

# How to create a Ministry: the co-optation process as a distension mechanism in the relationship between social movements and the State

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This article discusses a little examined process in Brazilian public administration literature: the creation of a Ministry. The mishaps of the constitution of the Special Secretariat for the Promotion of Racial Equality Policies (Seppir) in March 2003 and its implications for public policy design are discussed through the narrative of its creation. Thus, the article examines the reasons for the creation of this ministry as a result of the accommodation of social tensions beyond political coalitions, which impacted public policy. From public documents and interviews with actors with active participation in the process, this paper discusses how the co-optation process allowed the government to accommodate some social tensions it faced. However, the co-optant also suffered changes with the institutionalization of a new place for the construction of public policies to combat racial inequality

**Keywords:** racial inequality; public policies; co-optation.

## Como se cria um Ministério? O processo de cooptação como mecanismo de distensão na relação entre movimentos sociais e Estado

Este artigo tem como objetivo discutir um processo pouco examinado do ponto de vista da administração pública: a criação de um Ministério. Por meio da narrativa da criação da Secretaria Especial de Políticas de Promoção da Igualdade Racial (Seppir), em março de 2003, são discutidos os percalços para sua criação e suas implicações para as políticas públicas. Assim, o artigo se debruça sobre as razões para a criação de Ministério como resultado de acomodações das tensões sociais para além das coalizões políticas, impactando o desenho das políticas públicas. A partir de documentos públicos e entrevistas com atores com participação ativa no processo, discute-se como o processo de cooptação permitiu ao governo acalmar algumas tensões sociais que enfrentava. A contribuição transcende a mera descrição do processo de cooptação que resultou na criação da Seppir, mas também mostra o caráter dialógico da cooptação, na medida em que a cooptação é ao mesmo tempo um processo social e um conceito que permite a compreensão de uma mudança institucional gradual, que no caso analisado é o surgimento de um novo *lugar* para a construção das políticas públicas de combate à desigualdade racial.

**Palavras-chave:** desigualdade racial; políticas públicas; cooptação.

## ¿Cómo se crea un Ministerio? El proceso de cooptación como mecanismo de distensión en la relación entre los movimientos sociales y del Estado

Este artículo tiene como reto discutir la creación de un Ministerio, un proceso poco examinado desde el punto de vista de la administración pública. A través de la narrativa de la creación de la Secretaría Especial de Políticas de Promoción de la Igualdad Racial (Seppir), en marzo de 2003, se discuten los percances de su creación y sus implicaciones para las políticas públicas. Así, el artículo se centra en las razones de la creación del Ministerio, con el objetivo de disminuir tensiones sociales, no apenas como resultado de coaliciones políticas, que afectan el diseño de las políticas públicas. De los documentos públicos y entrevistas con los actores que participan activamente en el proceso, se analiza cómo el proceso de cooptación permitió al gobierno calmar algunas tensiones sociales que se enfrentaba. No obstante, el cooptador también sufrió transformaciones, la institucionalización de un nuevo lugar para la construcción de las políticas públicas para combatir la desigualdad racial.

**Palabras clave:** desigualdad racial; políticas públicas; cooptación.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

It is not rare to come across criticisms towards Brazilian governments because of the “excessive” number of ministries. Common sense points that influence of political parties, inefficiency of public administration or the overlap of functions among ministries are the factors that lead to this excessive number.

The literature on creating ministries is virtually non-existent in the field of public administration in Brazil. A rare work that discusses the topic is the study by Cavalcanti (1985) on the ministries created by the first post-democratic civilian government. The author uses a functionalist perspective and advocates for technical criteria for the creation and existence of new ministries, especially those that result from the division of a larger ministry, as was the case of the separation of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Culture in the period of the New Republic in Brazil. Cavalcanti supports the view of Wahrlich (1984) that even without directly addressing the creation of ministries, points out descriptively the virtues of the administrative reform of 1967 to regroup federal government departments in 16 ministries, according to the principles of planning, decentralization, delegation of authority, coordination and control.

For Political Science, the creation of ministries — in a presidentialism coalition system — takes into consideration the result of the negotiation between the Executive and Legislative branches (Mainwaring, 1993; Figueiredo and Limongi, 1998; Amorim Neto, 2000).

However, few studies have looked into the reasons to create a ministry, to reflect on its impact on public policies and on reducing social tensions as well as to accommodate political coalitions.

Thus, this article aims to discuss this little known process of public administration, describing the creation of the Special Secretariat for the Promotion of Racial Equality (Seppir) in March 2003. The article will present the setbacks during the process to create this secretariat with the status of ministry, as well as its implications in terms of public policies to combat racial inequality in Brazil.

The data used is the study comprised of documents of public domain and interviews with the key actors involved in the process, such as leaders from Black Movement organizations and politicians members of the Workers’ Party. These sources enabled to obtain a privileged look at this case and to build an analytical narrative on the impacts on public policies.

The article analyzes Seppir starting at the organizational *place* (Spink, 2000) it provides to public policies, as well as emphasizes the process of reducing social tension between the Black Movement and the State.

The creation of Seppir can be considered an important event as it is the first ministerial structure created exclusively to promote racial equality, which is a sensitive issue in Brazilian society. Although racial equality had already been the subject of public policies, the secretariat marks a shift in how the issue is faced in terms of policy, positioning racial equality as a transversal issue.

The contribution of this article lies on resuming an important moment in the history of fighting racial inequality, and more importantly, on showing that the creation of a ministry can not only meet the negotiations between political parties, but can also reduce tensions present in society and change the conversations around public policy. The article takes up the work of Selznick (1966) on co-optation, highlighting how this process can promote institutional change by reducing social tension, and avoid being limited to accommodate the interest of political parties as literature suggests. Finally, the article presents the co-optation as a strategy that social movements adopt to promote institutional change.

The following section presents the theoretical discussion on *place* and on the construction of meanings, while the subsequent section presents the methodology. The fourth part of this article will emphasize the political articulation around the creation of Seppir, at the same time highlighting the emergence of the ‘transversality’ as a *place* from where racial inequality can be discussed. The fifth part highlights the latent tension between the process of creation of the secretariat and the co-optation of the movement.

## 2. THE PLACE IN PUBLIC POLICIES

It would be strange for the Ministry of Education to develop public policies related to agribusiness. This strangeness is due to the expectations created about what public policy in education is and what is expected of a Ministry of Education. These expectations can be understood as senses and meanings assigned to these organizational spaces. *Sense* provides a direction, an orientation. Sense guides the action (Spink and Frezza, 1999). When people realize the sense for social relations, they find meanings for things and phenomena.

*Meaning* is what people socially attribute to certain phenomenon; It is the content one assigns to an action (Gohn, 2005:31). Sense and meaning constitute a dialectic relationship because both are socially constructed as a sense is attributed to an action, and an action carries on a meaning. At the same time, the meaning of an action gives purpose to future actions (Spink and Frezza, 1999), which makes it difficult to separate this process. Sense and meaning are often considered synonymous.

This field of negotiation takes place in the public sphere (Habermas, 1984), the space in which ideas are examined, discussed, and argued. In this article, this space is called the *place* of public policies. *Place* is understood as a series of connections, in which the sense of social relationships are built, where there are power struggles over these senses. As such, *place* transcends the limited space. The *place* is daily life where relationships are under the effects of macrostructures and where microstructures are materialized influencing the macrostructure (Spink, 2000; Alves, 2004).

Thus, the *place* of public policy is the negotiation space between organizations, social movements or advocacy groups connected to a particular political claim (Alves, 2004). This negotiation space is formed by partially conscious discursive practices (Spink, 2000).

This article will discuss how the need for reducing social tension enables institutional change that culminates with the creation of Seppir, which provided a new organizational space for the development of public policies.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

The main sources of data for this research are interviews and documents of public domain. These sources focus on the process of the creation of Seppir, looking at elements such as the law through which the secretariat was established, the speeches of President Lula and the first Minister, Matilde Ribeiro. It looks also at news and documents related to the secretariat and the Black Movement organizations, which allow the assessment not only of the creation of the secretariat but also the consequences of this process to the Black Movement.

The Chart 1 presents the 12 interviewees approached between 2005 and 2008. They were key actors in the process of creating Seppir, some of them had connections with the Worker’s Party, and

others are activists of the Black Movement. Interviews were conducted during a period where the secretariat was being re-structured, and the actors and organizations were available to tell the stories and reproduce the narratives around the creation of Seppir. The interviewees were comfortable to evaluate and reflect on Seppir’s organizational structure and on the results obtained regarding the articulation with the Black Movement and the effectivity of the public policies implemented. Therefore, it was a unique moment to build a privileged point of view about this story and its processes, producing a narrative of analysis about the impacts on public policies.

### CHART 1 ABOUT THE INTERVIEWEES

Name	Activity	Location
Humberto Adami	Lawyer, president of <i>Instituto de Advocacia Racial e Ambiental — Iara</i> (Institute of Racial and Environmental Advocacy), created by Adami in 2003. The institute’s actions and debates prioritize social and environmental responsibility and racism with a focus on the promotion and protection of rights of the African-Brazilian population. His recent work has focused on remembrance of slavery.	São Paulo
Joes Beasley	American activist for human rights, was a member of the American Air Force when he began his activism for human rights within the organization. Currently he is working with the African Ascension movement.	São Paulo
Deputy Raul Carrion, Pernambuco, and Thiago Thobias	The then State Deputy from Rio Grande do Sul by the Communist Party of Brazil (PC do B), Raul Carrion was the main coordinator of the <i>Frente Parlamentar Quilombola</i> (The Quilombola Parliamentary Front) in that state. Pernambuco is a former activist of the Black Movement; according to reports, he questioned the then Federal Deputy Paulo Paim to reflect on race relations. Thiago Tobias was adviser to Paulo Paim (in Paim’s mandate as Senator) and member of <i>Educafro</i> . He coordinated the establishment of racial quotas as affirmative action system in federal universities and the approval of the Statute of Racial Equality.	Brasília
Martvs das Chagas	Martvs was responsible for the Sub-Secretariat of Policy Planning (Subplan) of Seppir, under the management of Matilde Ribeiro he was the assistant secretary and temporarily assumed the secretariat on some occasions. He was Secretary to Combat Racism for the Workers’ Party (PT) during the 2002 elections, integrating the campaign committee; after the presidential election, he participated in the transition team.	Brasília
Edson Cardoso	Edson has a Master’s Degree in Communication from the University of Brasília. He was a member of the <i>Movimento Negro Unificado (MNU)</i> (Unified Black Movement), where he edited the periodic <i>Jornal do MNU</i> (1989-94). He was the main organizer of the march <i>Marcha Zumbi dos Palmares</i> in 1995 and the march <i>Marcha Zumbi +10</i> in 2005. After the 1995 march, he founded the newspaper <i>Irohìn</i> (which means “news” in the African Yoruba language).	Brasília
Paul Paim	Senator of the Republic for the State of Rio Grande do Sul. He worked on the bill that created the Statute of Racial Equality.	

Continue

Name	Activity	Location
Reginaldo Bispo	He was the coordinator of MNU and founded the movement in Campinas, São Paulo. He took part in the emblematic protest on July 7, 1978 in front of São Paulo's Municipal Theater, an event that marked the creation of the MNU.	
Edson Santos	He was secretary of Seppir, his activism started with urban social movements, such as the student movement; He was also Chairman of the Residents of <i>Cidade de Deus</i> (neighborhood in Rio de Janeiro). He was elected the councilor for the city of Rio de Janeiro five consecutive times. In 2006 he was elected Federal Deputy, the most voted from The Workers' Party and the most voted black candidate in Brazil. In February 2008 he was invited to take the position of Minister of Seppir, which he held until March 2010.	São Paulo
Matilde Ribeiro	A professor at the Institute of Humanities and Arts of the <i>Universidade da Integração Internacional da Lusofonia Afro-brasileira</i> (University for International Integration of the Afro-Brazilian Lusophony), she was the first Minister of Seppir, holding the position between March 2003 and February 2008, when she left the position because of pressures over the "scandal of corporate cards". She was involved with activism for the Feminist and Black Movement; she joined The Workers' Party where she was a member of the first Secretariat to Combat Racism.	São Paulo
Viviane Ferreira	From Bahia, Brazil, she graduated in law, founded Odun in 2007, an enterprise that works in the production and shaping of cultural goods, articulating female and racial issues. She directed and produced the film " <i>Dê sua ideia, debata</i> " ("Give your idea, discuss"), a documentary about the various opinions on Africanism, the black diaspora, and racial classification in Brazil.	São Paulo
Edna Roland	She is a social psychologist and coordinator of the Coordination of Women and Racial Equality of Guarulhos, Brazil. She is one of the founders of the nonprofit <i>Fala Preta! Organização de Mulheres Negras</i> (Speak, Black Woman! The Black Women's Organization) in 1997. She was General Rapporteur at the 3rd World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Related Intolerance at the UN in 2001.	Guarulhos
Sueli Carneiro	A Philosopher, she holds a PhD in education and is executive coordinator of Geledés, <i>Instituto da Mulher Negra</i> (the Black Women's Institute), coordinating the human rights program. She is one of the founders of the <i>Coletivo de Mulheres Negras</i> (the Collective of Black Women). She was a counselor and served as Secretary General of the Council of Women's Rights and coordinated the Women's Rights Program in 1998.	São Paulo

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

The interviews and public documents were analyzed using the critical discourse analysis (CDA). This approach reveals naturalizations and ideologies embedded in the discourse, which reproduce power relationships that many times are not clear for the participants (Fairclough, 1995, Dijk, 1993; Wodak, 2001).

Discourses are not defined as texts *per se*, because in this way the comprehension of the social processes involved in producing, consuming and distributing the discourse is lost. The discourses are analyzed as reflecting a context. They are indicators to analyze the image they portray, the moment in which they were produced, disseminated or consumed (Titscher et al., 2002; Dijk, 1997).

If discourses provide meaning to social action (Hardy, 2001), they may also point to the changes in these meanings. The same can be observed for documents of public domain. Considering they are

social products and embedded in an organizational context, these documents can bring up evidence of institutional changes (Spink, 1999). This perspective allows us to understand the laws and decrees that establish public policies, the analysis of research institutes and understand documents of the Black Movement as an institutionalization of daily practices. It is a perspective that may point to the changes of meaning of racial inequality and, therefore, the *place* established by Seppir.

#### 4. THE CREATION OF SEPPIR AND THE EMERGENCE OF TRANSVERSALITY

The Presidential elections in Brazil took place in 2002. In the second round, Lula was elected with 61.28% of the valid votes. One of the issues that marked the Workers' Party (PT) campaign was race. Matilde Ribeiro — who went on to be the first minister of Seppir — and Martvs das Chagas — then Secretary to Combat Racism for the party — took part in the coordination of the campaign, bringing the issue into the political advertising and the government program. In order to prepare the content about race for candidate Lula's campaign program, the Workers' Party held several workshops around the country, bringing together the activists of the party to discuss the issue. The result was the development of "Brazil without Racism" program. Matilde mentioned the importance of these workshops:

The four times Lula was candidate for the Presidency inspired the Black Movement to translate its historical demand to the language of a government plan. In the last version, the program was called "Brazil without Racism" and... we did a national survey through five workshops, one in each of the regions of the country, in which the activists of the Worker's Party or those close to the party stopped and looked at the entire agenda to say... that's the way I'm going...

Martys reinforces the importance of this articulation:

[...] In the campaign, in this dialogue we had with the advertiser Duda Mendonça, the party's directors, we created a brand — a brand that had a white boy hugging a star. And we created another one with a black boy hugging a star. And it was very successful, very cool, the image turned into an icon of the campaign.

The Secretariat to Combat Racism of the Workers' Party coordinated the bases of the party in order to present a program for the campaign that included the activists' point of view about the issue of race. This strong presence in coordinating the campaign made room for both to take part in the government's transition team.<sup>1</sup>

With the issue of race included in the campaign and the presence of the two coordinators of "Brazil without Racism" on the transition team, the negotiations to create an agency for the promotion of racial equality started. The idea was that such a governmental body would have its own identity, different from those previously created in the Ministry of Justice.

According to Matilde and Martvs, this was not an easy negotiation. Despite the considerably troubled moment, there was the expectation that the creation of Seppir would be announced on the

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<sup>1</sup> The team was formed of 51 people, led by Antonio Palocci, coordinator of the presidential campaign and future Minister of Finance.

same day as the announcement of the top ministers to form the government, together with the other two Special Secretariats — Secretariat for Human Rights and Secretariat for Women. However, that did not happen, as Martvs notes:

[...] Because our internal negotiation in the transition team was that Seppir was announced together with the Secretariat for Women and the Special Secretariat for Human Rights. The government created three secretaries. We were surprised when on December 23, if I'm not wrong, when the President announced the ministries, Seppir was not there. Seppir was not there! [...]

The fact that Seppir is a body that is not at the same level as the other ministries creates discomfort, and social pressure for the creation of the Secretariat increases, Matilde states:

[...] The Human Rights and the Women secretariats were already there among the ministries, and Seppir had not been created, which brought up a big tension, I... in my case, coming from the transition and [Martvs ] the representative of the National Secretary to Combat Racism, we had to literally 'bullfight' the relationship with the Black Movement who asked: where is it? It was such a struggle... and then? So we went from... my Christmas was awful, my New Year was awful, because my phone didn't stop ringing, people did not stop aguishly looking for us because they had this expectation [...]

The articulation with the activists and government continued. According to Martvs, on December 26 they were already back in Brasilia trying to figure out why Seppir had not been created. In this context Martvs and Matilde talked to the Black Movement organizations and prepared a debate in the '*Quilombola*' tent at the 2003 World Social Forum, in order to hold the government to its word on the establishment of the Secretariat. Martvs reports on this process:

[...] then we gathered several people from the entire country in the '*Quilombola*' tent, to negotiate. In the World Social Forum, I was with the Minister Luiz Dulci,<sup>2</sup> talking to him and to the Minister Zé Dirceu, in order to continue the negotiations [...].

Thus, the creation of Seppir is decided internally between late January and early February. It was decided to hold the announcement of the institution of the Secretariat for a symbolic date, March 21, the International Day for Combating Discrimination. After the decision to create Seppir was made, Martvs and Matilde met with several of the Black Movement organizations to discuss how the structure of this new body should be:

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<sup>2</sup> The team was formed of 51 people, led by Antonio Palocci, coordinator of the presidential campaign and future Minister of Finance.

From this moment we had meetings with several Black Movement organizations, with Unegro,<sup>3</sup> with MNU,<sup>4</sup> with Conen,<sup>5</sup> and with another two organizations of the social movement, I do not remember their names..., they recommended people to participate in our team to build Seppir.

Provisional Measure No. 111 of March 21, 2003, creates the Special Secretariat for Policies to Promote Racial Equality, the same date that Matilde Ribeiro takes office as Minister of Seppir. The next day, Martvs and Matilde did not have an office where they could work from.

As Edna Roland pointed out, Seppir adopts a model of operation that is transversal around the government's ministries and agencies. A secretariat aims to coordinate public policies with other ministries, and government bodies and actions. Therefore, Seppir's aim is not only to promote policies, but also to coordinate the different social spheres creating policies to combat racial inequality in that particular context. The Law that established Seppir states in its 2<sup>nd</sup> article

The Special Secretariat for Policies to Promote Racial Equality is responsible for advising the President of Brazil, directly and immediately [...], in the *formulation, coordination and monitoring of cross-government policies to promote racial equality* [...]. [Brazil, 2003]

President Lula explains this idea in his speech at the inauguration: "The creation of this secretariat is the beginning of a work that needs to succeed. A work that must be coordinated with the other ministries. A daily, persistent work, to stimulate, coordinate, and make the government's actions more efficient in this area (Lula, 2003).

Martvs explains the transversality of the secretariat:

This is our mission [Seppir]: to advise the President of Brazil in order to promote that the government incorporate the issue of racial equality. [...] I, for a long time, was worried if we did the right thing when we created Seppir's mission. I was in doubt. For a long time I defended the idea that we should be a ministry. An equipped ministry, with resources to be able to manage and implement policies for the black population. But over time and with better knowledge about the government machine, I convinced myself that this was a wrong vision. [...] Seppir being a coordination body, articulating policies, the role, not only the role, but the change in mentality when it comes to elaborate public policies in this country, you put, qualify, train public officers to be able to take on policies to promote racial equality, in the several ministries. I have no doubt today that this is the best mechanism; this is the best definition that Seppir could have adopted. [...] With the implementation of Law 10.639 it is our political role to ensure its implementation. But this is a technical function of the Ministry of Education, to make sure that the law is implemented and gets to the schools.

<sup>3</sup> *União dos Negros pela Igualdade* (Union of Blacks for Equality), created on July 14, 1998, in Salvador, Bahia.

<sup>4</sup> *Movimento Negro Unificado* (United Black Movement).

<sup>5</sup> *Coordenação Nacional das Entidades Negras* (National Coordinating Body of Black Organizations).

The question to be asked is: whether a structure for articulation such as this one will produce results, if it will have breath and political will so that policies are implemented. Matilde Ribeiro, after leaving Seppir, comments that she is reflecting on this issue:

I think that the ideal model, I am not going to put a name on it, it is the most empowered possible and with the largest budget possible. I also have lived this in the last 5 years and now I am on the other side, working as a researcher. I have several criticisms to the logic that exist in Brazil regarding the Intersectoriality, transversality, of policies. I think that many times this hides some things; this is lack of engineering to make the policies happen. On the other hand, I also observe that working with these questions in the field of human rights, work setting up a democratic agenda, you cannot do that isolated from the other traditional areas of public policy; [...] I think, well, I do not think, I'm sure that the policies for racial equality, to build them, they cannot happen in spaces that are subordinated to other areas of the government, although Seppir has the status of a ministry, it responds directly to the President, but the negotiation with the fellow ministries do not happen at the same level because it is a body that has an inferior status, in a pragmatic and formal point of view. Thus, this is a challenge for the public administration towards these policies.

## 5. SEPPIR AND THE BLACK MOVEMENT: CO-OPTATION OR ADVANCE

Considering these data, the tension is explicit: is Seppir a result of the Black Movement or a result of the activism of the Workers' Party? To what extent can the two be separated? It seems that this tension is the tip of the iceberg of another problem: how is the relationship between the State and the social movement understood? This issue is little researched when it comes to comprehending the reasons for the creation of a ministry.

From the point of view of the relationship between the State and civil society, one can question the role of co-optation as a guarantee of the actions sense. In this sense, Valenzuela and partners (2015) argue that co-optation is a risk to the processes of decentralization and popular participation, jeopardizing the institutional advances inherent in them. At the same time, in the case presented here, the Black Movement organizations include the government as an oppressive actor who will take their autonomy and freedom. On the other hand, the government sees these organizations as actors who must remain by its side, demobilizing conflicts in society and ensuring its electoral success and permanence in power, while formally and informally holding it accountable to its own state organization.

As presented in the previous section, there seem to be difficulties in the discourses of both sides, a contradiction at times. The government assumes that there must be a conversation, but without deeply considering the issue of the autonomy of the Black Movement. In turn, organizations of the Black Movement consider the actions of the government as a possible co-optation element, although they put pressure for public policies. Others adopt the institutional framework and strive to work within it.

The 'traditional' concept of co-optation is coined by Selznick (1966) at the beginning of the theory of organizations. Co-optation is initially connected to the resource mobilization theory. In this theory, among the main variables are human and financial resources, infrastructure and political

opportunities. Therefore, social movements only come into play when there are resources available (McCarthy and Zald, 1977; Jenkins, 1983).

Co-optation, for Selznick (1966), occurs when an organization mobilizes its resources to fulfill a particular sense. When finding obstacles on this path (such as other organizations with conflicting senses) it mobilizes a portion of these resources to incorporate (absorb) this obstacle (e.g., organization) to its purpose; both go on, then, to pursue the same end.

This definition of co-optation points to a perspective that seems to have been forgotten over time: the “co-opter” also goes through changes. This analysis allows us to understand co-optation not only as a strictly negative event for social movements. For example, an organization of the Black Movement, when ‘absorbed’ by the State, can include a portion of its agenda into the State’s structure. Following this reasoning, Selznick (1966) gives the co-optation mechanism the great advantage of legitimacy: “This device may be utilized when an actual sharing of power is envisioned, but it is especially useful when its objective is the creation of public solidarity, the legitimization of representativeness of the government”. (Selznick, 1966:260).

By incorporating elements from the movement, sharing responsibilities and power, a commitment is created, making the environment difficult for severe criticism, contrary and combative positions, limiting their autonomy, bringing the extra-institutional to inside the institution structure.

However, the co-optation mechanism is a little more complex. The process discussed here is called formal co-optation. In addition, there is a dilemma resulting from the division of authority observed during the incorporation of elements into the organization.

The great advantage of co-optation lies in incorporating a resistance, dividing the boundaries of power, gaining commitment in return, without however, transferring substantive power to the former opponent. Thus, it is necessary to ensure that the co-opted do not get out of hand, taking advantage of their formal position to take power (Selznick, 1996).

As for informal co-optation, it happens when a formal authority does not publicly admit that there has been concession of power as consequence of pressure of any kind, because this “may itself undermine the sense of legitimacy of the formal authority within the community” (Selznick, 1966:35).

Thus, formal co-optation needs this informal control, since the co-opted performs an exchange: they give their commitment with the future hope of greater power. The co-optation ensures that the co-opted does not try to take power for themselves, because they are under threat of losing the power they already have. Notwithstanding, the informal co-optation does not guarantee this legitimacy for long. There is a need to ensure the participation of the co-opted in the decision-making process. Consequently, the dilemma of co-optation becomes a paradox (Selznick, 1966).

Interestingly, the most widespread view is that of formal co-optation, which realizes the division of power as a demobilization strategy (Terry, 2003). In this article, this is referred to as the traditional view of co-optation.

Selznick (1966), however, studied the organization of the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) during the years 1942 and 1943 and could not follow the continuity of the changes undergone by the ‘co-opter’ and the process of absorption of the co-opted. For Selznick, co-optation, formal and informal, has two objectives: to guarantee supporters — formal — and eliminate potential opponents — informal.

Couto (1988) studied the co-optation process at the TVA from the post-war period to the late 1980s (1947-88), observing the changes in the political environment. The author realized that over

time co-optation functions as an element of participation and representation. With each “round” of co-optation, more power was attributed to the co-opted group (Couto, 1988).

There are, then, two consequences: the first is that co-optation is a continuous process and it changes the political context. Secondly, this view reinforces the positive side of co-optation, because the limit of this process can work as a strategy for institutional change.

Therefore, social movements when in relationship with the State, are not destined to co-optation and demobilization. The co-optation process can assume the characteristic of change in power structures, changing participation and representation. It is different from other government activities that produce results that are inherent in the bureaucratic process of organizations.

Regarding the context of Seppir, Edson Cardoso is emphatic: “Seppir exists to camouflage the racial conflict in Brazil and prevent Afro-Brazilians political organization” (Cardoso, 2005:100). The idea of demobilization of co-optation is present here from the perspective of a member of the government, when Martvs throws light on the relationship between Seppir and the Black Movement: “[...] I think it is important that the Black Movement knows what I think. I think we ended up helping the Black Movement to be better positioned. The existence of Seppir is the affirmation of the Black Movement”.

Other achievements of the Black Movement seem to have been forgotten or considered irrelevant: the *Fundação Cultural Palmares* (the Palmares Cultural Foundation), the criminalization of prejudice by the 1988 Constitution, the 1995 *Marcha de Zumbi* (Zumbi March), achievements that exposed the issue of racial inequality that was hidden in Brazil. However, Martvs points to Seppir as a result of the pressure and the co-optation of the Black Movement:

However, Seppir was only created because the Black Movement requested a space to relate to the federal government, a space that could manage not all the policies that Brazilian society — well, I cannot call it society... — but certainly the Afro-Brazilian communities wanted the federal government to develop. Thus, Seppir was in truth a response to the wishes of the black social movement, and I think it is successful [...]

Sueli Carneiro highlights the co-optation process in the Montoro government in the state of São Paulo,<sup>6</sup> when it promoted the State Council of Women and the State Council of Participation and Development of the Black Community:

All this made us realize, I mean, the heat of the fight, the need to give support to those mandates, to that racial perspective we introduced into the council, which is expressed in different ways. Expressed in the presence of different black women, in different commissions - health, labor market, education, all this made this collective,<sup>7</sup> which until then was an initiative of civil society, it was ‘swallowed up’ by the machinery of the government, by the government sector, that was the Council. The collective thus lost autonomy, independence and critical capacity. It

<sup>6</sup> Montoro was the first governor elected by direct votes after the 1964 coup. His mandate was from March 1983 to March 1987. He created the Council of Participation and Development of the Black Community. This was the first experience of a council (and a government) to address the race issue.

<sup>7</sup> The collective Sueli refers to is the *Coletivo de Mulheres Negras* (Collective of Black Women), which she explains: “In 1982 I took part in the creation of a collective of black women in São Paulo, an organization formed by black women to question the creation of the State Council of Women in São Paulo, a council that was created by the government of Mr. Montoro and was formed without any black women”.

was absorbed completely, in some way. [...] what happened was almost a process of co-optation of a space of the civil society by a government body. It is a *voluntary co-optation*, let us say, because it was strategic for us to be inside in order to support the work we were developing there. But at the same time it is like if this choice made us a “neo-governmental” structure, something like that.

Sueli further reflects on the need for this autonomy in Geledés:<sup>8</sup>

Geledés, for example, is an autonomous and independent organization when it comes to political parties. Although we are politically positioned on the left wing, we understand that the role of civil society organizations is to establish a critical and eventually cooperative relationship with the Government, insofar as it responds to the concrete demands of the social movement. But this is not a position of the majority inside the government. It is the opposite. I think there is a very big commitment from most part of the Black Movement organizations with the party and with the government, which I think limits the criticism and this is not an exclusive phenomenon of the Black Movement; It is something that is observed in several other social movements.

This view of “voluntary co-optation” (which is strategic for the development of activities), and the demand for an attitude of independency, can both be understood as the dynamics between formal and informal co-optation; while it is important to avoid co-optation, it is also important to institutionalize advances.

Reginaldo Bispo, from MNU, points out the importance of keeping the movement detached from political parties and governments.

[...] It is like there is a touchstone in government. We could have participated in the [CNPIR] Council, we have never participated. It is MNU’s position, based on its principles. We do not recommend or defend anybody, we do not write a letter of support to any ministers. But we have effectively contributed to the debate. [...] We participated in the debate about how Seppir should be, after that we said: “thank you, but... bye”. We have a view that we should not be bound to any party or government, there are people from several parties who are connected to the MNU. *We fight to change the State, I mean, conquer the State because it is strategic.*

As pointed out by Reginaldo, the option of MNU is to stay away from institutional action to preserve autonomy. Although the views of Geledés and MNU seem opposed, both highlight the importance of the State as a space required to make changes happen. To perform an activity in institutional spaces opened by the State would lead to co-optation, corrupt activism, and deflate the fight, but at the same time is essential for institutional changes to happen.

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<sup>8</sup> *Geledés: Instituto da Mulher Negra* (The Black Women’s Institute). Sueli Carneiro was one of the founders in 1988. More information available at: <[www.geledes.org.br](http://www.geledes.org.br)>.

Finding the limit in the relationship between society and State, between autonomy and co-optation, seems a dilemma. Edna Roland vocalized the conflict in this discourse and the current difficulty in understanding this relationship:

[...] Thus, these activists [black within the party] have to dialogue with the sectors that already dialogue with the State, to look for references. What references do we have now we are going to be State, that we are going to be inside the government, and now, what do we do? We cannot adopt the same attitude as always, i.e. to reject the State, to reject the public policy process. So, the fundamental reference will be a reference given by the fights we have been through. [...] however fragile it may be, sometimes the fragility of the State presents more capacity than we would have as activists or as civil society organizations. On the other hand, a significant part of the activists have been busy with that, with the implementation and formulation of policies, and there are moments in which the capacity of autonomous thinking is weakened. Where will we meet in order to continue thinking, reflecting, maintaining the radicalism of our thoughts? Radicalism in the sense of “no”, of thinking independently of the material and political limits that the State will always offer us. We have to have two things: the ability to deal with this reality that limits us in our daily lives and at the same time be able to continue thinking: where do we want to get to? [...] *I think the government's dilemma is always this: the limit between partnership and the attempt to co-opt, I think that's the drama.*

Edson Santos also notes this dilemma:

[In the Black Movement] there is a kind of indifference, I think, for institutions, for the institutional action. This leads the government, when developing policies, in the current debate in society about taking or not taking the opportunity to develop a policy, the government ends up somewhat alone. [...] I mean, there is no connection, there is no... unfortunately, there is not a proximity yet, regarding the social movement, the institutional action and the government. It is clear that I am not saying that they should be co-opted to defend everything the government puts on the table.

Edson Santos explains that there is a battle to be fought within the institutional spaces, approaching social movements and government's institutional action. Matilde Ribeiro reinforces this point presenting the same dilemma when re-telling her story in Seppir:

[...] then there is in the air this thing of becoming part of the institution. For the public administration, this leads to changes in procedures of practice and in attitude. For the movement, this leads to rethinking of its role as mediator and at the same time the function of pressing public agencies to expand policies. [...] it is not a very easy task, I think that in complex contexts like this, the pressure often tends to decrease in the name of a negotiated agenda, or even the language is, the action of the movement has to be another, it cannot be just in the imperative tense, “I want”, “I can”, “I do”. The language is more like, “how is it done”, “let's do it like this”.

So, it changes, it is another paradigmatic action. So I guess there is no recipe, I would not know how to tell you what would ‘tip the balance’ here. I can only say that these challenges are on the agenda on both sides. And the dialogue between the two sides is not always rational, nor is it always... constructive, even considering the criticism [...]. For me, the feeling that I have, for having lived these years as a minister in this area, is to be experiencing a moment of boiling, effervescence, possibility of the new, not knowing very well which are the exact steps that contemplate the different roles between Government and civil society. [...] And for me it is guarantee of autonomy, the movement guarantees its own autonomy. The government understands that the movement has autonomy to exist.

In this sense, co-optation of the Black Movement on one hand allows for the construction of a new *place* for its demands, the transversality. At first, the failure in creating the ministry as was planned increased social tension, and this needed to be mended to ensure the legitimacy of the new government in the face of the social movements. Although the creation of the secretariat institutionalized a breakthrough in the debate on racial inequality, in its transversality, as it expands the *place* of influence of social inequality, it also strengthens informal co-optation, which demobilizes the pressure of the movement, with the risk of losing institutionalized achievements. At the same time, it is necessary that the power of this new group incorporated into the institutional framework is not excessive. In this way it is possible to limit the scope of this institutional transformation, by giving it a transversal characteristic and by diluting its economic power. This paradox of transversality represents the dialogical process of co-optation, as is demonstrated below. Therefore, co-optation is a central strategy of political actors in the process for the creation of Seppir, although a “traditional” view of co-optation is not enough to understand this paradox enshrined in transversality.

## 6. THE PLACE OF SEPPIR: BEYOND CO-OPTATION?

The third section of this article (the creation of Seppir and the emergence of the transversality), shows the political articulation to create the secretariat, highlighting the emergence of the transversality as a *place* from where racial inequality can be discussed. The fourth section (Seppir and the Black Movement: co-optation or advance) illustrates the latent tension between the secretariat and the cooptation of the movement. The contrast between these two sections allows understanding of co-optation as result of a process of social tension, which was materialized in the creation of Seppir among the ministries of the government and in the meaning the Black Movement associated to the secretariat (i.e. “an extension”). In addition and just as importantly, this contrast allows co-optation to be understood as a mechanism (Stinchcombe, 1991), because the reduction of social tension with the creation of Seppir is connected to a gradual institutional changing, a new *place* for racial inequality, the transversality. Therefore, the idea of co-optation is at the same time an empirical result and a category of analysis that allows comprehending a gradual institutional change.

In this sense, the idea of co-optation conveys a possible paradox between the advance represented by the institutional change (i.e., both the creation of the secretariat and the emergence of transversality) and the co-optation of the movement by the State (i.e., the accommodation of social tension). This paradox may suggest that it is not a dichotomy, but a dialogical process.

The interviews presented in the previous sections show that Seppir's creation process can be understood as a process of building legitimacy of the elected government, considering the Black Movement organizations participated in the campaign and expected the creation of the Special Secretariat as a compensation. Such process is highlighted in the importance that Matilde and Martvs assume during the government transition, a kind of participation that represents the formal cooptation, which brings the institutional change as consequence. At the same time, the emergence of transversality as the new *place* for the debate on racial inequality shows the informal co-optation. Considering this, a question to be raised is: what does this 'transversality' mean?

Edson Santos emphasizes Seppir's new *place*:

It is not possible for Seppir, for instance, to take care of the black population's education. That would be wrong, because it would be a super ministry. It would be the largest ministry, taking care of policies for half of the Brazilian population. It makes no sense. I think that, from the viewpoint of the commitment of the government with this policy, it is essential that the policy is transversal. In my opinion, the issue of promoting racial equality is an initiative for the government itself. This means all the areas of the government. We dialogue even with the Ministry of Defense.

This institutionalization is an advance, because the first response of the State to the mobilization of the black population had been repression: escaped slaves were hunted, beaten, whipped. The "*quilombos*", today symbols of the resistance and struggle for freedom, in the past, when discovered, were completely destroyed. Over time, the society moved from repression to the 'soft repression' of the discrimination. A repression with emphasis on culture, on harsh legal repression. The recognition of human rights has been a way to fight this repression. Racial inequalities must be confronted in other aspects of society as well (Jaccoud and Beghin, 2002).

Seppir's history represents, for the public policies, actions and strategies towards the Black Movement, that racial inequality is not located in the workplace or in the culture in our society. Seppir institutionalizes the need to face racial inequality in all aspects of social life. The discussion is not limited around culture or labor. It is wherever there is evidence of this inequality. Sueli Carneiro explains:

[Seppir is] a body symbolically responsible to raise the awareness of the other government agencies, promote the racial agenda in other ministries. Therefore, I do not believe that [...] it was a demand that was being delayed for a long time, the creation of a federal body to deal with racial issues.

This new perception brings, as we have seen, other expectations for the debate on racial inequality. However, it also presents problems. Their success depends on political articulation, depends on convincing other ministries that they must work the issue of racial inequality in their policies.

Matilde Ribeiro pointed to the difficulty of dealing with a structure without a budget, a structure designed for negotiation. In addition, it is a negotiation between ministries and a secretariat with ministry status, i.e., a negotiation at different levels. This element identifies the transversality as informal co-optation. Here, there is a risk of loss of conquered power. In addition, this power

is given but without subsidies that would allow the needed changes to happen. It is quite ironic that the President himself emphasized this uneven relationship in his speech at the inauguration of Seppir:

My dear Matilde, every time we work in a factory, or when we join the army, or in any activity, when the person is a newcomer, this person needs to take their time. You will start treating the other ministries as authorities who are in a higher position than yourself, because you are a newcomer. All ministries here are your friends, dear. You will approach them with reverence just as a matter of being polite, because, by law, you are their peer; you are the same as any other person who is already in the government. [Lula, 2003]

If there is a relationship of equality between the ministries and the new ministry, why stress that there is equality 'by law' and discuss differences of authority due to the fact one is a newcomer and the secretariat with status of ministry is a novelty? If the law ensures this equality ("by law you *are* their peer; you are the same as any other person who is already in the government" — attention to the tense used in the speech), why does the President not guarantee this equality since the very beginning of the new ministry? It is important to say that the ministries had been appointed only two months before the secretariat. Consequently, one could think about the situation of Minister Carlos Lupi, who took over the Ministry of Labor in March 2007. Was he in a "lower position of authority" in comparison to the Minister of Health José Saraiva Felipe, who took office in July 2005? Did the President warn Minister Carlos Lupi in the same way?

It is obvious the fragility that a secretariat has in comparison to a ministry. It is worth questioning what a negotiation to implement a policy will look like, especially when the secretariat does not have the resources to cover the costs of such implementation.

Some activists of the Black Movement have referred to Seppir as "an extension" a weak structure, with no budget. Adami points out: "It's an attachment, where you cannot do anything".

Co-optation, therefore, is explicit in this discourse. It is explicit in the denouncing of what is in fact happening, as well as by showing the need to avoid this co-optation in order to maintain the criticism, and keep exercising the role of pressuring the State.

What is observed in this article is that the creation of ministries brings consequences, usually not studied. It is also evidenced that this is not a purely technical process (Wahrlich, 1984). At the same time, an analysis of the process of co-optation of social movements highlights how the creation of ministries reflects on the elaboration of public policies, since it changes the *place* of public policies, offering an alternative to political-partisan negotiations of political science (Mainwaring, 1993; Figueiredo and Limongi, 1998; Amorim Neto, 2000).

Therefore, the conclusion is that the design of the ministries in a government, especially regarding the non-traditional ministries, may reflect a process of social accommodation, derived from a co-optation of elements of civil society. This process may, at the same time, weaken the combative power of these actors, and offer the possibility of institutional change. In this sense, this work contributes to the field of public policies emphasizing the importance of the concept of co-optation for policies formulation and implementation. While the literature points to co-optation as the mere annulment of the co-opted (Valenzuela et al., 2015), this article shows that transformations occur

not only in the co-opted but also in the 'co-opter' part of this relationship, provoking a spiral of political games and institutional changes, bringing the idea of co-optation closer to the idea of a process that is done by multiple rounds (Couto, 1988), not only of a single movement of absorption of the opposition.

From the point of view of social movements, it is possible to say that their autonomy is essential for the construction of a society with greater equality. On the other hand, the social movements can count on the strategy of engaging with the institutions around the public policies as a way to promote and consolidate these changes.

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