanto-foge* ('burro running away,' implying racial mixture of unknown origin)
35. *Cabocla* (mixture of white, Negro and Indian)
36. *Cabo-Verde* (black; Cape Verdean)
37. *Café* (coffee)
38. *Café-com-leite* (coffee with milk)
39. *Canela* (cinnamon)
40. *Canelada* (tawny)
41. *Castão* (thistle colored)
42. *Castanha* (cashew)
43. *Castanha-clara* (clear, cashewlike)
44. *Castanha-escura* (dark, cashewlike)
45. *Chocolate* (chocolate brown)
46. *Clara* (light)
47. *Clarinha* (very light)
48. *Cobre* (copper hued)
49. *Corado* (ruddy)
50. *Cor-de-café* (tint of coffee)
51. *Cor-de-canela* (tint of cinnamon)
52. *Cor-de-cuia* (tea colored)
53. *Cor-de-leite* (milky)
54. *Cor-de-oro* (golden)
55. *Cor-de-rosa* (pink)
56. *Cor-firma* ('no doubt about it')
57. *Crioula* (little servant or slave; African)
58. *Encerada* (waxy)
59. *Enxofrada* (pallid yellow; jaundiced)

60. *Esbranquecimento* (mostly white)
61. *Escura* (dark)
62. *Escurinha* (semidark)
63. *Fogoio* (florid; flushed)
64. *Galega* (see *agalegada* above)
65. *Galegada* (see *agalegada* above)
66. *Jambo* (like a fruit the deep-red color of a blood orange)
67. *Laranja* (orange)
68. *Lilás* (lily)
69. *Loira* (blond hair and white skin)
70. *Loira-clara* (pale blond)
71. *Loura* (blond)
72. *Lourinha* (flaxen)
73. *Malaiá* (from Malabar)
74. *Marinheira* (dark greyish)
75. *Marrom* (brown)
76. *Meio-amerela* (mid-yellow)
77. *Meio-branca* (mid-white)
78. *Meio-morena* (mid-tan)
79. *Meio-preta* (mid-Negro)
80. *Melada* (honey colored)
81. *Mestiça* (mixture of white and Indian)
82. *Miscigenação* (mixed – literally 'miscegenated')
83. *Mista* (mixed)
84. *Morena* (tan)
85. *Morena-bem-chegada* (very tan)
86. *Morena-bronzeada* (bronzed tan)
87. *Morena-canelada* (cinnamonlike Brunette)
88. *Morena-castanha* (cashewlike tan)
89. *Morena clara* (light tan)
90. *Morena-cor-de-canela* (cinnamon-hued Brunette)
91. *Morena-jambo* (dark red)
92. *Morenada* (mocha)
93. *Morena-escura* (dark tan)
94. *Morena-fechada* (very dark, almost mulatta)
95. *Morenã* (very dusky tan)
96. *Morena-parda* (brown-hued tan)
97. *Morena-roxa* (purplish-tan)
98. *Morena-ruiva* (reddish-tan)
99. *Morena-trigueira* (wheat colored)
100. *Moreninha* (toffeelike)
101. *Mulatta* (mixture of white and Negro)
102. *Mulatinha* (lighter-skinned white-Negro)
103. *Negra* (negro)
104. *Negrota* (negro with a corpulent body)
105. *Pálida* (pale)
106. *Paraíba* (like the color of marupa wood)
107. *Parda* (dark brown)
108. *Parda-clara* (lighter-skinned person of mixed race)
109. *Polaca* (Polish features; prostitute)
110. *Pouco-clara* (not very clear)
111. *Pouco-morena* (dusky)
112. *Preta* (black)
113. *Pretinha* (black of a lighter hue)
114. *Puxa-para-branca* (more like a white than a mulatta)
115. *Quase-negra* (almost Negro)
116. *Queimada* (burnt)
117. *Queimada-de-praia* (suntanned)
118. *Queimada-de-sol* (sunburned)
119. *Regular* (regular; nondescript)
120. *Retinta* ('layered' dark skin)
121. *Rosa* (roseate)
122. *Rosada* (high pink)
123. *Rosa-queimada* (burnished rose)
124. *Roxa* (purplish)
125. *Ruiva* (strawberry blond)
126. *Russo* (Russian; see also *polaca*)
127. *Sapecada* (burnished red)
128. *Sarará* (mulatta with reddish kinky hair, aquiline nose)
129. *Sararúba* (or sarariva: like a white meringue)
130. *Tostada* (toasted)
131. *Trigueira* (wheat colored)
132. *Turva* (opaque)
133. *Verde* (greenish)
134. *Vermelha* (reddish)

<http://www.zonalatina.com/Zldata55.htm>

I was happy when I returned to Brazil in 2010 after a long hiatus. In the hotel I was staying at, there was a metal plaque that stated that it was against the law to refuse anyone access to the elevator based on their skin color and to do so would result in a fine. Before then it was common practice that if you were perceived as non-white you would be shown the service elevator ... unfortunately the fabricated European theory of skin color, which began with the colonization process during the Renaissance, has made a heavy legacy of institutionalized racism in the Americas (I am from Brazil) and to ignore this reality only results in collusion with constructed narratives that support the continuous usurping of discourse by the colonizers (see census above). The choices for skin color were: black, white, red, brown, or yellow, but you were also allowed to describe your own color – there were 134 additional skin colors suggested – the list is being passed around. It was common practice until very recently for all white Brazilian participants in conferences, both in Brazil and abroad, to announce that they represented all Brazilians when questioned as to why there were no indigenous or Black representatives from Brazil. Change has begun – but slowly, with much public backlash from the white Brazilian speakers who feel threatened by what they perceive as their loss of power, of representing the other in Brazil. They are particularly angry and vindictive now that the non-white Brazilians are speaking out.



This is Uncle Teco, his Brazilian ID states that he is "moreno" with a "thick nose and big mouth".

We in Europe constantly talk about how many Chinese people are moving in, and how many African people are moving in; and with Chinese people this seems to be happening all over the world – doesn't it? But the truth is that it is white people who started going all over the world in the Renaissance, and continue to do so. And they never stop. So any place you go, you have white people acting as though it was their world and as though there is a problem with the Chinese and the Africans. There is a problem with white people. One of the main problems of white people in the Americas, besides the continuous killing and colonization, is that they use the Americas as an escape valve that allows Europe to escape facing realities such as social justice of various types and environmental justices of various types. Once again, there is economic depression in Europe, and what one sees is that the former colonies continue to be popular for young professionals otherwise unemployable in Europe. The escape valve of the Americas continues to welcome white European immigrants over, let us say, Haitians, as is the case in Brazil.

A footnote: Previous to the end of slavery, which was rather late in Brazil – 1888, which means that when I as a young teenager, I had met Blacks that had been slaves – the Catholic Church would breed light black slaves with darker skin slaves in order not to produce a white skinned slave who would call into question the foundation of slavery in the Americas, which was based on color. Interestingly, Brazil has the second largest population of Blacks in the world.

The Catholic Church's insistence on the Earth as the center of the world echoes the European idea that the world revolves around Europe and that Europe defines normality. And this continues in a strong way today. Here in Italy, which identifies itself with Europe and normalcy, I have seen an academic say that she teaches Chinese history (while pulling at the corners of her eyes), a friend referring to a friend's wife as Black (taking two fingers and running them against his cheek – this appears to mean dark skin for Italians) and a gallerist give war whoops à la Disney in reference to an indigenous artist. But, interestingly, I have not seen similar gestures to describe the French, German, Spanish etc. As I mentioned in a workshop I gave in Rome two weeks ago, we need such a gesture for an Italian in order to counteract this stupidity.

It is a distressing contradiction that, just when Europe began to celebrate looking at things beyond the village, town or continent, the result was the mass destruction of peoples, habitats, culture and languages. In Brazil alone, there were about 1300 different indigenous languages (not dialects) before Europe arrived in 1500 CE. More than 1000 of these

languages were made extinct by the Portuguese. About 180 languages continue to exist today – most barely exist, due to so few speakers who are alive. And with the loss of those 1000 languages, ways to see the world, ways to think about the world, ways to be scientists and philosophers and artists were destroyed forever.



From Hans Staden's book: *True Story and Description of a Country of Wild, Naked, Grim, Man-eating People in the New World, America.*

We continue to live with the European idea of race in the Americas. I would like to speak about one particular situation in the Ubatuba, a coastal town, in the state of São Paulo, where some members of my family live. Hans Staden was a German sailor who arrived in the Ubatuba area in the 16th century. It is one of those stories that has become a foundation text of the history (in very large quotes) of Brazil. Staden was imprisoned by the Tupinamba people of the area. His account, *True Story and Description of a Country of Wild, Naked, Grim, Man-eating People in the New World, America*, has left anthropologists

in doubt regarding its veracity. The book is quite sensationalist, telling of cannibalistic practices, for example, but it is not clear that they were ritualistic cannibalistic practices, which then led to the further development of theories that indigenous peoples did not have enough protein and hunted each other to supplement their diet. This fictive narrative has not left the Brazilian psyche. The colonizers have also used this narrative as a justification for stealing indigenous lands. So, from these impressions of a German sailor until today, we are forced into the set up of the cannibal. During the research for the 2010 biennale in São Paulo, I asked prominent Brazilians about the indigenous population. Their responses made no mention of land struggles, current assassinations of indigenous leaders, lack of adequate health care and quotidian racism against indigenous peoples.

For example, there was no mention that 53 Guarani children starved to death in 2005, that 60 indigenous people were assassinated in 2008.

Instead, responses contained some mention of cannibalism.

Emperor João VI declared in 1808 that the Krenak people in the state of Minas Gerais were cannibals, although, historically, they were not known to practice ritual cannibalism. The emperor's declaration of a "Just War against Cannibals" was a common enough tactic to usurp the lands of the "savages", in this case the Krenaks, lands which are rich in minerals. The emperor offered an additional incentive to join this "war" – fiscal benefits such as tax breaks for bringing in the head of a Krenak. It was called "just", as the activist Shirley Krenak says, "because our people were 'obstructing' the development of the region. But to be honest, our people were impeding forest fires, the pollution of the rivers, extraction of our natural riches ... And because they thought this land had no owners, they decided to exterminate us completely." And they almost did; only 600 Krenaks survived this initiative. Further attempts continued on their land, and then came the military dictatorship; anthropologists, in cahoots with the government, declared the Krenaks to be officially extinct in 1970. Those that protested that they were indeed alive were put in prison labor camps, where they were not allowed to speak their language, or forcibly removed to other reservations, another common tactic so that language differences and tribal rivalries resulted in a lack of organization against the repressive Brazilian state. Slowly the Kernaks returned to their lands, but were expelled again in 1988. Finally, in 1997, some of the land was returned. This took place, however, in the midst of a progressive constitution on native peoples and the environment. The Krenaks explained that the judge who had to return their lands said to them, "If it

is land you want it is land that you well get.” And with that, the judge allowed the non-indigenous usurers of indigenous lands to cut down every fruit tree or edible bush.

The Krenaks, whose lands had been taken when it was covered with forest, had lands returned that were deforested and with fertile soil having been washed away by erosion due to the deforestation. As Shirley Krenak says, “It was in a state that we could not recognize it. Completely transformed and without natural resources.” And, of course, much of the land was not returned, and still the Krenak fight for these lands today.

Shirley Krenak explains, “The aggressions against my people and negative reactions to our culture are each time more present and almost uncontrollable, reaching the point of a social conflict of grave proportions. It is urgent, therefore, that all know of the richness and importance of our people and culture and thus to begin to take initiatives in order for a more harmonious cohabitation among people with different cultures. We know that the constitution dedicated a small chapter to indigenous peoples. Nevertheless, ignorance and disrespect of the Brazilian society towards cultural and traditional questions continues to prevail encouraging prejudice and discrimination. It is necessary to demonstrate that these differences are what make Brazil a great nation.”



Shirley in Iracema

Shirley Krenak portrayed the eponymous role in *Iracema*, a video that I made for the Lyon Biennale in 2009 about a young indigenous woman who inherited a large estate from her “French father” and went to France and took possession of it and established an Institute for Art and Science.



Shirley in Iracema – on the road

During the filming in Brazil, and this particular shot is near the Krenak Reservation in Minas Gerais, these landless laborers on the right are returning home after working on plantations – before this frame the man had been on the left behind Shirley and the woman who is on the right turned around and shouted to him “better to come closer to us or the cannibal will eat you”.

This is just one of many examples of quotidian, racist violence to which Shirley is submitted. Then there is the added continual harassment and threats by the security forces, as she is a land rights activist.



Shirley's brother, Tam Krenak, gave me a print-out of a German/Krenak dictionary available online (Gutenberg, who made the word the final authority during the Renaissance and therefore Western thought as the authoritative text is also a partner in crime to the "cannibalization" of Brazil), which was written in the early 20th century by a German pharmacist. Tam wanted me to translate the German into Portuguese because he realized that there were many words that, due to the genocide and ensuing loss of language, they no longer knew and he wanted them returned to his people.

The dictionary was translated and enough copies were printed to give one to each Krenak.



It is displayed like this – in a locked box – because the Krenaks have requested that no Brazilian be given access to the translated dictionary, because, as Shirley says, “For 500 hundreds years they have not wanted to talk only kill us.” Walter Mignolo writes of the importance of language and the book as tools of colonization over those with an oral culture. And this is a nice reversal by those of the oral culture.



Kuek

Shirley had told me about the existence of a Krenak in Germany and asked me find out about him. In the oral history of the Krenaks, there is the story of Kuek who was taken by a German. Prince Maximilian Neuwied of the Rhineland visited Brazil for two years during the 19th century, and took Kuek with him to his estate. And Kuek was to die there later. Shirley wrote a letter that I translated to the descendents of Neuwied, asking for the return of Kuek's remains. In 2011, Kuek's remains were returned to the Krenaks, and, in a ceremony, Shirley put him to rest on what is left of Krenak land.



MARIA THEREZA ALVES

Although this image was made in the 17th century by the Dutch painter Eckhout – a fantasy image of a Tapuya woman in Brazil, it is very much still contemporary to what Brazilians believe of native people. As mentioned before, Hans Staden's book has many engravings with equally fantastical European imagery of cannibalism. However, if we are to see how many languages that have been destroyed by Europe in Brazil alone ... more than 1000 and their speakers ... then we have to have also a native definition of cannibalism, which would include all Europeans who colonized the Americas.

In his book, *From the Enemy's Point of View*, the eminent Brazilian anthropologist, Eduardo Viveiros de Castro writes about the belief system of the Araweté – a Tupi-Guarani people of Eastern Amazonia and, although he is at pains to explain that they are not cannibals, by the middle of the book he decides that they are indeed cannibals because their gods are cannibals although the Araweté themselves practice no form of cannibalism whatsoever.

Following this system of one-sided classification – we would also wish to include Catholics ... some of whom think they partake in symbolic cannibalism, and others who are more literal-minded and believe they are actually eating the body of a man and drinking his blood – the active cannibal, we might say. We can further specify if they are transubstantiation cannibals or essentialist cannibals or theoretical cannibals, but, if so, then we must also apply these specifications to the indigenous people who have been labeled cannibals with no such subtlety.

As it is continual practice to identify indigenous peoples in Brazil i.e. Tapuya warrior and cannibal, perhaps we can extend this practice in a more democratic fashion, and, as we are here speaking of the Renaissance, we can say Fra Angelico the painter and cannibal, Michelangelo, the painter and cannibal etc. ... And of course, of Brazilians who, due to colonization, are usually Catholic, we must automatically follow their religious profession and add: cannibal.

Now to return to the beginning and Hans Staden. There are some metal plaques in Ubatuba about local history, and not one of them speaks in a positive manner about the Tupinambas. These people are renowned for their struggle to not be made into slaves – having negotiated a treaty that prohibited the Portuguese from making them into slaves while at the same time negotiating the release of all slaves. This treaty was broken by the Portuguese.

The only mention of the original inhabitants in these historical plaques provided by the municipality of Ubatuba is:



On the fourth line, the plaque's text mentions the natives as cannibals.

Now what is the result of this continual blinkered account of history – 90% of the Guarani indigenous school children in Ubatuba do not go to school because of bullying by non-indigenous students.

I continually wonder how to respond to this clear example of colonization in Ubatuba, the legacy of the printed word and image – a legacy from Renaissance Europe that has until the present defined indigenous peoples as not quite human.

I have begun a series of bronze sculptures of seeds or seed pods that I have found in what is left of our Atlantic Rainforest

(This forest which followed along the coast is now 97% destroyed since colonization) in Ubatuba. The Tupinambas, who were exterminated from Ubatuba, spoke Tupi, which I do not speak, but should since I am from their land base. So I name each bronze with a Tupi word:



"Aicoabeeng"
(To offer something to someone in friendship
or as a good upbringing.)



"Aimobucu"
(To linger as one wishes in order to postpone.)

What we need to do is to prioritize a non-European study of Europeans, with special consideration for members of the former colonies of each country. Here in Italy, there should be priority for Somalia, Ethiopia and Libya; in Germany for Namibia, Tanzania, Togo, Cameroon, New Guinea, Micronesia, Solomon Islands, Marshall Islands, Samoa etc ... a residency program for artists, scientists, anthropologists, philosophers, sociologists from those countries to study Europeans in order to liberate Europeans from this self-defeating notion of being the definition of normality. Life is just more interesting than that.

To be liberated, to think that European cultural constructs are just that – a construction. Just like everyone else's. This would allow you the next time you look at me to be liberated from the European cultural tick that thinks that if I am not making direct eye contact with you that I am either lying or hiding something. Would it not be interesting to be allowed to think "Oh, this is something that is different from what my mother or father taught me and is it not interesting?" We need the non-European to allow us to understand that Europe is not normality.

Maria Thereza Alves