THE BLACK WOMAN'S PLACE IN THE BRAZILIAN SOCIETY

by

LELIA GONZALEZ

Axé,Muntu!

THE BLACK WOMAN'S PLACE IN THE BRAZILIAN SOCIETY

Lélia de Almeida Gonzalez
(NZINGA/Collective for Black Women)

1. THE BLACK POPULATION'S SITUATION

1.1 _Ideological_ – Two ideological trends define the black's identity in the Brazilian society: on the one hand, the racial democracy notion and, on the other, the ideology of whitening (branqueamento), resulting in a kind of double bind. According to Marilena Chauí (1984:207), "the double bind consists in affirming and denying, prohibiting and allowing something at the same time (the logicians affirm that double bind leads to impossibility of making decisions; the psychiatrists consider it the major cause for schizophrenia, and the anti-psychiatrists consider the double bind the typical practice of family and science)".

The notion of racial democracy, developed by Gilberto Freyre in the 1930s, constituted the public and official view of this identity. According to that notion, the black is a citizen like any other citizen who, being black, is not subject to prejudices and discriminations. The Brazilian images of carnival and soccer are widely used (especially abroad) as "concrete proofs" of the Brazilian "racial harmony".

Historically previous to the notion of racial democracy, the whitening ideology characterized itself as a justification for a policy developed by Brazilian governments to whiten the population of the country, through great stimulation of European immigration, especially in the period 1890-1930. The objective of such policy was to reverse a relation, already old in the Nineteenth Century: the majority of the black population, confirmed by the 1872 census (the first to be held in Brazil) and that of 1890. At a lecture level, the whitening ideology