

# The legacy of Rosário: worker associativism and the silence of ethnic-racial identity in the post-abolition period, Laguna (SC)

*As heranças do Rosário: associativismo operário e o silêncio da identidade étnico-racial no pós-abolição, Laguna (SC)*

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## RESUMO

Este artigo traz uma reflexão sobre a Sociedade Recreativa União Operária (1903), uma associação fundada por afrodescendentes vinculados à Irmandade de Nossa Senhora do Rosário dos Pretos. Consideramos a relação entre as associações, religiosa e leiga, o principal indicativo da ascendência africana dos sócios da Operária, uma vez que essa agremiação não afirmou, na primeira metade do século XX, uma identificação étnico-racial. O ocultamento da raça ou cor em uma agremiação classista na cidade de Laguna, estado de Santa Catarina, apresenta-se como oportunidade de estudo sobre a associatividade afro-brasileira no pós-abolição.

Palavras-chave: associativismo; pós-abolição; Laguna.

## ABSTRACT

This article looks at *Sociedade Recreativa União Operária* (1903), an association founded by Afro-Descendants linked to the Brotherhood of *Irmandade de Nossa Senhora do Rosário dos Pretos*. We consider the relationship between religious and lay associations, the principal indicator of the African ancestry of the members of *Operária*, since this association did not stipulate an ethnic-racial identification during the first half of the twentieth century. Hiding race or color in a class based group in the city of Laguna, in the Brazilian state of Santa Catarina, is understood as an opportunity for studying Afro-Brazilian associativity in the post-abolition period.

Keywords: associativism; post-abolition; Laguna.

Any outsider who comes to Laguna, whether by railway or by sea, soon has his observer's spirit solicited by a construction, which due to the elevated topographic position in which it is found, and by the religious symbolism which it reflects, must appear with another aspect and presence; and not like the ruin and true abandonment which it demonstrates.

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We refer to the small church of Rosário [the Rosary] which is erected on a small hill to the extreme north of our city and with the same name.

We know that the temple now in ruins belongs to the Brotherhood of the Rosary, which we think should congregate efforts and even ask for public support in order never to consent that a construction like that, which required so much work and dedication, would be found in the state it is currently exists; a condition of pure abandonment.

Here we appeal to the religious spirit of the *Brothers of the Rosary*, who, *in the majority, are workers*, can be a part of the effort to restore a church, which by the attraction it exerts our visitors, as well as how it is found, has become not only a flagrant mirror of our religious decadence, but also the massive lack of love for the aesthetics of our city.<sup>1</sup>

The Church of Rosário was demolished in the 1930, around 12 years after the publication of this text. The dissolution of the *Irmandade de Nossa Senhora do Rosário dos Pretos da Laguna* (the Brotherhood of Our Lady of the Rosary of the Blacks of Laguna) in Santa Catarina should be understood in a relational form and not definitively, since it implied a process of the associative regrouping of Afro-Descendants in the Post-Abolition period. This article reflects on the creation of an association founded by blacks linked to Rosário, in a context marked by racial segregation and the struggle for citizenship.

The brotherhood was the place of origin of four of the founders of *Sociedade Recreativa União Operária* (SRUO – the Workers’ Union Recreational Society): Bonifácio Jesuíno Alves, Lucidonio Sypriano, Pedro Jerônimo do Nascimento, and Antônio Felisberto da Rosa. Bonifácio and Lucidonio were bricklayers; Pedro, a carpenter, and Antônio, a merchant. We believe that the participation of the Rosário’s members in the creation and administration of the Workers’ Union is an important indication of the African ancestry of the members this society, since during the first half of the twentieth century SRUO did not affirm any ethnic or racial identification. The hiding of race<sup>2</sup> or color<sup>3</sup> is an opportunity to study the strategies of social ascension and conquest of new black territory through associativism. If the demolition of Rosário Church represented the elimination of an old Afro-Descendant space, the construction of the Workers’ Union served to legitimate the appropriation of another place for the sociability of an Afro-Lagunese group.

Santo Antônio dos Anjos da Laguna (1682), along with São Francisco do Sul (1658) and Nossa Senhora do Desterro (1662), were among the oldest

settlements in Santa Catarina. The *Vila* of Laguna served as a water port for the supply of food and timber during the first decades of Portuguese colonization in South America. The Vicentines used indigenous and African labor since their foundation. In the second half of the eighteenth century, the colonization and settlement of the coastline of Santa Catarina counted on a great inflow of slaves and the arrival of approximately 6000 immigrants from the Azores and Madeira. The agricultural production of Santa Catarina in this period began to offer a diversity of foodstuffs to “help meet the demands of the South-Central and Northeastern areas” (Mamigonian; Cardoso, 2013, p.24). In the first decade of the twentieth century, the economy of Laguna was based on small scale agricultural production and fishing. Among the foodstuffs produced were: manioc flour, salted fish, corn, broad beans, and black beans. In addition the city also had a dozen factories which produced: beer, soap, candles, fireworks, bags, trunks, objects made from tin, vinegar, casks, and shoes. The urban landscape was composed of ports, warehouses, and around a thousand buildings, both public and private residences. In 1900, Laguna had 16,471 inhabitants; in 1920 this number had jumped to 27,573. In the 1940 Census, in which there appears the indication of the color of the population, there appear 30,728 whites and 2,489 blacks and mixed.

Until the 1990s the history of Laguna did not consider the Africans and their descendants as historic agents. In the texts of local memorialists they appeared as slaves until abolition and afterwards were no longer cited. The invisibility of blacks in the South of Brazil is, according to Ilka Boaventura Leite (1996), one of the supports for the ideology of whitening which arose out of the discourse of the supposed insignificance of slavery for a Southern economic system based on polyculture on a reduced scale. However, current academic research shows that slaves, freemen, and freed slaves of an African origin had actively participated in the social life of Santa Catarina since the eighteenth century. In the first half of the nineteenth century they accounted for around 30% of the coastal population. Slave labor was used in agricultural production, notably for manioc flour, fishing, and the production of whale oil. Recent research also indicates that as well as serving as labor for their masters, slaves, freed, and free Africans and Creoles worked for themselves, associated in brotherhoods and societies of different natures, travelled between provinces, accumulated goods (including slaves) and created families with distinct degrees of kinship.

## THE ROOTS OF THE WORKERS' BROTHERHOOD

Studies which have dealt with the Brotherhoods of Rosário in Brazil have concentrated on the period prior to abolition and are fundamentally based on commitments (*compromissos*), books, and statutes produced in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The authors situate them in spaces social controlled by the Catholic Church, but they were also territories of resistance for African and Afro-Brazilian culture. Black and mixed brotherhoods held both traditional Catholic rituals and festivities with a hybrid cultural character.

Brotherhoods were potential spaces for the reinvention of African culture and the protection for the enslaved population, and as a place of congregation, allowing meetings between groups of African descent, slaves, freed, and free. According to João Reis, "The brotherhood represented a space of relative black autonomy, in which its members constructed significant social identities, within which its members constructed significant social identities, within a world that was at times suffocating and always uncertain" (1996, p.9). Russel-Wood agrees with Reis when he says that the brotherhoods were legally accepted communitarian forms of life, which stimulated associative feeling among Africans and Afro-Descendants and, at the same time, constituted a "direct relationship to a series of socio-economic factors" (2005, p.230). John Thornton raises the idea of an "African Christianity" (2004, p.334), in which the brotherhoods were spaces where many Brazilian slaves "expressed their identities" in "parades on holy days, doing the dances of their nation and singing in their own language" (*ibid.*, p.417).

The Republican period in Brazilian history was marked by the decline of black brotherhoods, which we can measure, for example, in the process of the destruction of the churches of the brotherhoods of *Nossa Senhora do Rosário* in different cities. In the 1920s the churches of Rosário in Uberaba (MG) and João Pessoa (PB) were destroyed. In the 1930s those in the cities of Curitiba (PR), Guarulhos (SP), in the neighborhood of Penha (São Paulo, SP), in Guaratinguetá (SP), Goiás and Campina Grande (PB) were demolished. The Church of Porto Alegre (RS) fell in the 1940s, and that of Campinas (SP), in 1956.<sup>4</sup> We understand that the demolition of these churches signified a systematic deletion of collective forms of organization and the mobilization of Afro-Descendant groups. The destruction of black brotherhood churches are indications of the march of the Romanization of the Catholic Church, as well as part of the urban reform policy (Hausmannization) which took form in the first half of the last century.

In turn, the decline of black and mixed brotherhoods was to some extent linked to the rise of other modern black associations. Studies point to the survival of the practices of the old brotherhoods in worker associations, created in the first half of the twentieth century. Cláudio Batalha identified the maintenance of determined rituals of brotherhoods, such as the organizational structure of assemblies and the celebration of the day of crafts in Afro-Descendant worker societies in Rio de Janeiro. According to Batalha, aspects of workers' associative culture were inherited from mutualist societies in the nineteenth century, related, for example, "to the dignity of work, the valorization of manual labor, and above all, to class, and what constitutes more than the mere survival of traditions or an archaic vocabulary" (1999, p.47). Sidney Chalhoub explains the emergence of modern beneficent societies as the consequence of the "decadence of Catholic brotherhoods" (Chalhoub, 2007, p.228). These, due to the reduction of the importance of religion, came to assume the "functions of social protection of workers" (ibid.). Marcelo Mac Cord analyzed the transformation of the Brotherhood of São José do Ribamar to the *Sociedade das Artes Mecânicas e Liberais* (1850 – Society of the Mechanical and Liberal Arts). His relational perspective was related to the importance of the symbolic capital accumulated by the Brotherhood for the modeling of the professional and lay society. The master carpenters "used the Brotherhood as an institute which added to the practitioners of that trade" (Mac Cord, 2012, p.30), while Mac Cord also explains the emergence of the Society of Arts as a strategy for maintaining the prestige of the brothers of the Brotherhood of *Ribamar*. "The idea of constructing an association allowed them to reinforce old common ties and to rework a cultural repertoire consolidated and shared by them in Recife" (ibid., p.50). In the field of Afro-religiosity, Luis Páres linked the weakening of the brotherhoods to the creation of associativity in the *Candomblé terreiros* in Bahia, which "came to constitute one of the most important means of social aggregation, identity, and cultural resistance of the black and mixed population" (2007, p.138).

These studies show, from different angles, the transformations of Afro-Descendant associativism, which stopped being organized around brotherhoods to organize in mutual assistance, educational, recreational, or Afro-Brazilian religious societies. Moreover, we still noted that modern black associations inherited some of the principal functions of brotherhoods: promotion of sociability, social integration, and the defense of racially discriminated groups.

Nevertheless, we know that the appearance of a society, whether of a religious or secular nature, has to be understood in relation to the historic context in which it developed. It is in this sense that we understand the Brotherhood of the Rosary of Laguna, like the other homonymous confraternities, as a place of solidarity and visibility for the African and Afro-Descendant population.

This brotherhood had its golden epoch at the time of slavery. It held the renowned *Padroeira* festival, in which could be felt the entire ritual, the taste of African things. In it appeared a king and a queen, with their respective vassals, all slaves, dressed in flashy clothes. The king, dressed in character, with a crown on his head, and the queen whose head was adorned with bright colors. With grotesque clothes, they came to church, heard mass, and went to the procession. When the religious part was over, they gave themselves over to dances brought from Africa, which went on until very late at night. The king of the first festival held in 1836 was the emancipated black Francisco Vaga, while the first queen was Josefa, slave of José Lourenço. This first festival was officiated by Vicar Francisco Vilela, who in 1839, was killed by the *Farrapos*. (Ulysséa, 1976, p.182)

This text is one of the rare reports about the practices of the Brotherhood of the Rosary of Laguna. The documents, minutes of meetings, and commitments made by this society have disappeared, therefore we have little information about it. We know, from reading the newspapers, that Rosário Church was the departure point, until 1885, of the important procession of the image of *Senhor Bom Jesus dos Passos*. We also discovered that it came to an end in the 1930s and the land on which it was located was sold by the brotherhood in 1941. No sign exists nowadays of that church, or of the rituals held there. Nevertheless, we can consider the ending of the Brotherhood of the Rosary, which resulted in the creation of black educational and recreational associations, a determining episode in the history of Africans and Afro-Descendants in Laguna in the post abolition period.

#### STATUS AND BLACK TERRITORY

The Workers' Union Recreational Society (*Sociedade Recreativa União Operária*), founded in 1903, and the Cruz e Souza Literary Club (*Clube Literário Cruz e Souza*), created in 1906, are the two modern black societies in Laguna. They had a markedly recreational nature. Until the appearance of

these associations, *soirées* were only held in the clubs of whites: Clube Blondin (1887), Congresso Lagunense (1889), and Sociedade Recreativa Anita Garibaldi (1889). We can therefore say that *União Operária* opened, in the framework of *Belle Époque* culture, a private place, territory of nocturnal entertainment for blacks.

Studies about black associativism in the South of Brazil, especially in Rio Grande do Sul, explain the creation of Afro-Descendant societies in the Post-Abolition period as the action of black communities against racial discrimination, since blacks and mixed persons were forbidden from frequenting the clubs of whites (Loner, 1999). Petrônio Domingues (2009) highlights the creation of Afro-diasporic networks composed of associations and newspapers, which had the purpose of fighting the segregation of blacks in southern Brazil – especially the cities of Porto Alegre, Pelotas, Santa Maria, and São Leopoldo. The black societies of Pelotas acted, according to Fernanda Oliveira (2011), with the purpose of manufacturing a positive image for the descendants of Africans. In a general form, in the process of positivation of black identity, recreational and cultural clubs followed a set of norms of civility and investing efforts in the school education of their members. The societies were places of sociability, but they also served as a means of social mobility for their members. In Rio Grande do Sul, according to Nara de Jesus, “black social associations or social clubs proliferated during the 1920s and 1930s, grouping a part of the black population who aspired to social status of the middle class” (2005, p.30). The desire for social distinction, through the acquisition of new status which occurred through the appropriation of determined cultural practices, is a common point in research about Afro-Gaúcho associativism.<sup>5</sup> In Laguna it was no different. SRUO workers also had the association as a place of visibility, integration, and social association.

Despite its name, the Workers' Union, was formed of a plurality of professionals, manual workers, merchants, traders, and civil servants. Of the 42 professions declared in the SRUO's registration books between 1921 and 1938, 17% of contributing members said they were workers, 13% traders, 9% casual laborers, and 7% carpenters. The variety of professions tended to reduce over time tempo. Between 1941 and 1949, 27 professions were registered: 13% declared themselves maritime workers, another 13% workers, 11% bricklayers, 6% painters, and 6% carpenters. Between 1950 and 1956, of the 25 professions registered, it was demonstrated that the number of 'maritime' workers increased proportionally: 23% were sailors, 10% stevedores, 9% casual laborers, 8% civil servants, 6% bricklayers, around 5% were dockers, and the same

proportion were carpenters and chauffeurs.<sup>6</sup> The quantitative data indicates that the dynamics of the registration of members between the 1920s and 1950s, was directly related with the socio-economic movement in the coal and cargo port in the city.

SRUO workers held dances on the association's anniversary, in the festivities dedicated to the patron saint of Laguna, Santo Antônio, also organizing festivities in carnivals and meetings in which they danced, played billiards, and bingo. In addition to the recreational nature, we identified that the club had an educational function, offering night courses and a library to its members, friends, and relatives. The aims of the club were:

- a) Provide dances or any other festivities in which the members and their families can meet;
- b) Create a varied and instructive reading section for its members, making acquisitions of good newspapers, books, and magazines;
- c) Intensify and develop by all means available to it social assistance services;
- d) Establish games permitted to societies for the recreation of its members.<sup>7</sup>

We understand that, as well as the objectives published in the statutes, there were 'hidden objectives,' those which were not made explicit in documents, but which could be identified in collective, daily, and continuous actions. Two non-specified objectives can be highlighted which also serve to understand the formation of *Operária*: create and maintain a group identified by color in a worker society, and acquire its own building in the central area of the city. These aims seem strategic to us for the constitution and maintenance of that association.

Its financial resources were especially used to fulfill the second implicit objective: the acquisition of the building. SRUO was capitalized through the collection of monthly dues, recreational activities, and donations. According to the books of revenues and expenses, the money was collected in the following order of importance: the monthly dues from the members, the rental of the hall for billiards games, bingo, lottery, and buffets. The monthly dues were the principal source of income for the society, which explained the concern with the defaulting of its members that appeared in the minutes of the meetings. Moreover, the principal cause for the removal of a member was because of the accumulation of unpaid dues. The treasurer was responsible for collecting the dues and notifying the Board when members did not pay for three consecutive months. Sales of dances tickets were a secondary form of income.



Dances had less financial importance, though a high symbolic value, since it was in these festivities that members gained greater visibility.

The greatest expenditure of *Operária* were related to payments to suppliers of products for dances and festivities, as well as services related to the maintenance of the building (the cost of electric lighting, removal of litters, and other charges paid to the municipality). In second place were expenses with the purchase of the building, located on Rua Santo Antônio, on the corner with Rua Tenente Bessa, one block from Praça XV de Novembro, the principal urban space in Laguna. The purchase of this eclectic style building seems to us the group's greatest achievement. It represented the conquest of a new black territory<sup>8</sup> in the center of the city.

The acquisition and maintenance of the building involved a series of linked efforts. Members and their families, especially the women, were responsible for the organization and the implementation of fundraising. Married and unmarried women, despite not having a seat on the board for the first decades the association existed, had a fundamental role in the organization of production of the 'entertainment.' Possibly the young people, relatives aged less than 18 of members, registered in the books as 'guests,' also assisted in the production of events. The registration books indicated the creation of an extensive associative network formed by members, their relatives, and guests, indicating that the club functioned as an aggregator of its worker members, and also their relatives and friends.

Also through the analysis of the accounting books in which revenues and expenditures appear, it was possible, once again, to relate the Brotherhood of the Rosary to the *Sociedade Operária*. Part of the money used to amortize the debt from the acquisition of the property was withdraw from a fund administered by the brotherhood. The presence of individuals in the two spaces, the brotherhood and the club, allowed the transit not only of people, but also of experiences and resources, which served for the formation of an associative economy, indispensable in the exercise of autonomous collective practices.

The conquest of autonomy also occurred though the connections of SRUO with important local persons. Visits by illustrious citizens were common during the commemorative events with a high symbolic value, such as the its foundation day, 9 February, and the First of May. According to Article 39 of its Statutes, the First of May represented the annual commencement of the new board. In the 1938 commemoration tributes were paid to the patron of the library, the abolitionist leaders and journalist, José Patrocínio, with the presence of Fr. Bernardo Philippi, the direct of the Lagunense Congress, Dib

Mussi, the Mayor of Laguna, Giocondo Tasso, and representatives of local trade unions, such as the Trade Union of Stevedores and the Trade Union of Metallurgical Workers.

In addition to the public acts involving the community, the association also gained respectability by adopting a set of formal and solemn acts in its meetings and festivities. The use of formalized symbols and practices following the precepts of civility and good conduct. Ceremonials consisted of a series of rituals, including: speeches given by persons (illustrious guests and members of the board), reading of the foundation act, singing of the anthem, saluting the flag, the dance, and ‘taps.’

The manipulation of republican symbols, such as the flag and anthem, had, amongst other functions, a pedagogical nature from the Comtean perspective of positivism. Emblems were used in public rituals in order to reach everyone, including “women and the proletariat, less affected, at least in Brazil, to the written word” (Carvalho, 1990, p.140). Ritualized meetings reproduced the language of public symbolic discourse, through both form and the content of what was said. The ritualization of festivities was one of the principal ceremonial practices invented in recreational societies. Public ceremonies of societies conferred on them respectability, at the same time that it reaffirmed their identity.<sup>9</sup>

According to statements collected by Júlio da Rosa (2011), SRUO was a club formed by blacks of social importance. Paulo Sérgio da Silva, great-grandson of Sizino Antônio Machado, a merchant who joined the club in 1919, referred to the members as “blacks of the elite” (Rosa, 2011, p.78). Antônio Paulo Bento, a former president of *Operária*, identified the members of the *Operária* as “*morenos*,” (ibid., p.67), i.e., mixed or ‘brown’. Marina Viana da Silva, daughter of Eugênio Viana, a merchant who exercised the functions of treasurer and president of the Society, declared that *União Operária* belonged to the “mulattos” (ibid., p.86-87). In Antônio and Marina statements, a social superior position of members was identified by a clearer skin color. In these memories – which we identified as collective (Halbwachs, 1990), the name of mulatto or *moreno*, for the *Operária*’s members, served to affirm a social superior status and, thereby, mark a difference in relation to other blacks, members of *Clube Cruz e Souza*, said by the same interviewees to be ‘blacks.’

In the memories of Nerina Viana Mendes, also a daughter of Eugênio Viana, in comparison with that of Cruz e Souza, the club’s dance “was more social. It was full of *something*. Black ‘*nega*’ did not get in. I was black and got in, because I was family.”<sup>10</sup> Nerina’s memories accentuate the differentiation of status. We can perceive here that the link of an Afro-descendant with the

club was based on connections which involved identifications of color and prestige. Changes in social position of a person could even imply a new ethnic-racial identification. Becoming a member of the *Operária* could signify ‘whitening.’<sup>11</sup> Becoming mulatto/*moreno* represented a mark of social ascension.

Although the statements of people linked to the club, former members and relatives, present a collective memory of the identity of the group (Pollak, 1992, p.204), we have to be attentive to the fact that memories produced in the present time mix with the life memories of the interviewee. Moreover, social memory also suffered modifications over time. Memory, according to Pierre Nora (1993, p.9), “is life, always carried by living groups, and in this sense, it is in permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting.” For this reason data from memory has to be treated skeptically, memories questioned, and absences problematized. Memory, as a history vestige, needs to be confronted and related to other contemporary documents related to theme studied. We believe that the identification of the mulatto or *moreno* by collective memory serves, at the same time, as a reaffirmation of the social importance of the antecedents of the group and a way of distancing it from its African ancestry. Having said this, we will analyze an image 1921 which shows the board of the *Operária*.



Figure 1 – Board of *Sociedade Recreativa União Operária*, Laguna, 1921.

This photograph was produced to record the awarding of the club’s lottery prize.<sup>12</sup> In the center of the image is Lucas Bainha, responsible for the action,

surrounded by the members: Pedro do Nascimento, the then president, João Augusto de Carvalho, Luiz Natividade, Euclides Santiago, João Marcolino de Souza, and Bonifácio Alves. The clothing, like the distribution of men around the table, suggests that the scene was mounted. The photograph is, in this sense, evidence that creates an idealized<sup>13</sup> visibility of the group.

Furthermore, it can be argued that the way of dressing, as ‘white’ as possible, is visual proof of whitening. However, we can understand that those members of the *Operária* reproduced practices and ceremonies accepted in a specific social and cultural context, did not signify they were whitening, in the sense of abandoning Afro-Descendant inheritances, but rather acting strategically “to suffer less discrimination and perhaps be more accepted” (Hofbauer, 2005, p.408). After all, whitening is an ideal that “opens the specter of negotiation, in the way that any definition of color/race reflects, to an extent, the context of the relations of power in which they occur” (ibid., p.409).

In turn, the photographic presentation of the directors of the society in formal clothes contributes to the fabrication of an image of “blacks of the elite,” and is related to what differentiates them, according to the already mentioned statements, from the members of Cruz e Souza. In this case, the difference between the members of the two clubs is in status and not in color. It is important to highlight that the term “black elite” is used to reference those who are prestigious whilst part of a discriminated collectivity (Giacomini, 2006). In other words, it is an expression which serves to distinguish some Afro-Descendants from all the others, through the accumulation of economic, cultural, social, or symbolic capital.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, the ethnic-racial identification of SRUO based on the *moreno*/mulatto skin color of its members of greatest prestige seems to us to be a generalization of collective memory. After all, not all members of *Operária* were blacks with clear skin and belonged to an ‘elite’ group. We will now look at two Afro-Descendants, Olavo Alano and Pedro do Nascimento, who were of importance in the association.

Olavo Alano (1893-1965), a merchant, was one of the most important members of *Operária*. In his death certificate he appeared as ‘white.’ Olavo was the son of Miguel Alano Bittencourt (1861-1939), ‘mixed,’<sup>15</sup> whose parents were Eva Sypriana de Jesus (1820-1890) and Luciano Alano de Bittencourt. Olavo was the nephew of Manoel Alano Fernandes Lima (1845-1923), ‘mixed,’ the oldest son of Eva Sypriana, also ‘mixed.’ Both, Eva and Manoel, from what it seems, were slaves on a plantation in Aratingaúba, which was part of the parish of Imaruí. Manoel’s father appears in his baptism record as ‘unknown,’ common among the children of slaves. According to Saul Ulysséa, Manoel

Alano was “the only man of color who managed to overcome the prejudice of the time against the descendants of the black race, due to his character, insinuation and delicacy” (1943, p.43). It is important to highlight that Manoel was treasurer of the Brotherhood of Our Lady of the Rosary and the owner, with his relatives, of the plantation shop and haberdashery Manoel Alano & Irmãos.

Pedro Jerônimo do Nascimento (1882-1967), godson of Manoel Alano, was another prestigious member of the society. Pedro was the secretary of the Brotherhood of the Rosary and had different function in *Operária*: president, secretary, and caretaker. He was recognized as an able carpenter and was a part of the founders’ group: “Perseverant souls who have the wisdom to valorize in the vanguard of this social line this group of workers, sons of this *Lagunense* land.”<sup>16</sup> At the age of 65 he received the title of President of Honor of SRUO, due to the “brilliant actions he always demonstrated for the Society.”<sup>17</sup> It is probable that his brilliance was related to the associative experience he acquired in Brotherhood of the Rosary, as well as the assiduous participation he had in the assemblies of *Operária*. Nevertheless, while his professional skill and commitment to the society were worthy of being noted in the minutes of meetings and assemblies, his connection with the black brotherhood remained silenced.

We do not intend to look in greater depth at the trajectories of either Pedro or Olavo, but rather call attention to the African descent of both, even in the case of the second being declared ‘white,’ and point to the probable ties of kinship they had with Manoel Alano for success in the intra-group relationship. Both also help us understand the meaning that this society gave to worker members: a responsible, disciplined, and orderly worker. The ‘true worker,’ according to Olavo Alano, was the one who paid their dues on time and respected the norms agreed in the statutes. Worker members, irrespective of the nature of their profession, had the obligation to produce ‘from their sweat’ the money to support the society. Olavo, as stated in the minutes, warned that if it were not for the efforts of the ‘real workers’ the building would have been a ruin.<sup>18</sup> Pedro and Olavo were, thus, the exemplary workers in an ethical association which aimed at preserving the territory conquered by the group.

## SILENCE OF ETHNIC AND RACIAL IDENTITY

The affirmation of a racial identity for *Operária* could not be perceived in the documents produced by the group in the first half of the twentieth century. It is, therefore, not possible to affirm, based on these sources, an identification of color/race for the members of that club. This identification, as we have seen,

was obtained through oral statements in 2010 (Rosa, 2011). How then can an Afro-Descendant identity be considered in a recreational club which publically presented itself in the same clothes as the clubs of whites?

To answer this question, we started with the nominal list of the members of *Operária* who were also part of the Brotherhood of the Rosary,<sup>19</sup> to imagine a dual identification for the members of SRUO: blacks and workers. We perceived that determined subjects moved in the interstitial space between the brotherhood and the club, witnessing both the process of decadence of their church and the construction of a club for them, their relatives, and friends. The end of *Rosário*, looked at through the prism of associative transfiguration, resists the version of the disappearance of the community of men of color and strengthens an interpretation based on the strategies for the conquest of citizenship in a modern urban world permeated by racism. The politics of transfiguration, emphasized by Paul Gilroy, allows us think about the *performances* of the Laguna Afro-Descendants in a worker association.<sup>20</sup> Even though SRUO did not make any claim in its documents to an ethnical-racial identification, we understand that the associative spirit of the black brotherhood gained a new form in that society – an institution more suitable to the positive republican ideal of civility and progress.

How then to understand the hiding of the identity of race, or color, in an association that is bears the name workers? To understand the factors that can explain the silence about an African identity, it is necessary to consider the general and local historic and geographic context of the birth and development of the association. In the field of ideas in the 1900s there circulated a discursive production about the construction of a national identity which sought to nullify the ethnical and cultural differences at the same time that it reinforced, under the ideology of whitening in the South of Brazil, the valorization of the race and culture of Portuguese colonists and European immigrants. Another important question in the context posterior to abolition is related to the disciplinarization and discrimination of black workers, which mobilized newspapers and police in a wide-ranging fight against ‘vagrancy.’ It is in this context, in fact, that recreational and sporting societies presented themselves as a solution to the problem of indiscipline and vagrancy in the urban space. As the newspaper *O Albor* stated: “The spirit of sociability” of the Laguna associations was an “expression of civilization,” which “reflects the requirement for an educational advances of a collectivity.”<sup>21</sup> SRUO also corroborates this to encourage sociability and education of workers of African descent.

In the context of the positivation of labor, worker associativism demanded the participation of blacks in the public life of the city. The connection of the identification of the black with labor,<sup>22</sup> in turn, could act in the fight against the stigma of African descent related to slavery. It is in this sense that the positivation of the Afro-Descendant group does not occur through the sustentation of an ethical-racial identity, but rather an affirmation of values accepted in the shared behavior of a local community, which to a certain extent explains the non-existence of a discourse of positivation of black identity in *Operária*.

The discourse published in *Operária*'s minutes and statutes reaffirmed this: the hierarchy of command; the exercise of voting in elections for the board; bureaucratic organization; financial and administrative rigor; and the zeal for the 'decency' of its members. Among the duties of members was, according to Article 7, Sub-item C of the statutes: "Remain decent and ensure this decency in all part of the society's premises, treating politely those present, as well as not using indecent or irritating gestures or words." The defense of the values of civility appeared in the sanctions of 'disorderly' behavior, such as in the reprehension of Fernando dos Santos for "disrespecting the principal hall with immoral words and gestures."<sup>23</sup> It appears that this type of action served to deny any relation of the club's members with uncivilized habits, generally associated with poor Afro-Descendants. Antônio Ramos was removed from *Operária* "for causing disorder in the inaugural *soirée* of *Grêmio Corbeille de Flores*, thereby becoming unworthy of continuing to belong to the society."<sup>24</sup> Antônio, according to the member Aragão, carried out "disrespectful conduct to families and board," therefore the "loss of all his membership rights" was just.<sup>25</sup> The punishment of loutish members had to be exemplary. Almiro and Luiz Pacheco were also expelled from the society for fighting within *Operária*'s building, with "the two being prevented from frequenting the club, and can no longer be proposed again (as members) in accordance with Article 18, Sub-Item C of the statutes."<sup>26</sup> Punishment in these cases, rather than signifying a distension of the group, seemed to strengthen the ties of solidarity, since the norms of conduct, by exercising control over the ways of acting, reinforced the image of civility among *Operária*'s members.

The public discourse<sup>27</sup> of the members of *União Operária* seems to us to be the result of a process of negotiation of power between the different social groups in the city. To understand the public performances and the silence of black identity in *Operária*, we should consider the soil on which it was formed: an urban space in which political power was concentrated in the hands of a few families associated with the Catholic Church (Serpa, 1993). Perhaps, for

this reason, the social ascension or importance of an individual in SRUO involved the hiding of racial identification. To think about this silence we should also consider the ethnic distribution of the population of Laguna. We saw at the beginning of this text that Afro-Descendants (blacks and mixed) represented, according to the 1940 census, 7.5% of the population. Possibly an identity affirmation based on color would have resulted, in the first half of the twentieth century, in negative reactions, directly or indirectly, prejudicing the social projects of a minority group.

Hiding racial identity in public discourse was not the deletion of the African inheritance, but the tactical positioning of the social insertion of Afro-Descendants in the Post-Abolition period, given that: “Especially during the first decades after the end of slavery, references to the condition of former slaves, or the mention of the color of a person continued to cause suspicion or to disqualify an individual” (Rio; Mattos, 2005, p.33). The example of *Operária* highlights that the silence of color/race was not only an individual strategy, but also of a group. This silence could be explained by the victory, even if only provisionally, of the ideology of whitening. According to Hebe Mattos: “Equality between Brazilian citizens was fundamentally perceived by the loss of the mark of slavery,” which implied “stopping being recognized not only as freed (a necessarily provisional category), but also as ‘black’ or ‘negro,’ until then synonyms of slaves and former slaves and, therefore, referring to their character of non-citizen” (2013, p.289-290). It is precisely for this that the hiding of identification was also presented as a strategy of resistance, integration, and social ascension.

The act of not declaring an associative connection of color/race has to be understood in segregationist contexts. Since the Empire, according to Sidney Chalhoub, State Councilors used different subterfuges, such as the lack of signatures, or the illiteracy of one of the directors of an association, to disapprove statutes with racial cleavages: “The opinions of State Councilors about the beneficent societies of blacks show the determination of councilors to prevent the creation of collective social subjects based on racial self-identification and/or of an African origin” (Chalhoub, 2007, p.237). Analyzing the public discourse of SRUO – characterized by the authorized and documented discourse in minutes and in statutes –, we can perceive that the affirmation of difference, especially Afro-Descendant, continued to suffer from self-control, whether declared or hidden, after Abolition and the proclamation of the Republic.

Actually in *Operária* culture there was an intention to silence determined actions and words, probably with the purpose of preserving an image of integrity



for its members. We can read in the statutes that among the duties of members was: "Remaining reserved and not divulging any disagreeable occurrence or incidence, or any other facts which might happen within the premises of the society."<sup>28</sup> In only one episode can we find an evident sign of racial identification for the members of SRUO. In the assembly held on 6 May 1967, it was registered in the minutes: "it was decided that the *Fiscais* [literally inspectors, but meaning bouncers] should prohibit all and any entrances on to the dance floor of members of the white race."<sup>29</sup> Apart from this limited episode, which affirmed identity through the contrast and negation of the other, *Operária* did not leave explicit, in the statutes or working documents, an ethnic-racial affiliation. Although Law 173, from 10 September 1893, and the 1916 Civil Code<sup>30</sup> did not prohibit the formation of racially based groups, in practice the disapproval existed, even in a veiled form, of the values which underlined the history of Africans and their descendants in sociocultural formation of Laguna. The silence around the identity of race could be interpreted as a sociocultural mark of slavery, as well as a strategy for the exercise of citizenship.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

We have seen that the collective memory did not identify the 'mulatto' or 'moreno' members of *Sociedade Recreativa União Operária* as the descendants of the 'blacks' of the Brotherhood of *Nossa Senhora do Rosário*. This data is forgotten or hidden. We can only establish the intimate relationship between these societies in the comparative research among the names of their members. And it was exactly the presence of the Brothers of the Rosary in the foundation and running of *Operária* which led us to think about the dual identity of this society: black and worker, with the black identity, hidden, being one of the inheritances of *Rosário*. Based on what we read, we can suspect that the accumulated experiences and prestige of those who moved from the brotherhood to the club were factors which influenced the choice of leaders and the development of the association.

We also showed that being a member of *Operária* demanded its own associative ethics. The good worker was the worker dedicated to the club and who complied with its regulations. Being an Afro-descendant member signified a real form of self-valorization through work, especially for those whose exercised manual trades.

Finally, studies about black associativism shows us that the act of meeting in associations was a practice of sociability, but was also a possibility of affirming

or altering the social position of the subject who, through the group, could negotiate a positive insertion in Lagunense society. This research, in turn, indicated that the process of hiding ethnic-racial identification was part of the daily strategies of the social and political actions of a worker and Afro-Descendant association in the city of Laguna, in the Post-Abolition period. The silence of black identity was read here not as a victory of the ideology of whitening, but as a localized tactic which by avoiding direct confrontation with the discriminator, allowed the conquest and maintenance of a new black territory.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> *O Albor*, ano 21, n.923, 25 set. 1921. Emphasis added.

<sup>2</sup> We understand race as a social and culturally constructed concept (GUIMARÃES, 2005). The idea of race adopted here is one with emerges in social interactions and conflicts, in which the social functioning or triggering of race (racialization) can both initiate racism through hierarchical differentiations based on phenotypical or cultural characteristics, as well as serving as a “resource for self-defense which should help the recovery of ethnic sentiment, the sentiment of dignity, self-esteem, and self-confidence” (HOFBAUER, 2006, p.24). It is precisely in the analysis of the processes of racialization that the concept of race is presented as an important category of academic analysis, since it serves us to comprehend the dynamic of the manufacture of identity and difference.

<sup>3</sup> According to GUIMARÃES (2005, p.33): “Color’ in Brazil functions as a figured image of ‘race’.”

<sup>4</sup> Unlike what occurred in Laguna, the majority of the churches cited were reconstructed and afterwards preserved as historical and cultural heritage. See: DANTAS, 2013; DIAS, 2008; PASCHOALIN; BODSTEIN, 2015; PELEGRINI, VILANOVA, 2012; ROLNIK, 1997; SOUSA, 2003; TANCCINI, 2008; TOLEDO, 1983.

<sup>5</sup> Civility is understood as a set of norms and cultural practices adopted by individuals or groups. According to Norbert Elias, the values of civility (*civilité*) – control over speech, posture, gestures, clothing, and facial expressions – were used socially to differentiate social classes and groups (ELIAS, 1994).

<sup>6</sup> In addition to the professions mentioned, in the registration books there appear the following trades: agent, tailor, artist, clerk, canoeist, carter, confectioner, lecturer, butler, cook, agent, plumber, shoeshine boy, blacksmith, operator fireworks, stoker, civil servant, waiter, hotel worker, machinist, carpenter, mechanic, soldier, goldsmith, baker, fisherman, teacher, shoemaker, servant, telegraphist, and printer.

<sup>7</sup> Estatutos da Sociedade Recreativa União Operária. *Diário Oficial*, p.7, 5 out. 1965.

<sup>8</sup> We understand territory as a practiced place, a space “produced by operations which orientate it, give details about it, temporize it, and lead it to function in a polyvalent unit of conflictual programs, or contractual proximities” (CERTEAU, 1994, p.202). The black territory is, by extension of the concept, the space of experiences of Afro-Descendant groups, the place where singular constructions and preparations of common knowledge occurs (ROLNIK, 1989). It is in this sense that the office of the *Sociedade Operária* is perceived here as a territory of “international occupation” (LEITE, 1990), since this was used for meetings and exchanges.

<sup>9</sup> We understand that the discursive practice of identity takes place in the process of negotiation and conflict with otherness. “The distinctive language of identity appears again when people seek to calculate how tacit belonging to a group or a community can be transformed into more active styles of solidarity, when they debate the place in which they constitute frontiers around a group and how they should be imposed” (GILROY, 2007, p.125). The identity is a historic question and, therefore, should be thought of in the dynamic of daily relations, to the contrary, in turn, of the essentialism of primordialist theories (HALL, 2013). Generally, ethnic-racial identity emerges from the negation of discourses and practices which involve an identity of collectivity (BARTH, 2011). According to Ana Rios and Hebe Mattos: “the historicity of identities and racial classifications becomes a central question for the understanding of processes of slave emancipation and the how Afro-descendant populations and post-emancipation societies culturally deal with the meanings of slavery” (RIOS; MATTOS, 2005, p.29)

<sup>10</sup> Author’s personal archive. MENDES, Nerina V. Interview with Marilise L. M. dos R. Sayão, 16 jun. 2013.

<sup>11</sup> The ideology of whitening disseminated the idea that the mixing of races would eliminate over time African biological and cultural traces, which would be absorbed and eliminated by a supposed racial superiority of the white element. Whitening, through intermixing, aimed at ethnic purity. According to the logical of this racist ideology, defended in Brazil by intellectuals such as Silvio Romero and Oliveira Viana, the paler the skin color the more distant the subject was from the racially inferior black element. The ideology of whitening, by fusing race and social status, affirms and naturalizes difference by means of color. According to Andreas Hofbauer, whitening is a “historically constructed ideal (an ‘ideology’, a ‘myth’) which fuses elevated social status with the ‘white color and/or white race’ and also projects the possibility of the transformation of skin color, of the ‘metamorphosis’ of color” (HOFBAUER, 2006, p.177).

<sup>12</sup> *Revista Ideal*: mensário independente de artes, letras, sociologia e ciências, ano 1, n.1, jun. 1921.

<sup>13</sup> Visibility, according to André Rouillé, corresponds to “a clarification of things: a manner of seeing and showing, a certain distribution of the opaque and the transparent, of the seen and not seen” (ROUILLÉ, 2009, p.39).

<sup>14</sup> Economic capital is what is constructed by the sum of income and of goods and proper-

ty; social capital involves the network of social relations; while the level of education characterizes cultural capital, it is “inherited or acquired in school” (BOURDIEU, 2007, p.19); and finally, symbolic capital characterized by prestige. “The purchase of works of arts, objectified witness of ‘personal taste,’ and the closest form of the most irreproachable and most inimitable of accumulation, in other words, the incorporation of the distinctive signs and symbols of power under the modality of natural ‘distinction’, personal ‘authority’ or ‘culture’” (ibid., p.263).

<sup>15</sup> The identification of color/race of determined individuals were obtained in death or baptismal registers.

<sup>16</sup> Ata de sessão da diretoria. Livro de atas da SRUO, 11 jun. 1926.

<sup>17</sup> Ata de assembleia geral extraordinária. Livro de atas da SRUO, 28 abr. 1947.

<sup>18</sup> Ata da sessão da assembleia geral. Livro de atas da SRUO, 21 abr. 1933.

<sup>19</sup> We found the following names amongst the brothers of the Brotherhood of Our Lady of the Rosary who playing a leading role among the members of the Workers’ Union Recreational Society (*Sociedade Recreativa União Operária*): Adolpho Campos, Antão Veríssimo, Antônio Felisberto da Rosa, Bonifácio Deoclesio Gil, Bonifácio Jesuino Alves, João Augusto de Carvalho, José Alano de Bittencourt, José Antônio de Oliveira, Lucidonio Cypriano, and Pedro Jerônimo do Nascimento.

<sup>20</sup> The policy of transfiguration “emphasized the emergence of desires, social relations, and modes of associations that were qualitatively new in the ambit of the racial community of interpretation and resistance and also among this group and its oppressors in the past. It specifically points to the formation of a community of needs and solidarity” (GILROY, 2012, p.96).

<sup>21</sup> *O Albor*, ano 23, n.1037, 30 dez. 1923.

<sup>22</sup> According to Beatriz Loner: “Blacks had practically to develop their own associative network as means of the survival and organization of the group. For this they had leaders whose concern with the integration of the ethnicity in society led them to develop various associations and activities in the search for the social and economic elevation of the black man. This integration corresponded to their affirmation as workers, especially working class ones, in the most various and diverse forms that this could concretize. The search for fixed employment as a guarantee of survival and a certain endorsement by society and the public authorities is part of the dreams of all those who fought for the valorization of the black in discriminatory society of the First Republic” (LONER, 1999, p.270). In the relationship between associativism, the positivation of identity, and the social ascension of the black through labor, see : ESCOBAR, 2010.

<sup>23</sup> Ata da sessão da assembleia geral. Livro de atas da SRUO, 12 set. 1921.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 1 jul. 1930.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 30 nov. 1931.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 28 abr. 1942.

<sup>27</sup> Public discourse is understood here as publicized discourse, generally formed by norms of etiquette and courtesy. It represents or reproduces the discourse of the elite and the dominant ideology in a determined time and space. Public discourse is imbued with the power of authority, and for this reason escapes from moral censures. Despite being a discourse of the dominators, as James Scott affirms, public discourse can also be used and appropriated by the subordinate, thereby functioning as an effective strategy for social inclusion and cultural resistance (SCOTT, 2000).

<sup>28</sup> Artigo 7º, letra F, dos estatutos da SRUO.

<sup>29</sup> Ata da assembleia ordinária geral. Livro de atas da SRUO, 6 maio 1967.

<sup>30</sup> It regulated the associations for “religious, moral, scientific, artistic, political purposes, or for simple leisure, in the terms of art. 72, § 3, of the [1891] Constitution.”