

**THE REVOLUTION WILL BE TELEVISED:
AFRO-BRAZILIAN MEDIA PRODUCTION IN SÃO PAULO, BRAZIL**

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AFRO-BRAZILIAN MEDIA PRODUCTION IN SÃO PAULO, BRAZIL**

Reighan Alexandra Gillam, Ph. D.

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This dissertation documents the development of the TV da Gente (Our TV) television network in São Paulo, Brazil. The first network of its kind in Brazil, TV da Gente producers channeled blackness as a focal point for television production by employing Afro-Brazilians to appear on the shows as central figures and by creating content that sought to appeal to an Afro-Brazilian audience. This dissertation characterizes the racially unequal visual relations in Brazil through the ways in which Afro-Brazilians are and are not seen in public images. It foregrounds these racially unequal visual relations as sites of contestation for Afro-Brazilian media producers at TV da Gente. I track the roles of Afro-Brazilians in mainstream Brazilian visual culture to demonstrate the ways in which they remain conspicuously absent or marginally present with public representations. An examination of TV da Gente television producers' intentions in program creation and an analysis of the programs they made shows that they privileged middle class images of Afro-Brazilians that emphasized education, professional work, and civic responsibility. I argue that the visual conditions of Afro-Brazilian images that already saturated the public sphere circumscribed the images available to TV da Gente workers for Afro-Brazilian visibility. The emphasis on a middle class image of Afro-Brazilians enabled them to intervene within and challenge the stereotypical and limited representations of Afro-Brazilians that proliferate in public life.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Reighan Alexandra Gillam was born in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. She received her Bachelors of Arts Degree from University of Virginia in 2003, where she double majored in Anthropology and African and African American Studies. She received her Masters of Arts degree from Cornell University in 2007 and her Doctor of Philosophy Degree in 2012. She will be a Post-Doctoral Fellow in the Department of Afroamerican and African Studies at the University of Michigan.

To my parents Warren and Dorothy Gillam

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Biographical Sketch.....	iii
Dedication.....	iv
Acknowledgements	v
Table of Contents	ix
List of Figures.....	xii
Introduction	1
National Media, Hegemony, and Racial Inequality	2
Media and Minority Activism	5
Methodology	9
A Note on Terms	10
Chapter Outline	11
Chapter 1: Brazil’s Racializing Terrain: Between Racial Democracy and Racial Recognition	14
Afro-Brazilians from Slavery to Marginal Labor Integration	14
Racial Democracy	16
Academic Scholarship Surrounding Race Relations in Brazil	18
The Racial Democracy Idea Persists	20
Political Openings to Discuss Racial Politics	22
Chapter 2: “Cultura Sem Negro Não Existe”: The Marginal Presence of Afro-Brazilians in Brazilian Public Life.....	25
Black Culture in the Americas	28
Rhythm Nation	34
Carnaval.....	39
Playing for the Nation	44
On Television	52
Telenovelas	57
Conclusion	62
Chapter 3: TV da Gente: A Network of Resistance	67
Brazil, the Country of Television	70
TV da Gente	71
The TV da Gente Programs.....	77
A Legacy of Mediated Resistance	80
TV da Gente as Televised Resistance	83
Chapter 4: Black Consciousness At Work: Network Formation and Afro-Brazilian Media Professionals.....	86
At the Margins of the Middle	87
The Ideological Implications of Class	90

The Middle Class as an Ambiguous Category	93
The Black Middle Class at Work	97
Obtaining Work Experience	99
Racial Problems Working in the Mainstream Media	100
Separation of Work in Mainstream Media and Segmented Media	106
A (Net)work You Can Believe In	107
Conclusion: At the Center of the Margins	108
Chapter 5: Becoming Black: Black Consciousness and Black Identification.....	111
Born into Blackness: Racial Identity and Kinship	112
Media, Race, and Reflection	114
“Mixed Race” Black Identification	116
Conclusion: A Commitment to the Margins	120
Chapter 6: Channeling Blackness: Television Networks and Flows in the African Diaspora	122
Media in the African Diaspora	123
Brazil and the United States in African Diasporic Perspective	126
Watching <i>Everybody Hates Chris</i> in Brazil	128
Television Networks in the African Diaspora	130
From <i>Judge Hatchett</i> to <i>A Question of Rights</i>	135
African Influences in the Children’s Program: Tio Bah	138
The Limits of Diaspora	141
Conclusion	143
Chapter 7: The Struggle to be Ordinary: Race, Representation and the Politics of Sameness	146
The Debate	148
The Problem of Visibility	151
Narrating Absence	152
Narrating Presence	153
Aesthetics and Activism	155
Who Is Ordinary?	157
<i>A Question of Rights</i> – The Interview Show	158
<i>Quem Sabe Clique</i> – The Game Show	165
<i>Turminha da Hora</i> – The Children’s Show	167
<i>Encontro da Gente</i> – The Women’s Show	170
The Continuous Struggle	172
Chapter 8: The Revolution Will Not be Brought to You by Coke: On Television and Revolution	177
A Question of Audience	179
A Question of Advertising	183
Only the Popular Survive	186

Conclusion: “Look a Negro”: “Visual Activism” and Seeing Race as Cultural Politics189
 Acts of Looking and Visual Activism 191
 Looking at Negros 194

Works Cited..... 196

LIST OF FIGURES

2.1 Samba band performing at a club in downtown, São Paulo, Brazil	38
2.2 Katuka Que Ela Pula <i>Bloco</i> in Rio de Janeiro Carnaval 2008	40
2.3 The Flag Bearer Couple of Vai Vai (Go Go) Samba School, São Paulo, Brazil ...	41
2.4 The Junior Flag Bearer couple of Vai Vai (Go Go) Samba School, São Paulo, Brazil.	42
2.5 Crowd watching a world cup game on Avenida Paulista.....	45
2.6 2010 World Cup Advertisement for Nestlé Chocolate in Race Magazine.....	49
2.7 Advertisement for Bank Itaú	50
2.8 Advertisement for Cable Provider Net	50
2.9 Advertisement for Bank Itaú	51
2.10 Television at a bar depicting a scene from the Brazilian World Cup game 2010	52
2.11 Restaurant in São Paulo with a television playing a novela	61
2.12 Devassa Beer ad for a new dark beer	62
2.13 Response to the Devassa Ad.....	64
3.1 TV da Gente Logo 1	71
3.2 TV da Gente Logo 2	72
3.3 Members of the TV da Gente team	75
4.1 The service and social entrance to an apartment building in the Jardins neighborhood in São Paulo.....	95
6.1 Flyer from Dr. Hédio's campaign for deputado federal	135
6.2 <i>A Question of Rights</i> with Dr. Hédio Silva	137
6.3 A BaoBao Tree	139
7.1 Dr. Hédio Silva hosting <i>A Question of Rights</i>	159
7.2 New municipal building	161
7.3 Afro-Brazilian judge presiding over a case	162
7.4 Restaurant owner interview	163
7.5 Dr. Hédio Silva interviewing Pai Celso	164
7.6 Pai Celso	164
7.7 Adyel Silva interviewing a guest on <i>Our Meeting</i>	170

INTRODUCTION

Recent news reports have heralded Brazil as an economic powerhouse of Latin America, whose conservative fiscal policies have allowed the country to remain steadily on their course of upward ascension by avoiding the financial crashes that plagued North America and Europe. As an upwardly mobile nation, Brazil also has an upwardly mobile population where increased wealth and market shares have lifted millions of people out of poverty to obtain a lower middle class lifestyle. This national upward economic movement accompanies a shift in state policies to directly combat the entrenched forms of racial inequality that structure access to opportunities for many of Brazil's African descendent population. Affirmative action programs to increase Afro-Brazilian attendance in the nations public universities target education as a means through which Afro-Brazilians can gain access to professional employment and economic advancement. These recent state initiatives seem to premise equality upon upward mobility or opportunity to obtain a middle class social position, all of which frames my consideration of Afro-Brazilian media workers and their representational agenda of black image production.

This dissertation examines Afro-Brazilian media workers' demands for increased televisual representation within the context of this racializing Brazilian national terrain, which presents a marked shift from the historical characterization of Brazil as a racial democracy. Racial democracy traditionally posited racial mixture as the heritage of the Brazilian populace, thus denying the presence of clear racial categories. According to this national narrative, inequality did not manifest along racial lines, which rendered racism or racial discrimination non-existent. Literature on mixed race nationalism reveals other locations where ideologies of mixture obscure the workings of racial exclusion (Stutzman 1981; Wade 1993; de la Fuente 2000; Munasinghe 2002; Rahier 2003). Anthropologists have illuminated the complex mechanisms through which the idea of racial democracy maintains a salient foothold in many

Brazilians' conceptualizations of themselves and their social relations (Burdick 1998; Twine 1998; Goldstein 1999; Sheriff 2000; Caldwell 2007). This Brazilian racializing terrain, characterized by state policies to combat racial inequality, remains a field of contestation where meanings surrounding the appropriate ways to acknowledge racial identities and redress racial inequality constitute a site of struggle in which activists' calls for increased racial consciousness receive opposition from those who support racial mixture as the dominant idiom.

I examine these issues of race, class, and representation through the lens of TV da Gente (Our TV), a television network in São Paulo, Brazil begun by a group composed predominately of Afro-Brazilian media producers to racially diversify television content. TV da Gente participates within the racializing terrain of Brazilian public life by drawing attention to and attempting to rectify the conditions of racial inequality within the field of media images.

National Media, Hegemony, and Racial Inequality

I situate myself among those anthropologists interrogating the media as an important locus of social and cultural life (Abu-Lughod, et. al. 2002; Askew and Wilk 2002; Spitulnik 1993). Within media studies, anthropologists have shifted the critical focus from textual analysis to the study of the social interactions, identities, and imaginations constituted by media production and consumption (Davila 2001; Mazzarella 2003; Abu-Lughod 2005; Boyer 2005; Larkin 2008; Lukács 2010).

Benedict Anderson (1991) has drawn attention to the circulation and consumption of media as the imaginative locus of community belonging. Anthropologists have extended this analysis to probe the televised narratives of nationalism that inform daily life by educating viewers about national values and normalizing particular subject positions within the national fold (Dornfeld 1998; Mankekar 1999; Abu-Lughod 2005). During long-term anthropological

study of television in the early 1980's in Brazil, Conrad Kottak found that instead of acting as a global homogenizing force, through increased access to television “millions of Brazilians who were formerly excluded by isolation and illiteracy have now joined in a single national communication system. They now have better access than ever to distinctly Brazilian themes and representations” (2009: 16). Kottack's findings seem to corroborate Benedict Anderson's theory that media consumption can shore up the boundaries of the national imagined community (1991). Yet, in reconciling inequality and national belonging, Anderson claims, “regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship” (1991). In a reference to racial inequality in televised representations Kottack noted that “traditionally, blacks, when present on Brazilian television at all, played the same kinds of menial roles they played in real life” (2009: 61). For Kottack and Anderson this inequality within the nation and national media seem to merit little exploration beyond their brief acknowledgement. However, media images that engender national belonging do so according to nationalist ideologies and their attendant marginalizing imperatives. This dissertation endeavors to examine how Afro-Brazilians whose image seems to lie at the margins of the national imagination seek to address this representational inequality by producing segmented media to channel their own visions of themselves, their social roles, and their professional capacities.

Examining the relationship between alterity and the visual representations of national community directs my analysis towards the ways in which subaltern groups have been imagined within national media narratives and how these mediated renderings of minority communities indicate and underwrite structural forms of exclusion. Theories abound within media studies and cultural studies that conceptualize the media's role in fixing a set of meanings around specific racial identities. Drawing from Gramsci's theory of hegemony, Stuart Hall (1980) contends that media elevate certain narratives to the realm of common sense through their repeated retelling

giving media the potential to normalize the logic of national narratives. By attending to representations of African American women in the United States, Patricia Hill Collins developed the term “controlling images” to describe the limited and stereotypical roles, such as mammies and welfare recipients, that “are designed to make racism, sexism, and poverty appear to be natural, normal, and an inevitable part of everyday life” (1992: 127). Yeidy Rivera (2006) examines the effects of these limited images of African descended populations within the area of performance, theatre, and television. Drawing from Diana Taylor’s (2003) concept of the “scenario,” Yeidy Rivera (2006) describes “scenarios of blackness” as a way to understand the kinds of roles that black actors are required to play due to the dominant perceptions surrounding the social, cultural, or geographical place of blackness within Latin American and the Caribbean. These “scenarios of blackness” that Rivera describes typically exist in Latin America where national narratives of racial mixture obscure discussions about racism and awareness about the existence of such scenarios, which, in turn, serves to further perpetuate and reinforce the same scenarios.

I examine the visual field of blackness within the Brazilian public sphere to show the marginal presence of Afro-Brazilians within mainstream images. Part of the ways in which they are marginally present is through the cultural images of black performers and athletes that support a national logic of racial democracy that celebrates Afro-Brazilian cultural contributions, but denies them equal access to positions of economic and political power thus ensuring their ubiquitous presence within lower class levels of life. Afro-Brazilians also dominate in representations of slaves, service providers, and slum dwellers in the popular renditions of life presented by the evening televisions soap operas. This visual field of blackness frames the representational agenda of Afro-Brazilian media producers whose self-perceptions fail to align with the role assigned to them by the national community.

Media and Minority Activism

Media is a site of domination, but it can also be considered a tool of critical resistance. Anderson and Goldson locate alternative television as a site that “undercuts hegemonic control by introducing meanings or interpretations that lie outside the ‘preferred range’” (1993: 60). Anthropologists Faye Ginsburg and Terence Turner have examined minority produced media within movements for visibility, rights, and recognition and as resources for cultural maintenance and expression. Faye Ginsburg contributes the term “cultural activism” to describe the ways that visual and audio recording technologies allow indigenous producers to “transform historically produced social ruptures by renarrating, from their perspective, the relationships between indigenous histories and cultures and the encompassing societies in which they lived” (1997: 123). Through an examination of the Kayapo Media Project in Brazil, Terence Turner found that indigenous people in central Brazil used cameras for political empowerment during their resistance to a dam building project that would flood their land (2002). In response to arguments that media production is antithetical to indigenous culture (Faris 1992; Weiner 1997), Ginsburg and Turner have held that media are a mode through which indigenous people can affirm, record, and express their cultural values and practices.

In her study of a soap opera production within activism for social justice, Cymene Howe describes how gay and lesbian activists’ agendas are televisually produced and represented in “dialogical engagement with the audience” to prompt discussion surrounding controversial topics in Nicaragua (2008). Howe developed the concept of “televisionary activism” as “a mediated form of social justice messaging that utilizes the pervasive, popular platform of television to create new ‘visions’ of social transformation to shape and change, in the word of advocates, ‘culture’” (2008: 54). Activists within Brazil’s black movement organizations have consistently

worked to make explicit the terms of racial exclusion in Brazil through demonstrations, marches, programs, speeches, conferences, and government advocacy (Mitchell 1977; Andrews 1992; Hanchard 1998; Caldwell 2007). Similar to Indigenous “cultural activism” and “televisionary activism,” Afro-Brazilian television producers at TV da Gente extended movements for racial equality to the visual realm by using their knowledge of media production to create programs that intervened within and disrupted the visual field of blackness to make themselves publicly visible in new ways. Unlike Indigenous media production, which have been predominately concerned with questions of cultural difference, cultural maintenance, and historical memory, Afro-Brazilian media producers did not view their television project as a space to record and communicate a politics of cultural difference. Afro-Brazilians are already culturally recognized within the national imagination as producers of authentic performances and practices that evidence Brazilian national distinction. Similar to the television producers in Nicaragua that Cymene Howe described as normalizing the image of gays and lesbians, Afro-Brazilian media producers at TV da Gente sought to transcend their difference in their demand for full inclusion. They employed the representational strategy of de-emphasizing their ascribed cultural roles and instead cultivated a middle class professional image that emphasized the virtues of civic responsibility and achievement in education. Thus, I argue that their fight for inclusion is not premised on cultural terms, but on the terms of the normative image of middle class inclusion and belonging.

Presenting an image of middle class respectability when enacting a politics of uplift has been the goal of many black populations in the New World such as the New Negro movement in the U.S. during the early 1900s (Gates 2007, Gaines 1996) and middle class creole nationalism during Jamaican independence (Thomas 2004). Generally the foregrounding of a middle class image of blackness emerged within projects that intended to advocate for the dignity, equality,

and the fundamental humanity of black people in the context of degrading and pernicious images of blackness that circulated publicly. Henry Louis Gates Jr. argued that in the United States, “In the first decades of the nineteenth century, the few prominent blacks who obtained access to the middle and upper classes commissioned paintings, and later photographs, of themselves, so that they could metaphorically enshrine and quite literally perpetuate the example of their own identities” (1990: xxix). W.E.B. DuBois was a strong proponent of countering the degrading images of blackness with images of middle class and elite African Americans, who he labeled the “talented tenth.” Shawn Michelle Smith examined DuBois’ American Negro Exhibit during the Paris Exposition of 1900, a series of 363 photographs of middle class African Americans, which, she argued, represented “elite class standing and cultural refinement to contest scientific claims about innate ‘Negro inferiority,’ thereby evoking class to trump (an essentialized hierarchy) of race” (2004: 23).

The struggle over the image of blackness in the United States continued in the arena of television through the various sitcoms that centered around African American middle class families and characters, most popularly exemplified by *The Cosby Show*. Through its portrayal of the Huxtables, a professional couple with a stable home for their five children, Michael Eric Dyson noted, “The Cosby show reflects the increasing diversity of African American life, including continuous upward social mobility by blacks, which provides access to new employment opportunities and expands the black middle class” (1989: 29). Herman Gray pointed out that against the backdrop of Reaganism and political attacks on welfare that highlighted black promiscuity and cultural deviance to garner support for conservative fiscal policies, *The Cosby Show* “repositioned and recoded blackness and black (middle-class) subjectivity within television’s own discursive and institutional practices” (1995: 83).

Although the historical and material conditions distinctly differ, it seems as though Afro-

Brazilian media producers at TV da Gente enacted similar practices of centering images of a black middle class. However, they did so in a country whose national narrative denies the legitimacy of race as an idiom through which to express difference or identification. I ask what made a middle class image of blackness desirable for media producers at TV da Gente? In addressing this question, I examine the visual conditions of images within the public sphere and the social conditions of black middle class life that made a middle class image of representation available for Afro-Brazilian media workers at TV da Gente.

Middle class communities of African descent in the United States have received considerable academic attention. Researchers have shown how middle class African Americans choose to live in black neighborhoods in order to assert a racial identity and connect with other black people (Patillo 2007, Prince 2004, Taylor 2002). Patricia Banks labeled the practices of middle class black art collecting “black cultivated consumption,” in which she argues that the collectors construct black appearances that “articulate and sustain understandings of black phenotype” (2010: 5). This dissertation contributes to an understanding of the black middle class as part of an African Diaspora project that examines the histories and experiences of people of African decent within the diverse geographical, social, and cultural contexts in which they reside. Although they constitute a small, but growing group, I examine the role of middle class Afro-Brazilians within the complex dynamics of racial configurations in Brazil. Specifically, I look at Afro-Brazilian media producers engaged in actions for social change. Perhaps the black middle classes are positioned to enact change because they have more access to resources and the means of image production. They are also positioned to experience the contradictions of society in ways that the black underclasses may not. In this study of black middle class life in Brazil, I examine the particular constructions and conditions of middle class life that work within an ideology of racial democracy, which denies the presence of blackness as a generally accepted category of

identification but then historically and ideologically associates whiteness with middle class status. These particular contours of middle class construction in Brazil make black Brazilians unrecognizable as middle class professionals or consumers leaving them vulnerable to misrecognition as lower class.

Methodology

I arrived in São Paulo, Brazil in August 2007 to encounter a field workers nightmare of their proposed research site's discontinued existence. No one has told me when TV da Gente officially stopped recording, but they were not operating when I planned to carry out participant observation at the television network. I did not want to abandon the project, so I set out to recover any accessible data in order to reconstruct a description of the TV da Gente television network. This agenda involved tracking down and interviewing everyone I knew who worked there, as well as asking them for further contacts. I was able to move through these black media networks to reconstruct an image of TV da Gente by collecting and viewing television programs passed on to me and by conducting 25 in depth interviews with the founder, producers, directors, and program hosts who were critical agents in shaping the network's content. The study I have produced through the information I retrieved during 15 months of field work may be considered an ethnographic excavation of a formerly existing entity or an attempt to document the short lived activities of a Brazilian black television network with a social justice imperative.

The irony of the task of representing people who produced representations in order to counter or change the ways in which they were already represented does not escape me. Throughout the dissertation I privilege their voices through narrative representations of their comments, ideas, and assertions. I understand that this does not necessarily equalize the power I yield in representing them, but I do not take my position lightly. Of course, I exercise the final

say in what gets told, whose voice comes in where, and whose words are used to what end.

A Note on Terms

Any research on race in Brazil must address the complications of translating racial terminologies from one language to another and from one national context to another. The decision to use certain racial signifiers is not free from the history in which people of African descent have been subject to naming practices by the dominant group and then subsequently have struggled in developing and insisting upon their own terms of identification. It is generally known that terms describing degrees of racial mixture proliferate in the context of Brazil, such as *preto* (black), *negro* (black), *pardo* (mixed race), *mestiço* (mixed race), *mulato* (mixed race between black and white), and *moreno* (brown). That Brazilians employed a stunning variety of classificatory terms for color description was codified in a study done by Marvin Harris in 1970. His research elicited 492 race-color terms from 100 respondents presented with a deck of 36 male and 36 female representations of phenotypes (Harris 1970).

Federal policies for racial equality and black movement activists have elevated the use of such terms to political acts of identification within the current shift from racial democracy to racial recognition. Black movement activists have historically rallied around the term *negro* for identification of Brazil's population of African descent for a variety of reasons: to gain an accurate count of their numbers, to more accurately track inequality statistics, to render visible the workings of inequality along racial lines, and to invest identification with a *negro* identity with pride. All of my research participants used the term *negro* when describing themselves and other Brazilians of African descent.

In this dissertation I will use the term Afro-Brazilian to refer to black and brown people who identify themselves as *negro*. I also use the term Afro-Brazilian when referring generally to

the black population in Brazil. I will also refer to Afro-Brazilians as black Brazilians. I use the term African American or black American when referring to people of African descent in the United States, realizing that this term may obscure the diversity of those who identify as black in the U.S. I use the term black to refer to people of African descent across national contexts and I will freely interchange it with the terms Afro-Brazilian or African American.

I follow Satya Mohanty in understanding racial identity as both “real” and constructed. In his essay entitled “The Epistemic Status of Cultural Identity,” Mohanty offers an understanding of identity that places individual experience as integral to developing an understanding of the world and one’s social position in it. He writes,

Whether we inherit an identity – masculinity, being black – or we actively choose one on the basis of our political predilections – radical lesbian, black nationalism, socialism – our identities are ways of making sense of our experiences. Identities are theoretical constructions that enable us to read the world in specific ways.
(2000: 43)

Using a realist theory of racial identity in this way prompts me to consider the role of individual processes of black identity development for my research interlocutors in order to understand their interpretation of the visual and social world and their intervention within it by deploying racial representations.

Chapter Outline

This dissertation focuses exclusively on TV da Gente, but it does not necessarily follow in a chronological order from the beginning of the network to the end. Instead, I organize the chapters around different concepts and use the material from the network to elaborate on specific themes. In chapter 1 I begin the dissertation with the background of racial construction, racial democracy in Brazil, and the contemporary movements for racial recognition currently underway. In chapter 2 I map the racial and cultural coordinates of Afro-Brazilians’ marginal presence in the national imagination as athletes, performers, service workers, enslaved men and

women, and slum dwellers. I show that these cultural images of Afro-Brazilians as performers and athletes were and are crucial to nation building projects through media circulation by casting Afro-Brazilians as central to the national imagination through authentic cultural production, which draws attention away from the lived conditions of and images of Afro-Brazilian poverty and inequality. In Chapter 3 I discuss the beginning of the TV da Gente television network, the programs they produced, and the ways in which they resisted Brazilian national narratives of racial democracy.

Chapters 4 and 5 discuss the backgrounds of the TV da Gente media producers. In chapter 4 I examine the ideological and historical construction of middle class identity in Brazil as reserved predominately for white Brazilians. I argue that middle class Afro-Brazilians occupy the margins of the middle when they are consistently misrecognized as lower class within the context of work or within the context of everyday life. The occurrences of not being recognized as professional workers and the inability to include diverse content into their media venues pushed many Afro-Brazilian media workers to segmented media organizations, such as TV da Gente. In chapter 5 I use the narratives of black racial formation to describe the multidimensional processes of black identity development among middle class Afro-Brazilian media professionals.

In chapters 6 and 7 I turn my attention to the TV da Gente television network itself. In chapter 6 I illuminate the African Diaspora relationships and connections that enabled the network's development and informed program creation. These include money from Angola, inspiration from the U.S. and Africa, and television programs from the U.S. In chapter 7 I give specific attention to the content of the programs and the intention behind it to present Afro-Brazilians within televisual subject positions of authority as hosts of programs and who controlled the flow of content and narrative. They presented an image of Afro-Brazilian middle class success that privileged professional work, civic responsibility, and education. I argue that

they enacted a struggle to be ordinary by formatting their programs like other television programs on mainstream networks and foregrounding middle class Afro-Brazilian images. Rather than reading this representational strategy as simple mimicry, their actions are emblematic of a wider struggle to transcend racial difference.

I explore and speculate on the end of the TV da Gente television network in chapter 8. As far as I can ascertain, the network had a life span of about 2 years. Many of the producers cited the financial problems of the network and their lack of commercial advertisements as impediments to further production. I place the end of the network with a wider context of the difficulty in balancing entertainment and substance in their television programming. I also consider the role of television producers' conceptions about their audience as a potential site of disconnection for TV da Gente. I place their inability to obtain commercial advertisements within the context of racial democracy and race relations in Brazil, where beliefs in racial mixture may prevent corporate sponsors from advertising on a controversial network or on a network that rhetorically targets a black audience, who make up a disproportionate amount of Brazil's poor. I conclude the dissertation with my understanding of visual activism as a strategy for cultural politics and social movements.

CHAPTER 1

BRAZIL'S RACIALIZING TERRAIN: BETWEEN RACIAL DEMOCRACY AND RACIAL RECOGNITION

Afro-Brazilians from Slavery to Marginal Labor Integration

The presence of the majority of African descendents in Brazil stems from a history of forced migrations and enslavement of African peoples in the new world. The first slave ship arrived in the colony, that would come to be known as Brazil, in 1538 bringing enslaved African men and women to labor in the growing global sugar industry. In addition to working on sugar plantations, enslaved African men and women

brought along with them, or learned in the New World, many skills essential to the growth of Brazil. They were the carpenters, painters, masons, jewelers, sculptors, locksmiths, tailors, cobblers, and bakers. They made technical contributions in metallurgy, mining, cattle-raising, and agriculture. (Burns 1993: 45)

Scholars estimate that 3.5 million Africans over three centuries survived the middle passage en route to Brazil. Brazil's infamously ambiguous racial categorization makes accurate numbers difficult to collect, but today Brazil is considered to have the largest African descended, or black, population outside of Africa. In 1995 the Minority Rights group estimated that the Afro-Brazilian population ranged from 58 million to 132 million (between 33% and 75% of the national population).

Brazil has the dubious distinction of being the final polity in the western hemisphere to abolish slavery in 1888. In 1889, the country became a republic, free from the control of the Portuguese monarchy. Failing to acknowledge the effect of slavery on the previously enslaved, Brazilian political elites did not institute policies or programs to incorporate the newly freed population into the labor market.

Brazilian elites were influenced by turn of the century pseudo-scientific theories of racism from Europe. These arguments around black inferiority doomed Brazil to a substandard nation due to their substantial black population. Following the abolition of slavery, “science was increasingly used, as it had been in Europe since the Enlightenment, to define how much ‘nature’ would limit the social and political equality of blacks and mulattoes in the new republic” (Stepan 1991: 45). The Brazilian political and professional elite wrote prolifically about the “problem” of the alleged inferior black population, the degenerate mulatto or mixed race population, and the tropical climate that further hindered Brazilian progress. To address this challenge of developing a unifying national project, elites positioned miscengenation as central to producing a whiter population to comprise the body politic. Thomas Skidmore describes this as a project of whitening, where race mixing “could forge a healthy mixed population growing steadily whiter, both culturally and physically” (1993: 65). This strategy for national progress negotiated between the precepts of racist social theory and the demographic reality of Brazil’s large non-white population by insisting on the potential for their disappearance.

Under the influence of eugenics and the desire to “racially improve” the national population, the government sponsored European immigration to Brazil to both whiten the population and work in the labor market sector left vacant by the abolition of slavery. The immigration law of 1890 expressed explicit racial prejudice by denying immigration to Brazil for, “people from Asia and Africa, who will require special authorization from the National Congress” (Skidmore 1993: 137). Also, in a pamphlet published in 1914, Caio de Menezes wrote in favor of attracting German immigrants

as an ethnic coefficient of the highest quality [because] the Brazilian people, more than any other, needs the influence of advanced peoples in building a race, especially at the historic moment when the percentage represented by the African race is beginning to decline and must disappear into the whirlpool of the white race. (qt. in Skidmore 1993: 130).

The Brazilian elite thought that only European immigration would increase the white population, which would diminish and eventually eliminate the black and brown population.

After 1890, about 3 million Europeans immigrated to and settled in Brazil, with over half of them going to the state of São Paulo to work in the coffee industry. As a particularly wealthy state, São Paulo had the resources to subsidize the transatlantic passage of European immigrants. This tide of European immigration would create the conditions in which Afro-Brazilians would be displaced as laborers. European immigrants did not undercut wages paid to Afro-Brazilians by working for less money. Rather, *Paulista* landowners wanted to subsidize European travel to Brazil, in order to “flood the labor market with workers, thus keeping the cost of labor down” (Andrews 1991: 58). *Paulista* landowners’ and employers’ hiring practices favored the new immigrants for agricultural and manufacturing jobs in the urban center and countryside. The increasing pool of immigrant workers replaced the need for planters to rely on Afro-Brazilian labor, and contributed to their exclusion from the labor force. George Reid Andrews found that,

blacks were almost completely barred from factory work, and black artisans had virtually disappeared from the city. Poor and working class black people found their job opportunities restricted to domestic service and what today would be termed the informal sector. (1991: 68)

Although Brazil never had formal laws barring black people from certain job opportunities, historian George Reid Andrews argues demonstrates that the favoring of immigrants, particularly in São Paulo, acted as an informal segregation of Afro-Brazilians from the labor market, which hindered their potential as a group for economic advancement and upward mobility (1991).

Racial Democracy

With the publication of *The Masters and the Slaves* in 1933, Gilberto Freyre is credited for recasting black heritage within the concept of racial mixture as a symbol of Brazilian national

specificity and source of cultural strength, rather than an element of national inferiority. Trained by Franz Boas in cultural anthropology at Columbia University, Freyre wrote that from Boas he “learned to regard as fundamental the difference between race and culture, to discriminate between the effects of purely genetic relationships and those resulting from social influences, the cultural heritage and milieu” (1956: 3). With this intention, Freyre sought to vindicate the non-white Brazilian population by extensively describing and insisting upon the centrality of their cultural contributions to the Brazilian national character.

In *The Masters and the Slaves*, Freyre argued that miscengenation between the African, Portuguese, and Indian populations narrowed the social distance between these groups allowing for cultural exchange and producing malleable racial relations. He drew attention to the interpersonal and sexual relationships between slave owners and enslaved in forging a new, racially mixed Brazil. Freyre revised the role of blackness as a marker of inferiority for the Brazilian national populace, by redefining it as a source of cultural strength. In this social history of race relations during slavery he cast racial mixture as foundational to Brazilian national identity and argued that “a widely practiced miscengenation here tended to modify the enormous social distance that otherwise would have been presented between Big House and tropical forest, between Big House and slave hut” (Freyre 1944: 5). He argued that out of this sexual and social intimacy, a hybrid Brazilian culture emerged consisting of Indigenous, African, and Portuguese characteristics and cultural contributions. Freyre is credited with articulating an ideology of racial mixture upon which the idea of racial democracy is based.

Freyre presented a romanticized social history of Brazil during the colonial period that he argued lead to contemporary harmonious race relations. However, he failed to include the historical fact of domination and power inequality that framed the relationship between slave and slave master, or colonizer and colonized native people. Rather than empower Afro-Brazilians

and Indigenous peoples, his account obscured the system of brutality and exploitation in which this mixture took place. Race relations in Brazil were not harmonious during slavery or after abolition, but were only represented as such by Freyre in order to buttress his racial democracy thesis.

Freyre published additional books on race relations in Brazil and remained an outspoken supporter of Brazil's racial democracy as a journalist and politician. Other researchers, like Mario de Andrade and Edison Carneiro, investigated and published accounts of Afro-Brazilian culture. Also, the Brazilian national government under the Vargas regime and the military dictators (1965-1985) would make racial democracy the guiding principle of national cultural policy. (I will talk more about this in the next chapter.) Freyre did not work alone, but he popularized and continually supported this idea of Brazilian racial democracy, which continues as a contested belief of the national population.

Academic Scholarship Surrounding Race Relations in Brazil

The political, scholarly, and public propagation of racial democracy gained for Brazil an international reputation as a "racial paradise." U.S. American scholars and politicians found Brazil to be free from racial animosity. For example, after six months of research in Brazil, African American sociologist, E. Franklin Frazier wrote in 1942, that the United States was "beginning to give more serious attention to Brazil where despite its absolutely and relatively large Negro or colored population there is no race problem in the American sense" (quoted in Hellwig 1992: 122).

After the end of World War II and the aftermath of the Holocaust, UNESCO sponsored social scientific examinations into Brazil's appearance of egalitarian race relations in the beginning of the 1950's. Some of the resulting publications refuted this idea of Brazil as a racial

democracy, and uncovered deeply entrenched problems of racial inequality. Rather than confirm the existence of a Brazilian racial democracy, many of the UNESCO studies revealed that Brazilian blacks were subject to a particular and very subtle form of racism. Nogueira (1985), Costa Pinto (1952), and Bastide and Fernandes (1959) argued for the presence of racial prejudice in Brazilian society. These studies marked the beginning of academic inquiry into the details of racism in Brazil, which have led to the academic debunking of the racial democracy ideology.

Scholars have continued to probe the patterns, origins, and continued consequences of racial inequality in Brazil, with particular attention given to the black population. Substantial research supports the enduring and continual patterns of anti-black racism that effect the black population through unequal access to the labor market (Andrews 1991), political underrepresentation (Johnson 1998), increased police violence (Mitchell and Wood 1998), lower wages (Lovell 1999, Silva 1985), underemployment (Hasenbalg 1985), residential segregation (Telles 1992), and underrepresentation in the media (Araujo 2000, Simpson 1993, Ramos 2002). This translates into gross racial inequalities in statistical representation as well. According to the PNAD (National Household Survey) done in 2010: While black Brazilians make up 45% of the population they represent 64% of the poor population; White Brazilians make up 54% of the population, but 35% are impoverished; In São Paulo, the black population (parda and preto) is 5,765,977 and represents 23% of the total population; Most of the black population lives in favelas or communities on the periphery of the city; Of every ten people in the poorest income category, eight are black; Of every ten people in the highest segment of the income distribution, only one is black. These studies present a formidable body of data supporting persistent practices and the pervasive presence of marginalization or exclusion along racial lines.

The Racial Democracy Idea Persists

Despite academic, social, and experiential evidence of the ways in which race structures many areas of Brazilian society, many non-elite and elite Brazilians continue to believe in and articulate a discourse that supports the idea of racial democracy. Popular denials of racism and discrimination in Brazil are generally undergirded by a set of mutually reinforcing justifications that include the following: the phenomenon of various and diverse color gradations evidence the absence of a definite racial line, the problem of inequality in Brazil is the result of class, not race, and the intractable and entrenched racial problems reside in the United States rendering any racial inequality in Brazil more benign by comparison as well as a general silence around the topic of racism and discrimination in everyday life. When speaking to most Brazilians about racial inequality, they would invariably cite one of these common explanations for why Brazil had no race problem, or at the most a race problem of relatively minor proportions.

The valorization of racial mixture and the silencing of discrete racial identities are enacted through concrete social practices and everyday experiences within the conversations, exchanges, and silences that make up quotidian life. Philomena Essed's conceptualization of "everyday racism" is applicable here. This term describes racism that "links ideological dimensions of racism with daily attitudes and interprets the reproduction of racism in terms of the experience of it in everyday life" (1991: 2) Thus, racism and by extension, the racial order is produced, expressed, and reinforced through quotidian practices.

Anthropologist Robin Sheriff argues that Brazilians of varying classes and races avoid discussions of racism, which produces a palpable silence surrounding the issue. She theorizes this silence as "cultural censorship" which prevents "open discussions of racism in Brazil [that] has no doubt robbed all Brazilians of what would otherwise be a richer and more incisive discourse in which to critique racialized prejudice and discrimination" (Sheriff 2000: 127).

While this silence, on the part of Afro-Brazilians, appears to indicate a tacit approval of the status quo, it is actually an ideological by product of racial democracy and works to reproduce the very conditions of racial inequality that limit black upward mobility.

Many Brazilians will also point to the substantial poverty and uneven income distribution as the root causes of social and economic exclusion. Indeed, Brazil does have a system of considerable uneven resource allocation where 10% of the population has 90% of the wealth. Yet, this inequality is not annexed to the history of slavery or the consequent exclusion of Afro-Brazilians from the labor market, which hindered their ability to be counted among this wealthy upper crust. As I will demonstrate in Chapter 3, racial issues do not disappear for middle class Afro-Brazilians because of their upward mobility.

Central to the everyday denial of racial discrimination in Brazil is the reference to the variety of skin colors that fall along the spectrum from black to white that prevents the recognition of a distinct racial group. Brazilians will employ a variety of color classifications to describe another person's appearance. These terms can include, but are not limited to *claro* (light), *clarinho* (light skinned), *moreno* (brown), *escurinho* (very dark), *negro* (black). Anthropologist, Yvonne Maggie (1988) found that white and nonwhite Brazilians will not describe someone as black (*negro* or *preto*) to avoid insulting that person. Typically, *moreno* is the polite label to use when referring to people of darker complexion. That the descriptors *negro* or *preto* (black) constitute grounds for insult indicates that the selection of color categories is not innocent of racial prejudice and illustrates the inferior value placed upon blackness.

Many Brazilians will cite the United States' past *de jure* segregation and history of civil rights struggles to argue for Brazil's comparatively more harmonious or cordial race relations. Michael Hanchard contends that this position of Brazilian exceptionalism pivots upon the "recognition of racial prejudice, discrimination, and subordination as a feature of Brazilian life,

while maintaining the belief that relative to other multiracial polities Brazil is indeed a more racially and culturally accommodating society” (1994: 43). Scholars also note that Brazilian political elites who engaged in processes of nation building (Skidmore 1998) and academics who produced comparative analysis (Siegel 2005), which contrasted the racial constructions in Brazil and the United States, played a crucial role in the production of ideologies of national racial difference. In these renditions, the United States became the site of extreme racial animosity and strife rendering any racial discrimination in Brazil inconsequential.

Brazilians employ various discursive tactics to explain the absence of racism within their everyday lives and the social structure. Anthropologist Kia Lilly Caldwell theorizes Brazilian emphasis on racial mixture as “mestiço essentialism” which characterizes the ways in which “discourses function as forms of racialism that privilege a hybrid racial essence and, by so doing, both obscure racism and foreclose discussions of racial difference” (2007: 28). By analyzing the discourses that produced, framed, and continue to maintain the idea of racial democracy, Caldwell describes the ideological and discursive mechanisms through which racial democracy operates.

These mechanisms I have outlined here assist in maintaining the idea of racial mixture as the dominant conception of national identity in Brazil. Although academics have announced the death of the racial democracy thesis through their analytical conclusions, these everyday mechanisms of thought and action continue to perpetuate a general belief in racial democracy for the majority of the population of all colors.

Political Openings to Discuss Racial Politics

After several decades of authoritarian military dictatorships, the governmental reconstitution, after the Brazilian democratic opening in 1988, made racism illegal by law and

the government began to put programs in place to address racism and racial discrimination. President Fernando Henrique Cardoso's administration (1995 – 2003) was instrumental in elevating racial inequality as a relevant issue for the government to address. For example, in 1996 several government offices hosted a meeting to consider diversity policies of international firms, government offices, and public relations (Reichmann 1999). The World Conference on Racism in Durban, South Africa held in 2001 constituted a political turning point for policies to target racial inequality. The Brazilian delegation produced and presented a report that included a recommendation for affirmative policies to address racial inequality. Affirmative action programs, in the form of spaces reserved for Afro-Brazilian applicants, became a part of state agency's hiring practices and spread to higher education admissions (Htun 2004, Telles 2004). 2% of Afro-Brazilians go on for higher education as opposed to 19% of white Brazilians. The principle goal of affirmative action is to increase the number of black and poor students within the higher education system, which allows them greater access to economic upward mobility.

President Lula's administration (2003 – 2011) continued the momentum driving racial equality legislation and policies by signing law 10.639 as the first law of his presidential tenure. In addition to mandating the inclusion of African and Afro-Brazilian history and culture within primary schools, the law established November 20th as the Day of Black Consciousness in celebration of Zumbi dos Palmares, the leader of a community of escaped slaves called Palmares (quilombo). Zumbi is said to have been killed by the Portuguese when defending the community in 1694. Today, he is invoked as a symbol of black consciousness during marches, poetry, song, chants, and visual depictions. Lula also created the office for Promoting Policies of Racial Inclusion (SEPPPIR) and placed Matilde Ribero, a black woman, at the helm (Telles 2004). While Brazilians continue to believe in the idea of racial democracy, recent political shifts have provided a platform upon which Afro-Brazilian activists and politicians can advocate for racial

equality and racial recognition. The federal and state governments have supported the majority of these initiatives to recognize race as a significant aspect of inequality and redress this inequality through programs and policies.

The city of São Paulo has steadily seen an increase in spaces of visibility for the Afro-Brazilian population. The Afro-Brazilian Museum (*Museu Afro-Brasil*) was created in 2004 to curate exhibits and house a permanent collection addressing the history of the Afro-Brazilian population. The University Zumbi dos Palmaras is directed towards higher education and development of the Afro-Brazilian population. *Educafro* is an organization in the city with the mission to prepare Afro-Brazilian and poor students for the vestibular (a college entrance exam) to increase their numbers in the nation's public universities. Law 10.639 has promoted various training sessions in the city to educate teachers on the history of racial exclusion in the city. TV da Gente emerged within this milieu of race-based activism in the city of São Paulo.

As academics, activists, and, most recently, the federal government attack the idea of racial democracy through scholarship and policy, mixed race nationalism persists within the thought, opinions, and sentiment of many Brazilians. Afro-Brazilians and other activists continue to hammer away at their agenda of racial recognition and empowerment and may succeed at raising awareness about inequality along racial lines. However, a logic based upon racial democracy persistently undergirds any opposition to these social and cultural changes of recognizing racial difference in order to systematically attempt to redress past inequalities – as was the case for TV da Gente. Thus, racial democracy persists as the ideology which activist must undermine and contest through their unrelenting calls for racial recognition and equality.

CHAPTER 2

“CULTURA SEM NEGRO NÃO EXISTE”:

THE MARGINAL PRESENCE OF BLACKNESS IN BRAZILIAN PUBLIC LIFE

There was a myth of the Negro that had to be destroyed at all costs.

--Frantz Fanon (1991: 117)

As nation builders, mythmakers become race-makers.

--Brackette Williams (1989: 430)

Cultura sem negro não existe. (Culture doesn't exist without black Brazilians)

--Conceição Lourenço, executive producer of TV da Gente

In the summer of 2005 I participated in a Portuguese-for-foreigners language program in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. As part of the program's promise of language immersion, I lived with a Brazilian family in a comfortable condominium two blocks from the Copacabana beach. When I arrived home from class one day I enthusiastically recounted the day's events (in Portuguese of course) to my host mom, paying extra attention to the special samba dance class taught that day to introduce us to this definitive enactment of Brazilian culture. Our class spent two hours learning to samba that day, with some of us grasping it with greater facility than others. Another cultural class included a Capoeira lesson, a martial arts practice developed by Afro-Brazilians. "So show it to me," she asked, hoping to observe my rendition of these famous and iconic dance steps. When I displayed my newly learned samba moves in the center of her living room, she raised her eyebrows and exclaimed, "You samba very well—but of course you do, it's in your blood."

Conceição, the executive producer of TV da Gente worked for a mainstream woman's magazines in her media employment experience. Recounting her work history, she said "I worked for One Magazine where I was the editor of the culture section and culture without Afro-Brazilians doesn't exist. You're going to include material like records and the best records are always by black people. So where I could I was very happy to have the power to include Elza Soares and Beyonce and no one said anything. I also did cinema and books, but it was more difficult to feature black people in these areas, and it's not because they don't exist. There's Denzel Washington and Will Smith. I could only include Afro-Brazilians in cinema if they were very famous, if not my white editors were ignorant and didn't know that there were other important black people."

Implicit in the comments made by my interlocutors in these epigraphs—that samba is “in my blood” and that “culture doesn’t exist without Afro-Brazilians”—lies the issue that this chapter explores on race and racial construction in Brazil. These experiences and conversations were my empirical introduction to the contradictory patterns of racial construction exemplified by my host mother’s recognition of race in my blood coupled with her often overt claim that denied the existence of racial categorization in Brazil. In a country where ideologies of mixture dominate national narratives and inform individual identities, nevertheless certain cultural productions become inextricably linked to particular racial types or groups that are thought to feed into the mixture. I explore in this chapter the linkage between race, culture, and Brazilian national identity, but not through the idea of cultural hybridity upon which national appeals to racial democracy rely. I am concerned with the ideological flip side of racial mixture, which is racial singularity. How did Brazil’s iconic national cultural performances and productions become inextricably linked to blackness? Why did Afro-Brazilians’ central place within national culture not bring about social, economic and political uplift for Brazil’s black population? How is it that my host mother, who believes in such a pervasive ideology of racial mixture, can at the same time articulate a logic of racial difference located within the body through the metaphor of blood?

Some of the most iconic symbols of Brazilian national identity are connected to, and are sometimes thought to originate from, the enduring African presence in Brazil. The transmutation of black cultural forms from “folk” culture to the definitive form of national culture was facilitated through historical negotiations between the state, intellectual elites, and the cultural products of Afro-Brazilians. As Brackette Williams argues, “as nation builders, mythmakers become race-makers” (1989: 430). Brazilian state and cultural power brokers historically

appropriated Afro-Brazilian culture as national mass culture in order to construct a national identity that would both unify the country and mark it as distinct from European cultural hegemony. In this process, they simultaneously divested black cultural productions of black specificity in order for any Brazilian to participate in this performance of national identity, while also maintaining and even naturalizing its link to black people as a source of its authenticity. Afro-Brazilians became invested with properties that positioned them as natural performers of these national rituals but denied to them sole proprietorship over the cultural forms through which the rituals are performed. Black Brazilians have, through this process, become legible or visible in the idiom of culture or as cultural performers, a circumstance that Conceição sarcastically articulated when she wryly commented that, “culture doesn’t exist without blacks.”

I will limit the cultural examples I analyze here to the areas of samba and soccer. I use the history of the popularization of these two cultural forms to examine the discursive link created between blackness and culture in the Brazilian audio-visual public sphere. The cultural roles of Afro-Brazilians within national culture developed before television was introduced to a Brazilian popular audience. In the last part of this chapter, I discuss the roles of Afro-Brazilians in (and on) national television. I argue that Afro-Brazilians occupy a marginal presence within mainstream public representation and television programming. When Afro-Brazilians are present on television they generally occupy the delimited roles of service workers (maids, chauffeurs), enslaved African men and women in colonial soap operas, performers, athletes, criminals, or the poor, making them televisually present but within marginal, secondary, or stereotypical roles. While television in Brazil is changing slowly and beginning to include Afro-Brazilians in more prominent or starring roles, until very recently their presence has served only to confirm their marginal status in society.

This marginal presence of Afro-Brazilians in the public sphere and on television

constitutes the dominant “regime of racial representation,” which Stuart Hall describes as a series of representational and discursive practices that signify racial difference and confer specific meanings onto blackness in the form of stereotypes (2007: 276). There is a discrepancy between the Brazilian racial regime of representation that valorizes Afro-Brazilians within their cultural roles for national progress and the lived conditions of poverty, limited opportunity for upward mobility, and unequal access to resources that the majority of Afro-Brazilians face. This discrepancy works in favor of the ideology of racial democracy by drawing attention away from racial inequality and casting Afro-Brazilians as central through their cultural contributions and performances. The normative relations of nationalism are articulated in racial terms through the visual and discursive link between blackness and national culture.

Black Culture in the Americas

The presence of black cultures in the New World has been an enduring subject of anthropological inquiry and theorization. At Columbia University, Franz Boas supported and guided anthropological research on communities of African descent in the Americas, in keeping with his philosophy of cultural relativism and his insistence that race and culture were not naturally related phenomena. Under the academic guidance of Boas, anthropologists such as Melville Herskovits, Zora Neale Hurston, and Gilberto Freyre set out to Africa, the Caribbean, the southern United States, and Brazil to investigate, document, and examine the cultural patterns and manifestations of black people in disparate geographical contexts. Herskovits, Hurston, and Freyre undertook similar projects, seeking to recuperate the image of the black population from the widespread perception that people of African descent lacked a cultural background or were culturally backward. They recorded and recast the distinct practices of black populations as a cultural legacy of an African history and heritage manifested in diverse ways of thought,

production, and creativity in the New World. Herskovits traveled to Africa and the Caribbean and documented similar cultural practices of Africans and African-descended peoples in the New World, which he labeled “Africanisms” and “survivals” (Herskovits 1990).¹ Of the three people mentioned, Herskovits became the most well known in the American academy and the field of black studies, due in part to his debate with E. Franklin Frazier regarding the origins of black culture in the New World.² While Herskovits would continue to argue for the recognition of black culture in the Americas to refute the idea of black inferiority, Gilberto Freyre would cast black culture as the defining feature of Brazilian national culture while nevertheless assisting in creating the very conditions of white racial hegemony and power that depend on imposing a system of black inequality.

Freyre began *The Masters and the Slaves* by claiming, “It was my studies in anthropology in the Graduate Political Science School of Columbia University under the direction of Professor Franz Boas that first revealed to me the Negro and the mulatto for what they are . . .” (1956: 3). In the course of analyzing “the Negro and the mulatto for what they are,” Freyre detailed their cultural contributions to Brazilian colonial life describing, for example, enslaved Africans’ talent for food cultivation and preparation. This contribution of value by Afro-Brazilians to Brazilian life is linked directly to Africa, their place of origin:

Moreover, a number of the most characteristic nutritive values that the Negroes possessed—at least so far as vegetables went—were brought with them to America, and this contributed to the process, which was by way of being one of

¹ Herskovits’s method has been continued and critiqued by other scholars of the African Diaspora (e.g. Mintz and Price 1976; Gilroy 1993; Matory 2005).

² Opposing Herskovits’s thesis that there are continuities between Africans and African-descended populations in the New World, E. Franklin Frazier argued that, “Probably never before in history has a people been so nearly completely stripped of its social heritage as the Negroes who were brought to America” (1939 TNFUS). Frazier linked contemporary African American patterns of difference and inequality to the legacy of slavery and of uninterrupted patterns of persistent racism and economic exclusion that black people encountered after abolition. Part of what was at stake in this debate was the legacy of slavery for New World black people. If it proved out that enslaved Africans were able to maintain their culture in the diaspora, it would be more difficult to argue that slavery was cruelly exploitative. Frazier argued that slavery wiped out cultural differences and was generally detrimental to the black population. In so doing, he was better positioned to argue that the failure of African Americans to assimilate into U.S. culture was due more to anti-black racism than to any cultural difference.

Africanization, that the whites and the natives underwent, while at the same time it smoothed over for the Africans the disturbing effects of transplantation. Once in Brazil, the Negroes became, in a sense, the masters of the land: they dominated the kitchen, preserving in large part their own diet. (Freyre 1956: 263)

By insisting that black people carried these skills across the Atlantic Ocean during the middle passage, Freyre naturalized the domestic skills of Afro-Brazilians and their reasons for performing such tasks to a legacy of cultural inheritance from Africa. He also framed kitchen work as a coping mechanism for Africans in a new environment that both obscured the brutal and violent manner in which Africans were transported to the New World and cast slave owners as benign overseers who allowed the enslaved a measure of autonomy or freedom. Freyre centralizes the role of Africans within the New World through their domestic work within the kitchen and, from there, he argues that they were able to Africanize or influence Brazilian culture. Today in Brazil, the kitchen continues to be a place to which many Brazilians of all colors refer when discussing their national belonging linked to black heritage.³

The Afro-Brazilian origins of feijoada, one of Brazil's national dishes, constitute the basis of its construction as a national symbol of the country. Feijoada is a black bean stew, generally cooked with pork and other meat for flavoring, and served with rice, shredded collard greens, fried manioc flour, oranges, and various other side dishes. The dish is traditionally served on Wednesdays and Saturdays, which I learned from attending many feijoadas was because on these days enslaved Africans prepared the dish during the colonial period. Yet no matter how such a custom found its footing in Brazilian life, it remains true that feijoadas help to define the role of Afro-Brazilians as the producers of national culture, a culture that Brazilians of all colors consume as a marker of their own Brazilianess. In comparing African American soul food to

³ Fernando Henrique Cardoso, elected president of Brazil in 1994 and 1998, is among the most often-cited examples of such a reference. During his presidential campaign in 1994 he said that he had one foot in the kitchen (a pé na cozinha), which invokes the idea of mixed-race origins through the metaphor of service work. Yet, Cardoso is considered white in Brazil. He can make an appeal to black heritage, which authenticates his Brazilianess, while maintaining his identity as white and accessing all the privileges that accompany it.

feijoada, Peter Fry contends that while both these dishes were produced by black populations, the symbolic meanings are different. In Brazil, “feijoada was incorporated as a symbol of nationality whereas in the United States it became a symbol of negritude, in the context of the Black liberation movement” (Fry 1977: 45).

Food provides a rich example of the mechanisms through which Brazilian national identity, race, and culture articulate to acknowledge the role of Afro-Brazilians in the production of particular cultural products and then, by discursively associating it with the broader nation, erase any claim that Afro-Brazilians may have on this product as a source of black racial identity and difference. Afro-Brazilians have played a central role, that is, in creating cultural products such as feijoada, samba, soccer, and Carnival, which have all come to stand for Brazilian national specificity and uniqueness. Peter Fry elaborated on how these symbolic transfers from Afro-Brazilian product to national culture maintain white racial hegemony within Brazil:

The conversion of ethnic symbols into national symbols not only hides a situation of racial domination but makes the task of denouncing it much more difficult. When the very symbols of ethnic boundaries are converted into the symbols which characterize the nation, one has converted something which was originally dangerous into something ‘clear,’ ‘safe,’ and ‘tamed.’ (Fry 1977: 47)

In his research on Afro-Brazilian social activism that stresses issues of racial inequality, Michael Hanchard found that the national appropriation of Afro-Brazilian culture forecloses the availability of these cultural products to Afro-Brazilians, preventing them from deploying them in the service of their own protests. He argued that, “culturalist (as opposed to cultural) practices have also been an impediment to certain types of counter hegemonic political activities because of their reproduction of culturalist tendencies found in the ideology of racial democracy and Brazilian society more generally” (Hanchard 1994: 21). The practice, or sociocultural strategy, of incorporating this African-derived culture into black social protest reinscribed the national role of Afro-Brazilians and their culture rather than calling attention to the conditions of their

own inequality. In other words, Afro-Brazilian protestors who enact what would otherwise be for them black cultural practices end up reflecting what Hanchard sees as the culturalism traditionally associated with Afro-Brazilians that is appropriated as a symbol of racial democracy. In such an environment, it is difficult to see how Afro-Brazilian culture can be harnessed constructively by social change movements.

Robert Stam notes that “cultural victories mask political defeats,” (1997: 296) an aphorism that illuminates how the national celebration of Afro-Brazilians within cultural roles can exist alongside their general absence from structures of political, economic, and social power. I want briefly to return to Melville Herskovits and *The Myth of the Negro Past* to highlight the duplicitous nature of the text’s opening lines: “The myth of the Negro Past is one of the principle supports of race prejudice in this country” (1990: 1). The myth to which he refers is that Africans in the Americas, specifically the United States, have no cultural past and no distinctively black cultural practices, which confirms the perception of black inferiority and the conditions of black inequality in the New World. In reading this statement from the vantage point of Brazil, the myth becomes redefined by the idea that Africans did transport their culture to the New World, and Afro-Brazilians draw from this cultural past to reproduce their cultural practices under New World conditions for the benefit of the New World nation, a cultural transmission that ironically also supports a system of black inequality. The complex dynamics of culture within these antithetical but co-existing contexts illuminates additional ways through which culture becomes a “cunning” pawn manipulated in the playing out of power relations between minority and majority groups—culture is rendered useless as a vehicle for social ascendance and recast as the mechanism of minority entrapment (Povinelli 2002).

I suggest that in Brazil there is a racialized mythological resonance that produces a link between blackness and culture, implying public acceptance of Afro-Brazilians and masking

racial inequality through the fusion of blackness, cultural productions, and national belonging, and representing this link musically, discursively, and visually within the public sphere. The myth that authentic national culture is rooted in Afro-Brazilian culture and produced by Afro-Brazilians creates a strong association between blackness and national culture to the point at which “culture doesn’t exist without Afro-Brazilians.” This myth is propagated in public life during moments that invoke nationalism and national identity—when, for example, consumers of feijoada discursively link slavery and food, Afro-Brazilians take center stage during Carnival and samba performances, or images of black men and boys playing soccer proliferate during World Cup competition.

This mythological resonance between race and culture works to justify the position of Afro-Brazilians as cultural laborers for the nation and distracts attention from the conditions of racial inequality that the majority of Afro-Brazilians face. Such a mythological link between blackness and culture in Brazil provides “a logical model for overcoming a contradiction,” which Claude Levi-Strauss contends is the purpose of myth (1963: 299). Communication technology is central to the resonance of this myth as a means through which to reach the wider national public, making it possible for everyday people to understand the inextricable connection between blackness and national culture that is at the same time celebrated and recognized by all. To understand the mechanisms of this process, I shall explore the convergence of media, race, and nationalism through the historical use of radio by the Vargas regime to promote samba as the sound of Brazil as part of a national unification mission and the contemporary use of Afro-Brazilian men and boys within public advertisements as soccer players during the World Cup.

Rhythm Nation

Afro-Brazilian culture became central to state and elite nation-building processes during

the 1930s. Previously, many Brazilian intellectual elites looked to Europe as the standard model for cultural accomplishment. Elite Brazilians

were compelled to identify with power. And, in 1900, power was Europe, with its nation-state model, with its Civilization, with its Progress, and with the legitimization of a complex, literate heritage which was taken to explain and justify European superiority. (Needell 1999: 10)

This view of Europe rendered the large non-white population in Brazil a liability and a hindrance to Brazilian national progress on the international stage.

Those characteristics that deemed Afro-Brazilian culture unsuitable for national representation were precisely the values that made it vulnerable to state cooptation. Music associated with an African influence was a nationalizable product that symbolized a departure from European cultural hegemony and acoustically distinguished Brazil from other nations. While samba can be considered a hybrid musical blend of African-influenced rhythms and Portuguese lyrics, state projects during the 1930's marketed samba through the radio as a musical means of national identification whose authenticity was rooted in its production by a native black population.⁴

Samba is both a genre of music and a dance that has become an international symbol of Brazilian national identity. Barbara Browning describes samba in technical terms as “a polymeter, layered over a 2/4 structure. But the strong beat is accentuated, and the weak accentuated,” producing a syncopated beat that is the mode “of all Pan-African music” (1995: 9–10). The roots of the samba are complicated, but scholars have traced the origins of the word “samba” from the Angolan word “semba,” “which refers to the umbigada, the ‘invitation to the dance’” (McGowen and Pessanha 1998: 19). “Samba” was also used during the early nineteenth

⁴ Muniz Sodre charts the development of samba within people's homes in *Samba: o dono do corpo*. He argues that Samba was developed in the house of Tia Ciata, which was also an important location for the practice of Candomblé. He calls her house a “living metaphor” for the ways in which Afro-Brazilians created musical traditions by fusing African rhythms with Portuguese lyrics, a practice that represented their incorporation into urban life (25).

century in Brazil to refer to “various Afro-Brazilian dances and to designate parties held by slaves and former slaves” (McGowen & Pessanha 1998: 19).

As president of Brazil from 1930–1945, Getulio Vargas and his administration enlisted communication technology in their campaigns to unify Brazil by defining the samba and Carnaval as the preeminent forms of Brazilian popular culture. Vargas came to power through a bloodless military coup with a plan to strengthen the economy, unify the country, and centralize the government. He was able to implement his national agenda by instituting an authoritarian regime of government in which “he and his hand-picked representatives at the national as well as state and local level held all the power” (Levine 1998: 32). This authoritarian control of government allowed Vargas to implement governmental policies and programs that affected the everyday lives of Brazilian citizens while promoting national values and culture.

The Department of Press and Propaganda (DIP), created under the Vargas regime, was responsible for establishing, producing, and distributing the necessary media vehicles to circulate Vargas’s messages regarding the importance of patriotism and a strong work ethic to national progress. For example, the DIP produced an evening radio program called the Brazilian Hour or *Hora do Brasil*, which included “a compendium of music, general news, uplifting speeches, tips on farming, nutrition, child rearing, agriculture, and anything else deemed appropriate by the DIP” (Levine 1998: 61). The radio provided a platform on which the government administration could promote Brazilian national values to the masses throughout the country within the confines of their domestic homes.

The Vargas regime also realized the political potential of popular culture. In 1940 the government took over the popular radio station called National Radio or *Radio Nacional*. The ensuing influx of government economic support provided National Radio with the necessary resources to flourish under the watch of the DIP. The producers of National Radio “brought both

a sense of nationalist mission and a keen understanding of evolving popular tastes” and, most importantly, “endorsed Afro-Brazilian popular music as the essence of the nation” (McCann 2004: 40). Afro-Brazilian music, in the form of samba, would prove to be the definitive form of expressive culture to signify the uniqueness of Brazilian national identity.

The media dubbed Vargas “The Father of the Poor,” seemingly validating his rhetoric of caring for and assistance to the nation’s disenfranchised and economically depressed. Vargas’s policies did little, however, to change the everyday lives of Brazil’s poorest citizens. Hunger among poor families persisted, as did unequal access to education and employment. While Vargas incorporated Afro-Brazilians into the cultural fabric of the nation, he failed to incorporate them into Brazilian infrastructure politically and economically. His governmental policies and programs were ostensibly “colorblind,” providing a purportedly non-racist rationale that was consistent with the ideology of racial democracy. Yet he also broke apart political associations of Afro-Brazilians in São Paulo, preventing them from organizing and mobilizing for social change or mobility. The Vargas regime presented the worker or laborer as the ideal Brazilian citizen who would aid in building the modern nation. Thus, labor unions were the preeminent form of organization and received the most attention from the state. Many Afro-Brazilians had been excluded from the labor market, however, because of racist practices and attitudes and the monopoly held by European immigrants in this sector. The historian Robert Levine writes, “If Vargas was Brazil’s ‘father,’ he treated his children differently, ignoring those with darker skin and who lived in the countryside with benign neglect, favoring those of his ‘children’ who he considered to have the potential to carry out his dreams of national construction” (1998: 138).

The Vargas regime lent financial support and governmental legitimacy to the iconic samba performer, Carmen Miranda. In 1939 Vargas appeared with Miranda on the Day of Brazilian Popular Music and the DIP promoted Miranda’s performances abroad and directly

sponsored her presence in the United States. Miranda, a Brazilian-raised entertainer of Portuguese descent, helped samba “cross over” from a musical form associated with the black lower classes to the mainstream music of middle class and elite Brazilians. Miranda’s performances achieved popular recognition of samba “largely through the use of humor and folklore and by presenting stereotypical images familiar to a national audience of blacks and mulattoes” (Davis 2000:189). Miranda’s whiteness and middle class status mediated between the general perception of samba as a cultural form associated with blackness and a form of musical expression that defined a modern nation.

Through her presentation, dancing style, and, most importantly, the lyrics of the songs, Miranda performatively articulated the natural link between samba, blackness, and whiteness.

Consider the lyrics to one of her songs:

In samba, whites break into pieces.
In samba, a good black has a swell time.
In samba, whites don’t have a chance, my good friend
For samba—blacks are born to do it.
(quoted in Davis 2000: 194)

Samba became naturalized as the cultural property and practice of black Brazilians through the claim that they were born to perform and sing this art form. Although Miranda sings that “whites don’t have a chance,” her performance of the samba through song and dance, as a white Brazilian, undermines this claim. Although she discursively attributes samba to blackness, whites can perform the dance as well, evidenced by her own enactment of samba. When Afro-Brazilians samba they participate in their own natural and, I would argue, racial cultural production. When whites samba, it is their claim to national participation and inclusion.

The Vargas regime used samba as an internal means of national unification and as an outwardly facing symbol to project Brazilian identity internationally. Vargas enlisted Miranda in his project of celebrity diplomacy in which “cultural relations joined commercial propaganda as

a vehicle for improving Brazil’s stature in the international community” (Williams 2001: 199). Vargas hoped that her performances in the United States would facilitate stronger ties between the northern and southern hemisphere. He hoped that this link to the US would benefit Brazil economically by extending its share in the American coffee market (Clark 2002: 255). Carmen Miranda would popularize Brazilian music and culture by performing in Latin-themed U.S. movies and mainstream television programs.



Figure 2.1: Samba band performing at a club in downtown São Paulo, Brazil

Samba remains a definitive and distinct representation of Brazilian national culture throughout the world. As suggested in figure 2.1, Afro-Brazilians continue to be most visible playing in the numerous samba bands that appear in clubs throughout major Brazilian cities—the figure shows a samba club in São Paulo. While white Brazilians do dance samba and even play in samba bands, I would argue that many Brazilians link nation, race and culture by considering samba to be the specific cultural property of black people. Thus samba, like other domains of national and popular culture, is not an appropriate or adequately transgressive space in which

Afro-Brazilians can enact a counter-hegemonic cultural politics for state recognition or the rights of citizenship.

Carnaval

If Samba is one of the most preeminent forms of popular culture in Brazil, it achieves its apotheosis during the yearly Carnaval. In Brazil, Carnaval consists of several days of revelry before the somber period of preparation for Easter that Ash Wednesday ushers in. The festivals vary throughout the country, but Carnaval is most internationally popular in Rio de Janeiro where the samba schools parade through the Sambadromo to the delight of the audiences and to compete with one another. São Paulo follows a similar system as Rio, with samba schools developing intricate spectacles over the period of about five months before Carnaval. During Carnaval the streets of Rio de Janeiro are filled with *blocos* or samba bands parading through the street with crowds following them and singing, dancing, and drinking the day away. Afro-Brazilians take center stage in the performances by the samba schools and in the *blocos*,



Figure 2.2: Katuka Que Ela Pula *Bloco* in Rio de Janeiro Carnaval 2008

playing in the street as in figure 2.2. Scholars have interpreted Brazilian Carnival in various ways,⁵ but I would like to stress that Afro-Brazilians are central to the performance of this national ritual, achieving salient visibility in the role of the samba player.

In addition to promoting samba, the Vargas administration oversaw the nationalization of Carnival. Black people became central to this endeavor through governmental interference in these popular cultural forms, which replaced white producers and participants with blacks. Prior to the 1930's, social barriers around Carnival prevented Afro-Brazilians from participating. In Rio de Janeiro the police would actively target and attack blacks who tried to join the Carnival revelry. In order to achieve state legitimacy and avoid police repression, Afro-Brazilians began entering groups for Carnival participation under the label of samba schools. Rio de Janeiro's mayor, who was appointed by Vargas,

offered the schools—and thus Rio's black population—legitimacy and modest subsidies in return for their adherence to certain regulations. One of the new rules was that each school had to obtain a parade permit, which would be issued when the group registered with the police and provided the names of its officers and an acceptable name for the school. More important in the long run, however, was the ruling that each School must center its Carnival parade around an important event or figure of Brazilian history. (Raphael 1990: 77).

⁵ Some argue that Carnival is an inversion of the existing social order, a time during which elite Brazilians exchange places with poor favela dwellers. Robin Sheriff argues that Carnival is a “ritual intensification in which Brazilians celebrate their own vision of themselves as an amorous, optimistic, unified, and color-blind nation” (Sheriff 1999: 22). Based on ethnographic research, Sheriff also points out that, “for poor people of color, the carioca Carnival is less about Brazil as it is than about Brazil as it ought to be” (1999: 22). Sheriff does illuminate the significant emotional affect of Carnival for some Afro-Brazilian performers. Others argue variously that Carnival is a politically counter-hegemonic and subversive cultural practice or a performance that is engineered to keep the poor in their place. I use the Brazilian Carnival to illustrate one of a set of spaces that the Brazilian state and society have reserved for Afro-Brazilians, and thus many forms of notoriety, compensation and recognition result from Afro-Brazilian performances within these cultural spaces. Members of the Brazilian elite have written, developed and presented the script for Afro-Brazilian inclusion within the nation, and they either oblige that elite or remain always at the periphery, in every way.



Figure 2.3: The Flag Bearer Couple of Vai Vai (Go Go) Samba School, São Paulo, Brazil

This shift in emphasis in the production of Carnival encouraged Afro-Brazilian participation in the annual event, but only, of course, on Vargas's nationalist terms. The incorporation of Afro-Brazilian participation specifically through the vehicle of the samba schools centralized samba as a significant idiom of Brazilian national essence.

The contemporary reputation of the Brazilian Carnival as an international representation of culture par excellence further projects an image of national unity through cultural mixture by featuring predominately Afro-Brazilians performing for spectators from around the world. In 1984, president Kubitchek built the Sambadrome, a large stadium with a wide alley through which the samba schools can process and present their performances for the scrutiny of the judges and to the joy of the crowd. The Carnival performances continue to be enacted predominately by poor Afro-Brazilians and people of color from the favelas or poor neighborhoods surrounding the city of Rio de Janeiro. Black Brazilians perform *Brazilidade* on the global stage.



Figure 2.4: The Junior Flag Bearer couple at Vai Vai (Go Go) Samba School, São Paulo, Brazil

There is clearly a gendered division of cultural labor within samba performances. Men tend to dominate, but not exclusively, in the *bateria* or the percussion arm of samba music. Men and women sing, and women take center stage as dancers and flag bearers, as in figures 2.3 and 2.4. Every samba presentation during Carnival features a cadre of mulatas,⁶ the nearly naked black women who dance samba at a frenetic pace on the parade floats. Kia Caldwell argues that the “ostensible veneration of mulatas incorporates negative views of African sensuality that have been central to Western constructions of self and ‘other’” (2007: 58).

In São Paulo I frequented the Vai Vai (Go Go) Samba school during the practice performances leading up to Carnival 2008, the year in which its members reigned as champions. The two pictures from this Samba school show the couples who would bear the Vai Vai flag

⁶ For an analysis of the figure of the mulata see Pravaz 2004, Gilliam 1998, and Caldwell 2007.

during the Carnival show. They are all of African descent, as were most of the leadership and musicians in Vai Vai. The samba school was located within a traditionally Italian neighborhood, Bixiga, and attracted several members of the community to their weekly Sunday practices, which were more like parties in the street replete with concession sales of food, beverages, and Vai Vai merchandise. While I do argue that samba and Carnival are discursive spaces that mutually imbricate blackness and Brazilian nationality, ensconcing Afro-Brazilians firmly in the role of the performer, samba schools are also spaces of relative autonomy and creativity for its members and leadership. I found that the Vai Vai samba school provided a venue in which Afro-Brazilians leaders felt empowered in their ability to have a measure of control over their production and enjoyed the process of producing a large-scale, highly coordinated, and beautiful performance.

On the way home from a samba club with two black male friends—Edson, an Afro-Brazilian and recent graduate of a masters program from a French university who was in São Paulo looking for work; and João, a graduate student at the University of São Paulo originally from Angola—we were discussing the racial dynamics of samba performances. João wrote his masters thesis on the dynamics of racism in Brazil and he told me from the back seat of the car that “*samba que é preto é branco*,” or “samba that is black is white.” He was referring to the situation in virtue of which Afro-Brazilians played samba for consumption by whites within the city’s exclusive clubs and venues, such as the club from which we were returning. Prior to this moment, we had been listening to a black samba band at a club at which we were the only black spectators. They told me that the club was owned by white Brazilians who wanted to create an exclusive, low-key venue in which to enjoy good, live music. The club was located on a small side street, did not have clear signage, and accepted only cash for the 20 Reis cover and mandatory two-drink minimum. Certainly, this place would be out of reach for the majority of Brazilians and particularly the Afro-Brazilians who comprise a disproportionate number of the

city's poor. When we left the club, Edson said, "You *see* how it works; they have blacks play music in the club and outside you *see* who is parking the cars." In referring to the black man to whom we paid one real to watch the parked car, Edson raised the issue that the celebration of Afro-Brazilians in the club seemed to blind people to the poor Afro-Brazilian man outside of the club doing the menial labor of watching the cars. He also mentioned that "white people controlled the whole thing," meaning that the samba musicians inside the club performed at the behest of the owner. During this car ride, they demanded that I see and understand the contemporary dynamics of samba presentations in São Paulo through a lens that frames samba as a racialized performance that reaffirms and supports a system of racial dominance and hegemony in Brazil and in effect circumscribes the concomitant place of Afro-Brazilians in disjunction of roles—performer or servant—within the larger power structure.

Playing for the Nation

The World Cup is a high-profile spectacle in Brazil that harnesses national sentiment for athletic competition in soccer, the world's most popular sport. General World Cup euphoria over the possibility of a Brazilian victory animates national news coverage, dominates television programming, and informs the emotional ethos of public life. People gather in the streets around public televisions that are oriented towards sidewalks to watch the latest games and remain abreast of the most recent wins and losses (figure 2.4). When Brazil plays, most workers are allowed to leave their places of employment and crowd into the nearest bars and restaurants to cheer for the national team. After Brazilian losses that eliminated its team from the tournament in 2005 and 2009, I witnessed people crying in the street and a general feeling of disappointment or anger. In short, the World Cup is a big deal.



Figure 2.4: Crowd watching a world cup game on Avenida Paulista

I will focus here on the advertising that is seen during the World Cup as a lens through which to examine the place of blackness, and specifically of black men, within the Brazilian national identity. The economic exploitation of the World Cup through advertising and the racial ramifications of this staging index the merging of race, nationalism, and culture through both media representations and sport. Scholars have contributed several methodologies and theories for examining advertising.⁷ Judith Williams argues, “advertising must take into account not only the inherent qualities and attributes of the product they are trying to sell, but also the way in which they make those properties *mean* something to us” (1978: 12). Sut Jhally offers an understanding of the way in which cultural symbols are integrated into the advertising image to create meaning. Jhally writes, “advertising absorbs and fuses a variety of symbolic practices and discourses, it appropriates and distills from an unbounded range of cultural references. In so doing, goods are knitted into the fabric of social life and cultural significance” (2002: 329). I read the series of advertisements that follow as a visual terrain generated within the particular

⁷ See Mazarella 2003 and Davila 2001 for an ethnographic investigation of advertising.

context of São Paulo, Brazil during the World Cup tournament in 2010.⁸ I contend that these ads reveal a significant dimension of the racial contours of Brazilian nationalism.

During the World Cup, Afro-Brazilian men enter into the public sphere through the idiom of soccer, as the image of the soccer hero proliferates in the flooding of media outlets with Cup-related ads. The racialized mythology of the black soccer player who represents national honor and acts as a symbol of “Brazilianness” resonates through the advertisements and images that link black bodies, national distinction, and sport in order to generate consumers’ national identification in the service of corporate profit. Before examining these advertising images directly, however, I will elaborate on the historical and discursive processes through which blackness, nationalism, and soccer became conflated.

Young Brazilian students traveling abroad for educational exchange programs imported soccer, or *futebol*, to Brazil. It grew rapidly into a favorite leisure sport for elite Brazilian families. Many upper-class Brazilians valued the game as an amateur form of competition and as a “gentleman’s game played exclusively by youths of good breeding in pursuit of manly sportsmanship” (Levine 1980: 454). The game’s status as an elite activity at first limited its spread to an enclave of white Brazilians who comprised the majority of wealthy families. As soccer became more competitive and commercialized in the pursuit of financial gain, club owners began to recruit star players from lower- and middle-class backgrounds. As Brazilian teams began to compete internationally, pressure began to mount for improving the Brazilian game so that its teams could represent the country more respectably. With the creation of the Brazilian Soccer Federation in 1933, the best teams “recruited more and more blacks and

⁸ Although I include images of ads from the 2010 World Cup, I noticed similar tendencies during the 2006 World Cup in Brazil as well. Scholars have analyzed the presence of Afro-Brazilians in World Cup ads in previous years and found similar patterns of representation. Carmen Rial examined ads during the 1994 and 1998 World Cups and found that Afro-Brazilians were central figures in images of boys playing ball and they prevailed in “what is ideologically considered their domain – sport, music, dance, drink, food” (2001: 9). In his study of advertising during the 1998 World Cup, Edison Gastaldo found that “Afro-Brazilians are frequently represented as soccer players with great ability, in uniforms of the Brazilian national world cup team, making happiness for the “Brazilian fans” – the majority of whom are white” (2001: 170).

mulattos, raiding the clubs from the poorer industrial suburbs and abandoning the old pretense that athletes, as representatives of their team colors, had to be from ‘good’ families” (Levine 1980: 455). Soccer therefore at an early stage represented one of the few available routes of upward mobility for Afro-Brazilian men, and it remains so today. Much like the disproportionate prevalence of African American men in U.S. basketball and football, the large numbers of Afro-Brazilian soccer players nationally reflects economic imperatives and the dearth of opportunities for sufficient compensation in other occupations. Young black men flood the ranks of these sports because they have few options for financial success. Through heavy representation on professional soccer teams, Afro-Brazilians have come to assume a key role in enacting the Brazilian cultural practices that have now come to define the nation at the global level.

Soccer, unlike samba, is not necessarily a cultural creation whose origins are linked to an African past. I would suggest, however, that Afro-Brazilians are thought to have influenced the game through their style of play, generating a distinctively Brazilian version of the sport. Gilberto Freyre claimed that the Brazilian “manner of playing soccer appears to me to contrast with that of the Europeans through a conjunction of qualities of surprise, guile, astuteness, swiftness, and at the same time the brilliance of individual spontaneity which reveals a mulatto quality” (1945: 421). The term “mulatto” generally refers to someone who has one white and one black parent. I read his use of the term “mulatto” as a reference to the qualities that black Brazilian players bring to a sport that began in Europe. Many Brazilians commonly refer to Brazilian soccer as the *jogo bonito* or “beautiful game” in reference to the Carnavalesque quality of the ways in which Brazilian soccer players move and play. The idea of a specific form of Brazilian soccer that distinguishes it in international competition discursively connects blackness and national distinction.

Brazil’s 1970 World Cup win is considered by many soccer fans to have been a classic.

The Brazilian national team won all six of its games and beat Italy in a 4 – 1 victory during the final match. Because it was Brazil’s third World Cup championship, the Jules Rimet Trophy was awarded permanently to Brazil, as stipulated when World Cup competition began in 1930 (it has since been replaced by a replica after being stolen in 1983).⁹ That third World Cup victory became a nationally iconic event, not only as an emblem of Brazil’s success in the game itself, but also as a benchmark in the state project of connecting soccer success to Brazilian progress and international ascension. Towards this end, the military dictatorship linked Brazil’s World Cup win in 1970 to national progress and pride. The regime popularized slogans such as “No one will hold back Brazil any longer” (*Ninguem segura mas o Brasil*), “Brazil, Love It or Leave It,” or “Count on Me Brazil” (*Brasil conta comigo*). Peter Flynn, in an article reporting on the 1970 World Cup win, writes that these slogans were “plastered on billboards across the country, often above a huge picture of Pele [the national soccer hero] leaping in the air after scoring a goal” (327). This campaign relied on a visual image that linked blackness and soccer as emblems of Brazilian nationality, progress, and uplift. It created a sense of national unity and implied racial equality through the representation of Afro-Brazilian soccer players whose play for the nation seemed to represent racial democracy in action.

⁹ At the time of this writing, Brazil had won the World Cup championship five times: 1958, 1962, 1970, 1994 and 2002. The World Cup has been held every four years since 1930.



Figure 2.6: 2010 World Cup Advertisement for Nestlé Chocolate in Race Magazine

The advertisement for the giant food company Nestlé in figure 2.5 is taken from a June 2010 edition of *Race Magazine*. This ad featuring Pele revisits the iconic 1970 World Cup win for Brazil. This contemporary Nestlé advertisement invites recollections of Brazil's impressive victory, an ascendant moment on the world stage. The ad indexes a series of Brazilian national historical moments and memories and casts Pele, a black man, as the central symbolic agent of this moment. Within this ad, blackness becomes mapped onto nationalism, national sport, and national victory through the figure of Pele, which in turn becomes associated with the Nestlé chocolate company.



Figure 2.7: Advertisement for Bank Itaú



Figure 2.8: Advertisement for cable provider Net



Figure 2.8: Advertisement for Brank Itaú

I want to suggest here that, while Afro-Brazilian men have been assigned a central role in redefining soccer as the Brazilian national sport, they have also come to be defined *by* soccer in the visual arena of Brazil. This is one role among a series granting Afro-Brazilian men widespread representation on the national stage. Particularly during World Cup season, black men and boys sporting new soccer uniforms and holding soccer balls adorn billboards, magazine advertisements, bar and restaurant walls, and public ads (figures 2.6, 2.7, and 2.8). The public gathers en masse to watch on television the *Seleção Brasileiro* or the Brazilian national team compete in hopes of a Brazilian victory (figure 2.9). Yet after the World Cup ends every four years, the presence of imagery depicting Afro-Brazilian men as soccer players is typically reduced in the public sphere—only to return in the familiar role of samba performers during Carnaval or as criminals on the national news.



Figure 2.10: Television at a bar depicting a scene from the Brazilian World Cup game 2010

In the context of the ideology of racial democracy, it is important to acknowledge that Afro-Brazilians' cultural labor in sports and entertainment has not generated significant economic, political or social gains for the majority of the black population. Rather than illuminating the contradiction that exists between the centrality of Afro-Brazilians in national culture and their marginalization and underrepresentation in other areas of society, Afro-Brazilian cultural visibility provides putative evidence of racial democracy, satisfying its ideological imperatives of denying the occurrence of racism and emphasizing the harmony of Brazilian race relations.

On Television

Contemporary television programs in Brazil support the cultural centralization of Afro-Brazilians through their broadcasts of soccer games, the World Cup, Carnival, samba performances, and other cultural practices that are part of everyday life in Brazil. On the famous

and popular telenovelas or soap operas, Afro-Brazilians become visible through the additional marginalized positions of enslaved men and women, service workers, and slum dwellers. As it did with Vargas' use of radio earlier, the state government under the rule of the military dictatorships utilized television in promoting national unification and its preferred image of Brazil as a harmonious country. The television audience increased dramatically during the dictatorships, as did the largest television network in Brazil, Globo. The television industry followed the military government's imperatives of maintaining the image of Brazil as free from racial and political strife.

Assis Chateaubriand, a media executive, introduced television to Brazil on September 18, 1950 when he established a commercial station in São Paulo that would become the TV Tupi network. Other media groups created television networks in Rio de Janeiro, including TV Rio, TV Excelsior, and TV Globo. Joseph Straubhaar divides the development of Brazilian television into five phases:

1. An elitist phase (1950 – 1964), when it was limited to the upper and upper-middle classes in cities.
2. A populist phase (1964 – 1975), when the audience expanded rapidly and programming became more popularly oriented.
3. A technological development phase (1975 – 1985), when broadcasting expanded via microwave and satellite and the number of networks increased.
4. A transition and international expansion phase (1985 – 1990), when civilian government returned and TV Globo and other powerful entities began to export its programming to the world.
5. A fifth phase (1990 – present) that seems to be characterized by the advent of cable, Direct Broadcast Satellite (DBS) and Satellite Master Antenna TV (SMATV) technologies, along with further segmentation of the audience. (1984: 224-25).

During the elitist phase, television was recorded and broadcast live. Television networks attracted radio station directors, writers and actors to produce their programs and adapted radio programming formats to television (Straubhaar 1984: 227). Television audiences at this time were comprised of elite and upper-middle-class Brazilians in major urban cities.

The mid-1960s began an important period of growth for television viewing and initiated policies and programs that would shape the contemporary structure of the Brazilian television industry and popular programming content. During this period, 1965 – 1985, Brazil's military dictatorships targeted television as a potential site of national integration. Rapid economic growth provided more money for increased consumption and the military dictatorships extended low-interest loans to many Brazilian families in order to subsidize the purchase of a television set. This expansion of the national television viewing public accompanied stringent media censorship by the regimes to quell opposition use of media and present the image of Brazil as a harmonious and peaceful country. During this time, TV Globo became the preeminent television network of Brazil by cultivating close ties with the military rulers and broadcasting content that remained in step with the government's program of national unification. The telenovela won widespread popularity, capturing large audiences and presenting national storylines for viewers.

The news media had operated under the right to freedom of speech from the end of the Getulio Vargas regime in 1954 until 1965. After president João Goulart (1961-1964) attempted to collectivize the economy and private property, the military quashed Goulart's plans by seizing control of the government in 1964 and installing a series of generals to preside as president. Working under the objective of state-directed capitalism, they ushered Brazil through a period of economic growth and increased the urban workforce. In order to carry out their plans, the regime eliminated democratic institutions of government and enacted a regime marked by repression and state violence, restricting civil liberties and censoring the media. The repressive intensity of the military dictators would vary in extremity until the end of these regimes in 1985.

The military regimes legally justified censorship by enacting a series of laws that permitted the president to suspend free speech and free expression (Guimarães & Amaral 1981: 104 – 5). All media, including radio, newspapers, films, popular music lyrics, and television

were subject to the scrutiny of a cadre of government censors who would review, edit, and approve reports and scripts that had been submitted before publication or broadcast. However, the censors could not review all media in the country, so “the government relied on the help of journalists, artists and mass communicators to censor themselves, knowing that if they were too incautious they would be chastised with anything from a few days in jail to long imprisonment” (Pierce 1979: 28).

The Ministry of Justice established the topics and themes that were to be banned from the media, and updated the list to keep up with political and cultural trends and events. Prohibited topics ranged from internal and external political matters to immoral, sexually explicit, or vulgar material. For example, the censors recommended that the press avoid publishing information on the government’s suspension of the political rights of extremists or showing violent labor protests and disruption of the public order (Alisky 1981: 109).

The harmonious national image that the dictatorship wished to present extended from politics and morals to racial harmony as well. The censors prohibited the publishing of racially charged material, which was in keeping with the ideal of racial harmony and equality that was meant to represent Brazilian racial democracy. For example, when a censor inspected a film for approval, one of the criteria that the film content had to satisfy was indicated by the question, “Does it deal with black power in the United States?” (Pierce 1979: 37). Also, the censors prohibited the U.S. television miniseries *Roots* from being screened on Brazilian television in 1978 (Straubhaar interview). Thomas Skidmore reports that the cover of a magazine for which he wrote an article, which was initially printed showing a black Brazilian, was replaced with an image depicting other subject matter. The limited availability of data that might expose the censorship undertaken by the dictatorship concerning race indicates that the censors enlisted the media to cooperate in presenting a harmonious and unified nation, free from racial friction.

The Globo television network, arguably the most popular in Brazil, was born in the transition to the military dictatorship. The Globo media conglomerate includes radio stations, newspapers, television networks, and a movie production company. Robert Marinho presided as head of Globo during the dictatorships. Prior to 1965, the year of the military coup, Marinho entered into a partnership with the Time Life Corporation in the U.S. to establish a television network in Brazil. Time Life was eager to break into the Brazilian media market. When the dictatorship gained control of the Brazilian government, it restricted media ownership to Brazilian nationals. Marinho consulted with the first dictator, however, and persuaded him to permit the partnership with Time Life and the creation of Globo. With the advent of new satellite technology in the early 1970's, "EMBRATEL, the state-owned Brazilian telecommunications company, paid for and set up the infrastructure that made it possible for TV Globo, a private company, to reach an audience of close to 80 million people" (Guimarães & Amaral 1988: 127). This partnership between Globo, the Brazilian government, and the Time Life Corp. provided the necessary capital to create the premier television-programming source of Brazil.

The military regime restricted television to culture and entertainment and TV Globo remained in its good graces by working within these boundaries. Globo "hired its own censor, the former head of the federal censorship branch in Rio" (Pierce 1979: 37). They also broadcast content that covered the government's achievements, such as the 1970 World Cup victory in Mexico. During the World Cup coverage, Globo "carried out patriotic campaigns like 'Brazil, love it or leave it'" (Guimarães & Amaral 1988: 127). In addition to this nationalistic programming, Globo maintained its evening telenovelas, which have become a cultural mainstay of Brazilian television.

Telenovelas

Telenovelas or novelas (soap operas) are an integral aspect of Brazilian national culture. They are serialized in narrative television programs that generally air every night except Sunday. Their storylines cover tragic, comic, or romantic themes and take place during both historical and contemporary times. Unlike U.S. soap operas, Brazilian novelas run for a limited time (around eight months) and then end, making way for a new novela to begin and run its course. Major networks typically run three different novelas consecutively from about 6pm until 10pm.

Scholars trace the beginning of the telenovela to the feuilleton, a serialized novel in France. Brazilians read these novels in translation and became accustomed to serialized stories. U.S. companies, like Colgate-Palmolive, that wanted to advertise in Latin American markets sponsored serialized programming for the radio in the 1930s. With the introduction of television in the 1950s, “the same corporate advertisers that underwrote radio soaps in Latin America pushed ahead with the development of the telenovela” (Page 1995: 450). A series of structural shifts during the 1950s and 1960s moved the telenovela from daytime to evening, lengthened the broadcast period from a month and a half to about eight months, and expanded the episode length to about fifty minutes (Page 1995: 451).

Airing in 1968 and running for a full year, *Beto Rockefeller* is credited with being the first “Brazilianized” telenovela. The story, set in São Paulo, featured a shoe salesman who masqueraded as a millionaire. *Beto Rockefeller* featured urban Brazilian life, included Brazilian Portuguese colloquial phrases in the dialogue, and differed from other Latin American telenovelas in the following ways:

In place of the heavy melodrama of the standard Latin American novela, it substituted wit and satire. Instead of starring a brave, romantic, idealized hero, it offered as its title character a deceitful social climber. And it was the first telenovela to use musical themes for each of its main characters. (Page 1995: 452)

This telenovela was a popular hit for the television network TV Tupi and demonstrated to other networks the potential of the telenovela to attract a large audience. TV Globo took note of this telenovela's success and poured considerable resources into producing the premier telenovelas of Brazil.

The telenovela *Beto Rockefeller* had an Afro-Brazilian cast member, Zeze Motta, who played the role of a maid. Zeze Motta is a well-known Afro-Brazilian actress who has appeared in many telenovelas and films, from her debut in *Beto Rockefeller* in 1968 to the present day. In a documentary film made by Joel Zito Araujo, called *O Negação do Brasil* (Denying Brazil), Zeze Motta recounted a conversation with a neighbor about a drama class. The neighbor asked, "Why do you need to study drama to play a maid and serve coffee?" This trend continues in many contemporary telenovelas, where Afro-Brazilians continue to monopolize service roles, portraying house cleaners and butlers who wait on the wealthier, whiter central characters.

Academics have found that the narratives and messages of novelas as well as the characters that Afro-Brazilians play support an aesthetic of racism embedded within the ideology of racial democracy (Araujo 2006, Costa 1989, DeLima 1988, DeLima 2000, Ferreira da Silva 1999, Oliveira 2004, Ramos 2002, Leslie 1999). In his book-length companion study of Brazilian telenovelas, also titled *O Negação do Brasil* (Denying Brazil), Araujo (2000) analysed the role of black characters, and the ways in which their story lines support the idea of racial democracy, the presumption that Brazil is free from racial tension and antagonism. Araujo undertook an extensive content analysis of the racial representations of Afro-Brazilians in telenovelas from the 1960s until the 1990s. He found that Afro-Brazilian actors and actresses had access only to limited characters and roles on Brazilian telenovelas. Following Donald Bogle's (1994) analysis of African Americans in U.S. cinema, Araujo defined the typology of roles that

Afro-Brazilian actors and actresses primarily interpreted as maids, butlers, loyal and obedient slaves, and one-dimensional middle-class professionals. He charts the developments, historical trajectories and differences in these roles in the various Brazilian telenovelas.

Afro-Brazilians are predominately cast as slaves in telenovelas set during colonial times, in order to provide a realistic backdrop for plantation life. Araujo highlights the early telenovela *A Cabana da Pai Tomas* (Uncle Tom's Cabin), produced by TV Globo in 1969 and based on the book by the same name written in the United States in the nineteenth century by Harriett Beecher Stowe. In this telenovela a white actor interpreted the role of the lead character, Uncle Tom. Araujo calls this a "double insult" to the black population because the main character is an obedient and docile male slave. Moreover, the producers apparently doubted that a black actor could successfully portray this role, so they painted a white actor's face with dark makeup, placed cork in his nose and behind his lips to enact a protruding effect, and placed cotton in his mouth so that he would not be able to speak clearly. This approach to depicting a slave echoed the historical use of blackface by white actors in the U.S. Still, this alteration of a white actor's appearance to simulate a black person sparked protests by the general public as well as by black actors and actresses, who thought a black actor should have been cast in the role.

Telenovela scriptwriters began to incorporate one-dimensional black middle-class characters in the 1970s. For example, the Afro-Brazilian actor Milton Gonçalves played a well educated psychiatrist in the telenovela, *Pecado Capital* in 1975 and the Afro-Brazilian actress Ruth de Souza interpreted the character of the head of a school in *Duas Vidas* in 1977. The Afro-Brazilian screenwriter Janete Clair wrote both scripts. Araujo argued that, while these characters do provide visibility to Afro-Brazilians in professional roles, the characters are represented "without relations to their communities of origin and without linkages to other people of their race" (2000: 120). Also, black middle-class professional characters in other telenovelas never

articulate any consciousness of conflicts resulting from racism, of discrimination, or of relations of subordination that exist in real life (2000: 126). These black middle-class characters inhabit worlds in which there are no connections to other black friends, family, or acquaintances and show characters working unaffected by racial prejudice or discrimination, in professions that are in reality predominately occupied by white Brazilians. Race and racial inequality, consistently with the racial democracy ideology, are never at issue in these stories or in the characters' lives.

In addition to showing Afro-Brazilian characters in plantation life and unrealistic middle-class scenarios, television and cinema have incorporated them in representations of favela, or shantytown, life. Favelas are unplanned communities of informal housing inhabited by the urban poor on the periphery of São Paulo or in the hills of Rio de Janeiro. *City of God (Cidade de Deus)*, the internationally renowned, Oscar-nominated film, popularized this representation by portraying the violent side of favela life resulting from drug wars. The film's popularity supported TV Globo's broadcasting of a television version of the film, called *City of Men*, produced and directed by the same team as was *City of God*. *City of Men (Cidade dos Homens)* followed two Afro-Brazilian teenagers as they navigated the triumphs and pitfalls of life within and outside of the favela. *Antonia*, another film turned into a television program, follows black women in a favela who are trying to initiate a singing career and form a singing group. In the past ten years, the mediated image of poor, excluded Afro-Brazilian favela residents has gained a wider audience on the popular televisual stage. This image of the favelado joins the panoply of other Afro-Brazilian images of service providers, slaves, and occasional middle-class professionals, images that form a body of work rendering blacks visible within these particular roles but maintaining silence about the racial discrimination or racism that underwrites and informs the majority of Afro-Brazilians' contemporary social positions. While these representations of favela residents may be intended to present a critical perspective by lending

this marginal population greater televisibility, such representations may not only fail to provide a remedy for social exclusion but actually serve as one of the very mechanisms of its reproduction.



Figure 2.11: Restaurant in São Paulo, Brazil with a television playing a novela

In São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, Brazil television comprises part of the public visual sphere through the ubiquity of public television sets in the cities (figure 2.10). It is common for restaurants, cafes, and bars to install large televisions for patrons. Many of the magazine stands, taxi points, security guard stations, and even public buses are outfitted with televisions for the benefit of both employees and the public. The racialized discourses shown on television work in conjunction with magazine, film, newspaper, and advertising content to project images of Afro-Brazilians' marginal presence (or conspicuous absence from positions of power or privilege) in public life. Television's extensive reach throughout the Brazilian population makes its content a source of concern for those who are aware of its implications for racial discourses.

Such images of marginalized Afro-Brazilians, who are shown as samba performers,

soccer players, enslaved men and women, service providers, and slum residents, structure the field of possibility for the creation of oppositional images of Afro-Brazilian life. Many Afro-Brazilian scholars and activists continually point to television as a site of cultural production that remains uncritical of race relations, reduces Afro-Brazilian self-esteem, and continues to represent Afro-Brazilians in limiting ways. Against this backdrop of marginalized representation, black media producers at TV da Gente aimed to produce television programming that would present Afro-Brazilians, publicly and visually, in more uplifting ways.



Figure 2.12: Devassa beer ad for a new dark beer

Conclusion

In this chapter I have examined how the media has been a critical site of state control to promote a national audio-vision of Brazil to both unify the country and project internationally. National elites have historically made Afro-Brazilian culture central to the Brazilian nation building project, by linking the authenticity of national culture to Afro-Brazilian practices of cultural production. Under the leadership of President Vargas, the state propagated this mythical

link between blackness, culture, and nationalism through available media technologies for the popularization of samba. Media remains critical to the racial mythology that associates Afro-Brazilian men with soccer through advertisements that flourish within the public sphere during World Cup competition. Currently, samba and soccer are two of the dominant images through which the public sees Afro-Brazilians.

Television extends the roles of Afro-Brazilians into private households through family viewing as well as in public venues. Samba performances, Carnaval parades, and soccer games are routinely broadcast by mainstream television networks. Television also provides the genre of the telenovela, which introduces a host of additional images of Afro-Brazilians, including enslaved men and women, slum dwellers, service providers, and, rarely, middle-class professionals. Novela storylines almost never remind viewers of the conditions of structural and institutional racism that inform the positions and placement of Afro-Brazilians in visual and everyday life. Rather, these popular entertainments support the general belief in racial equality or racial democracy by avoiding historical and ongoing economic exclusion along racial lines, seemingly celebrating Brazilians of all colors. Afro-Brazilians remain marginally present through the cultural and televisual roles given to them, and conspicuously absent within other domains of Brazilian visual life.



Figure 2.13: Response to the Devassa ad

Afro-Brazilians remain marginally present through the cultural and televisual roles given to them, and conspicuously absent within other domains of Brazilian visual life.

Public culture continues to be one of the important terrains that Afro-Brazilian activists and scholars target as a field of contestation and struggle. New derogatory images that reference old stereotypes appear regularly, adding to the other images that I have outlined. Recently, in the beginning of 2011, Devassa, a beer company, ran an ad (figure 2.11) picturing a black woman with the text, “It is by the body that you recognize the true black woman: Devassa Full Bodied Dark Beer in the style of dark ale with high fermentation, creamy, and with the roasted malt aroma?” (*È pelo corpo que se reconhece a verdadeira negra: Devassa Negra Incorporada Estilo Dark Ale de alta fermentação cremosa e aroma de malte torrada*). The ad image featured a black woman with thigh high stockings and a strapless leotard. This ad repackages old stereotypes about the overt sexuality and sexual availability of black women as well as the attention to and the surveillance of black bodies from enslavement until the present. The ad draws an association

between dark beer and black women by using the term “negra” for both. Its text claims that the discerning consumer can recognize either the black woman or the dark beer by the body, implying that both should be full bodied. Although the ad uses the term “negra,” it references the sexuality of the mulata who dances samba almost naked during Carnival. It links the constructed sexual desirability of black women to the desirability of the dark beer in an attempt to spark consumer awareness of a product and encourage its consumption. White consumers who fantasize about black women are invited to indulge their fantasies over a dark beer.

Activists launched a response to the ad and circulated it through other media channels (figure 2.12). One of my Afro-Brazilian friends sent me the response through Facebook, which he received from a listserv to which he subscribed. He did not know who produced it, but told me he would ask other people. I am, however, less concerned about the source of the response than I am with the meanings associated with it. The response image is broken into four equal sections, the first with the picture of the Devassa ad, the second with the question “Do you want to collaborate with racism?” and the third with, “Continue drinking this beer.” The last square contains an image of a diverse array of black women with the text “We demand respect” in capital letters.

The response clearly considers the original Devassa ad to be racist and warns viewers of the ad that they will be participating in racism if they drink the beer and support the company. I am particularly interested in the bottom right square, with the various pictures of black women in the frame. The image implies that Devassa’s simplistic rendering of black women as sexualized bodies is a racist act and shows black women demanding respect in recognition of their diversity and for the multiple roles that they play in everyday life. The response resists the presentation of a marginal image through which Afro-Brazilian women become present in the Devassa ad, by drawing attention to the numerous ways in which black women are more realistically present or

ordinarily exist.

CHAPTER 3
TV DA GENTE:
A NETWORK OF RESISTANCE

On May 25, 1998, federal senator (*deputado*) Paulo Paim organized a seminar called the Means of Communication and Racial Diversity (*Meios de Comunicação e Diversidade Racial*) held in the Cultural Space Zumbi dos Palmares Auditorium in the Federal Senate Offices (*Camara de Deputados*) in Brasilia, Brazil's national capital. This meeting gathered together academics, professional media workers, politicians, university students, and others interested in the issue of racial representation in the Brazilian media. The goals of the seminar were:

1. Evaluate the situation and the disposition of research studies completed and projected in the area of the academy;
2. Evaluate and discuss advances in legislation of the states and projects in transmission in the National Congress;
3. Have a deeper understanding from the testimony of actors, models and publicity professionals about the obstacles that block their ascension, which are the cultural stereotypes about black people.

The proceeds of the meeting consisted of a series of testimonies and reports by various parties about their experience working in, studying, or legislating about the media. In keeping with the goals of the meeting, many of the respondents found the consistent representation of Afro-Brazilians within limited and stereotypical roles to be a problem that impeded the equal integration of Afro-Brazilians into mainstream media and reflected their difficulty to gain representation within social, economic, and political spheres of life in Brazil.

This meeting held within the government offices of the nation's capital indicated that many people gave high priority to Afro-Brazilian public representations. A journalist, Paulo Henrique Souza outlined the stakes of black media (mis)representation in the public sphere.

This prejudice is incorporated principally into television that, unfortunately, ends up being the medium that stimulates this, when you see that the roles assigned to

[minority] groups are generally stereotypical... If we think, our basic problem is that prejudice exists, it is real. We live this and we have already lived this. I think that prejudice is more social than anything. Black people are treated like a citizen with less possibilities, because normally they are part of the lower classes, and don't have access to education to elevate themselves. Generally, black people need to start working very early and don't develop their intellectual potential. Unfortunately, black people are always seen in this way, as a cheap laborer. The large majority of those in jail are black. This simply doesn't occur because of prejudice, but because there is a social limit.

Souza insists that television reflects the prejudice against Afro-Brazilians that exists in everyday social life. He makes the argument, that the depiction of Afro-Brazilians on television naturalizes their economic and social position as low wage laborers within the stratified hierarchy of employment possibilities. Souza also wrote that, "no one wants to discuss the issue because everyone thinks that the problem doesn't exist" due to the prevalence of the infamous racial democracy in Brazil that denies the existence of racism and racial prejudice as a significant aspect of Brazilian inequality. For Souza, national ideologies of racial democracy mask racial prejudice in Brazil, but television makes this prejudice explicit through the stereotypical presence of Afro-Brazilians within this realm of visual representation. Mainstream commercial television not only reflects racial prejudice in Brazil, but exposes it.

Souza referenced the social limit or the societal conditions that constrain Afro-Brazilian upward mobility. The economic circumstances of many poor families require young people to leave school and seek work to support their households. Out of economic necessity, they trade the higher salaries that may come from skilled labor or professional employment for the ability to earn money at an early age. Souza states that "Unfortunately, black people are always seen in this way, as a cheap laborer" without the recognition or the acknowledgement that social and economic limits contribute to this situation. His attention to how black people are seen, connects his discussion of a social limit to television and representation and the ubiquitous images of poor, black slum dwellers that provide the background for many Brazilian films, soap operas, and

other television programs. Television programming renders these social limits visible for its discerning viewers, as well as contributes to the maintenance of these social limits by normalizing the place of Afro-Brazilians. But television also constitutes the very social limits itself through its practices of production, image creation, and national circulation of its visual narratives.

Souza's analysis of the relationship between racial inequality and television articulate with Deborah Poole's understanding of a "visual economy" (1997). In *Vision, Race and Modernity* Poole draws attention to the social, political, and cultural contexts that frame, constitute or inform the production, circulation and consumption of visual images. She contributes the term "visual economy" to understand how

visual images are part of a comprehensive organization of people, ideas and objects. In a general sense, the word 'economy' suggests that the field of vision is organized in some systematic way. It also suggests that this organization has as much to do with social relationships, inequality, and power as with shared meanings and community. (Poole 1997: 8)

In following Poole's theorization of a "visual economy," the racialized representations in the Brazilian public sphere cannot be separated from the national ideology of racial democracy and its concomitant histories of nation building through racial unity and tendencies of silencing racial inequality or discrimination.

Afro-Brazilian professionals, political elites, and academics have been concerned with the representation of Afro-Brazilians in the popular media. Interrogating this subject of racial representation is considered a critical part of the fight for racial equality and Afro-Brazilian inclusion within the economic, political, and social spaces of Brazilian life. Many Afro-Brazilians with whom I interacted freely voiced their criticisms of the televisual roles assigned to Afro-Brazilians within mainstream programs. When I attended social events and met new people around the city of São Paulo, I would tell people that I was researching the media in Brazil for

my dissertation. Many Afro-Brazilians would have a critical response to my description of my research project. During a book launch party one man asked me, “You mean how the media deceives Brazil into thinking it’s a white country?” At a reception at the city’s Afro-Brazilian museum, another woman recounted a scene from a past novela about Italian immigrants that didn’t show any Afro-Brazilian characters until they needed someone to touch a rat, for which they employed a young black actor. These expressions of dissatisfaction with the media’s representation of Afro-Brazilians were common responses when I briefly disclosed the general topic of my research. Afro-Brazilians have formally, through government means, and informally recognized the devaluation of the sign of blackness within the mainstream media and identified it as a site for contestation and change.

Brazil, the Country of Television

The ubiquitous presence of a television set within many Brazilian homes makes available the dominant narratives surrounding blackness by broadcasting them to the general population. An estimated 80% of Brazilians own a television set, the largest tv market in Latin America. The relatively high illiteracy rate of 25% coupled with the large amount of poverty make television an accessible and consistent form of entertainment for a large portion of the population. Many researchers have noted the prevalence of television while conducting research in Brazil. Hoineff observed that, “television culture in Brazil is closely related to the absence of alternatives in a society with no access to other types of cultural consumption” (1996: 53).

The underrepresentation of Afro-Brazilians outside of a series of the limited roles of soccer players, samba performers, service providers, or slaves makes television an important venue to demand racial equality. In a study on television in Brazil in the early 1980’s Conrad Kottack noted that, “dark-skinned Afro-Brazilian actors mostly still play cooks, maids, drivers,

and thugs” (1992: 62). In Amelia Simpson’s study of Xuxa, the blue eyed, blond star of a popular Brazilian children’s program, she observed that “anybody who watches Brazilian television for half a day sees that it is dominated by whites and by white images of power, success, intelligence, and beauty” (1993: 38). She argues that the incredible celebration and success of Xuxa’s beauty reveals an aesthetic hierarchy that privileges whiteness in Brazilian culture and in the media.

TV da Gente



Figure 3.1: TV da Gente Logo 1

November 20, 2005 marked the inaugural airdate of a Brazilian television network called TV da Gente, translated to Our TV in English, which sought to intervene within the racially stratified visual economy of Brazil. TV da Gente, located within the city of São Paulo, had the mission to racially diversify Brazilian television programming. The network included a predominately black staff and offered content that visibly included Afro-Brazilians and information the staff thought to be relevant to this population. November 20 also marked the national holiday called the Day of Black Consciousness, which commemorated Zumbi dos Palmares, the historic leader of the fugitive slave community who fought for the community’s independence from the Portuguese artillery in 1694. Zumbi dos Palmares was captured and killed

by the Portuguese on November 20, 1695. Today Zumbi is constantly invoked as a symbol of black resistance and black consciousness through poetry, song, and visual images. The Our TV television network chose a launch date that linked it to the national and city wide events celebrating a black historical figure and black consciousness, which fit with the network's mission of Afro-Brazilian empowerment through visual representation.

Unlike the Black Entertainment Television (BET) channel in the United States, the name TV da Gente does not refer explicitly to race or blackness. TV da Gente has been translated into Our TV in English, in U.S. American newspaper articles. "TV" means television but "da Gente" can be translated and interpreted in different ways. "Da Gente" can be interpreted as the pronoun "our," which is used in the English translation for the name Our TV. "Da Gente" can also mean "the people" referring to the common people or non-elite Brazilians. One of the logos (Figure 1.2) reads *TV da Gente: A Cor Do Brasil* or Our TV: The Color of Brazil. The colors of this logo represent the recognizable blue, green, and yellow color of the Brazilian flag, and the brown of the darker populations.



Figure 3.2: TV da Gente Logo 2

This is the only direct reference to color, but again does not directly address blackness. TV da

Gente was the first black owned television network in Brazil, composed predominately of black media producers, and aimed to represent Afro-Brazilians within the televisual sphere. The association with blackness comes with the content of the programs, but is also made in conjunction with the contemporary events, and discourses surrounding black consciousness and black recognition within the city and the nation.

Jose de Paulo Neto, commonly referred to as Netinho, developed the TV da Gente television network to represent the issues and needs of the black population. He is an Afro-Brazilian celebrity famous for singing pagode, a form of samba, as well as working as a television host on mainstream Brazilian media. He obtained money from the Angolan government to organize a television network in Brazil that would produce programs with content directed towards a black audience (I will go into more detail about this in Chapter 6). These programs would be broadcast for a Brazilian audience and exported to Angola for their viewers as well. Netinho also worked with the Black Family Channel in Atlanta, GA to import their programs, dub them into Portuguese, and run them on the network. To produce the local programs in Brazil, Netinho assembled a team of predominately black media professionals including television producers, directors, journalists, and presenters to create, produce and host the programs (some of whom are pictured in figure 1.3).

Netinho, the founder of TV da Gente outlined the goals surrounding the network's creation:

We had three principle objectives. The first was to organize, through entertainment, a force that the black community would be able to identify with through politics and art. The second objective was to show, through our own eyes, what racial diversity is. And finally, the third objective was to show the public market that when they create programs for the working classes and facilitate their credit, the audience and consumption together can reach their peak.

Netinho envisioned TV da Gente as a form of entrepreneurial activism that connected profit and

capital accumulation with social and political activism by creating and catering to specific publics who wanted to consume their message of racial empowerment. Netinho articulated the expectation to extract income and profit by providing the means of representation for a particular community or constituency. Through an analysis of U.S. commercial television and the struggle over African American programming, Herman Gray shifted “attention to commercial media as a site of cultural politics” (1995: 1). This shift entails the recognition that television is a market-based industry and televisual activists must attend to the capitalist structures that precede their entry into it. Thus, Netinho wanted to work within a hybrid conceptualization of a television market as both political and profitable that would attract viewers through the medium of black identity construction while generating economic accumulation for the mutual benefit of all parties involved.

São Paulo is both the largest city in Brazil, and the southern hemisphere, with an estimated 11 million inhabitants. As the financial capital of Brazil, many international and national corporations have established their headquarters in the city, providing a strong economic foundation for the city’s population. As a cultural hub, São Paulo offers several museums, theatres, universities, festivals, and media outlets. The concentration of wealth, financial prospects, business infrastructure, and professionally trained people draw several institutions and individuals to the city in search of opportunity. About 8% of the population, or 872, 609 *Paulistanos*, identify as black forming the second largest black population after Salvador, Bahia in the Northeast. As one of my research participants asked me, “If we can’t succeed in São Paulo, where can we?”



Figure 3.3: Members of the TV da Gente team

TV da Gente created a variety of programs in their São Paulo studio space in the Casa Verde neighborhood within the northern zone of the city. They later moved to a studio located in downtown São Paulo, which TV Globo formerly occupied.

The network employed a small staff to undertake the large responsibilities of developing content and programs for a commercial television network. Many of the workers told me that they had more duties at TV da Gente than they had within other network television work, but they saw working at TV da Gente as an opportunity to exercise some creative and production control. Two voices will emerge as dominant throughout my discussion of the network, those of Conceição Lourenço and Oswaldo Faustino. These two took the most time to speak with me, but they also had the most control and were the most involved parties in shaping the path for TV da Gente's progression. Conceição was the executive producer of TV da Gente and Oswaldo worked as a story teller for the children's program, as well as a general producer and consultant for the network's other programs.

Netinho did very little in leading program production and placed Conceição in control of the network as the executive producer. When I asked about her responsibilities, Conceição said she “managed everything except for the finances.” She developed the vision for the network, generated the ideas for the program formats and content, controlled the casting and network staffing, attended to any conflicts among the staff, and even appeared on one of the programs as an interviewee. Conceição is an Afro-Brazilian woman who has been employed within various media organizations since she graduated from college about 26 years ago. She has worked across print media in mainstream women’s magazines, television news production, and on commercial radio. Before coming to lead TV da Gente she was the editor in chief of *Revista Raça* or Race Magazine, Brazil’s only national magazine produced for an Afro-Brazilian readership. Her extensive experience working within different media and her distinction as the head of a segmented commercial magazine made her a strong candidate to lead TV da Gente. Netinho asked her personally to be the executive producer of his television network and she accepted the opportunity requiring her to leave the editor in chief position at *Revista Raça*.

Conceição asked Oswaldo to join her at TV da Gente as one of her first acts as executive producer. She had worked with Oswaldo at Race Magazine, where he wrote a monthly column about Afro-Brazilian culture and history. In addition to writing for Race Magazine, Oswaldo was a veteran of mainstream news journalism, having worked for the *Folha de São Paulo* (a major daily newspaper) for over 30 years. Oswaldo has also published a series of books including collections of children’s stories and a book of interviews with other successful Afro-Brazilians. He enjoys telling stories and educating people about Afro-Brazilian history in São Paulo, in Brazil, as well as the histories and activities of black people in the African Diaspora. For our very first meeting Oswaldo had me meet him in the Black Men’s Church (*A Igreja dos Homens Pretos*) in the *Centro* district of São Paulo in order to recount for me the history of this church

and its importance for Afro-Paulistas. Conceição considered Oswaldo's knowledge about racial issues and experience working in the media useful for a television network that sought to represent the Afro-Brazilian population. Oswaldo's primary responsibility was to appear as Tio Bah on the children's program and tell stories for the audience. In addition to this, he developed the questions for the game show, suggested and recruited guests for the various programs, and generally consulted with producers about all the programmatic content. Oswaldo worked for TV da Gente in addition to maintaining his primary employment as a night reporter for the *Folha de São Paulo*. He received little money for working at TV da Gente (he would not tell me how much), but he participated in the project to realize his dream of telling children's stories and to become part of a movement for recognition of Afro-Brazilians in the mainstream media.

Here I should note that not all of the employees at TV da Gente were Afro-Brazilian. Brazilians of European, Japanese, and African descent made up the program hosts and producers. However, TV da Gente did have more Afro-Brazilian hosts and producers than other groups, which made it quite anomalous as a media institution in São Paulo.

The TV da Gente Programs

The children's television program called Class Hour (*Turminha da Hora*) was hosted by Cinthya Rachel, a former Afro-Brazilian child star and current entertainer. The show featured various musical performances and Cynthya Rachel would introduce them to the viewing audience. The program also featured Afro-Brazilian journalist Oswaldo Faustino, who interpreted the character of Tio Bah (Uncle Bah). Tio Bah lived in a Bao Bao tree, which is a tree commonly found in East Africa and has a distinctive shape of a wide trunk with several thinner branches sprouting upwards out of it. This tree was emblematic of an African origin and its continued cultural significance for contemporary Afro-Brazilian creative expression. Uncle Bah

would tell allegorical stories to children, intended to communicate a particular lesson or illustrate positive values and behavior.

The network's game show featured students from two different schools in competition with one another to answer the most correct answers to questions regarding African and Afro-Brazilian history and culture. An Afro-Brazilian man and a Japanese woman hosted the show, which was called *Click If You Know! (Quem Sabe Clique!)*. The winning team would win a computer for their school. Some of the questions included:

An Engineer from the Brazilian state of Bahia, son of a slave, with a father born in *Bom Jardim*, municipality of *Santo Amaro* (BA) on January 7, 1855. He planned major infrastructure works and buildings in the city of São Paulo. Today is the street name. Answer: Teodoro Sampaio.

This country was a colony of Belgium. Was freed in 1960 and among the heroes of independence Patrice Lumumba. What's its name now? Zaire

The questions' subject material ranged from Afro-Brazilian historical figures, Afro-Brazilian cultural products and festivals, African and African Diaspora history and culture. The questions were meant to both test the knowledge of the students, but also educate them and the viewers about this particular subject matter neglected within many Brazilian school curriculums. The creators of the program intended for it to contribute to law 10.639, which President Lula signed in 2003 and required that elementary and middle schools include African and Afro-Brazilian history and culture within the classroom lessons. By including law 10.639 into consideration of their television programmatic content, the TV da Gente media producers extended this legislation into the area of the mass media thus linking a political and representational commitment to black visibility and equality.

A Question of Rights (A Questão de Direitas) was hosted by Dr. Hédio Silva, a black civil rights lawyer and activist in the city of São Paulo. Through the show they intended to inform viewers of their rights and showcase others taking civic action to improve their

communities and neighborhoods. For example, Dr. Hédio interviewed a disability rights activist who advocated for increased access to buildings and public facilities for disabled men and women. Dr. Silva's presence on the show provided an example to viewers of a successful lawyer and advocate who spoke out in support of programs and initiatives that supported the black community. The guests on the show were also examples of those who would take action to improve social conditions for all Brazilian citizens.

These programs were all created by the TV da Gente media production team and executed by the network workers. They chose to cast Afro-Brazilian personalities and leaders within the roles of hosts and presenters to privilege their position as central to programmatic control and authority. Not all of the hosts and guests were Afro-Brazilian, as in the Japanese female host of the game show. By including other groups they also wanted to signal that the network aimed to showcase the ethnic diversity of Brazil and representationally account for the country's many different groups and people. Through their program production they sought to fairly represent Afro-Brazilians, as well as other racial and ethnic populations in Brazil, in ways that mainstream television had not already done.

TV da Gente received international attention from the Los Angeles Times in an article entitled "A New Color in Brazil TV." The LA times journalist placed TV da Gente within the context of Brazilian television dominated by white actors and actresses and the limited representations of Afro-Brazilians. The journalist framed their programs as an intervention within a televisual context of "when darker-skinned characters crop up in TV dramas, almost invariably they appear as maids and other domestic workers, or worse" (2006). The article framed TV da Gente as a form of activism through which Afro-Brazilians demanded representation and inclusion on television.

The network opened to considerable scrutiny and criticism from the Brazilian media

institutions. Journalists levied accusations of racism against the fledging network because of its focus on the black population. In an article entitled “Black TV Ignites Ire in Brazil” a journalist named Flavio Porcella was quoted saying, “I think it’s legitimate that a channel specialize in sports, politics, sex, religion and any other type of segmentation. I don’t agree with a channel segmented for race, color, or religion. Therefore, this means racial discrimination for me.” Porcella then asked, “If people are equal independent of color, why does a television channel show only people of one color?” Thiago Jerke, another journalist wrote, “If there is a channel only for white people, wouldn’t it be racism?”

This accusation of racism against TV da Gente needs to be understood within the meanings of racial democracy in Brazil. Typically, initiatives launched to combat racial inequality that make specific reference to race and blackness are labeled as agents for the perpetuation of racism, rather than movements to ameliorate it. This response runs in accordance with the ideals of racial democracy, which render racial inequality an inappropriate or unnecessary topic of conversation thus seeking to silence those who call attention to it. Those working to advance this burgeoning racialization of the public landscape, such as those workers at TV da Gente, must contend with the competing narratives of racial democracy that continue to have sway within the general population.

A Legacy of Mediated Resistance

TV da Gente follows behind a series of previous actions taken by Afro-Brazilian performers, journalists, and community leaders to mobilize the media in service of their own agenda for black representation. I will discuss three of the most visible historical instances of black media production: the black press in São Paulo, the Black Experimental Theatre, and Race

Magazine.¹⁰

During the 1920's and 30's a succession of newspapers directed towards an Afro-Brazilian readership began to circulate throughout the city of São Paulo.¹¹ The founding and folding of these newspapers depended primarily on the financial resources of its producers. Many of the papers were linked to Afro-Brazilian community organizations and mutual aid societies, whose leaders developed the journals as a form of outreach to the wider community and a promotion of their own activities.

Many of the papers included photographs of Afro-Brazilian men dressed in suits and posing for the camera. Seigel finds that the photos “made the pages a collage of respectable black masculinity. The bourgeois conventions of portraiture; the subjects’ fashionable, modern dress; and this evidence of the press’s proficiency with the technology of photography all positioned it and its constituency squarely in the ‘modern’ age” (2009: 185). In addition to portraying “modern” and respectable black men, these photographs depicted Afro-Brazilian male workers whose use of suits and ties placed them within a white collar, professional class of employment.

Abdias do Nascimento¹² developed the idea for the Black Experimental Theatre (Teatro Experimental Negro - TEN) in 1941 on a trip to Lima, Peru. While there he watched the play *The Emperor Jones* by Eugene O’Neill, which had a black character as the leading role. Nascimento was shocked to see a white actor playing the role in black face, and this encounter spurred his reflection upon the lack of opportunities offered to Afro-Brazilian actors in Brazilian

¹⁰ I focus on the most visible black media vehicles in this section, acknowledging that I am missing other periodicals, programs, leaflets, and other visual media that have been created by Afro-Brazilians or for the black movement. The value of these media cannot be underestimated in the creation of the legacy of Afro-Brazilian media production.

¹¹ For a list of all newspapers and the dates of their existence see Seigel 2009: 181.

¹² Abdias do Nascimento has been an outspoken proponent of Afro-Brazilian rights and the recognition of racism in Brazil as a politician, activist, and scholar. In addition to founding the TEN theatre, he has developed a theory of “Quilombismo,” which centers the model of the quilombo as a space to reformulate the foundations of Brazilian society (Nascimento 1980).

theatre. Nascimento returned to Brazil and founded the TEN theatre, which he described in the following statement: “what was proposed was the social elevation of the Negro by means of education, culture, and art. We would have to work urgently on two fronts: to promote the denunciation of the mistakes and alienation purveyed by the studies of the Afro-Brazilian and to see that the Negro became aware of the objective situation in which he found himself” (qt. in Fernandez 1977: 8). In working to achieve these goals, the TEN theatre produced and performed plays starring predominately black casts with content that focused on black history and issues.

Their first play was a production of Stela Leonardos’ *Palmares* in 1944, which explored slavery in Brazil. In 1945 they produced and performed O’Neill’s play *The Emperor Jones* in the Municipal Theatre of Rio de Janeiro. They would continue to execute plays written specifically for them by national and international authors until the mid 1960s. Nascimento developed the TEN theatre to be a vehicle for anti-racist social action through its ability to draw attention to the absence of Afro-Brazilians in mainstream theatre, prepare a critical mass of black actors for professional theatre roles, invest blackness with value, and organize black spectators into an audience aware of the ways in racial inequality effected their lives (Nascimento 2004). At its inception the TEN met with opposition from the press, who found venues for black actors to be “counterproductive and urged instead more assimilation with white culture” (Fernandez 1977: 14). Oscar Fernandez attributed the demise of the TEN theatre in the mid 1960s to a lack of financial support, the general opposition to race based social action, and censorship from the military government (1977).

Revista Raça is a magazine directed towards an Afro-Brazilian readership that circulates nationally (and internationally).¹³ It was founded in 1997 and continues on a monthly release cycle. The covers feature Afro-Brazilian models and celebrities, and occasionally African

¹³ For a discussion of *Revista Raça* in relationship to gender and aesthetics see Caldwell 2007.

American or other black non-Brazilians. The content centers on lifestyle issues such as fashion, beauty, relationships, and educational material about Afro-Brazilian history and culture.

Although produced in São Paulo, *Revista Raça* features content from all over the country. The magazine demarcates a commercial space of black representation that has achieved success in its longevity and adheres to its mission of infusing identification with a black or negro category with pride.

The São Paulo Black Press, the TEN, *Revista Raca*, TV da Gente, and the various other forms of black media in São Paulo and within other cities create a discursive space of mediated resistance that contests the marginalization, invisibility, and inequality that many Afro-Brazilians faced and continue to endure. This discursive space is marked by Afro-Brazilian's insistence that they have a voice, opinions, and activity worthy of representation, as well as that they belong as central figures on the stage, in magazines, and on television. Within these venues, simple visibility is not the main intervention, but rather Afro-Brazilians controlling how they are seen by the ways in which they present themselves is the crucial representational intervention they make. These examples of mediated resistance I have mentioned were transnational in their inception and content production. In many ways, TV da Gente was a new iteration of an old form of battle where Afro-Brazilians accessed the means of representation to advance their concerns about their community, their constituency, and their place within the Brazilian nation.

TV da Gente as Televised Resistance

Although the TV da Gente television network does not exist today in the city of São Paulo and in the same form as it had, it presented a unique opportunity to examine the role of television and visual culture within movements for racial equality in Brazil. By creating a television network with the mission to racially diversify its content and presenters, the TV da

Gente team developed a site for televisual resistance to the racist conditions of image circulation within the Brazilian public sphere. Their acts of program creation and dissemination mobilized the very medium of their marginalization to imagine, invent, and distribute oppositional images to those within the public sphere thus creating a televisual presence that was meaningful and affirming of black people, experiences, and culture.

The very act of creating and publicizing a television network with the intention to produce representations along racial lines ran counter to the grain of racial democracy, which promotes the belief that every Brazilian is mixed, making it impossible to delineate distinct racial groups. To speak candidly and openly about the dearth of black racial representations on television and their desire to change this mediated landscape of whiteness also resisted the silencing mechanisms of the racial democracy and the idea that racism is not a legitimate topic of conversation or argument. Although they are working to “break the silence” around racism in Brazil and pioneer viable strategies to overcome it, they did not avoid the criticism of racism by the press and public. These accusations of racism are emblematic of the continued hold that the idea of racial democracy has in Brazil and an example that ideologies and national narratives do not easily fade away in the face of fervent opposition.

Although the Brazilian national narrative of racial democracy purports to include all citizens equally, business ownership and management remains largely in the hands of white Brazilians. Netinho’s decision to invent, organize, and finance the TV da Gente television network drew attention to the critical need and role of black ownership of businesses and industry, in order to create spaces in which people committed to racial equality could carry out their work. Given the small number of black media producers and the friction they face working in many mainstream media organizations, these kinds of places can have an important role in providing equitable access to the means of representation and visual production. This network

confronted the structural and institutional presence of racism within the television and media industry through its commitment to employ and support diverse media workers and their ideas.

By casting predominately Afro-Brazilian hosts and presenters and including content that referred to black history and culture, TV da Gente distributed images that resisted and expanded upon past conceptions of Afro-Brazilians as either invisible or as service workers, enslaved men and women, or other marginal roles. In this way, the media workers at TV da Gente extended the movement for racial equality in Brazil from the government and black movement organizations to the arena of visual images and mass media by demanding to be seen in ways that they controlled. The media work and mission of the TV da Gente team created a new front in the fight for racial equality by targeting the aesthetics of power and domination to make visible the possibility for what racial equality can actually look like.

CHAPTER 4

BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS AT WORK:

NETWORK FORMATION AND AFRO-BRAZILIAN MEDIA PROFESSIONALS

They approach me in a half hesitant sort of way, eye me curiously or compassionately, and then, instead of saying directly, How does it feel to be a problem? They say, I know an excellent colored man in my town; or, I fought at Mechanicsville; or, Do these Southern outrages make your blood boil? At these I smile, or am interested, or reduce the boiling to a simmer, as the occasion may require. To the real question, How does it feel to be a problem? I answer seldom a word.

—W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folks*

A college-bred Negro still is not a person like other folks, but an interesting problem, more or less.

—Zora Neale Hurston, *What White Publishers Won't Print*

TV da Gente was formed by a group of predominately Afro-Brazilian media professionals from around the city of São Paulo, Brazil. These network employees came from a small pool of black media workers within São Paulo. Among Brazilian media workers, 1.1% in São Paulo and 1.6% nationwide identify as black (negro) (Carrança 2004). Given the small numbers of black media workers in São Paulo, many of them knew one another before working at TV da Gente. Most had earned bachelor's degrees in media production or journalism from colleges or universities in the city. Many had worked across various media, including print, radio, and television, and for various media outlets around the city for several years. They all paid attention to shifting events within mediated public culture. For example, while many of them told me that they did not watch the *novelas* or soap operas that dominate Brazilian television every evening, they all offered some critique or comment on the scarcity of black characters in the latest *novelas*. They were also registered members of the journalists' union and one of my research participants founded and coordinated the Commission of Journalists for

Racial Equality. They were intimately familiar with the professional media sphere in the city and participated in multiple venues of its reach.

Many of the TV da Gente staff members who comprised my research participants invited me to their homes, their primary places of employment, or for lunch or coffee in several of the many restaurants and cafes that the expansive city had to offer. During these excursions and encounters, their middle-class status struck me as a point of commonality. Many of them transported me in their cars, lived in condominiums or houses in middle-class neighborhoods, vacationed at the beach, and traveled extensively. One person told me, when she was giving me a ride in her car, of her involvement with an international service program that would send her to the United States for two weeks. Another woman mentioned that her son was going to the United States for six months to participate in an exchange program in which he would learn English. As I sat in the executive producer's apartment in a nice high-rise building, I observed her large flat screen television, DVD players, stacks of DVDs, magazines, artwork by a Brazilian artist named Britto, and a laptop computer on which she showed me some of her current projects. It is difficult to delimit the boundaries of middle-class status, but given the level of higher education, employment in white-collar professions, and material markers of consumption and leisure that characterized the TV da Gente staff members with whom I met, I am confident that they are generally positioned somewhere between Brazil's poorest and wealthiest sectors.

At the Margins of the Middle

As the middle classes continue to grow internationally, scholars increasingly examine the middle class as a category contingent upon its particular cultural and historical contexts. Social scientists have recently produced several studies illuminating how middle-class subjects continuously make, remake, and negotiate their class positions through consumptive practices or political commitments (O'Dougherty 2002; Liechty 2003; Fernandes 2006; Zhang 2010). As

with many other identities, the middle class is a construct resulting from historical, ideological, and representational processes that work to generate a normative image of categorical identification. The middle class may appear to occupy a neutral position but, like other categories, the ways in which it has been developed and imagined has been subject to certain erasures pertaining to the question of who does and who does not belong to that classification. Racial identification as well as a history of forced enslavement, unequal access to the labor market, and persistent racism inform the parameters of middle-class inclusion in Brazil. I argue that middle-class Brazilians who claim a black identity are ideologically unaccounted for within public discourses of racial democracy that erase blackness as an identity category while simultaneously (and paradoxically) associating upward mobility with whiteness. Further, I contend that public discourses pertaining to class in Brazil naturalize the category of the middle class as white, which informs middle-class Afro-Brazilians' experience of their class status as marginal. In this chapter, I will examine the complex processes and experiences that inform middle-class Afro-Brazilian media producers' identification as black as well as describe how their race informs their work practices. I demonstrate that their marginal position within mainstream media employment encourages them to seek work within race-based networks of segmented media production organizations such as TV da Gente.

Karl Marx (1968) divided economic stratification into two class categories defined by their relationship to the means of production within a capitalist economic system. Capitalists own the means of production, including land and capital, and the proletariat, or working class, must sell its labor in exchange for payment. Marx recognized the *petit bourgeoisie* as an additional category of artisans, craftspersons, and merchants. However, he hypothesized that the *petit bourgeoisie* would eventually dissolve into either the capitalist class or the working class in the event of class struggle. Marx conceptualized alienated workers becoming conscious of their

exploitation and revolting in order to unravel the exploitative capitalist mode of production. This unequal class structure, which is embedded in the capitalist political economy and shapes its ideology, would be the root of the system's demise.

Marx's analysis of class and economic relations has left scholars to grapple with new forms presented by a continuously expanding middle class (and the absence of a revolution broad enough in scope to overturn the capitalist mode of production everywhere). John Urry noted that, "although Marx is right in predicting a decline in the importance of the petit bourgeoisie, he is often criticized for not predicting the rise of a new middle class of clerks, technicians, managers, and professional workers (such as accountants, lawyers, teachers, technologists, etc)" (1973: 176). In presenting a structural theory of a growing middle class, Urry argues that the technological progress required for increased capitalist accumulation called for an expansion within the administrative, technical, clerical, and educational areas of the productive structure. The increase within these employment categories produces a group of workers who do not own the means of production, and thus cannot be considered capitalists, but are separated from proletarian labor and its subsistence existence.

Urry's theorization of the structural conditions of middle-class status within capitalism has particular racial and cultural implications for the emergence of middle-class populations in Brazil. New employment positions that would provide the salary necessary for a middle-class lifestyle have been relatively closed to Afro-Brazilians. Brian Owensby (2002) chronicled the emergence of the Brazilian middle class in the course of the country's transition from an economy dominated by an agricultural elite supported by slavery to an urban, industrial environment in which the state expanded rapidly. In Brazil, race inflected the already socially and economically stratified population out of which the middle class historically developed, which informed the creation of a predominantly white middle class within many cities. Owensby

demonstrated that, within the urban centers of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro after 1920, the sectors that fueled the development of the middle classes in Brazil included the government, banking, and the import, export, and distribution of consumer goods. An abhorrence of manual labor and a requirement to present a so-called professional appearance (a shirt-and-tie standard) characterized this gendered and raced category of professional middle-class workers who had the potential for upward economic mobility and social advancement. The class line demarcating the middle and lower classes also served as a color line that restricted many blacks and mulattoes from “jobs in the commercial sector because appearance mattered, and good appearance was something ‘people of color could not have,’ as one shop keeper noted” (Owensby 2002: 63). The criteria for presenting a good appearance comprised not only a shirt and tie, but light or white skin as well, making it difficult for Afro-Brazilians to ascend the social ladder.¹⁴ The subjective criteria of good appearance or “an unspoken discrimination against those of darker skins” (Owensby 2002: 64) constrained the parameters around who would be accepted for white collar or office work, allowing white Brazilians to enjoy a monopoly on middle-class employment, salaries, and status within the expanded market of opportunities for non-manual work.

The Ideological Implications of Class

In Brazil, as in many Latin American countries, it is common to privilege class as the primary locus of inequality, not racial inequality and discrimination. This phenomenon is informed by a history of racial democracy and an emphasis on racial mixture, which has been thought to ameliorate racism. As the most prominent architect of the Brazilian racial democracy

¹⁴ Donna Goldstein acknowledges the continued use of good appearance as a criterion for employment in her anthropological study of black domestic workers. She writes, “Many jobs require *boa aparência*, which literally means a ‘good appearance’ but more often is a thinly disguised discriminatory phrase placed or implied in job advertisements and meant to discourage dark-skinned people from applying” (2003: 60)

ideology, Gilberto Freyre explicitly emphasized class inequality in his influential work on Brazilian national identity. He ardently defended Brazilian racial equality by declaring that, “the Brazilian ethnic democracy, has the almost perfect equality of opportunity for all men regardless of color” (Freyre 1945:7). To be sure, he does go on to acknowledge economic stratification: “There has been, and still is, social distance between different groups of the population. But social distance is—more truly today than in the colonial age or during the Empire (when slavery was central to the social structure)—the result of class-consciousness rather than of race and color prejudice” (119). Freyre fails, however, to acknowledge the residual effects of slavery and the social stigma that blackness carries for the previously enslaved men and women who had to find work after abolition in 1888. For Freyre, the abolition of slavery heralded the end of race-based separation, and he presents an understanding of any prevailing inequality in Brazil through the lens of class, not race.

U.S. American and Brazilian academics have supported a position similar to Freyre’s by similarly emphasizing strong class inequality in Brazil. The American anthropologist Donald Pierson, in his work *Negroes in Brazil* (1945), recognized a type of prejudice against blacks, but it was class prejudice, not racial prejudice. He writes, “There are no castes based on race; there are only classes. This does not mean that there is not something which you can properly call ‘prejudice,’ but that the prejudice which exists is a prejudice of class and not of race” (1945: 402). Brazilian university professors have generally held the view that social class, not race, has been the most important variable for analysis and social change. The historian Thomas Skidmore writes that university professors in Brazil held the general position that “economic injustice rules the capitalist world, and attacking it would lift all boats, whatever their color” (1992-3: 42).¹⁵

This scholarly assertion of prevalent class prejudice accompanied by the dismissal of race

¹⁵ Florestan Fernandes represents a notable exception to this approach. His work *The Negro in Brazilian Society* focused on racial inequality within the capitalist system of Brazil.

as a target of discrimination has been expressed commonly by Brazilians. Anthropologist Marvin Harris, conducted a descriptive study of life in Salvador, Bahia for his doctoral dissertation. In it he writes that “Brazilians say ‘money whitens,’ meaning that the richer a dark man gets the lighter will be the racial category assigned to him by his friends, relatives and business associates” (1964: 59). More than forty years later, Brazilians continue to articulate the common belief that ascendancy in economic status affects a person’s racial classification and the type of treatment he or she is accorded. This idea that money whitens has both a class-related and a racial component. First, the concept assumes that class position or wealth is foundational to social inclusion and treatment. This logic posits upward economic mobility as the answer to inequality, but fails to address how or why a (black) person occupies a given class status. This emphasis on class ignores the histories of labor and slavery that created the large black lower class in the first place. Second, this saying posits an inverse relationship between blackness and economic upward mobility by associating whiteness with higher economic status, thus rendering the term “black middle class” an oxymoron in Brazil. Whiteness becomes the designation assigned to those in the middle or upper classes according to this popular theory of the relationship between race and class. Yet this scholarly, more or less official, narrative that class eclipses race as a factor in inequality and discrimination is widely accepted by those Brazilians whose lives are not circumscribed by its strictures.

It is difficult to disentangle the complex dynamics through which race and class have historically functioned in Brazilian society. Brazil’s history of race-based slavery, an absence of policies that might have assisted newly manumitted slaves with entrance into the labor market, and the continuation of racial discrimination in that market left many newly “freed” Afro-Brazilians unemployed, underemployed, or employed in the lowest paid industries. The ideology of racial democracy, which emerged decades after the abolition of slavery and therefore long

after this socioeconomic pattern was established, may have drawn attention away from the historical production of a predominantly white middle class by de-emphasizing race as a valid category of concern and masking the historical conditions of the lower-class position of many Afro-Brazilians. The middle class in Brazil was produced historically and ideologically as white, leaving little room for an Afro-Brazilian middle class, which remains virtually invisible.

According to this logic of class inequality, upward economic mobility should be the answer to social inequality in Brazil. Yet the significance of race does not disappear with upward mobility. For middle-class Afro-Brazilians, despite the benefits of higher education, significant work experience within their fields, and the material markers of middle-class success, race has remained a significant factor within their work and personal lives.

The Middle Class as an Ambiguous Category

A consistent theme running through much of the scholarship on the global middle classes is the critical caveat that the category of the middle class remains ambiguous and nebulous. For example, in his work on the emerging middle class of Kathmandu, Nepal, Mark Liechty noted poetically that, “although people often spoke of the middle class in concrete terms, trying to find objective criteria to characterize a middle class in Kathmandu was like trying to catch clouds with a net” (2003: 67). In his work with African Americans in Harlem in New York City, John L. Jackson contends that, “quick and easy uses of class labels don’t necessarily tell you all you need to know about people’s socioeconomic lives, about who is a member of which class category, and what makes her or him a member—about what criteria are used to freeze changing life stories into specific and often resolutely immutable class boxes” (85). These anthropologists make the point that it is difficult to demarcate the economic, social, and practical criteria that delimit the boundaries of the middle classes. They also point out that the “middle class” label should not obscure the complexity that narratives of lived experiences of class may offer.

I encountered the ambiguity of the middle class during my meetings with my research participants. Flavio, the head of the journalism department at TV da Gente, described his family background to me in the following way:

My father didn't go to university, but he was a machine designer. For many years he worked for São Paulo Alpargatas. That was an English factory that produced footwear. So it was a middle class family.

Even though Flavio's father lacked a university education, he was able to earn enough money to maintain a middle-class standard of living for his family. Professional work may not have been necessary to achieve and maintain a middle-class lifestyle. Moreover, some people might claim to be middle class while working blue-collar jobs that allow them to acquire the typical middle-class amenities (a development that seems to have eluded Marx). Nevertheless, work—particularly professional or “white-collar” work—traditionally creates and sustains a middle-class lifestyle and provides the means with which to purchase the consumer goods that represent such a lifestyle. Professional work is part of the middle class experience as well, a marker and facilitator of upward mobility.

I agree with other scholars that the category “middle class” is a contentious and fragmentary one, but it is made even more contentious through the racially normalizing processes involved in its representation, historical production, and ideological understanding. By attending to those who occupy the racialized margins of the middle class, I further problematize the category as one that is difficult to define in terms of who is included, but also as one that at the same time systematically *excludes* certain segments of the population. I am more concerned with the experiences of those who are not included, as I seek to identify and define the racial terms of their exclusion or marginalization, than I am with delineating the imprecise criteria that determine who is included.

While the middle-class category certainly lacks definitive criteria, class status in Brazil is

socially and publicly marked in ways that distinguish Brazilian experiences of class from other national contexts. For example, class signifiers are imprinted within the architectural structures and layouts of many buildings in São Paulo (as well as in other Brazilian cities). Most residential and commercial buildings contain entrances and elevators designated with the labels “service” and “social.” Generally, domestic workers or building maintenance staff use service entrances and elevators, while the general public uses social entrances and elevators. A maid’s quarters and service area are typical features of a middle-class or upper-class condominium or single-family home (Holston 1989). While many people have discontinued the practice of employing live-in domestic workers, most middle-class Brazilians pay domestic workers to clean their homes on a regular basis. As Donna Goldstein asserts, “being a member of the middle class, in this sense, signifies that one is not a member of the serving class” (2003: 67). The contours of class have far more visible indicators in Brazil than, for example, in the U.S., where one’s class status may not be marked so explicitly through spatial stratification.



4.1 A service and social entrance to an apartment building in the Jardins neighborhood
The public and visible markers of class status in Brazil have implications for Afro-

Brazilians during their encounters within these spaces. These clear demarcations of class status

(the social vs. the service) present opportunities for Afro-Brazilians to experience their exclusion from the middle-class category. On one occasion, I went to a very upscale mall (*Shopping Morumbi*) in São Paulo with an Afro-Brazilian friend, and the cab dropped us off in the underground parking area. When we asked the security guard how to enter the mall, he walked us to the service elevator and pushed the button for us. It became apparent to us that this was the service elevator when we walked in and saw padding on the walls and when we stopped on one of the floors and more (black) service employees in uniforms entered. We stood in silence on the elevator and when we exited my friend said, “You can dress up all you want, but they will always put you in your place (*en seu lugar*).” It becomes apparent who does and does not belong within the middle-class category when you are assigned to the service elevator in a public building based upon racial phenotype rather than on other factors such as dress or “appearance.”

The anthropologist Angela Figueiredo argues that, in Brazil, “belonging to the middle class, far from being an antidote against racial stereotyping, exposes blacks to situations of increased vulnerability, given that whites predominately occupy the social spaces they frequent” (2010: 57). This vulnerability that Figueiredo addresses can involve something as extreme as physical violence or death, as evidenced by some public cases. An example of an incident of physical violence would be the well-publicized case of the black Cinderella, Ana Flavia Peçanha de Azevedo, the daughter of the governor of the state of Espírito Santo who was physically attacked during an altercation with white residents in the building in which she was visiting a friend. When Azevedo held the elevator to speak to a friend, she inconvenienced other residents who wished to use the elevator, causing a confrontation between the two parties that ended with Azevedo being punched in the face (*Cinderela Negra* 1993).¹⁶ A more extreme case made a victim of Flávio Ferreira Sant’ana, a 28-year-old black dentist who was killed by the police on

¹⁶ For a reading of the case of the black Cinderella in relationship to race, modernity, and the public sphere see Hanchard 1999.

February 3, 2004 when they stopped him in his car on the way to the airport. The police approached his car and mistook him for a thief, claimed he had a gun, and shot him (Death of a Dentist 2004). These situations reveal the contradictions within the composite of the black middle class individual in Brazil whose higher status is marked by a certain stratum of work, income, and material products against their lower status identification through their race. In such situations, whether one considers mine with my friend at the mall or those of the black Cinderella and Flavio Sant'ana, our blackness seems to render us unrecognizable as legitimate members of the middle class who have earned access to symbolic markers such as social elevators. This vulnerability seems to be rooted in what we might term the illegibility of Afro-Brazilians as middle-class subjects, or the ways in which Brazilians of African descent are rendered unrecognizable as members of the middle class under the historical conditions of middle-class formation as well as in contemporary social encounters, daily life, and national thought.

The Black Middle Class at Work

Recent scholarship on the middle class in Brazil positions consumption as foundational to middle-class identity for both blacks (Figueiredo 2010) and whites (O'Dougherty 2002). In her study of middle-class Afro-Brazilians in Salvador, Bahia, Figueiredo argues that those who comprise the black middle class are "out of place." She focuses primarily on consumption and writes that, "middle-class Afro-Brazilians are looked upon with curiosity when they participate in middle-class social activities and with distrust when they try to acquire or enjoy the symbolic and social goods associated with people with high financial means" (2010: 53). Figueiredo focuses primarily on the practice of consumption and shopping as a significant locus of discrimination against the black middle class. Because whiteness is associated with the ability to acquire goods of a certain price, black shoppers may experience discrimination when attempting

to purchase products that are considered to be out of their financial reach. To demonstrate the breadth and depth of this phenomenon, I will foreground the unequal conditions of professional work within the mainstream media as another locus of Afro-Brazilian middle-class experience.

The media industry is dominated by white Brazilians and so are the representations that they produce. One might assume that the first step towards integrating media representations would be to educate and employ workers of color to produce diverse representations. However, the experiences of the Afro-Brazilian media workers with whom I worked indicate that race affects their work within various media outlets when editors limit their ability to include material that addresses racial issues or refuse their desire to represent certain aspects of Afro-Brazilian experiences in Brazil. Anthropologist Dominic Boyer demonstrates that “public cultural institutions such as mass media organizations and universities are significantly responsible for both formalizing and accrediting informal knowledges of identity difference” (2001: 469). Exploring Afro-Brazilian media workers’ everyday experiences within mainstream media networks illuminates the ways in which racial difference affects those experiences within a professional work atmosphere. The workplace is another locus of racial discrimination that affects black professionals in spite of their acquiring the necessary education and work experience to carry out their assignments effectively. In my examples, money does not “whiten” and, despite social upward mobility, my study participants’ race informs their experiences at work, including their constant frustration over not being allowed to diversify the mainstream media with black content and feelings of loneliness and invisibility. Afro-Brazilian media workers experienced something similar to what Boyer labeled “putatively objective bifurcation of professional competence,” in his description of East German journalists’ encounters with their own difference during their journalism work in unified Germany (2001: 463). These unequal working conditions subject many Afro-Brazilian media workers to the predicament of

reproducing the mass-mediated representations of their own absence or marginalization.

Obtaining Work Experience

Most of TV da Gente's staff had studied radio, television, or print media production in college and had gained considerable professional experience working for various media outlets around the city. Work assignments within the media industry in São Paulo appear to be transient and fairly short-lived. Many of the people involved in my study had worked across a range of media (radio, television, magazine production, print journalism), and had held jobs for short tenures. Employment in the media was, after all, contingent on the popularity of a given show, the viability of a given media institution or organization, the intended life span of a given program, or the possibility of an opportunity for better or more suitable employment.

Flavio, a journalist, described his extensive work experience within various media institutions:

I am 56 years old, and I graduated with a degree in journalism from *Cásper Líbero* [a college focused on communication in São Paulo] in 1981; then I worked on a public relations advisory board, in the supply office of the São Paulo government for three years. After that I worked for four more years on the press advisory board of a publicity agency called *Sales Interamericana*, for Mauro Sales. After that, I worked on the radio station *Cultura de São Paulo* (São Paulo Culture). I was a reporter and head of reporting. After that I worked three years on the radio station *Eldorado* that is owned by the group *Estado* (State Group). I was the editor of reporting. After I left there I went to a press that produced a television news program called *Diário Rural da tv Bandeirantes* (Rural Daily News, on the television network called *Bandeirantes*). I was an independent producer that made this news program. I stayed for 14 years at this press. I left there and worked in a production called GW, making a program for the *Futura* (Future) Television Channel called *Rural*, an agricultural program. After that I worked at *TV da Gente*; that was a short experience. Now I have returned to the *Cultura* (Culture) radio station where I am editor-in-chief of the radio journalism department.

After attending a college specifically focused on training journalists and media workers, Flavio accumulated work experience in television, advertising, and radio in the areas of publicity, reporting, news editing, and television producing. I interacted with Flavio during his twenty-

seventh year of working in media; his longest-tenured job was of 14 years.

Janete Moreis, the director of women's programming, described her background in media work in the following way:

I was already in the television [industry] for 16 years. I started for *Record* television network with Ana Maria Braga in the *Note e Anote* program. This was in 1992 and 1993. Then I left *Record*, worked for the former television network *Machete*. I worked for a magazine, worked in radio where I directed Ronnie Von, Ney Gonçalves Dias, Solange Couto and Solange Frazão. I worked for the TV television network for *Band*. I have already been in the [media] market for some time.

Much like Flavio, Janete worked in diverse media including television, magazine production, and radio. She also attended university to study journalism and then moved between various employment opportunities.

While consistent, long-term work within one institution is something of an anomaly in Brazilian media, this transience provided media workers with the opportunity to build and cultivate diverse skill sets across media and positions. These multiple forms of work experience within the media industry would aid the TV da Gente workers in the task of creating and building a television network from scratch.

Racial Problems Working in the Mainstream Media

White Brazilians make up the majority of employees within the media industry (as well as within most professional employment sectors). The Afro-Brazilian media workers I interviewed communicated the limitations they encountered when working within these environments. Several themes emerged from their criticisms of working conditions for Afro-Brazilians within the mainstream media: loneliness or being the only Afro-Brazilian worker, frustration, censorship from their editors, and misrecognition of their professional status by people who worked within and outside of their media organizations. They contended that these situations resulted from their own racial identity as black.

In reference to the absence of Afro-Brazilian media workers within the mainstream media, one of the TV da Gente directors stated,

Until now I forgot that I was black. I always worked with whites, always worked with other issues. I started to learn many things about blacks working [at TV da Gente] because it had well informed people, intellectuals that were involved with racial issues I don't consider myself white, I am black, but my path didn't have many successful blacks, principally black women; television is very difficult.

While working with other white Brazilians she was afforded few opportunities to work with issues that might concern many Afro-Brazilians. She considers herself black, but before working at TV da Gente she had “forgotten” she was black. She found television to be “difficult” because there were few “successful blacks.” She points out that there was a conspicuous dearth of black women working in the television industry.

Some Afro-Brazilian media workers expressed discontent working in the mainstream media, which was due primarily to their editors' failure to approve their ideas to integrate Afro-Brazilians into the media content. For example, the executive producer, Conceição Lourenço, described her previous work experiences in the mainstream media:

I graduated 26 years ago and worked in various media vehicles. Black people are totally invisible in the editorial staff of newspapers. I was always alone, I was always the only [black person]. Then you don't have a voice, the head positions are always whites. Blacks don't have lead positions in the media, in the newspapers, in the magazines. Because of this, the magazine covers, principally the beauty covers, are always white women because the head is always white. So it's a fight to survive the editorial staff. But I always do my work in the best manner possible and never stopped suggesting stories where blacks can enter. This almost never happened, but I always beat against the same key and never had difficulties with my boss. They said that these stories wouldn't work but no one ever said this looking me in the eye because they didn't want to do these stories, but I never gave up.

Conceição's main body of media experience was in the area of women's magazines, whose covers typically feature a white female model as a symbol of beauty and success. She links the absence of Afro-Brazilians in editorial positions with the dominance of whiteness as a standard

of beauty on the covers of the magazines. When she elaborated on the types of stories she wanted to incorporate into the magazine, she mentioned featuring black models in the beauty shoots inside the magazine or on the cover. She would also want to profile black people in stories for the magazine, such as having a black doctor discuss common women's health problems. However, these story ideas were never approved by her editor and thus she could not pursue them for possible publication. As a black journalist, she was "alone," "the only one," and did "not have a voice." Conceição continues,

Now, when you enter into the labor market it's very difficult. Whites are going to demand a lot from you and you become a little disheartened. I stayed working as a disheartened journalist most of the time. Without telling someone that you are going to interview them, people don't believe that you are the reporter that made a telephone appointment with them. They stand there staring at you.

Conceição discussed an experience she had in which an interviewee failed to recognize her as the reporter with whom they had spoken on the phone. Her work within the mainstream media caused her to become "disheartened" by the censorship of editors and the treatment she faced with interviewees. Conceição illuminates two modes of resistance she encountered when pitching a story: The explanation she would be *told* would invariably, but vaguely, mention their unsuitability, usually, she would be told, because they "don't work"; yet she often also *sensed* the resistance based on nonverbal behavior, feeling that the editor "didn't want to do the stories." This indicated to her a certain prejudice or subjective decision that became the basis for denial. Thus her story ideas were routinely denied or censored by her editor and the legitimacy accorded to her as a trained and experienced journalist was also denied when an interviewee failed to recognize her as a reporter. As a black journalist, Conceição is in effect illegible in this role of professional media worker. This disheartened feeling is linked to the racial conditions of inequality manifested in the treatment of both her and her ideas within her work place.

Visibility is a key theme in Conceição's narrative of her work experiences. In similar

ways, the social philosopher Frantz Fanon problematizes the visibility of blacks within the public sphere through his well-known narration, “Look, a Negro,” in *The Fact of Blackness* (1967). In this famous “Look, a Negro” passage, Fanon narrates the unfolding of a public spectacle at the expense of his blackness:

“Look, a Negro!” It was an external stimulus that flicked over me as I passed by. I made a tight smile. “Look, a Negro!” It was true. It amused me. “Look, a Negro!” The circle was drawing a bit tighter. I made no secret of my amusement. (1967: 112)

Fanon cannot move throughout the world without others, mainly whites, drawing attention to his race, or the race of other black people. Conceição feels the weight of her blackness when her editor will not completely deny her ideas, but rather says that they “don’t work” without “looking [her] in the eye.” She takes an editor’s failure to look at her as proof of the editor’s insincerity about her story idea’s inability to “work”; it is clear to her that the editor simply “didn’t want to do the stories.” She experiences one denial through her editor’s not “looking her in the eye” and she experiences another denial at the wrong end of a stare. The politics of visibility takes various forms including peremptory denial and dumbfounded staring.

The head of TV da Gente’s children’s show, Oswaldo Faustino, worked for a major daily newspaper in São Paulo as a journalist. He articulated a sentiment similar to Conceição’s when describing his efforts to gain some attention from editors about stories he would propose:

Working for the newspaper I never had the opportunity to write stories, and I said: Look, this is happening, something that I thought was important. “Ah! Leave it here, later we will look at it.” And it was never taken into consideration. At some point I gave up and said: It’s not here that I am going to do my activism.

Oswaldo’s editors, like Conceição’s, rejected stories about events that he considered worthy of representation in the newspaper, including black marches, academic conferences focusing on black issues, or black musical events such as hip-hop shows in favelas. He considered these attempts to be attempts at activism, but he eventually gave up. I would also say that he was

challenging the idea of what was considered worthy of representation as news and what events deserved press coverage.¹⁷

In addition to telling me about being ignored by his editors, Oswaldo also discussed being misrecognized or misidentified by his co-workers in the workplace. Outside of work, Oswaldo became involved with hip-hop musicians in the municipality of *Diadema*, on the periphery of the city. Two college students finishing their coursework approached him for help with their project on the hip-hop movement. He was able to facilitate their research and, eventually, they published a book about it. The authors asked Oswaldo to write the forward to the book and it was featured in a section of the *A Folha de São Paulo*, the very newspaper for which Oswaldo worked. The article write-up included quotes from Oswaldo's forward to the book. One of the reporters at the *Folha* was talking to a journalist, a friend of Oswaldo's, at another paper about the article. This *Folha* reporter claimed that the article taught her so many things that she did not know about and mentioned that Oswaldo said many interesting things about hip-hop. This reporter, who worked near Oswaldo at the *Folha*, was unaware that Oswaldo also worked for the newspaper as a reporter. Oswaldo's friend, the other journalist, told her to cross the hall and she would find his office door. Oswaldo said,

She came to the door of my office, looked at me and said, "You are Oswaldo Faustino?" I said: "I am." She said: "But the Faustino who wrote the forward. . . ?" I said: "Yes, it's me." She said, "But how is it possible that I saw you here for so many years and didn't know that you were a journalist?" She thought my job was a secondary technical function, or something else, and not that I would be a journalist. She was a journalist for many years and thought that I was an employee who, you know, made copies, whatever thing, but not that I was a journalist, and much less that I could write the forward to a book.

This situation raises two interesting points. First, as a newspaper reporter or journalistic

¹⁷ Gaye Tuchman (1980) discusses the idea of newsworthiness as a process of negotiation between various levels of editors and reporters. She concludes that, "In the act of judging the relative value of diverse items caught in the news net, the editors perpetually create and recreate negotiated standards of judgment. By accomplishing judgments, the editors in turn affirm and reaffirm the validity of the anchoring of the news net as a frame imposing order and coherence on the social world" (1978: 38).

authority, Oswaldo had no opportunity to write about the hip-hop movement in the newspaper for which he worked. By the time the project materialized, he had, in frustration, ceased regarding the newspaper as a conduit for his interests and pursued this project outside of the confines of work. However, when the newspaper editors did become interested in including alternative culture in newspaper content, Oswaldo was not offered the opportunity to report on the story. Within the text of the feature, he is cited as the writer of the book preface by a reporter who works for the same newspaper that he does, and is reporting on a project on which he would have liked to report.

Second, Oswaldo worked unrecognized as a journalist by one of his coworkers, who assumed he was a technical assistant, a secondary position in the hierarchy of newspaper employment. Oswaldo, much like Conceição, says that his co-worker looked at him and proceeded to question who he was. Oswaldo says that she asked, “But how is it possible that I *saw* you here for so many years and didn’t know that you were a journalist?” Again, visibility emerges as a theme characterizing the conditions of media work for Afro-Brazilian media producers. For Oswaldo, the inequality he experienced in the work place is not linked to his invisibility, but to the *way in which he is seen* by coworkers. His race mediates how he is recognized by others, restricting the domain of recognition to that of a non-professional worker or non-journalist. Race also mediates his position as marginal within mass media organizations generally, which Oswaldo describes below:

So, it’s more or less like this. There is a lack of sensitivity, and many times you are side by side and people don’t recognize you. The people that are at your side, principally in our case, they don’t see you and they don’t want to find out about your story. You don’t have prominence within the mass media.¹⁸

¹⁸ In saying “our,” Oswaldo meant to include not only both him and me but also black people in general. He is recognizing my blackness and including me in that category.

Separation of work in the mainstream media and segmented media

Such marginalization within the mainstream media has driven many black media workers to pursue involvement with alternative media projects or networks (such as TV da Gente) or other racial projects in the city that include the black population. Thus, many of the TV da Gente media workers brought with them to the network experiences of producing racial representations within racially segmented media projects. Most of them had maintained their work in the mainstream media for income, and then either volunteered or earned a minimal salary for this segmented media work. One of the journalists describes such segmented media work:

Between 1987 and 1995, I did other work in the area of social communication. I participated in Afro-ethnic programs directed to the Afro-Brazilian population, communication programs connected to the government. I worked for the special advisory office on the Palmares Cultural Foundation and did some work as a presenter on television. I did a specialization in television journalism, but radio was my principle activity until 1995.

The black media worker found alternative media work through the Palmares Cultural Foundation, a branch of the Brazilian government that was created to work on racial issues for the equality of the black population.

Some of the journalists and presenters had performed freelance work for *Race Magazine*, a popular black magazine that circulates nationally. This allowed them to utilize their journalism skills to address racial issues and reach an audience that was particularly interested in such topics. Others worked with Law 10.639 and helped train teachers around the city to address issues related to black history and culture. They were also affiliated with the Commission of Journalists for Racial Equality, which provided a platform on which they could address these issues. Others had written books that explored racial issues. All of these activities were carried out in parallel to their primary employment with mainstream media outlets. Ironically, by splitting their work between mainstream and segmented media, they simultaneously worked to critique the very images they had no choice but to participate in producing.

A (Net)work You Can Believe In

Such transience in the media industry and the constant movement of media professionals from workplace to workplace seems to have produced a network of interaction and connection among media workers. The low numbers of black professionals generally, and of black media professionals in particular, have created small, tightly interwoven networks. Either the TV da Gente network founder, Netinho de Paula, or the executive producer personally contacted most of the eventual TV da Gente employees to request that they come to work for the start-up television network. No one stated that he or she had answered an employment ad. The TV da Gente television network leadership pulled people from their networks of fellow media associates to fill the empty job positions. The director of journalism, Claudia Alexandre, described her entry into TV da Gente as follows:

I received an invitation from television presenter Netinho de Paula who started a television network called TV da Gente, a network directed towards the Afro-Brazilian population with reception in other countries, the United States, and also in Africa, in Angola.

She in turn invited Flavio Carrança to work with her on the journalism program. Carrança stated,

It was Claudia Alexandre, I knew her from the Commission of Journalists for Racial Equality and I also knew Oswaldo Faustino. Claudia became editor-in-chief of the journalism department of TV da Gente and she invited me to work with her. I was the sub-editor and together we made the channel's news program.

These connections among Afro-Brazilian journalists were a common source of workers for TV da Gente. Netinho, the network founder, called Claudia Alexandre, who in turn brought Flavio Carrança to work as journalists. However, Flavio also knew Oswaldo, a program producer.

One person, a director, stated that she had not been invited to work there, as many others had. She sought out and personally asked the executive producer if a spot existed for her at the network:

The truth is, I followed the beginning of the project from the media, the newspaper, and I already knew Netinho, but I didn't have a friendship tie to him. I knew him through the media and I called him to do some programs that I was doing. I followed [Netinho's] exit from the *Record* television network through the news and also the beginning of a new channel with a directed proposal. I thought, why not take part in this project? I'm Black, I work in the media, I am on the market and I looked for the channel. I met Conceição Lourenço during the time when she was the director and then she moved to the position of Vice President. I looked for her in a building that no longer exists. They were in the process of selecting people. I went there and put myself at their availability. I said that I would like to take part because I believed in this work. Janete Moraes was directing the program and at the moment an opening did not exist. The spot was already filled, but I told them I was available for whatever position because this was a project I was interested in working on. This happened in December and Conceição called me in February. Janete left the network and she called me to take over the position. This was how I came to TV da Gente. It wasn't because I was called by anyone. I went there, and knocked on the door.

She is careful to note that she “was not called by anyone.” Her employment with TV da Gente came from her own initiative. She pursued work there because she was “on the market” or looking for a job as well as because of her black racial identity and experience working in the media. She thought that her profile and skill set would benefit the network's activities and she “believed in this work,” so she “knocked on the door” and asked for a job.

Conclusion: At the Center of the Margins

Middle-class identity in Brazil has been constructed, historically and ideologically, through the idiom of hegemonic whiteness. This process has, of course, occurred and continues to operate within the system of racial democracy, which draws attention away from race as a valid category marker and underplays, almost to the point of denying it, the existence of racism and racial discrimination in Brazilian life. However, race continues to demarcate the limits of middle-class belonging. Middle-class Afro-Brazilians experience, in their professional work and in their everyday lives, the contradiction between the insistence that race does not exist and the general understanding of the middle class as white. My research participants shared with me

many moments when their blackness mediated their exclusion, from watching editors dismiss their ideas when they involve including racial content in their media vehicles to feeling the sting of co-workers' assuming that they could not be working in positions with professional and creative responsibilities. They lived and worked through feelings of isolation, becoming disheartened without a voice in editorial decisions. The contradictory imperatives with which they must contend have emerged from the ways in which others have seen or perceived them, and from the ways in which they have found themselves to be invisible to others—or, that is, visible only as black. This contradiction constitutes the basis for their exclusion from the middle class.

I have argued that middle class Afro-Brazilian are marginal or operate on the fringes of the middle class category evidenced through their interactions with other middle class Brazilians at work. However, they have also obtained a class level that many Afro-Brazilians have not obtained. Middle class Afro-Brazilians are not impoverished, eking out a living through service work, and residing in *favelas* on the periphery of the city. They have the skills and educational experience to obtain professional work and the salaries to pay for middle class lifestyles. As I have mentioned, many of them have been involved in community activism around black issues and concerns or they attempted to weave these actions into their mainstream work. Their income levels, amount of free time, identification as black and interest in black equality positions them to take on leadership roles in the areas of racial activism and other enterprises, like TV da Gente, to push for racial equality. In many ways, some of them may take on the roles of advocates for the Afro-Brazilian population by rallying around and creating programs, initiatives, and institutions to improve the conditions of all black Brazilians by making the structures of racism visible and working to eradicate them.

The experiences of Afro-Brazilian media workers within mainstream media has caused

many of them to participate in racially segmented media networks that focus exclusively on black content and cover issues thought to be pertinent only to their Afro-Brazilian consumers. This segmented media industry constitutes a network of alliances and associations among many Afro-Brazilian media workers who circulate through a circumscribed set of channels. These alternative networks provided the pool of talent from which TV da Gente executives drew when filling employment positions within their ranks. Afro-Brazilian media workers, whose professional media experience came principally from mainstream media, applied their media production skills to generate images that valued black aesthetics and subject positions within these new vehicles of segmented representations.

CHAPTER 5
BECOMING BLACK:
BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS AND BLACK IDENTIFICATION

In this chapter I examine the development of black consciousness or black identity claims for the middle class black media workers at TV da Gente. I ask, why do they identify as black within a country that denies or complicates the existence of this category? What informs their racial identity formation?

A small, but growing body of literature on the relationship between class and black identification in Brazil has revealed that black middle class Brazilians are more likely to identify as black or *negro* than their counterparts of lower socioeconomic status. Livio Sansone observed that, “the younger and, more generally, the better educated individuals with a higher income tend on the contrary [of whitening] to be proud of being black and sometimes claim to be *negro* even when they are relatively light skinned” (2003: 56). Angela Figueredo concluded that for middle class Afro-Brazilians, “the realization of being black, as well as any attempts at producing a discourse of identity, appears in the adult phase and as a result of contact with the white world” (2010: 57). Figueredo argued that black identification among the black middle class results from their substantial contact with white Brazilians and occurs when they are adults.

Examination of the narratives of Afro-Brazilian media workers affiliated with TV da Gente, reveal a more complex relationship between middle class status and black racial identification. The narratives I present draw from the memories of my research participants to uncover a series of multidimensional processes that contributed to their development of a black racial identity including: their interaction within their families, encounters with U.S. African American cultural influences, observations of invisibility within mainstream representations, and

political action within the black movement during college. These were significant events that shaped their black consciousness development from childhood through adulthood and index the dynamic processes of racial identity formation.

Born into Blackness: Racial Identity and Kinship

Many of my research participants referenced their family as the primary influence of their black identification. I went to visit the executive producer, Conceição Lourenço, at her house where she showed me a family tree she was constructing on her computer. She had carefully scanned pictures of her parents, grand parents, great grand parents, as well as her siblings, aunts, uncles and cousins. Thick tan lines connected the pictures together and labels of kinship relations indicated the various relationships and traced them through the generations. She shared with me:

my father said many things when we were little. He said don't lower your head, don't be afraid, you need to stand up for yourself, because we aren't different from anyone, we aren't inferior. He delivered this sermon practically everyday.

Like Conceição, many of the people I interviewed cited their parents and grandparents as critical examples of black people with self-esteem and pride. It is unclear whether her father identified as black, but Conceição remembers him delivering encouragement during her childhood to take pride in herself and refuse feelings of inferiority. She interpreted his words as a source of pride in being who she is, or being black.

Another television show producer, Big Richard, referenced his family as the main influence surrounding his identification as black. He said,

My maternal grandmother is 73 years old. She is from Minas Gerais. Until her generation there weren't mixed blacks. They didn't have Indians or Whites, only blacks. My maternal great grandmother was the first black editor in chief of the editorial staff of the Newspaper of Brazil (*Jornal do Brasil*) and I'm talking about the decade of the 50's. I had an uncle that was the first black justice of the court of accounts in the state of Minas Gerais. So I was already born with the responsibility of the community, by the name of my family.

Marcia Brecho, one of the directors, said, “My grandmother was a black woman with light skin (*negra de pele clara*), not dark, but she always demonstrated for us that you don’t have less value or to feel inferior for anything.” All of them recounted the generations within their family who vocally resisted being associated with inferiority. Black identification is communicated through interaction with their family members and by witnessing the examples that their family set for them in the area of education or professional success. Membership in their families provided them with the basis for black identification and through affirming black identification within the family, naturalized blackness as a source of pride and not a hindrance to success and achievement. I would argue that they were born into blackness, not through the biological inheritance of particular genes that denote phenotype, but through their kinship networks and familial relationships that affirmed black identification and invested it with meanings of pride, success, and dignity.

Many of them continue to pass this sense of black consciousness and black identification on to their children. Marcia stated,

I am not ashamed at all to be black, I never have been. I pass this to my daughter, because in this country you have hair a little bit better you aren’t black. So I always say to my daughter that her hair is good (*bom*) but she can’t forget her origins. Don’t feel ashamed, I don’t feel shame, I adore being black.

In the way that Marcia’s grandmother told her not to feel ashamed to be black, Marcia passed this affirmation of black consciousness to her daughter. In mentioning her daughter’s hair, Marcia touches upon the relationship between aesthetics, definitions of beauty, and black hair. John Burdick noted that, “a key source of subjectively felt color identity is what one knows to be the truth about the natural state of one’s hair” (1998:18). Kia Lilly Caldwell revealed that “having ‘good’ or ‘bad’ hair is also used as a means of assigning individuals who have

questionable or ambiguous racial origins to either the ‘white’ or ‘black’ racial category” (2007: 87). One’s racial category can shift depending on one’s hair texture. Marcia referred to her daughter’s hair as *bom* or good, which indicates smooth, soft, straight, or loosely curled hair. The opposite of good, *ruin*, or bad hair is associated with tightly coiled, kinky, thick hair. Despite this view that the degree of one’s hair texture indicates one’s blackness, Marcia insisted that her daughter is black even though her hair texture could allow her to deny her blackness and embrace a mixed race category. Marcia makes an appeal to familial origins and argues for a conception of race that moves beyond phenotype and biological definitions, but as sense of identity that you pass on and that one develops within their networks of kinship into which they were born. Racial consciousness is intergenerationally negotiated and framed through the idiom of blackness that children can read and interpret in their parents and relatives or through an active project of racial socialization from parents.

Media, Race, and Reflection

Black media professionals at TV da Gente were invested in the media as a democratic space that includes, presents, and reflects the diversity of people who compose the Brazilian population. Claudia Alexandre described the connection between the formation of racial identification to the media in the following way:

I know many blacks that live 20, 30, 40 years and don’t think of themselves (*enxergam*) as black. But you have a black consciousness here in Brazil principally when you start to see that you are not seeing yourself. Here the television for example is one of the vehicles most consumed by Brazilians. After it, I think it’s the radio and after that the newspaper. So this brings you to consciousness to say “why am I not seeing myself? Why am I in school and I am the only black person? Why do my friends call me “*negra*” as if it offends me and not with pride to have me as a friend? So the black Brazilian consciousness, principally that I got to study, came at the moment that they do not get to see themselves.

For Claudia, the ubiquity of media within the Brazilian public sphere coupled with the absence of Afro-Brazilian middle class images informed her racial consciousness through the act of questioning the lack of black images. She linked this interaction with the media to everyday interactions that assign negative values to the term “negro.” Claudia made connections between her general treatment within daily life and the absence of black images to the development of a critical consciousness from which to question the meanings associated with blackness and the general invisibility of black people in Brazil. For her, when Afro-Brazilians “do not get to see themselves” this may heighten awareness of racial difference.

Conceição indicated that the conspicuous absence of black Brazilian images on television, coupled with the circulation of African American images, provoked her formation of black consciousness.

I don't know how to explain. When I was twelve years old, I liked soccer a lot, the player that I liked the most was white, he wasn't black. The singer that I most liked was white, I didn't have black role models. My role model Elisa Regina was white and Rivelino who played for the soccer team Corinthians. So I didn't have black role models. One day I discovered Angela Davis, she mixed (mexeu) with my life...She is a beautiful and cultured (culta) woman that was fundamental in my life. I had a photo of her on the cover of my notebook and I grew up with this. I thought she was beautiful. Then I had an U.S. American role model who was black. Her story (mexeu) mixed with my head and the role models are always American. The sitcoms that we watched were American. There was a serial during the 60's called Mod Squad and they had a handsome actor and I started to put him on the cover of my notebook. So you start to form your identity.

She mentions the absence of black images on television in Brazil, but also emphasizes the importance of African American's in the U.S. American media that flowed through the Brazilian televisual sphere in her development of a black identity. Conceição incorporated the African Diasporic media images from the United States into her own conceptions of blackness in Brazil. She described the African American figures supplanting the white Brazilian role models as a source of identity formation and black consciousness development. African Diaspora images

drew attention to the absence of black images in Brazil and then provided a new image of identification for Conceição.

“Mixed Race” Black Identification

The last narratives are interesting because the men who gave them acknowledge that they are of mixed race, meaning they have parents who identify as black and white. Yet, contrary to the insistence of the Brazilian racial democracy to identify as mixed, they identify as black and actively work and advocate on behalf of Afro-Brazilian people, issues, and causes. Hédio Silva is a prominent and well-known lawyer in the city of São Paulo. In addition to running a non-governmental organization, I witnessed him testify to the national congress in Brasília (the national capital) supporting the development of national affirmative action legislation to include Afro-Brazilian, Indigenous, and lower income citizens into the higher education system. In July of 2006 he ran for the political office of federal deputy within the national government. For TV da Gente, he was the host of the program called “A Question of Rights.” He described his development of black consciousness in the following passage:

When I was twelve years old a biography of Martin Luther King fell into my hands and I became enchanted with the history of this man. I read a lot and it was very important also because I took notice of racism very early, at six or seven years old. My mother was white and people asked her if we were adopted sons and this hurt a lot. She told us, she talked with us about this and it was obvious that it was because of the fact that she was white and we were black (*negros*). So when I read this book at twelve years old I already had an elaboration from these experiences with my mother. It was the reading of this book that really awakened me to the issue of militancy. I think that probably it was good for us to have in Brazil a group of blacks that I saw in [King’s] history. Later in the student movement and finally at 19 years old I was invited to be a part of an entity of the black movement and I started my militancy. It will have been almost thirty years.

Contrary to the popular emphasis on racial mixture and a general refusal to discuss racial difference in Brazil, other people mistook Silva and his brother for adopted children of his

mother, which Silva attributes to the “fact” of her whiteness and their blackness. Silva implicitly learned about racial difference, and that he was black, as a result of these experiences of other’s placing him outside of his family structure because of his race. Although his mother was white, she had to confront these perceptions of others and speak with Silva and his brother about these incidents. Thus, perhaps inadvertently, Silva’s mixed race family was a significant site of forming a black racial identity for him, even though he had a white parent.

When describing his development of black consciousness, Silva also emphasized the African Diasporic influence of a biography about Martin Luther King, Jr., an African American civil rights leader. This book informed his interpretation of his past experiences of being mistaken for an adopted son due to his racial difference. King’s biography pointed him in the direction of social action and the Brazilian black movement as a way to confront racial inequality and anti-black racism.

Flavio Carrança was a journalist with considerable work experience within different media institutions. He founded the Commission for Journalists for Racial Equality and was still actively involved with them. This organization worked to raise awareness surrounding the dearth of minority journalists in the country, interrogate the representation of minority populations within mainstream journalism, and to advocate on behalf of journalists from minority populations within the city of São Paulo. He described his family background and experiences with racism while growing up in the following passage:

I am from a racially mixed family (*família miscigenada*). My mother is half black and half white (*mulata*), my grandmother was black (*negra*). She (my grandmother) was one one of six women and they all married white men, except for the youngest who married a black man. It was a middle class family. I lived in the Alta da Lapa in the western zone of the city, where my mother lives and where I grew up. It’s a white neighborhood. I had black friends to play soccer, but my friends and my classmates were whites. After, I went to a high school that was basically white, that had two or three other blacks. I knew that racism existed; once in a while a white person would curse (*xingava*) a black person. I had all these friends, but no girlfriend because everyone was white.

Like Hédio Silva, Flavio was also from a mixed race family, and this did not prevent him from noticing racism and racial difference. Despite having a family that is racially mixed, Flavio experienced racial difference through the actions of other whites talking badly about black people and through the absence of romantic relationships with the opposite sex because, as he puts it, all of his contemporaries were white. Although he was aware of racism during high school, when he entered college he became active with different activist networks where he linked black consciousness to politics and social action.

I entered into the school of economics at the University of São Paulo (USP) in 1972. It was the beginning of the movement against the dictatorship and inside USP there was a group of black intellectuals who started to organize the embryo of the Unified Black Movement (*Movimento Negro Unificado* (MNU)). By coincidence I studied with Milton Barbosa who was one of the main leaders of the MNU. During that time they produced a journal called Tree of Words (*Árvore das Palavras*). Milton Barbosa and I were of the same academic class of the USP school of economics in 1974. Following Milton I started to know. For me, this thing called the black movement was something from the United States. It was something that I read in the newspaper. I didn't think about this as an alternative to political action. When I made contact with the Tree of Words, after Milton I met Rafael Pinto, another leader of the MNU and I was a collaborator in a newspaper called The Work (*O Trabalho*). I was of the connected to the student movement in that time and very well known called Liberty and Fight (*Liberdade e Luta*) that was born from that generation that entered the university during that time that I took part in. I became militant in a Trotsky organization called OSI (Socialist Organization International) that is connected to the fourth international. So I had initial contact with the black movement in the university, but I became militant in this organization. When the MNU appeared in 1978 I started to cover them and make small stories for the newspaper O Trabalho (The Work). So, Milton Barbosa and Rafael Pinto re-entered and I started to participate in the meetings and we resolved to open the Organizational Intervention Front inside the MNU. So my intervention was within the journalists union directly inside of the Unified Black Movement. I was the journalist responsible for the MNU magazine. This was because I had the register. The magazine was made by the directors of the organization. Much later MNU had a magazine called Pode Crer (You can Believe). After that was the commission for journalists for racial equality, but this was in 2001.

Upon entrance into the University of São Paulo, Flavio became exposed to the beginnings of the

Unified Black Movement (MNU) and began to learn about the relationship between black consciousness and political struggle from Milton Barbosa, a leader of the black movement and founder of the MNU. But in recounting his movement toward militancy, Flavio states that he actually developed a political consciousness from the Socialist Organization International (SOI) and then he became involved with the MNU after it was officially organized in 1978. In his study of black Brazilian activism, Michael Hanchard found that The Socialist Organization was a critical training ground for many black militants within the Brazilian black movement because of its particular brand of Trotskyist Marxism. Black trotskyists were attracted to the SOI because of Trotsky's relationship with C.L.R. James, a Marxist, pan-africanist scholar from Trinidad (1994).

Trotsky had discussions with James over the linkage of struggle for racial equality in the United States with the worker-oriented concerns of the Communist party while Trotsky was exiled in Mexico in the 1930s... Their conjuncture of race and class was eagerly received by black militants who had been historically alienated by the materialist positivism of the white Brazilian left. (Hanchard 1994: 122-23)

Flavio became and remained active within various activist organizations through his position as a journalist or producer of periodicals to facilitate communication within the group and with the general public. Flavio's racial consciousness stems from his experiences as a child as well as his activism and political activity in college. His involvement within various organizations as a journalist, including the Unified Black Movement and the Socialist Organization International, allowed him to combine his interest in journalism, politics, and black politics in his pursuit of social justice. Journalism and news media continues to be the predominate vehicle through which he both earns a living and participates as an activist.

The people I presented here came to identify as black through different paths framed by their familial relationships, their interactions with dominant representations of whiteness, the circulation of black diasporic images and literature, as well as within networks of black activism. From these different interactions, they developed an understanding of themselves as black. They

also learned to recognize the association of blackness with inferiority and inequality, and counter it with an alternative consciousness that refused to feel ashamed or devalued because they were different. Many of them described the circumstances surrounding black identification as the beginning of a search or requiring black people to seek out information concerning themselves.

When Conceição became the editor in chief of Race Magazine, she said,

I started to read a lot about things, I went after people, everything that I didn't know, I would go after someone who knew. So I went after Oswaldo Faustino because I knew that he was very good. He worked with me there, we exchanged many ideas and the consciousness each time grew stronger. You go traveling, conversing with great people, you want to fight, go to the street, make a movement.

Claudia Alexandre said that, “everything that black people live doesn't reflect them. So this ends up giving you the consciousness to search (*buscar*), to reflect, open your mouth, talk and try to reflect because being that we are equal, we have to have equal opportunities, we are different but we have to have equal opportunities.” And Marcia Brecho stated that in developing a black consciousness “you have to seek out (*voce tem que buscar*), study.” I do not argue that they are seeking out or searching for a black identity itself. They are not on a quest for identity, but for information regarding the history and culture of black people that many Brazilian schools did not provide. They are not seeking out an identity itself, but they state that their identity becomes solidified in their search for more information.

Conclusion: A Commitment to the Margins

Scholars have noted the prevalence for middle class Afro-Brazilians to identify as black more consistently than working class Afro-Brazilians. In this chapter I have used the narratives of Afro-Brazilian media workers to lend some experiential flesh to these previous findings.

These narratives draw from memories of my research participants that reference their families,

observations of racism, the media, African American cultural products, and activism as central to their own black identity formation. They consider this process of identity formation ongoing through their consistent search for more information about black histories and experiences in Brazil as well as elsewhere.

Out of these narratives emerge the ways in which they have experienced their identity and themselves as marginal within popular representation, within spaces of power, and within everyday life. The contradiction between their racial marginalization and the national discourse of inclusion through mixture necessitates a critical response from them as actors within the social field. These experiences of alterity seem to motivate their commitment to representation, social change, and racial inclusion for both themselves and other Afro-Brazilians. The process of developing a black identification seemed to encourage them to speak out, open their mouths, or “make a movement” as Conceição indicated. Their positionality as marginal and their consciousness of the marginality of Afro-Brazilians in general informs their actions for media creation, their struggles for racial equality, and their general commitment to the racialized margins of Paulista life.

CHAPTER 6

CHANNELING BLACKNESS:

TELEVISION NETWORKS AND FLOWS IN THE AFRICAN DIASPORA

“Blackness” acquires its full revolutionary potential as a social site for resistance only within transnational and Pan-African contexts.

-- Manning Marable (2008: 3)

TV da Gente was produced with ideas, workers, and resources internal to Brazil, but also through the African diasporic connections of the network founder and producers. To create programs that challenged and responded to the Brazilian televisual terrain replete with limited and stereotypical representations of Afro-Brazilians, network producers drew from televisual influences and resources from other African Diaspora communities, principally in the United States and Angola when developing the network and conceiving of its televisual content. Television programs, capital, and inspiration flowed along African Diaspora circuits between the U.S., Brazil, and Angola in the making of critical sites of black televisuality. In this chapter, I will examine these diasporic influences as vital components that informed the establishment of the TV da Gente television network and its programmatic content.

I conducted extensive interviews with the executive producer of TV da Gente in her home, a comfortable condominium in a high-rise building outside of the São Paulo city center. From the vantage point of her living room couch, it was not hard for me to view the numerous amounts of DVDs and magazines that filled the shelves surrounding her large flat screen television. Stacks and piles of magazines were scattered around the small living room, the majority of which, produced by and for African Americans such as *Ebony* and *Essence*. I also caught a glimpse of some *Oprah* magazines, whose monthly covers always feature the famous African American television personality and media mogul Oprah Winfrey. When I told her that I did not have cable television, she generously offered for us to watch the end of the Oprah show

before we began to talk.

She owned several DVD's of television programs produced in the United States for a general audience, such as *Sex and the City*. Additionally, she had African American produced television programs such as *Everybody Hates Chris* and *The Cosby Show*. As the past editor in chief of *Revista Raça* (Race Magazine), Brazil's largest magazine for Afro-Brazilians, and the current executive producer of *TV da Gente*, she was intimately familiar with and an avid consumer of African American media products and personalities. While working for different magazines she interviewed the African American celebrity, Samuel L. Jackson and wrote stories about African American singers and actors like Beyonce and Will Smith. She and many other *TV da Gente* producers consistently referred to African American produced media and celebrity personalities in conversation and when referring to their programmatic content produced in Brazil.

Media in the African Diaspora

The African American produced media that fills Conceição's apartment participates within the "mediascapes" that Arjun Appadurai (1996) identifies as conduits for the contemporary informational flows that facilitate connections in the global world. Additionally, this African American media takes part in the racialized flows that move throughout the African Diaspora, which scholars Kelley and Patterson have characterized as a process that is

constantly being remade by movement, migration, and travel, as well as imagined through thought, cultural production, and political struggle. Yet, as a condition, it is directly tied to the process by which it is being made and remade. (Kelley and Patterson 2000: 20)

Scholars have theorized the African Diaspora as Black Atlantic routes (Gilroy 1993), processes of identification (Gordon and Anderson 1999), a relation (Brown 2005), a dialogue (Matory 2005), citizenship (Boyce Davies and M'Bow 2007), and an encounter (Caldwell 2006).

Drawing from Paul Gilroy's idea of diasporic raw materials, Jacqueline Nassy Brown argues "diasporic resources may include not just cultural productions such as music, but also people and places, as well as iconography, ideas, and ideologies associated with them" (1998: 298). The media, particularly television programs, can be considered resources that move between different African descended audiences and producers and operate within, what Deborah Thomas identifies as, projects of "racial vindication" (2005: 113).

While media moves through African Diaspora circuits, the means through which they are channeled can be diverse and various. Media outlets, such as television stations, magazines, and websites, constitute venues that facilitate the movement, circulation, and access to diasporic resources in the form of television programs, images, iconography, and information. Black television networks and other media groups are resources themselves as well as comprise critical sites of black representation shaped by concerns about black racial identification and images of blackness within the public sphere. In my reading, diaspora is a network, a complex set of connections and relationships between individuals and groups within overlapping discursive communities. These network connections can occur through direct interpersonal contacts and relationships, imagined, or made known through representation. For populations of African descent in Brazil, Angola, and the United States, media production and consumption constituted one of the primary sites of their intersection whereby the circulation and flow of money, inspiration, and cultural products contributed to the rise of the TV da Gente television network.

Media that flows along African Diaspora circuits can contribute to the processes of making, imagining, and representing transnational black subjectivities within the most far-flung and distant locals. Through the production and consumption of media, Diaspora subjects at TV da Gente simultaneously involved themselves within a field of action, imagination, and association that traversed the boundaries of the nation-state, while remaining grounded in their

local anti-racist struggles for representation, rights, and recognition. While black media flows constitute one of the most accessible means through which black subjects can encounter one another, scholars are only now beginning to probe this fruitful subject for investigation (e.g. Thomas 2005). Through my analysis, I will contribute to an understanding of diaspora as a network that both facilitates and is facilitated by cultural productions, institution building, as well as personal and business relationships. Principally, media products take on the multiple roles of representing the cultural specificity of the population by which it was produced, presenting the possibility for black representation, and then modeling various strategies of black representation for international black spectators. Involved within this process of black media production and consumption can emerge new institutions for media production, new forms of black programming, as well as a transnational web, or a network, of contacts and connections between black subjects themselves or between black viewers and black media products. Media are critical to the processes of diasporic formation, whereby their circulation through various locations constitutes a powerful means through which different African Diasporic individuals, communities, groups, and populations become aware of, encounter, and communicate with one another.

While diasporic flows have gained substantial analysis, I attend to the contemporary mediums and networks through which they move and the concrete relationships that facilitate, limit, or bring their movement into being. Drawing from Stuart Hall's concept of articulation, Kelley and Patterson argue that the transnational connections that, "tie the diaspora together must be articulated and are not inevitable" (2000: 20). This chapter will illuminate and contextualize the connections and disconnections of business relationships, inspirational ideas, and economic capital that facilitated the creation of TV da Gente and its content.

Brazil and the United States in African Diasporic Perspective

Black populations in the U.S. and Brazil comprise nodules among the historical flows of people, products, and ideas that move between and along these African Diaspora circuits. Scholars have demonstrated that these two African descended communities have encountered one another through soul music during the 1970's (Hanchard 1994), personal interaction (Hanchard 2000), reflection (Hellwig 1992), community activism (Vargas 2003), and heritage tourism (Pinho 2008). Indeed, Afro-Brazilians and African Americans have come together through a variety of means to contemplate the divergences and convergences between the histories, cultural practices, and experiences of blackness within their two respective countries, the United States and Brazil.

Encounters between African Americans and Afro-Brazilians have a historical basis that includes the black press in São Paulo. During the 1920s and 1930s, Afro-Brazilian journalists and community leaders produced a variety of black newspapers and journals to discuss the issues and concerns of the black population. Micol Siegel argues that, "of all the distant lands the Afro-Paulista press considered in its ample, inquisitive reporting, the United States was far and away its favorite reporting subject" (2009: 188). Afro-Brazilians and African Americans were transnationally connected through the São Paulo black press' inclusion of coverage about racial issues in the U.S. and aspects of African American lifestyles during the 1920s.

The ubiquity of African American popular culture in Brazil follows a history of the importation of black American magazines to Brazil. In his study on Brazil's black movement, Michael Hanchard interviewed a black activist about the role of U.S. black media and images for Afro-Brazilians.

At the end of 1969...I started seeing and buying black American magazines, *Ebony*, principally, which in this period had a revolutionary rhetoric. This journal (*Ebony*) reflected what was occurring in civil rights and the nationalist movements in the world, and it reflected this in a very strong way, especially the

esthetics element, the Afro hairstyle and the Afro clothing. It was love at first sight....It was a new image of blacks that came from the United States. (1994: 95)

We can understand the productive potential of media within an African Diasporic context because the media not only flows between different populations, but across national boundaries and racial ideologies. African American images and lifestyles recorded in various media vehicles offered a different view of blackness to which Afro-Brazilians could relate, compare, and contrast their experiences. By consuming African American media or producing stories on African American life, Afro-Brazilians could challenge or critique the restrictions and limitations of Brazilian racial democracy using a comparative perspective.

In many ways, media moves easier than people, who can be immobilized through insubstantial economic means or lack of opportunities to travel. While media does constitute a generally accessible means through which people can encounter one another, African American produced media may be more common in Brazil than vice versa. These unequal media flows can contribute to what Tina Campt and Deborah Thomas, “diasporic hegemonies” where particular representations of blackness are privileged over others during the transnational flow of black popular culture into different contexts. Media produced by African Americans flow into Brazil at a consistent rate accompanying other mainstream U.S. American media products making African Americans more visible in Brazil than Afro-Brazilians are in the United States. Thus the unevenness of diaspora or “diasporic hegemonies” become informed by the economic and national position of different black populations who come into contact with one another.

When compared to Brazilian television, African American television in Brazil exposed the contradiction between the ideology of racial democracy and the reality of the limited roles and presence of Afro-Brazilians within the Brazilian televisual sphere. While African American television programs are not unproblematic cultural products and have been subject to substantial critique, they presented the possibility for the existence of black representation and the

discussion of race relations on television in ways that Brazilian mainstream programming does not include. In the following section, I will examine the specific example of the African American television program, *Everybody Hates Chris* as an example of the possibility that black programming provided for Afro-Brazilians when they considered Brazilian race relations and their televisual representation.

Watching *Everybody Hates Chris* in Brazil

Everybody Hates Chris is a U.S. sitcom that ran for four seasons from 2005 until 2009. It follows the life of Chris, an African American teenager growing up in the Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood in Brooklyn, New York during the early and mid 1980s. The episode plots chronicle Chris' interactions with his working class family and his attendance at an all white school in another part of the city. All of the other characters seem to act against Chris' interests, make his life uncomfortable, and his plans never end in ways he desires. An African American comedian, Chris Rock, narrates the show and the plots draw inspiration from his teenage life experiences. In Brazil the show aired on the Record Television Network (*Rede Record*) and is called *Todo Mundo Odeia o Chris* in Portuguese.

Everybody Hates Chris discusses issues of race and class in the U.S. in comical and satirical ways through the experiences, observations, and voiceovers of Chris, the central character. For example, in the pilot episode, we learn that Chris rides several buses in the course of his commute across the city from his predominately black neighborhood to a predominately white neighborhood to attend middle school. As the story chronicles his transcity journey, the other riders on the buses also shift from black to white. On the bus with white passengers, the voiceover states,

My last bus was the thirty-one. Because I was the only black person on the bus, I was always the last person anybody would sit next to.

Then a pregnant white woman enters the frame, scans the full bus for a seat, notices the seat next to Chris, and continues to stand. Throughout the series, Chris' voiceovers inform the audience of the characters observations, perceptions, and thoughts as he moves from situation to situation. The voiceover offers some of the commentary through the lens of race, drawing attention to Chris' blackness as the source of the harsh, dismissive, or violent treatment from others. It is significant to note that the show was created, written, and produced by African Americans, Ali Leroi and Chris Rock, which effects the show's ability to critically communicate in ways that privilege African American experiences, histories, and opinions.

Many of my research participants enjoyed this show and mentioned it as an example of television programming that placed a black character, black life, and contemporary race relations at the center of its content and plotlines. The flow of this program, through a mainstream Brazilian television network, when compared to other Brazilian TV shows, draws attention to the general absence of content that focuses on black life or that primarily stars black actors and actresses in Brazil. Its presence, along with other U.S. produced black programming in Brazil, undermines the idea that a television program cannot or should not address racial issues and represent black people in entertaining, critical, or even comical ways.

When TV da Gente was launched, some journalists accused the channel of racism due to their mission to represent Afro-Brazilians on television. Commonly in Brazil, any discussion of race-based policies, practices, and initiatives for equality that address the black population attracts public accusations of racism for favoring one racial group. Oswaldo Faustino described a situation where many Afro-Brazilians who want to discuss Brazilian race relations may anticipate an accusation of racism as a response and attempt to mitigate the situation by self-censoring how and when they voice the topic of racial equality.

It appears that our [Afro-Brazilians] self-critique is much worse then the critique

of others. We continue to be very worried about being called racist. I think, how is it that these North American sitcoms and serials don't worry at all. Suddenly, for example like in the television program *Everybody Hates Chris*. There is the friend of Chris, who is a white young man, an Italian descendent. But generally the story takes place in a black neighborhood, with black people and there's no preoccupation about this. So there's not a lot of worry like, "Ah! You'll call me this or that." Incidentally, Chris makes fun of these realities and these concerns. But here, we have a little bit of this fear. It appears that we ask for permission. We already arrive apologizing for ourselves.

For Oswaldo, *Everybody Hates Chris* presents the possibility for racially based representation on television by featuring an all black cast and talking about racial issues. He interprets the very production and broadcast of this program as a lack of worry about being called racist and a blatant decision to produce what one wants, despite possible criticism. For him, if this program can be produced in the United States without the fear of accusations of racism, why can't the same production exist in Brazil? He laments the need for self-surveillance with regards to discussing racial issues and then asking permission or apologizing to whites when one desires to speak candidly about race and race relations. Next, I will examine the role of transnational black connections in the development of the TV da Gente network.

Television Networks in the African Diaspora

Jose de Paulo Neto, popularly known as Netinho, developed the idea to create a television network that would represent Brazil's black population from the existence of Black Entertainment Television (BET) in the United States. He states,

The idea basically arose from the influence of Black Entertainment Television (BET), attending to the issue of diversity implemented by the Special Secretary for Politics and Promotion of Racial Equality (SEPPIR), that was run by Minister Matilde Ribeiro. I saw that it was the right moment to practice the idea of diversity and thinking about the black population.

Netinho was aware of the existence of Black Entertainment Television (BET), the television network in the United States that sought in its beginning to address and represent African

Americans by producing televisual content that African Americans controlled, starred in, and spoke to the needs, issues and desires of U.S. black audiences. Netinho saw an opportunity with the openings created through attention to racial equality by the national government and the burgeoning public discussion of racial diversity. Lula's administration established the office for Special Promotion of Racial Equality (SEPPIR) and appointed Matilde Ribeiro, a black woman, as its first minister. Many Brazilians were engaging in debates about the state of racial inequality and the appropriate measures to ensure equality for minority populations. This inspiration from the United States, coupled with the opening of opportunities for such initiatives by more progressive governmental politics, presented Netinho with some of the conditions that made *TV da Gente* possible in 2005.

In January 1980 Robert Johnson started Black Entertainment Television (BET). The network developed programming to meet the needs of black viewers. BET acquired and broadcast music videos of African American performers and short lineup of in-network produced programs. In this way, BET took advantage of the increasing rates of cable television use and filled a void in African American television representation (Smith-Shomade 1992). After about twenty years with BET, in 2000 Robert Johnson rescinded control of the network when he sold it to Viacom, a media conglomerate, for 2.33 billion dollars.

Netinho attempted to make contact with Robert Johnson and executives at BET to gain support from the channel for *TV da Gente*, through television programs and information about creating a black television channel. But due to BET's acquisition by VIACOM, it became impossible to make meaningful connections in order to form a working relationship. Netinho recounted,

After numerous attempts to talk with Robert Johnson, one of the creators of BET, we felt an enormous difficulty, because the group VIACOM had acquired, together with various cable channels, BET. So, Mr. Robert Johnson, in a firm contract with VIACOM, became impossible to maintain a portion of the channel,

reveal numbers and strategic data about BET. So we went to find another network that had the same ideas like the beginning of BET and that was ample in their relationship with U.S. American society. Being like this, we went to Atlanta, where we had a meeting with the president of the Black Family Channel, Robert Townsend. Is this audience, they perceived that it was an important and viable project of TV da Gente in Brazil.

As part of a corporate conglomerate, BET executives and workers were unavailable for a relationship to aid TV da Gente. Netinho reached out to the Black Family Channel, instead of BET, to gain television programs to dub and broadcast on TV da Gente and acquire data regarding starting up a black television network.

The Black Family Channel (BFC) was launched in 1999, in Atlanta, GA, by a group of black investors including a boxer Evander Holyfield, Marlon Jackson, from the Jackson 5, Willie Gary, Cecil Fielder, and Alvin James. In opposition to BET's predominate focus on rap and hip-hop music videos, the BFC chose to produce suitable programming for all ages and gospel music shows. The BFC closed in April 2007 after difficulty gaining an audience and limited inclusion in cable television providers across the United States.

African diasporic circuits comprise some of the paths through which global media flow between nations, peoples, and groups. Television networks are critical sites for black televisual representation whose existence acts as sources of inspiration and possibility, by producing television content, and by facilitating the exchange of programs. However, ownership and control of network business can effect the formation of relationships for soliciting and offering material aid in the form of television programs. Robert Johnson, the creator of BET was unable to offer any assistance to TV da Gente after selling his network to VIACOM, while Robert Townsend, the president of the Black Family Channel could offer support through the exchange of television programs to aid the fledging channel in filling air time.

With the inspiration from BET, and the programs from the BFC, Netinho also received the necessary capital for starting TV da Gente from the Angolan government and Angolan

investors. After independence from Portugal in 1975, Angola became embroiled in a civil war that lasted about 27 years, with various short periods of peace, and finally ending in 2002. Oil provides the majority of the revenue for the Angolan government, and they only compete with Nigeria for the role of the top oil producer in Africa. Thus, they have capital, but little infrastructure from the disruption of the civil war.

Netinho's relationship with the Angolan government is influenced by the production of his own television program in Brazil. Netinho's own television program in Brazil facilitated the formation of his relationship with Angolan government officials and investors. Conceição Lourenço, TV da Gente's executive producer, stated,

TV da Gente was made with money from the Angolan government because Netinho de Paula had a very strong social appeal. About two thousands cards a day arrived for him in Brazil. He had a program that attended to poor girls and women called Princess for a Day¹⁹ (*Dia de Princesa*).

In Netinho's program in Brazil, Princess for a Day, he would travel around to various *favelas* and poor areas to surprise poor women with a day of beauty. The women would get their hair styled at a salon, manicures, pedicures, and new clothes. A chauffer driven limousine ferried the women to their various appointments. These appointments and the women's reactions were captured on camera for the content of the program. The program ended with a large party for the chosen princess. Conceição Lourenço shared that Netinho's social appeal reached from Brazil to Angola,

In Angola [Princess for a Day] was a success, so the president of Angola called him to make some programs there with Angolan princesses...He disclosed to the president of Angola that he was the only black person who had a program on television and that this wasn't just in a country with blacks being 50% of the population and that black people had to have their own television. So the president said that if Netinho could show the viability of the project, he would

¹⁹ The television program, *Queen for a Day*, is an early televisual tale of transformation that aired in the U.S. from 1960-64. Female contestants would compete against each other by telling their tale of sorrow and the winner's story was determined through the highest level of audience applause. Brenda Weber labels this program an example of early television that, "established a mediated affective economy where miserable subjects trade stories of abjection for the bounty promised through televisual benevolence" (2009: 20).

send the money.

Netinho's own popularity and celebrity coupled with the transnational flow of his program, Princess for a Day, from Brazil to Angola made possible his relationship with the Angolan government. Netinho said,

On that occasion the Angolan government contracted me to make programs directed towards that took part in the moment of reconstruction of the country. This made possible my personal relationship with the Angolan government, also allowing me to get close to diverse local business people, who knew about the TV da Gente project and promptly agreed to invest in it.

Netinho's Angolan Princess for a Day was also part of the post civil war transition for the Angolan population. The relationship between TV da Gente and Angolan government leaders included the plan of sending the television programs produced in Brazil to Angola for their viewing audience. Because Angola and Brazil share the national language of Portuguese, Angolans could generally understand the programs produced in Brazil. Angola was in the process of rebuilding infrastructure and services after the civil war and didn't have the facilities or the professionals to produce a substantial amount of television content. The Angolan government contributed a reported 1 million Brazilian reis to the TV da Gente network.

The convergence of racial and linguistic commonalities facilitated the relationship between Angolan business and government leaders and Netinho, a Brazilian celebrity who founded TV da Gente. Netinho gained an opportunity to produce his television program, Princess for a Day, in Angola to aid their post-war transition and he found a source of funding for his idea for a black television network. Additionally, these programs produced in Brazil could return to Angola for further broadcasting. Out of this transnational network formation between Netinho and Angolan funders, flowed monetary capital for television production within both Angola and Brazil to address black audiences within projects of nation building (in Angola) and national inclusion (in Brazil).

From Judge Hatchett to A Question of Rights

The inspiration for one of the programs on TV da Gente, called *A Question of Rights*, came from a court television program in the United States hosted by Judge Linda Hatchett. Netinho and Conceição Lourenço, the executive producer, wanted to model a TV da Gente program after Judge Hatchett, a program within the court television genre in the United States. In these programs, “everyday people” argue their litigation cases before a judge. Generally, they are small claims cases and do not award the winner more than \$5000. Judge Hatchett is an African American female judge whose show follows the typical format of court television. Netinho saw this show, knew of its popularity in the United States, and wanted to reproduce a similar version of the show in Brazil.



Figure 6.1 Flyer from Dr. Hedio Silva’s Political Campaign for *Deputado Federal*, which is similar to a senator in the U.S. It says Justice and Dignity across the header of the flyer.

For the role of judge, Netinho invited Dr. Hédio Silva, a well-known Afro-Brazilian civil rights attorney in São Paulo who runs a non-profit organization addressing issues of racial equality. He also ran for a political position in state government and testified before the national congress in favor of affirmative action policies. He is the first Afro-Brazilian to work as the Secretary of Justice of São Paulo States. He has authored policy material about Brazilian racial equality and has been outspoken in the area of racial politics and justice. Dr. Silva's public political profile, his background in law, and his involvement with black racial rights made him the ideal person to host a show similar to Judge Joe Brown.

Initially, Netinho almost wanted to copy the program that appears to me to be popular in the United States. It is a program that reproduces a jury (juri), someone films the popular jury and a person that is the black presenter comments. They almost dramatize the program. I explained to him that in Brazil we would have a lot of difficulty to make a similar program because there is a lot of difficulty recording the judgment in Brazil. The Jury, on the contrary of the United States judicial system, only judges crimes against life, like homicide. It's not like there where they judge civil material. So I said to Netinho that it wouldn't work to have this program and perhaps we could think of something else that explores the issue of people's rights.

Although they wanted to emulate the Judge Joe Brown program, the Brazilian legal system does not operate in the same way as that of the United States. National laws and legal codes prevented the direct production and creation of shows produced in other national contexts. In this case, they had to modify the idea for the show because they were prohibited from filming trials in Brazil. Rather than solely represent the settling of a grievance through the legal system by a plaintiff and a defendant, they tried to develop a show that would educate people about their personal rights guaranteed through the Brazilian legal system and showcase other Brazilians advocating for their rights within civil society. Additionally, they aimed to promote diversity by inviting people of different faiths and backgrounds as guests onto the show. Because the show privileged the

interview format, one of the producers referred to it as being more like Jay Leno rather than Judge Hatchett, the initial inspiration for the program.

While a show like Judge Hatchett would take place in a television set modeled to appear like a courtroom, *A Question of Rights* assumed the format of an interview show. Hédio Silva sat at a desk to the left of the stage, in front of a computer, with a big flat screen television hanging on the wall behind him. The set also featured a faux window in the backdrop, with a picture of an urban landscape that represented the city of São Paulo. From his seat at the desk, he would speak directly into the camera to introduce the topics for that day. Then he would move to either a table and chair set up, or two chairs facing one another, to interview his guests.



Figure 6.2: *A Question of Rights* with Dr. Hédio Silva

Either Dr. Hédio Silva or a member of his production team would generate the names for possible guests to come on the show. A potential guest might be someone who Dr. Silva personally knew, one of the team members' personal acquaintances, or someone featured in the daily newspaper. Above all, Dr. Silva said that he was looking for people who would be “positive examples of resistance and determination to encourage the youth to go in the same

direction.” For example, he interviewed an older man, thought to be about fifty years old, from the southeastern zone of the city of São Paulo who took on the responsibility of caring for a neighborhood square (*praça*) or common public area, in the absence of the local state authority’s maintenance. He also organized the residents to consistently clean the square for the benefit of the community’s use. Dr. Silva thought that this man constituted a “positive solution to a problem.” For the development of the show *A Question of Rights*, the African American show Judge Hatchett inspired the idea to centralize a black legal expert for a program about individual people seeking justice, but through their alteration at TV da Gente, the vehicle through which they sought equality would become through social action rather than strictly legal arbitration.

African Influences in the Children’s Program: Tio Bah

TV da Gente featured a children’s program hosted by an Afro-Brazilian female celebrity called *Turminha da Hora* or Class Hour. They featured different singers and activities that were appropriate for children. A significant part of the show was the segment featuring the character Tio Bah (Uncle Bah). Oswaldo Faustino, an older Afro-Brazilian man, interpreted this character, like a grandparent, recounting stories to the children in the studio audience. The audience consisted of children associated with the TV da Gente staff and workers. I will discuss the specific stories in the next chapter. Here I will examine ideas and symbols associated with Africa and “African” culture within the conception of Tio Bah and his segment.

Oswaldo drew from the idea of “African” orality and story telling when he conceived of his role as Tio Bah and the way in which he would communicate his material. He thought of his position as similar to a griot, a west African singer, poet or story teller who recounts the history of a select group of people or family and thought to be a repository of oral traditions. When discussing his reasons for the segments structure of telling stories, he said,

Why indeed orality? When you want to teach something you use orality. And it is very important that you use the oral communication, telling stories to educate, to keep a thought that continues beyond you. All my stories touched upon African orality.



Figure 6.3: A Baobab Tree

Another symbol on the show that drew from African symbolism was the presence of a Baobab tree, which Tio Bah sat under to recount his stories. Baobab trees have a very thick, square shaped trunk and thick branches sprouting from the top, so that it appears as if their roots sprout from the top of the trunk. They are found predominately in West and East Africa. These trees are becoming popular symbols of African culture in Brazil. I participated in a program to teach educators Afro-Brazilian and African history and culture called Project Baobab. This tree has been identified as distinct due to its prevalence throughout the continent of Africa and its distinct form.

Oswaldo learned about the Baobab tree from a book called *The Seed that Came From Africa*. The book weaves a legend around the Baobab tree's role in African slavery and black identity in the new world.

I saw that the baobab is a tree that can have arrived six thousand years ago, although this has not been scientifically proven it was there. A tree that is present throughout almost all of the African continent. A tree that, following the legend, the Africans, when they were enslaved they were taken to be loaded onto slave

ships, and they had to go around the large baobab tree in a circle, 20 times negating themselves saying “I am not fulano, I’m not part of such people. I am not the son of a fulano. I don’t live in the village, I don’t profess the faith of several gods.” So they negated themselves and after they were baptized with Christian names and boarded onto the slave ship, as the legend goes.

According to this legend written by another Afro-Brazilian, the Baobab tree served as the site at which Africans from different ethnic groups renounced their particular identities, communities, religious practices, and family ties to become enslaved black men and women headed for the Americas.

Oswaldo used this idea of the Baobab tree from the legend and decided to reinterpret this symbol of forced disidentification, into a source for reclaiming an African past through the continued tradition of orality and storytelling.

In that moment, in that I read in the poetry, I arrived at the following conclusion: the baobab tree that was until now called the tree of forgetting, is the tree of memory. It is the tree that would guard the memory of all those who boarded the slave ship. And so I arrived at the next conclusion: that there in that tree was the history of all our people. There’s nothing better than the spirit of this tree that was going to tell all of our history.

Although he would tell the stories from the “African” tradition of oral communication, he would make some of the stories relevant and reflective of Afro-Brazilian realities, experiences, and concerns. Oswaldo’s invocation of the Baobab tree and the story surrounding its importance invoke African Diaspora memory, which Carole Boyce Davies describes as “the ancestral memory as well as the received history of the Middle Passage, a basic vocabulary often articulated in song, mood, style, dance, and the corporeal generally, sometimes much more so than in literature. It is also reelaboration, rearticulation, redefinition” (1996: 207).

Other black populations throughout the African Diaspora have drawn upon ideas about Africa to reconstruct an alternative cultural heritage and confront dominant cultural ideas in their locations. For example, drawing from the example of Swahili words and values, Mulana Karenga developed the Kwanzaa ceremony for African Americans to celebrate after Christmas. Others

have criticized these practices of appropriation as essentializing productions that reduce the diverse cultural practices, languages, and rituals of Africa's fifty-four countries and numerous ethnic groups to simplified and limited creations. However, I view Oswaldo's actions as a way of appropriating African symbols and ideas as critical fonts of alternative culture to that of the nation, which allows him to create meaningful images that affirm blackness, black identity, and history. His invocation of "African orality" and the enslavement of African men and women as cultural traditions and events to be commemorated respond to both the televisual performance of blackness for this particular show and the need for black cultural productions that are oppositional to the ways in which Afro-Brazilians are already portrayed on television. These representations could be considered, "new traditions [that] have been invented in the jaws of modern experience and new conceptions of modernity produced in the long shadow of our enduring traditions – the African ones and the ones forged from the slave experience which the black vernacular so powerfully and actively remembers" (Gilroy 1993: 101).

The Limits of Diaspora

The television content, inspiration, and very existence of TV da Gente benefited from economic, inspirational, and material resources from the African Diaspora. However, the limits to these diasporic connections manifest themselves through national, cultural, and corporate barriers. While the television workers at TV da Gente worked very hard to pursue, create, and leverage connections with African and U.S. American networks, they eventually confronted the limits of the "difference and disjuncture" (Appadurai 1996) that is also a feature of African and African Diaspora relationships.

The difficulty with accessing African Diaspora resources was raised primarily in Netinho's attempted interactions with BET and its founder Robert Johnson. BET now falls under

the control and corporate umbrella viacom, which to date owns sixteen other channels. When the founders and owners of companies transfer primary possession to corporations, this may impact the productive and useful relationships that could potentially occur through new connections. Viacom may not have had an interest in aiding a fledgling television network in another country that was also an untested and unproven entity in its ability to generate capital and gain an audience. Reaching the viacom executive who could approve the use of BET television programs in Brazil would be difficult. Also, viacom required a monetary fee for licensing their television content, which is standard in the U.S. television structure, and TV da Gente could not afford to pay with their limited production budget.

The Angolan government did initially front the necessary capital for the creation of TV da Gente, however, eventually they discontinued this financial support. I could not receive an exact answer for the reasoning behind this occurrence. One person disclosed to me, that they were not prepared to produce programs for Angola. They told me,

Brazil is vast, and we didn't have a program directed towards an Angolan audience. Brazil for the Angolans came, but we didn't bring Angola for Brazilians to understand.

The Angolan funds that provided the economic means through which TV da Gente was created, were predicated on the idea of a television program circulation between Brazil and Angola. However, TV da Gente producers were not financially or knowledgably equipped to produce programs that would appeal to an Angolan audience. Brazil is a large country, with a large, diverse, and geographically dispersed black population. The ability to meet the representational needs of Brazil's black population and the Angolan population were impossible for the beginning network, located in Brazil, to accomplish. Oswaldo thought about African influences in the development of his segment for children's stories, but this would not necessarily provide a point of identification and interest for Angolan consumers. This diasporic disconnect, of

anticipating the expectations of different audiences in Africa and the African Diaspora, may have been a cause of the discontinued funding of TV da Gente by the Angolan government.

Conclusion

I began this chapter with the epigraph by the late Manning Marable, “‘Blackness’ acquires its full revolutionary potential as a social site for resistance only within transnational and Pan African contexts” (2008: 3). However, the ubiquity of African American media in Brazil may suggest the production of “diasporic hegemony” (Thomas and Camp 2007). Out of this situation comes the contradiction that black cultural exchanges may reproduce hegemonic relations between black populations at the same time that they resist other hegemonies, such as the hegemony of whiteness within mainstream Brazilian media. The question becomes resistance against which dominant forces? Thus, while there may be the proliferation of African American media in Brazil, Afro-Brazilian media producers use it to create their own possible representational of blackness. African American media is a “diasporic resource” (Brown 1998) that Afro-Brazilians can leverage to forge their own mediated presence.

African American media presents a significant incursion into Brazil’s television market, which is marked by the conspicuous absence or marginal presence of Afro-Brazilians that I describe in chapter 2 of this dissertation. African American programming and television networks, such as Judge Hatchett and BET, presented models of possibility for media producers at TV da Gente to televise their own identities. For Oswaldo, *Everybody Hates Chris* was an example that black characters could talk about racial inequality on television in an open and even comical way. For Netinho, BET provided opened the door to the possibility that he too could open a black television network in Brazil, a country said to have the largest black population outside of Africa. Narratives of racial democracy that deny the importance of race coupled with

the dominance of whiteness in Brazilian popular media condition the impetus for Afro-Brazilian media producers to consider African American programming within their own representational repertoires.

Media producers at TV da Gente reached out not only to African Americans, but to Africans as well. Netinho leveraged his own television program, *Princess for a Day*, to meet Angolan investors for TV da Gente. The future television programs produced by *TV da Gente* were to be sent back to Angola for viewing on their state television network. Oswaldo drew from his own ideas about Africa to create his children's show character Tio Bah. Ideas about Africa and actual relations with Africans provided resources for Afro-Brazilian media producers to create television programming in Brazil that resisted the racial status quo and represented Afro-Brazilian lives and interests.

While these African Diaspora relations presented great possibilities for Afro-Brazilian media producers, they were not without limits. Lack of understanding what an Angolan audience would want to see or about life in Angola in general prevented TV da Gente producers from creating programming that could appeal to these potential viewers. The ownership of BET by a major American corporation prevented Netinho from accessing information that he thought would aid in his own television network development. TV da Gente producers could not directly reproduce Judge Hatchett, due to the law preventing courtroom decisions from being aired on television. Limitations of knowledge, law, and capitalism impinge upon African Diaspora connections and the making of black television.

In this chapter, I attempted to demonstrate that Brazilian television producers engaged other black populations outside of Brazil forming transnational networks, in this case African Diasporic networks, to create the *TV da Gente* television network as well as develop programmatic content for broadcast and distribution. People, capital, and cultural productions

traveled between Brazil, the United States, and Angola in order to develop the *TV da Gente* television network and some of its programmatic content. Finally, African Diaspora media are implicated within processes of black racial identification. While black identity formations differ across geopolitical space, the commonality of blackness animated the travels of television programs, people, capital, and inspiration that went into creating the TV da Gente television network. Although diaspora formations are not without inequality and limits, actors continued to seek out resources and form relationships with others who shared the common objectives of black visibility and representation through the power of television.

CHAPTER 7

THE STRUGGLE TO BE ORDINARY:

RACE, REPRESENTATION, AND THE POLITICS OF SAMENESS

I do not doubt but there are some in this audience who are a little disturbed at the subject of this meeting, and particularly at the subject I have chosen. Such people are thinking something like this: “How is it that an organization like this, a group of radicals trying to bring new things into the world, a fighting organization which has come up out of the blood and dust of battle, struggling for the right of black men to be ordinary human beings – how is it that an organization of this kind can turn aside to talk about art? After all, what have we who are slaves and black to do with art?”

-- W.E.B. DuBois, *Criteria of Negro Art*

The time has long since passed when a Negro priest was an occasion to wonder. We had physicians, professors, statesmen. Yes, but something out of the ordinary still clung to such cases.

– Frantz Fanon, *The Fact of Blackness*

For various reasons, the average, struggling, non-morbid negro is the best-kept secret in America. His revelation to the public is the thing needed to do away with that feeling of difference which inspires fear and which ever expresses itself in dislike.

-- Zora Neale Hurston, *What White Publishers Won't Print*

The struggle over the image of blackness is as old as it is new for many black populations throughout the African Diaspora, but the terms upon which it is waged are both historically contingent and locally contextual. In Brazil, Afro-Brazilian media producers at TV da Gente had to contend with a national ideology of racial democracy that obscured the articulation of a black identity and their economic and social exclusion from the middle and upper classes of Brazilian society coupled with a visual field of blackness that celebrated them as entertainers, athletes, and menial laborers. In order to intervene within this contradictory field, they privileged images of middle class Afro-Brazilians that emphasized education, professional achievement, and civic engagement. Drawing from the work of DuBois, I argue that they engaged in a struggle to be ordinary, or to be seen as no different from any other Brazilian person. The struggle to be ordinary speaks to a kind of banality of being or equality of existence that has been denied to

subaltern subjects. Within this struggle to be ordinary they produced televisual texts of belonging that represented their equivalent position as middle class within the diversity of peoples that the Brazilian national narrative claims to include. Through media production they wanted to endow a black subject position with the possibility of performing various roles in life, and to not immediately be considered inferior, menial, or unprofessional. Thus they created accounts of their own existence that opened the door to the possibility for Afro-Brazilians to occupy different social, cultural, and economic positions in Brazil in the same way as whites. Their struggle to be ordinary grounded resistance and representation in images of uplift. They exemplified the understanding of television and media production as a meaning making process that accounts for the often subtle ways that people advocate for dignity, respect, and recognition within the context of social conditions not of their own making. However, this representative attempt at ordinariness must understand and accept the already established terms of what is normative, which leaves them within the bind of attempting inclusion within a category structured by their very exclusion, thus perpetuating a continuous struggle.

The various concerns surrounding activism through image production to address the racial content of mainstream commercial television bespeaks a wider concern about the role of blackness within public representations and the national imagination and activists' strategies to change these representations. The writing of Frantz Fanon, W.E.B. DuBois, and Zora Neale Hurston provide a framework through which to understand and contextualize issues surrounding black representation in different contexts. In his essay, *The Fact of Blackness*, Fanon narrates the central problematic of racial difference as the narratives of blackness that circulate throughout the public sphere that become the basis for how black people are understood and interpolated. In *Criteria for Negro Art*, DuBois, also noted this problematic, but offered the production of oppositional images of blackness as a means to alter or intervene in the already established

representational order. Zora Neale Hurston proposed that images of middle class black professionals workers could act as a corrective representation to those stereotypical and limiting black narratives that already circulated in the public sphere. For these writers, a black person's ability to be recognized and represented within the normative role of the ordinary, or everyday middle class working professional, is foundational to the deconstruction of blackness as a fundamental marker of difference. But as Fanon claims, "The time has long since passed when a Negro priest was an occasion to wonder. We had physicians, professors, statesmen. Yes, but something out of the ordinary still clung to such cases." Thus, what constitutes the continuation of their struggle is that this position of the middle class professional is denied to them on the basis of their blackness.

The Debate

TV da Gente's owner and producers premised their desire to establish the network upon the foundation that they would produce different content than what mainstream television networks already offered. Yet, when I asked many of TV da Gente's producers, directors, and program hosts what made their programs different from those on other networks, they did not articulate a specific description of the ways in which they were distinct. When I asked Conceição Lourenço, the executive producer and principle creator of program content about the difference between TV da Gente's shows and others on mainstream Brazilian television, at first she told me there was no difference at all. When I asked her to elaborate, she said:

The largest difference is the color of the people because the Brazilian television is a good television. It's a well-accepted television around the world. We don't want to change anything. We want to make the same thing only we want to appear. Because the white television doesn't show anything. Black ministers [of government] exist that never appear [on television], so we gave preference to

interview this type of person to give them more visibility.

Conceição's opinion of Brazilian television's general quality influenced her objectives for the programs. She lauded the quality of Brazilian television, evidenced by its export to other countries, such as Portugal. She did not want to alter the current mainstream television program offerings in anyway, except through the inclusion of more Afro-Brazilians within the content. According to her, the problem to be addressed is the absence of Afro-Brazilians, particularly those in power.

For Conceição, the stakes of presenting Afro-Brazilians who do not have "visibility," such as government ministers, were connected to the self-esteem of black viewers and the black population in general. Like many Afro-Brazilian activists, Conceição considered the general absence or limited images of Afro-Brazilians detrimental to black viewers' sense of worth. When discussing her goals for the programs she stated:

Really, the goal was to show black people because if black people see themselves they will have more pride in themselves. Our greatest problem is self esteem, this is not the case for you in the United States, but it's out case here. We don't have a black program host. There are [white television program hosts like] Faustão, a Hebe Carmago, Gugu Liberato, Sonia Abrão and it's not possible that not one black person is capable of sitting on the sofa and interviewing in front of the camera? Many are capable, many want to do it. So the intention was this, to make similar programs.

She presented the program host as a position where Afro-Brazilians were missing on mainstream television, which seems to exclude the possibility for a black person to occupy that role. Thus, she chose to produce similar programs to those already shown, but with Afro-Brazilians in those roles and positions, such as talk show hosts, and present Afro-Brazilians in power who get very little publicity, such as government ministers.

Not everyone agreed with this approach to diversifying television production evidenced by Oswaldo's criticism of the programs produced by TV da Gente. After everything had been produced and he realized they would not create any more shows, he levied the criticism "that TV

da Gente was a white television with black faces because it was commercial, and commercial is what is on the air.” He was dissatisfied with the way in which the content turned out. He linked the end result of TV da Gente as a “white television with black faces” to the commercial interests of the network and those that underwrite television production in general. The need to appeal to a mass audience may have influenced the kinds of decisions made around content, but he was not aware of Conceição’s vision for diversifying television, which was to fill roles that mainstream television reserved for white Brazilians, with Afro-Brazilians instead. Ultimately, while the mission of the network to racially diversify televisual content distinguished them from the other mainstream networks, their actual programming followed similar content and formats of other mainstream programs.

Conceição’s objective to replace white Brazilians on television with Afro-Brazilians, which resulted in similar programs to mainstream television could be read similarly to Oswaldo, like a reproduction or a mimicry of the television programs that already existed. Within contemporary Brazil, where Afro-Brazilian culture has become national culture, their Afro-Brazilian cultural productions have become devoid of the political potential for emancipatory projects of racial equality and racial representation. Afro-Brazilians are already represented in cultural ways. Thus, the fight for inclusion was not predicated on the value and recognition of their cultural practices, but became to fight to be recognized as ordinary, or a person among other people, who has the same possibilities, potential, and opportunities as everyone else.

This disagreement between Conceição and Oswaldo invokes the idea of the ordinary mentioned earlier, which is implicated within collective processes of making and unmaking racial difference. Social equality is not simply about equal rights of citizenship or equitable access to social and political institutions, but includes one’s ability to be ordinary or to exist like everyone else. Full participation within the realm of the ordinary is denied to black Brazilians on

the basis of their construction as racial others and due to the situation in which public narratives suspend blackness as a source of difference. Thus Afro-Brazilians must act to transcend these already assigned roles, to strip away the aura of difference that constantly clings to their presence.

The Problem of Visibility

Frantz Fanon addressed issues of black racial visibility through a phenomenological analysis of his own personal being in the world. He identified one of the central problematics of black existence as the inability to be “a man among men” or to be considered simply a person among other people. He includes various social examples of the moments in which he reaches the limits of his own racial subjectivity. He recounts the banal or everyday moments in which he cannot escape the confines of color, such as the phrase, “Oh, I want you to meet my black friend” (116) or the following situation:

When people like me, they tell me it is in spite of my color. When they dislike me, they point out that it is not because of my color. Either way, I am locked into the infernal circle. (116)

Fanon notes that he cannot escape his black racial signifier. The word “Negro” or “black” is always a pretext to his title, which constantly locks him into this source of racial identification and prevents him from being like everyone else.

Fanon argued that historical narratives previously created to justify black inferiority contributed to contemporary understandings and ideas of blackness causing him to be “battered down by tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetishism, racial defects, slave-ships, and above all else, above all: ‘Sho’ good eatin’” (112). These images that had come to signify blackness led to its becoming “overdetermined from without” (116). Thus, narratives surrounding blackness have established and constructed the reservoir of images against which

contemporary black populations must develop new images, create new narratives, and insist upon new ways of being seen.

Fanon ended *The Fact of Blackness* with an indictment of the relationship between the visual medium of film and a black social position. He writes that,

I cannot go to a film without seeing myself. I wait for me. The people in the theatre are watching me, examining me, waiting for me. (140)

If black people are involuntarily associated with one another, whatever image of blackness portrayed in films becomes a stand in for all black people. In the theatre, Fanon “feels himself being seen through images which have not, as yet, materialized, but are latent in the imagination of those around him – images of stereotypically menial blackness” (Silverman 1996: 27). Thus, Fanon links lived experiences with representations by embedding his own existence within the visual representations of black people in film and insisting upon their mutual relationship.

Narrating Absence

When I spoke with some of the TV da Gente program producers, they narrated their alterity within media representations as part of their critique of mainstream television. I met a program host for the news program at a bookstore with a café for coffee and a chat. In our conversation about the image of Afro-Brazilians in the media he asked, “Why don’t we ever see black people talking in a coffee shop on television?” and he gestured towards he and I referencing our interaction. He also said “I wash my clothes with detergent and drive a car, why don’t they show black people in those advertisements?” When I went to meet with the executive producer at her house on one occasion, she asked similar rhetorical questions. “Why doesn’t the media ever show a black women being interviewed by a researcher in her apartment?” When a commercial for toothpaste flashed across the television she yelled at the image of the white mouth with glowing, clean teeth “why don’t they ever show black people? We brush out teeth!”

They both argued that television producers do not broadcast Afro-Brazilians within these mediated images of everyday life. In both their statements they positioned themselves as consumers of products, which rendered them worthy of representation within advertising and on television in general. They also referenced everyday situations, the very situations in which we were engaged and enacting, as material worthy of representation and whose representative believability hinged upon the very fact of its actual existence. Aside from the equation of consumption with citizenship, television advertisements also represent aspects of quotidian life, such as doing ones laundry or brushing ones teeth. The absence of Afro-Brazilians from these banal, even ordinary actions signaled to my research participants that their existence extended beyond the boundaries of its purview.

Narrating Presence

The production of representations within emancipatory projects of racial vindication work in relationship to previously established images of blackness. TV da Gente image producers took on the task of not only producing new racial representations, but also revising, reinterpreting and reimagining the role of Afro-Brazilians in contemporary Brazilian life. TV da Gente's program creators were responding to the limited portrayals of Afro-Brazilians commonly found on Brazilian network television and the absence of Afro-Brazilians within professional roles. Thus, the dominant regime of televisual representation already delimited and demarcated the creative boundaries surrounding their own processes of program invention.

In developing a new television network from the ground up, the producers experienced the potential for a relative amount of creative freedom in their ideas for program concepts and themes. Big Richard said, "When you are a part of a television network that is in construction it's very interesting because it gives you the opportunity to involve your creative side." However, the

producers worked with the constant knowledge of how Afro-Brazilians are already represented on television and within the national public sphere. Now that the narrative of blackness had been established, it informed their contemporary artistic creations. Black artists who create out of social justice imperatives must create against and in opposition to these previous representations to carry out their goals of black equality.

TV da Gente program producers articulated what W.E.B. DuBois termed “double consciousness,” which he defines as “this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity” (DuBois 1990: 8). This term highlights the disconnect between the stereotypical, exaggerated, or racist caricatures of black people and black life that dominate within media narratives and a black individual’s view of themselves as something other, and different from these images. Many of the media workers were aware of the dominant images of blackness and actively refused to reproduce them. Oswaldo Faustino asserted,

The society needs to have a different vision of Afro-Brazilian society. To understand this Afro-Brazilian society not as whatever trash that was deposited here and that now they have to live with them. Because we’re always seen as indolents, as drunks, we are good at samba, good at soccer. Before we only served to drink cachaça²⁰, dance samba and play soccer. Our women were the most desirable because they had a large chest. So what do we need? What spaces do we want to occupy? *All of them. I want to be in all of the places, with all the opportunities.* (Emphasis his)

Janete Moraes, another program producer, described similar objectives when becoming involved in TV da Gente, she described the network in the following way.

It was a space that was giving black people a range of possibilities in the country, to be black is not just to play soccer and be a pagode samba player, black people are intellectuals, actors, well informed. So I thought it was great to open this space for black people on television.

Many of the media producers and other Afro-Brazilians with whom I spoke argued that the

²⁰ A strong Brazilian cane liquor

primary problem is not visibility or invisibility, but the *ways in which* Afro-Brazilians are visible within the dominant media as stereotypical and limiting images of blackness.

Aesthetics and Activism

In October 1926, W.E.B. DuBois published the essay *Criteria of Negro Art* in *The Crisis*, the official communication vehicle of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). In this essay DuBois described artistic production as an integral part of the fight for citizenship and rights by black people. In the struggle for equality, it becomes imperative that black artists produce artwork that values their own aesthetic.

Like Fanon, DuBois was concerned with the narratives of black inferiority that were continuously produced to support a racist hierarchy of value. DuBois also noted the limited number of roles that black Americans filled within the area of performance: “We can go on the stage; we can be just as funny as white Americans wish us to be; we can play all the sordid parts that America likes to assign to Negroes; but for anything else there is still small place for us” (1995: 513).

DuBois argued that the continuous perpetuation of the limited representations of black Americans would influence the ways in which the dominant society viewed them. He noted the absence of diverse narratives that reflected the realities of African American life and questioned how future generations would know about these hidden experiences. He asked, “What would people in a hundred years say about black Americans?” (1995: 513) if they relied upon the images generated within mainstream literature and art as the basis of their understanding African American people. In his critique of racial representations he suggested that white publishers act as censors who prohibit black stories from publication.

Suppose you were to write a story and put in it the kind of people you know and like and imagine. You might get it published and you might not. And the ‘might

not' is still far bigger than the 'might.' The white publishers catering to white folk would say, 'It is not interesting' – to white folk, naturally not. They want Uncle Toms, good 'darkies' and clowns. (1995: 513)

Dubois argues that publishers police the boundaries of book creation by deciding to publish the material that is potentially popular, rather than that which would fail to generate an audience. Publishers were less concerned with the content of the narratives, then with their ability to appeal to a mass consumer base and thus generate considerable profit and revenue. This situation foreclosed the possibility for different narratives of blackness to emerge and perpetuated the republication of stereotypical black images that had already found success.

The derogatory visual field of blackness coupled with the limitations within the publishing industry to challenge such narratives were the conditions out of which Dubois argued that art must become aligned with the aims of political and social activism and black anti-racism. He declared that, “all art is propoganda and ever must be” and should be used in the service of combating limited images of blackness and fashioning new black representations, visions, and imaginings. Thus artists and creators occupy a central role in the fight for civil rights and black equality within the battlefield of the visual. DuBois declared that African Americans “are hemmed in and our new young artists have got to fight their way to freedom” (1995: 514).

Both DuBois and Fanon articulated a central problematic of black visibility as the inability of black people to occupy “ordinary” roles. As Fanon argues, blackness is “overdetermined from without” and this has proscribed the boundary of blackness within social and cultural representations. While Fanon struggles with his inability to transgress his own racial subjectivity, DuBois points to artistic creation and production as resources to recuperate a black subjectivity that transcends, or at least combats, the residue of past and present stereotypical representations.

Who Is Ordinary?

In her essay, *What White Publishers Won't Print*, Zora Neale Hurston, articulated the need for African Americans to appear in ordinary or average roles.

For various reasons, the average, struggling, non-morbid Negro is the best-kept secret in America. His revelation to the public is the thing needed to do away with that feeling of difference which inspires fear and which expresses itself in dislike. (1979: 173)

To combat the difference associated with blackness and the resulting feelings of hostility, Hurston recommended “non-morbid” images of black people and black life. She argued that, “the realistic story around a Negro insurance official, dentist, general practitioner, undertaker and the like would be most revealing” (1979: 173). Hurston defined the ordinary or average through the experiences of black middle class professionals.

When producing *TV da Gente* television programs, their aims were to represent black Brazilians in particular ways, ways that were previously absent on television. In describing who he wanted to include on *A Question of Rights*, Hédio Silva (the show's host) articulated a list of black professionals to interview for the show's content.

I had a preoccupation to first promote people that would be a reference for the black community: judges, promoters, lawyers, black scientists, intellectuals, social leaders, politicians. The idea was to give visibility to references, icons, symbols of the Brazilian black community. I had the preoccupation to bring directors of public organizations, of universities, of legislative power, of judicial power, of executive state power, of city governments, there were many city leaders who passed through the program. I wanted to bring artists or popular culture producers of the periphery, who have success in the peripheral neighborhoods but don't have visibility in the greater vehicles of communication.

Silva articulated a similar agenda to Hurston and many other *TV da Gente* employees – to show Afro-Brazilians in roles that he did not previously see on television, which were middle class professionals. For Silva images of ordinary life were drawn from what he did not see on television. Silva is also a member of this group of people he wanted to invite onto his show. Thus, his life experiences, goals and aspirations become the source for “ordinary” images of

black life. It is important to note that they don't articulate a desire to completely supplant one set of images for another. Rather, they want to widen the field of vision to include the possibility for black professionals or black television presenters. As Oswaldo, explained, "What spaces do we want to occupy? All of them. I want to be in all of the places, with all the opportunities."

Workers at TV da Gente produced a series of television programs within their downtown São Paulo studio space. Network producers designed the programs' formats to accommodate their minimal production costs and to achieve the goal of giving visibility to Afro-Brazilians. Most of the shows consisted of a (black) host who directed the program by presenting and interviewing guests who would make a momentary appearance. These guests were diverse Brazilians from around the city of São Paulo who fit into the theme of the segment. They did not produce any soap operas or sitcoms, which are the average fare for Brazilian television entertainment. However, the price of actors and writers made their production costs prohibitive for a new network, with limited financial resources and no commercial advertisers. The structure of the programs were the cheapest to produce and allowed them to draw from their networks to present black Brazilians from around the city as an example of the various roles in which Afro-Brazilians worked.

A Question of Rights – The Interview Show

A Question of Rights was an hour-long program broken into different segments of interviews in which the host, Dr. Hédio Silva, spoke with his guests about their actions and work in particular areas of social justice. This show was originally modeled after the Judge Hatchett court program in the U.S., but required modification to comply with the Brazilian laws surrounding filming a courtroom decision. The show moved from its original inspiration of Judge Hatchett, to one premised upon interviews of people engaged in civil action. The majority

of the program took place in the downtown São Paulo studio soundstage. The set looked like an office from which Dr. Hédio would introduce the segments and discuss particular issues with his guests. A false window depicting the city's landscape marked with high rises acted as the backdrop of the set. Dr. Hédio sat at a desk with a lap top computer and in front of a large flat screen television with the title of the program in the opening frames of the program, then he would move to talk with guests while sitting at a table or with two chairs facing one another (figure 5.1).



Figure 7.1: Dr. Hédio Silva hosting A Question of Rights

Dr. Hédio did direct a small team of producers, but he took primary responsibility for the themes and interviews on the program. He established the issues for discussion and indicated who he wanted to invite onto the show. Drawing from his network of politically active acquaintances, he invited them to discuss their initiatives and projects within the greater São Paulo city.

Dr. Hédio aimed for A Question of Rights to display the diversity of Brazilians taking actions directed towards issues they individually found to be important and of social significance. Dr. Silva outlined the objectives:

to give visibility to diversity, problematize the different forms of discrimination, to give visibility to individual initiatives and institutions that raise the problem of discrimination, and give visibility to these social movements that fight against discrimination that don't always have the space to share their ideas, to share their experience on tv.

Overall, the program followed the theme of civil rights and invited people who fought against discrimination and for inclusivity of various populations, including religious groups, women, disabled people, and for other marginalized communities in the city.

While they maintained awareness about racially diverse guests, they did not forget about the needs of the black population. The host, Dr. Hédio is black and a publicly known civil rights attorney, politician, and activist for inclusion of Afro-Brazilians. As the host of the program, he became a reference for the inclusion of Afro-Brazilians on television and in control of the particular content and flow of the show. Dr. Hédio also noted that,

although in the case of my program we had an emphasis on diversity, we had a very explicit objective in relation to the black population. Although we intended for the program to dialogue with the general society, the idea of the television was for segmented media and the content, the interviews were done in consideration of the point of view of the black population...It was a television show for blacks, but not just for blacks, a television program by blacks for Brazil.

Dr. Hédio described the balance required of the program producers to include content that represented the racial diversity of Brazilian people, but also remained conscious of their intended black constituency. As an Afro-Brazilian, Dr. Hédio articulated the “point of view of the black population” by trying to think about questions for many of the guests as they related to racial issues and the specific concerns of black Brazilians. For example, he interviewed a police colonel and tried to discuss the role of the colonel in preventing the police in the street from discriminating against young black men. But Dr. Hédio assured me that the program was not about discrimination, but rather it focused on diversity and about “positive examples and experiences that were successful in confronting racism.” He was not as interested in diagnosing the problem of racism and discrimination, but rather he wanted to present people who were

taking actions in their lives to confront and ameliorate any kind of inequality.

A Question of Rights conveyed their idea of diversity through the segments that made up each episode. One episode would offer different people within a variety of situations of social action. For example, one program included four different segments featuring a black judge presiding over a case, a white woman fighting for equal access to public facilities for disabled citizens, a black AIDS activist, and a conversation with one of the executive producers of TV da Gente. On another show filmed around the Christmas holiday, Dr. Silva invited different non-Christian religious leaders to explain the ways in which they celebrated their own holidays that fall near the Christmas season. In this way they represented different groups of people, lobbying for different forms of rights on behalf of specific communities. While maintaining this eye towards diversity, they were sure to include ample Afro-Brazilian representatives to act as a black reference for this unequally visible population. Dr. Hedio chose people who he thought presented positive solutions to problems or “represented positive examples of resistance, determination, to encourage young people to follow in the same way.”



Figure 7.2: New Municipal Building

One of the segments of A Question of Rights featured a new municipal building, pictured in figure 5.2, in the northern zone of the city that increased the number of court rooms to process

small claims cases. Through this expansion of public government offices, the city's legal apparatus could process more cases in a more timely and efficient way. The reporter interviewed a lawyer and a receptionist in the building who stated that they liked the new facilities and the building was handicapped accessible to ensure that all Brazilians of various physical abilities could take advantage of the services it housed.

The segment focused upon a court case over which a black judge presided and whose proceedings occurred in the building. They narrated over the proceedings with the facts of the case and simply showed a few seconds of the actual court scene in figure 5.3. A former restaurant employee was suing the restaurant owner for back wages after termination. The viewer does not have the opportunity to hear the proceedings of the case due to Brazilian legal restrictions around filming court cases. We do see the Afro-Brazilian judge in the center of the frame hearing the details of the case.



Figure 7.3: Afro-Brazilian Judge Presiding over a case

After the case, the reporter asked the former employee if justice was served and he answered affirmatively. He won the case and his employer was directed to compensate him for

lost wages. The employer stated that he would pay his former employee when he had the money.



Figure 7.4: Restaurant Owner Interview

This segment presented the courtroom as a legitimate means through which to seek redress for grievances and injustices that people may experience within the labor and consumer market. By presenting a case with a ruling on the side of the worker, they framed court proceedings as a place where the disenfranchised or less powerful could win. The shot of the building and the geographical communication of its geographical location informed viewers of where to go to file a case to address any crime that they felt had been committed.

The Afro-Brazilian judge presiding over the case represented black Brazilians as professional workers in positions of power and authority within the legal system. This segment gave “visibility” to an Afro-Brazilian judge and presented him as an example for other Afro-Brazilian viewers to emulate or as a source to increase their self-esteem. The fact that he actually worked as a judge presented him as a possibility for the various positions that Afro-Brazilians could occupy within daily life. This segment was meant to empower viewers racially through black representation and informationally about the ways in which they could exercise their rights within everyday legal channels.

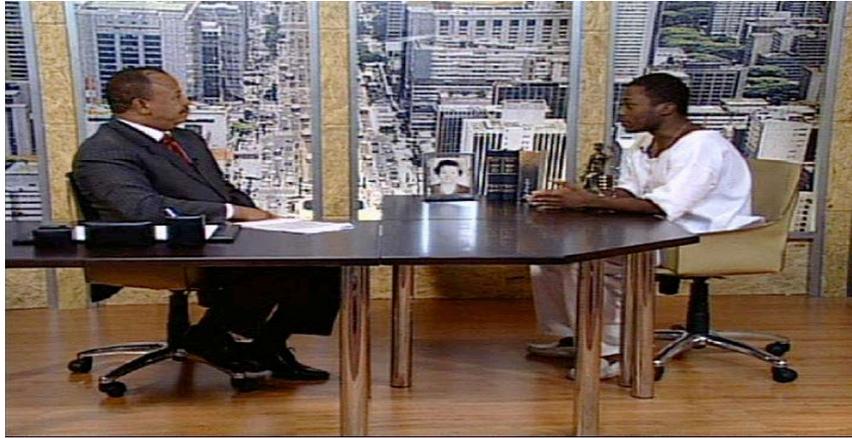


Figure 7.5: Dr. Hédio Silva interviewing Pai Celso

During another segment in *A Question of Rights*, Dr. Hédio interviewed Pai Celso, the leader of an NGO that worked to educate poor, Afro-Brazilian communities about AIDS prevention and awareness. Pai Celso, was a priest of an Afro-Brazilian religion called Candomble, which some Brazilians might consider to be a folkloric system of beliefs resulting from African influences. Dr. Silva centered the interview around Father Celso's nongovernmental organization that worked to stop the spread of AIDS through educational initiatives. In this way, the show portrayed Candomble as more than a system of religious beliefs, but also an active catalyst for social change and AIDS intervention.



Figure 7.6: Pai Celso

Dr. Silva brought race and class together during the discussion by framing AIDS as a

disease with social-economic implications, and not only as a biological illness. The host stated that 75% of the Afro-Brazilian population lives at or below the minimum wage. Father Celso explained that people who do not have education and live in poverty were particularly vulnerable to infection and required outreach to meet their specific needs. This focus on AIDS and activism recuperated the black religion of Candomble from the realm of folklore and recodes it as a contemporary vehicle within the movement to target a particularly serious disease that effected the Afro-Brazilian population. Father Celso also represented an example of an Afro-Brazilian man taking civic action to address the health and educational needs of the poor and less fortunate.

Quem Sabe Clique – The Game Show

“Click If You Know” was a game show on the TV da Gente television network. The show featured two teams who would compete against one another by answering questions about black history. The producers chose students from two different secondary schools in São Paulo and the winner received the prize of a new computer for their school. The hosts, a Japanese woman and a black man asked the questions to the students and moderated the game.

The executive producer conceived of this show in relation to law 10.639, a federal law passed in 2003, which mandated that all elementary schools include lessons about African and Afro-Brazilian history and culture within their curriculum. Through encouraging knowledge of black history, the show aimed to supplement the classroom information by educating the contestants and viewers on this subject matter through the entertaining and accessible format of the game show.

The questions covered various subjects related to Afro-Brazilian, African, and African Diaspora history and culture. They asked about Afro-Brazilian filmmakers, musicians, athletes,

and historical figures. For example, they asked the question:

This country was a colony of Belgium and gained independence in 1960 and Patrice Lumumba is among the heroes of independence. What is its name now?
A) **The Congo**, B) Zimbabwe, C) Tanzania.

One of history's most famous queens of the samba school Beija-Flor from Curitiba, in the time of Joãozinho Trinta (a famous samba singer). And to this day is remembered for having Prince Charles try to samba. Who is she? a) Valeria Valenssa b) **Pinah** c) Luma de Oliveira.

An engineer from the state of Bahia who was the son of a slave and a priest. Born in Bom Jardim, municipality of Santo Amaro (BA) on January 7, 1855. He completed important works of infrastructure and buildings in the city of São Paulo. Today a street is named for him:
a) Xavier de Toledo b) **Teodoro Sampaio** c) John Teodoro

"Carolina", "Narciso Rap" and "Distracted to Death" are names of movies by filmmaker Jefferson De. He is a founder of a film movement called:
a) Feijoada Completa b) Rice and Beans c) **Feijoada Dogma**

These questions included information about samba and soccer, as well as Afro-Brazilian cultural, historical, and intellectual leaders. In addition to educating contestants about these individuals, these questions and the context of the show alerted the viewers and the students that these historical figures were black. Teodoro Sampaio has a major street named after him in São Paulo, yet many Afro-Brazilian activists told me that most Brazilians do not know that he was black. The question about him on this show informed the audience both about Sampaio's accomplishments as a prominent city planner of São Paulo and his racial designation as Afro-Brazilian.

Oswaldo, who created the questions, described the show as a way "to create intimacy with our history." He also said, that when he was developing the questions "he worked a lot with this issue of why people think of these characters as different characters." He did not think they should be seen as different, but presented as part of a standard educational curriculum. Oswaldo

thought that the public should understand Afro-Brazilian and African history as general history that is not differentiated or separate from the other historical narratives that the schools teach to students.

Turminha da Hora – The Children’s Show

The children’s program called *Turminha da Hora* or Class Hour was directed towards children between the ages of five and ten years old. Cinthya Raquel, an Afro-Brazilian television personality hosted the program. She would introduce the guests, such as musicians who would perform a musical selection or other entertainers in the city. For example, Rebeca Nemer, a singer, came on the show. They began the segment with a discussion of her favorite color, fruit, and type of pet. Then she performed her song, “I’m Different.” She also presented her new DVD of her song and dance performances for children. They filmed the segment in front of a studio audience composed of children. The children came from the families and friends of TV da Gente media workers, which ensured a diverse audience of children in attendance.

A consistent feature of the show, was Oswaldo Faustino as Tio Bah, telling stories under the Baobab tree to the children. The Baobab tree grows throughout the continent of Africa and is recognizable through its particular shape. Oswaldo conceived of Tio Bah, as a character who would tell stories to children to impart a lesson and entertain them. His original name was *Balorim do Baobá Batucalê do Balacobaco*, but Oswaldo invited the children to call him Tio Bah as a shortened version of the name. Oswaldo originally conceived of Tio Bah as a spirit of the Baobab tree, however the executive producer and network founder thought that the idea of a spirit would bother some viewers. Following their recommendation, Oswaldo transformed Tio Bah from a spirit into a character that lived inside the tree, giving him access to all the stories he would tell.

Oswaldo wrote the stories himself and performed them for the children. He has authored a children's book and he drew from this experience to create stories for the show. Oswaldo drew from his ideas of African stories to structure his tales in a way that would teach children about social and cultural interactions.

I wrote the story, one after another in the style of African story telling and style of speaking. So I wrote the story that had to always reach a point and a conclusion, that was a lesson. Then I recorded on one day of the week five stories, which were the five stories the following week.

Through these stories, Oswaldo wanted to educate the children in an interesting and accessible way.

The stories that Oswaldo wrote for Tio Bah, always dealt with everyday life and circumstances he imagined his audience of children to encounter. Some of the stories referenced the issues that Afro-Brazilians might confront, without directly discussing the subject of race or racial identity. For example, he included a story entitled Bad Hair, Good Hair where he recounted a story with the lesson of human aesthetic equality. Through the story he demonstrated the absurdity of labeling hair with the terms good and bad by using the analogy of grass. He used a market as the setting of the story with three vendors selling three different types of grass: a green grass good for feeding animals, a yellow grass for weaving baskets, and very dark, thick grass. The vendors laughed at the person selling the dark, thick grass and joked about its uselessness. Then a prince came along from a nearby village and needed grass to cover his houses. The dark, thick grass became transformed from the useless grass to providing shelter and protection to the prince's houses. He ended the story with the prince saying, "Look there are infinite shades, textures and purposes of the grass that cover all the hills, mountains and valleys. None is better or worse than the other, just different. And all together to give harmony and balance to nature." The moral of the story went, "We are all different, but equally important as humans. Respecting diversity is what we should all do."

In this story Oswaldo addresses the common stigma attached to Afro-Brazilian or course hair texture. Researchers have shown that children do tease one another about the texture of their hair making school an uncomfortable place for Afro-Brazilian children (Gomes 2003). These ideas and jokes about bad hair, are particularly detrimental to black female children's self esteem. The story does not explicitly express the racial aspects of "bad hair," rather he wants to make children question the idea of something being bad or good, by arguing that everything has a use or a function. He brings together the issue that respecting diversity and other people, includes respecting their hair or other bodily differences.

The other stories themes taught general lessons through metaphorical stories. He used the story of three pigs to communicate the lesson: "It's not important the material out of which the house is made, what is important is that it's a home. Only like this is happiness going to want to live there." Another story explored the unintended consequences of wanting to change identities and ended with the lesson: "Who wants to be what they are not, always run the risk of ceasing to be what it is they are." Oswaldo used a story of relations among soldiers to discuss the issue of sharing, generosity, and valuing other people even if they appear to be weak: "Within every person there are diamonds. Even if they look like rough stones. So think, before they depart."

The stories used animals, like frogs and pigs, or categories of people, like soldiers and princes, or other children as characters whose interactions were meant to communicate such lessons such as human equality, respect, fairness, or sharing to the children in the audience. None of them explicitly articulated a black racial identity of the characters, although some of the stories were set in an African country, such as the Congo, or in a Quilombo²¹, both spaces that indicate a black racial identity for the stories protagonists. However, Oswaldo never directly discussed race or racial inequality in the stories. The characters interacted through the narrative

²¹ Quilombos are contemporary communities in Brazil of predominately black populations who have lived there since slavery. During the period of slavery, enslaved Africans would escaped from plantations and form communities called Quilombos.

of the stories to communicate values that Oswaldo thought all children should understand. That some of the settings were coded as black and some were not, and some of the stories indirectly addressed the specific issues of black people and some did not, speaks to a subtle strategy of storytelling that took racial difference into account, but prevented it from becoming the defining theme of the narratives. Those settings, characters, stories, and issues that are coded as black fall within the heterogeneity of these story aspects within and across the range of stories told, rendering blackness as an aspect of ordinary life – not spectacular or different – but worthy of representation in ways that others are already represented.

Encontro da Gente – The Women’s Show



Figure 7.7: Adyel Silva interviewing a guest on Our Meeting

TV da Gente included a show called *Encontro da Gente* or Our Meeting. This was modeled after a typical talk show in Brazil, where typically a female presenter hosted the program by introducing the theme for the topic of discussion and then interviewing a series of guests about that topic. The program was hosted by Adyel Silva, a former Afro-Brazilian model and current singer at the time of her appearances on TV da Gente. The program had a team of people to find the guests for the segments, but Adyel was responsible for generating questions for the guests. She received the theme for the show and then she would research the topic

through the internet and newspaper to learn about the various issues associated with it.

The content of the show was driven by contemporary issues in the national news. One of the producers told me that they read daily newspapers and weekly magazines to remain abreast of the salient topics cycling through the news media. From these issues they developed the themes for the programs and generated a list of potential people, usually experts about these issues, to come onto the show and discuss them.

Adyel spoke with doctors, lawyers, psychologists and other professionals about various contemporary topics, such as hyperactive children, laws surrounding child custody, and the effects of parents separation on children. She also spoke with people about different lifestyle topics surrounding hobbies, food, or other leisurely activities. For example they invited a cheese retailer on to the program to discuss different types of cheeses, their specific characteristics, tastes, qualities, and recipes they can accommodate. They presented another guest who gave a lesson on how to make miniature bonsai trees. This program did not deviate from other programs of its genre on Brazilian television. When choosing the guests, a producer said,

We tried to get people who were recommended to us. I invited a lawyer, but he could not come on to the show. So we asked if he knew another lawyer that was black and we explained that the focus of the channel was for a black public and we ended us getting a recommendation from him for another lawyer.

The mainstream news media coverage dictated the topics for discussion on the program. When producing the episodes, the staff tried to remain attentive to the racial identity of the experts they invited onto the show to discuss the topics. However, the show's guests were not exclusively Afro-Brazilian.

A general convention of women's talk shows is to have the host control the flow and subject matter of the discourse through their questions and their ability to call upon specific guests during specific moments to enter the conversation. By casting Adyel Silva, an Afro-Brazilian woman, in this position, they did privilege a black subject position for this dominant

and consistent role on the program. Adyel framed her dissatisfaction with the racial narrative of mainstream Brazilian television in ways many of the other TV da Gente workers expressed: “You watch television programs and see a few black reporters, but you never see a black person anchoring the program, so the participation is very sad because it reflects how Brazilian society treats us, how the society sees us. I think this is very sad.” She understood the problem surrounding the role of Afro-Brazilians on television through the lack of control they have within the programmatic structure of narrative television. Thus her intervention, and that of TV da Gente, was to place Afro-Brazilians in control of production, presentation, and in positions as experts on contemporary news issues.

The Continuous Struggle

In the last sentence of *Black Reconstruction in America*, W.E.B. DuBois stated, “I am going to tell this story as though Negroes were ordinary human beings, realizing that this attitude will from the first seriously curtail my audience” (2007: xliii). In its expression of one of the purposes of the book, this line evidences DuBois’ intentional act of mobilizing the tools of representation to craft a historical narrative that expressed the fundamental humanity and dignity of African American people. To be sure, DuBois was writing during a time of Jim Crow segregation across the U.S. south. Despite the difference of national and historical contexts it seems to me that Afro-Brazilian media producers at TV da Gente echoed DuBois’ theme of assuming the humanity of Afro-Brazilians, who have been represented through the marginal presence of stereotypes and caricatures in the national media. Yet, within DuBois phrase lies the rhetorical limit of his supposition of black ordinariness in the words “as though.” His struggle is thwarted in its very inception through his knowledge that African Americans are not seen as ordinary, evidenced by the audiences’ reactions that he presumed. The very necessity of having

to inaugurate a project of representation on behalf of a particular group to counter other ways in which they are represented undermines their status as ordinary. In short, those who are ordinary do not have to announce it, they are free to simply be.

The dominant presence of black presenters, the emphasis on Afro-Brazilian professionalism, education, and civic responsibility, as well as the television show formats of inviting people onto the programs facilitated TV da Gente producers ability to produce a generally unseen image of Afro-Brazilian life: the middle class. In order to challenge the saturation of cultural and menial images of blackness, the producers and presenters drew attention to actual Afro-Brazilians engaged in community activism, education, and professional work. TV da Gente's producers and creators experiences were generally invisible within the mainstream circulation of media images, and they sought to rectify that situation using a television network of their own. In many ways, TV da Gente producers considered themselves to be equal to other media professionals, and thus deserved to share in the television roles dominated by white Brazilians.

I characterize the logic and motivations behind the representation of human strivings at TV da Gente as a struggle to be ordinary, as I explained in the beginning of the chapter. Through the casting of Afro-Brazilian program hosts, working to standardize Afro-Brazilian history, and by Oswaldo telling a variety of stories, they sought to move beyond their difference by recognizing their equivalent capacity to execute such roles. They articulated the idea that their experiences, histories, professional work roles, and their very selves do not stand outside of the everyday processes of quotidian life, but rather were fundamentally part of a human and a Brazilian story.

The attempt to assert an image of the ordinary will remain a struggle due to the contradictions embedded within the very idea of the ordinary. The ordinary has already been

established and in many ways defined against those who do not fulfill its requirements. The pseudo-scientific narratives demeaning blackness, the history of slavery, unequal access to the labor market, and the circulation of stereotypical and limiting images, devalued the image of blackness within contemporary Brazilian life and culture. This idea of the ordinary does not include the very conditions that were central to Afro-Brazilians “unordinary” experiences. Making an argument for one’s ordinariness requires accepting the existing classed and racial terms upon which the ordinary is premised, and which is unachievable in many ways.

The possibility for emancipation embedded within the struggle to be ordinary will remain stifled because it requires that others recognize one’s ordinariness. Fanon alerts us to this problem when he narrates his experience of alterity through his interactions and encounters with others who draw attention to his otherness. (“Look, a Negro”) As alterity is predicated upon others recognition of it, so is the transcendence of that alterity. The ordinary is relational and contingent upon the responses, reactions, and discourses of others. TV da Gente required recognition from others as viewers and commercial sponsors, neither of which they obtained.

TV da Gente media producers did not aim to completely supplant the popular images of Afro-Brazilians as samba performers and soccer players, with those of professional, middle class, and educated Afro-Brazilians. They did produce a program called People of Samba (*Gente do Samba*) where they invited various samba performance groups to play music. Many of the producers themselves talked to me about their allegiance to one of the various São Paulo Samba schools and soccer teams, which generally stemmed from continuous family loyalty. However, they thought the public sphere was saturated with these images and wanted to make Afro-Brazilians visible in other ways. They wanted to *expand* the possibilities of ways in which they are seen, not completely replace one representation with another. The emphasis seemed to privilege middle class images of blackness within this expansion of the visual field of blackness,

which demonstrates the complex and contradictory narratives that progressive politics can produce.

One could argue that TV da Gente produced aspirational or unrealistic images that are the common stock in trade of television programs. In Brazil, nightly soap operas enthrall millions of viewers with their emphasis on white middle class and wealthy families who become embroiled in dramatic plots, enjoy lavish lifestyles, and encounter situations that many average Brazilians would never experience. I would argue that TV da Gente workers presented an image of blackness that they considered attainable through education and professional wages, evidenced by the very fact that they had obtained such positions. It is significant to note, that Netinho, the network's founder and a popular celebrity, appeared very infrequently on the channel. They did not rely on the attraction of celebrity for their programs, but rather the banality of their own lives.

Afro-Brazilians who desired to be seen as ordinary called into question the Brazilian national narrative that denied the existence of blackness and the simultaneous representation of Afro-Brazilians within limiting roles. By calling TV da Gente the color of Brazil and including Brazilians of various colors and races, they acknowledged the diversity of the population and sought to represent the actual ethnic and racial composition of the country. By making an effort to expand the roles of Afro-Brazilians and include Brazilians of other hues on television, the program producers presented a visual image of what they thought fair racial representation can and should look like. After all, "the realization that Negroes are no better nor no worse, and at times just as boring as everybody else, will hardly kill off the population of the nation" (Hurstun 1979: 173).

CHAPTER 8

THE REVOLUTION WILL NOT BE BROUGHT TO YOU BY COKE: ON TELEVISION AND REVOLUTION

TV da Gente ended because of the lack of money. If the largest television networks can't secure the funding, imagine TV da Gente that is just starting. It is difficult to make a child walk if you don't give it any food or space. TV da Gente was a child that was born, but it didn't have the structure to be able to walk and secure its own life, the adults didn't let it.

-- Janete Moraes

Both the titles of this dissertation and this chapter reference Gil Scott Heron's iconic poem and song, *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised*, distributed in 1974. TV da Gente producers attempted to combine the worlds of activism and commercial television production, two areas which Heron deemed to be mutually incompatible through both the title and lyrics of his poem. In one section, Heron writes, "The revolution will not be brought to you by Xerox, in four parts without commercial interruptions." Heron's lyrics point to the fundamental necessity of advertisers for commercial television, and articulate the idea that advertisers will not sponsor a message that undermines their very existence or calls into question the cultural values in which they participate through their commercials. To make this point, Heron plays with commercial slogans and catchphrases surrounding products, brands, and advertisements that display happy, pleasant images within the ad's constructed world. He writes, "The revolution will not go better with Coke. The revolution will not fight the germs that cause bad breath." These phrases invoke the past ad campaigns for Coke (*Everything goes better with Coke*) and Listerine.

Advertisements hold out the promise of a better life and satisfaction, but only through the consumption of the product can viewers experience the benefits that the ad and the product offers. But, as Heron claims, revolution, social discord, political unrest, or otherwise unhappy people, do not sell products. With this basis of corporate sponsorship through advertisements, mainstream media cannot provide a platform for such disturbances, which means that activism must happen outside and in public, where Heron claims that, "Black people will be in the streets,

looking for a brighter day.”

While TV da Gente may not be considered a revolution in television, the structure of commercial media within a capitalist system of funding limited TV da Gente in ways that support Heron’s hypothesis of the incompatibility between activism and commercial media. TV da Gente eventually stopped program production and relinquished their studio space in São Paulo. Few people were forthcoming about the details surrounding the failure to continue the network. Netinho said that the programs are still circulating through another city of Pecajus in the state of Ceara. However, all of the former TV da Gente employees have moved to other media organizations in the city.

When I asked about the difficulties that arose with the network, Netinho identified “balancing the finances and raising interest in the broadcasted content” as critical areas of concern. Revenue generation and audience attraction are two fundamentally linked issues for the survival of any television network or mass-market based product. Ultimately, the scarcity of finances proved detrimental to the continuation of the project. The network did not attract commercial sponsors, which seems to be the general consensus surrounding why they discontinued program production. In this section I will contextualize the demise of TV da Gente within the tensions between satisfying the demands of a capitalist media structure that requires a large audience and the agenda for social change that informed their actions and imaginations. If revolution challenges the status quo, then television as a medium underwritten by commercial and national interests will not support content that undermines its legitimacy. Brazil’s televisual media sphere cannot be separated from the nationalist imperatives present from its inception, and that inform contemporary commercial representations. So for corporations to support a network that seems anti-Brazilian is unfathomable, leaving the network vulnerable to economic instability and eventual closure.

I will examine the relationship between activism and television articulated by the TV da Gente producers and discuss the ways in which they conceived of their audience who would potentially consume their media product. In this section I attend to the particularities of Brazilian cultural, national identity, and media production that may have impeded TV da Gente's abilities to obtain an audience and commercial sponsorships. I will situate their discontinuation within the complex dynamics of attracting and representing audiences and commercial advertising as they manifest in popular television production. Their representational mission of Afro-Brazilian inclusion and middle class uplift may have been incompatible within national norms of entertainment, national discourses of race, and advertising's incorporation of Afro-Brazilians within their specific narratives.

A Question of Audience

With representation and social justice incorporated into their television production objectives, TV da Gente workers did not consider as central the type of consumer they hoped to attract. Generally, they assumed that Afro-Brazilians would want to see themselves on television and a country with such a large black population would provide them with an instant audience. However, when specifically discussing who would want to watch their programs, TV da Gente program producers used themselves as examples for their targeted consumer. In his work on the production of public television programs, Barry Dornfeld complicates the divide between production and consumption by arguing that media producers' interpretive practices and social experiences, their own conceptualizations of their audiences, as well as the processes of television production are central components that inform the creation of media texts. Dornfeld observed that the practices of media production, "requires that the producers act to a large extent as surrogate audience members, putting themselves in the place of their potential audience as

they react to the material they are shaping into programs” (1998: 87). TV da Gente television producers engaged in this act that Dornfeld described, by engaging and mobilizing their own tastes, desires, and social critiques when thinking about what their potential audience would want to watch.

When I asked the executive producer about what TV da Gente’s targeted audience would want to watch, she said:

They want to see themselves, truthfully we want to see ourselves. In fact I can put myself in the place of a viewer. I want to see a smart black person, beautiful, speaking about subjects that interest me in general, be it about race or not. But I want to see an intelligent black person. I believe we have the same capacity of thought as any other, regardless of our color, and that’s what I want to watch and I made this an issue to raise for those watching tv. I have the idea that the boy in the slum, who has no social status, does not have to be ashamed. But what I like to see when I turn on the television and see a black person, I want see what they are giving me, if they are cultured.

Within this statement she moves between a variety of constituencies, all of whom she understands to be black. She begins by articulating a collective desire on the part of Afro-Brazilians to “see themselves,” but then she quickly moves to her own individual desire for black representation by placing herself in the position of the viewer. Ultimately, she also wanted to see black people within roles where they could express their own opinions and intellect, which are normally reserved for white Brazilians on mainstream television. Then she moved to a poor Afro-Brazilian constituency, who she thought to be poor favela residents. She assumed that they are ashamed to be black, and greater representation on television (and elsewhere) will instill within them a feeling of pride. For her, the image of Afro-Brazilians that have the capacity to inspire pride is that of a cultured, smart Afro-Brazilian man or woman. Like the other journalist, the executive producer wanted to produce representations that she wanted to see and she thought necessary for others to see. While I don’t deny that the ways in which people are represented can inform their self-esteem, nor do I dispute the sincerity of her motives, the executive producer

presented a narrow view of an uplifting image and ultimately asserted another form of hegemony by allowing for herself to represent the diversity of the Afro-Brazilian population in general, and marginalized, poor Afro-Brazilians in particular.

Barry Dornfeld argues that the ways in which producers imagine and construct potential audiences effects the content of the media text itself. He observed, that “producers’ projections about their audiences greatly affect the selection, encoding, and structuring of the media forms these institutions are engaged” (1998: 13). The images TV da Gente workers produced, reflected what they wanted to watch. When I directly asked one of the media workers, who had a background in news journalism about his target audience and if the audience would want to watch TV da Gente’s programs, he immediately referenced himself, his own views of the mainstream media, and how he attempted to enact change.

I particularly had an assessment that coverage of the mainstream media leaves a lot to be desired around issues of interest of black people. It still portrays the black population so often as stereotypes in the press. The areas where blacks appear more are police, sports, arts and entertainment and less on economics, politics, so we thought it was possible to cover the everyday, but taking care not incur these problems that we detected in normal coverage in journalism.

He follows in the general theme of wanting to represent Afro-Brazilians in ways that the mainstream media did not. He describes the factors that motivated program development through the absences that he perceived within the media, not as ideas of what viewers would want to watch. He offers program production that is a critique or a corrective to mainstream media, not a desirable product for viewing consumption. He places himself, and the other workers, as the primary audience and incorporated themes into the programs that they wanted to see. The irony of foregrounding one type of image within an activist project of black racial representation can be seen as generated from the common practices of media producers when developing and imagining the purpose of and audience for visual content.

With social justice and activism informing the representational agenda at TV da Gente, workers there gave little thought to producing an entertaining product for the audience's consumption. In discussing the production of programs at PBS, Barry Dornfeld found that documentary producers tried to "maintain a balance between a pedagogical mission and a populist one, and to simultaneously assert its roles in education/enlightenment and leisure/entertainment, spreading them more broadly across social classes" (1998: 88). Dornfeld describes media producers who attempted to interject entertainment into their programs with an educational message in order to avoid the label elitist and attract an audience that might otherwise tune in to other mainstream networks. Dornfeld's findings coupled with TV da Gente's failure suggest that entertainment is an integral aspect of television production and a crucial factor in attracting a viewing audience. Although TV da Gente did follow the formats of mainstream television, they were missing the blockbusters of Brazilian television, which include soap operas, sitcoms, and large studio shows. TV da Gente did not feature any well-known personalities on the program, including their own founder Netinho, who had a national presence through music and television. Additionally, they did not consciously consider balancing social justice and pleasure within a majority of their programs, which may have been necessary to have a chance at commercial viability. To put it simply, they mobilized the popular medium of television without employing popular formats or content of typical programs.

Attention to TV da Gente producers conceptions of the audience may lead one to believe that all black media projects would fail. Thus, success of *Revista Raça* and the production practices of its workers suggest that knowledge of audience and balance of content between entertainment and information is important to sustain the life of the media vehicle. During an interview with Mauricio Pestana, the advisor to *Revista Raça*, he shared with me the information they had about their audience and what this knowledge meant for content production:

Revista Raça's readership is 80% female, young, between the ages of 14 and 25 years old. There are other people who read who are older but this category is less. The readership is not middle class, they are in the periphery. But they are into fashion. What I'm trying to do is bring information to them, in their own language and make an interpretation that they can read. So, the text has to be short because if we make the text too long they won't read.

Mauricio Pestana knew the general age range and sex of the readers, which informed his agenda for content creation. He knew they were young, not middle class, and into fashion. The magazine is full of fashion spreads highlighting the latest trends and styles. They include information on hair styles, black hair maintenance, and make up tips for women with dark skin. Throughout the magazine a reader can also find several stories about hip-hop artists and other popular musicians as well as information about the latest Afro-Brazilian soap opera actors and actresses. Mauricio included the entertainment that *Revista Raça's* audience would look for and find immediately attractive. Between these entertainment stories, Mauricio also included profiles of Afro-Brazilian business and political leaders, news about the latest struggles for racial inclusion such as affirmative action, and information that teachers could use that complies with law 10.639. Unlike TV da Gente, Mauricio had knowledge of what his readers would want to see and he aimed to give it to them. Like the creators of the PBS series that Barry Dornfeld worked with, Mauricio balanced this focus on entertainment with information that he thought would attune the consciousness of his readers to the current racial and political climate.

A Question of Advertising

While the producers' projected ideas about television audiences are important to the creation of media texts, the actual presence of the audience is critical for the pragmatic requirements of commercial media's existence: advertising. Conceição, the executive producer, said to me that she went down to the center that tracks each television networks' viewership

(IGBE) and TV da Gente's programs garnered so few views, that many of their time slots were not tracked. Some of the program producers and presenters did share with me stories of their own personal interaction with viewers who recognized them from the channel, however these sporadic pockets of audience support did not constitute the numbers that an advertiser would deem worthy.

Advertisers ability to reach an audience, whose presence they can determine through tracking agencies, constitutes the economic relationship upon which commercial television's existence is predicated. McCarthy (2001) drew attention to the importance of the audience for commercial program's existence. She reframes the idea of the television program as an income producing commodity to insist that the audience is the commodity for sale by the television network for corporate advertisers to access. She draws from the work of communications researcher Dallas Smythe (1977) to assert that,

The commodity that networks sell to advertisers is not a time slot within a programme but rather an audience. Advertising's relation to the economics of television is thus very distinct from that of the non-fiction genres in which it appears. Whereas the latter, in combination with the programmes that comprise them and the ratings that quantify their audiences, are involved in the *production* of the 'audience commodity' by attracting viewers, advertising can be thought of as the consumption of this commodity by the sponsor, that is, as a 'use value' purchased by a corporation and put to use in the act of airing. (2001: 94)

Following this understanding of the audience as a commodity, the absence of an audience product renders a television network dependent on other sources of funding and may lead to its eventual demise. TV da Gente did rely on funds from the Angolan government and investors, however, when this support ran dry they did not have the commercial support to sustain and continue their program production.

If audience is a commodity, one would have to question the value that a black audience in Brazil would have for potential sponsors attempting to sell their products. In Brazil, advertising companies operate within the racial field of images that relegates Afro-Brazilians to the

representational margins within commercials and ads. Anthropologist, Carmen Rial (2001) studied advertising professionals during the 1990's and she wrote about a conversation she had with an ad worker for São Paulo's branch of the U.S. advertising firm MacCanErikson about importing U.S. produced ads to a Brazilian commercial context.

I was studying the process of globalization in advertising and I was surprised when he revealed that the principal impediment to the importation of U.S. advertising texts was not legal, but that the U.S. advertisements include blacks at a level that is unacceptable in Brazil. That is, the presence of blacks required the Brazilian divisions of multinational advertising agencies to adapt the U.S. advertisements so that they correspond to a supposed racist imaginary of the Brazilian consumer. In fact, as I found at the time, from random observations of television in our two countries, black men and women only appeared in Brazilian commercials in the role of low paid employees, mostly as maids (drivers, gardeners, cooks). In the United States, to the contrary, black men and women appeared driving their own cars, drinking Coca-Cola, and doing everything that whites do. (2001: 5-6)

Rial found that Brazilian advertising professionals and the ads they created participated within Brazilian ideas about race and nation that delineate the roles for Afro-Brazilians to be within low wage work or athletics. U.S. American ads with African Americans "doing everything that whites do" were thought to be an unacceptable and unmarketable image of blackness that would fail to sell a consumer product. This refusal to include Afro-Brazilians within images of ordinary blackness in the realm of advertising and marketing makes it doubtful that companies and advertisers would want to attach their products to a segmented television network with more Afro-Brazilian presenters and hosts than mainstream television who were engaged within a "struggle to be ordinary."

The press and general public accusations of racism against *TV da Gente*, would affect their potential to attract commercial advertisements. Sociologist, Florestan Fernandes in his study *The Negro in Brazilian Society* has famously identified Brazilians' "prejudice of having no prejudice." This means that they operate under the assumption that racism and discrimination do not exist and therefore do not need to enact policies, programs or projects, like *TV da Gente*, to

combat the problem, which only perpetuates inequality along racial lines. Articulating a specific racial agenda that calls attention to prejudice in the mainstream media can be considered “unbrazilian” and for an advertiser to lend their support to such an anti nationalist endeavor could jeopardize the associations and messages of the product.

It is questionable whether a corporation would want to market their product to favela residents, who exist within the economic and spatial margins of many of Brazil’s cities. Although those who reside in favelas participate within the consumer market, they may not be viewed as valuable consumers when compared to the wealthier and middle class populations. TV da Gente presented those who live in favelas and poor Afro-Brazilians as their targeted audience, which may not constitute an economically viable strategy to gain commercial advertisements.

Only the Popular Survive

The end of TV da Gente was located within their inability to generate an income that could sustain a continuation of their television programs. With social justice and activism guiding their representational imaginations and practices, they fell victim to the tensions that exist between protest and commercial media’s economic structure. These tensions may have manifested themselves in their failure to consider the desires of their targeted audience when forming ideas for program production and then the stigma attached to their mission of racial empowerment within the national and cultural sphere of Brazilian life. Failure to attract an audience would leave most television networks commercially unviable and TV da Gente also had to contend with the question of whether corporations would want to associate their product with a controversial agenda or market their product to a poor and marginal target audience. TV da Gente workers and producers took a risk by pursuing television as a venue for their activism due to the television

industry's conservative nature underwritten by a financial logic that promotes the production of programs that the masses will tolerate rather than programs that a handful of people love.

Some of the TV da Gente workers saw racial changes within the media landscape in Brazil evidenced by the increasing representation of Afro-Brazilians on television after TV da Gente. A program director noted an observance of more Afro-Brazilians on mainstream networks and attributed this phenomenon to TV da Gente as a catalyst that called attention to the dearth of black Brazilians in the media.

SBT has a black female presenter, TV Culture, Rede Record, everyone, Globo already had some, but after TV da Gente went on the air with more black reporters and presenters began to appear. Before, it was difficult, TV da Gente entered the television market with attitude. Other networks started to follow our lead, it was a massive thing.

While I cannot prove a direct cause and effect relationship between TV da Gente and the increase of Afro-Brazilians on television, this worker did notice more black representation after TV da Gente went off the air. In doing so, she found that TV da Gente did make a difference within the mediated terrain of Brazilian life by illuminating the issue and inviting other networks to fill in the void.

In the U.S. African Americans are generally recognized as strong consumers with surplus money to purchase various luxury products and common goods. African American constituencies are targeted through segmented advertising campaigns by national corporations under the auspices that they constitute a distinct racial group with cultural values that differ from mainstream U.S. America. These segmented ads predominate within African American segmented media vehicles, such as Black Entertainment Television and magazines like Ebony and Essence. Yet, even with this recognized purchasing power, African American media is not immune to the problems of financing. The Black Family Channel in the U.S., which partnered with TV da Gente, eventually went out of business. The problems of TV da Gente, are strikingly

similar to other start-up black media networks in the United States and smaller black media projects in São Paulo, which is fundamentally a struggle to survive.

CONCLUSION

“LOOK, A NEGRO”:

VISUAL ACTIVISM AND SEEING RACE WITHIN CULTURAL POLITICS

On one of my meetings with Oswaldo, we were walking in the crowded São Paulo streets in the *Centro* section of the city near the *Praça de Republica*. As I dodged the bodies that threatened to push me from Oswaldo’s side and listen to him elaborate on Afro-Brazilian representation, he suddenly stopped in front of one of the magazine stands (*bancos de revistas*) that permanently occupy the sidewalk in São Paulo. These stands typically display the covers of the current magazines on the outer walls facing the street to alert those who pass by about their products. Oswaldo looked at the magazine stand, pointed to the covers, and said, “look at the covers of the magazines in this stand. They are all white people. Of course except for Race Magazine.” After noting the conspicuous absence of Afro-Brazilians on the magazines, he recounted: “I remember one time a fashion magazine did put a black model on the cover. And one of the letters to the editor in the next magazine issue said she was glad that they could include a black model but they should not forget about other Brazilians for future covers.” This memory indexed the general resistance that attempts at Afro-Brazilian representation receive from the public, which include accusations of racism or unfairness for targeting a particular racial group. For him these magazine covers were visible, undisputable proof of the unequal visual relations where Afro-Brazilians were visually marginalized and that initiatives like TV da Gente were necessary for Afro-Brazilian media inclusion.

By way of a conclusion, I would like to present a framework for understanding how media workers’ everyday actions and their involvement with alternative media vehicles, like TV da Gente, enact a cultural politics that implicates vision, relations of seeing, and image

production in their movements to challenge long term and entrenched forms of social inequality. Alvarez, Dagnino, and Escobar contend that, “when movements deploy alternative conceptions of woman, nature, race, economy, democracy or citizenship that unsettle dominant cultural meanings, they enact a cultural politics” (1998: 7). My research interlocutors acts of pointing, looking, and producing alternative images communicated their understanding of a racial order of vision that organized public images. This understanding undermines the idea of racial democracy and other discursive attempts to silence discussions of racial inequality in Brazil. Through their actions, words, and sentiments my interlocutors intentionally put forward a point of view that centralized race as a constitutive force in the representational and social organization of daily life.

I contribute the term “visual activism” to describe the form of cultural politics that targets the field of vision and unequal visual relations as a space to effect social change. Alternative media can be a critical space in which visual activists critique the existing representational order by envisioning alternative images of more equitable inclusion. However, “visual activism” does not require access to the means of media production for its enactment. Everyday people carry out visual activism in their daily actions, gestures, and words that discursively label the visual field as inequitable and unjust in its portrayal of particular groups, social issues, or minority life and culture. For me, this is exemplified by Oswaldo drawing my attention to the magazine stand, Conceição yelling at the television for its hegemonic whiteness in advertising, and the countless Afro-Brazilians who registered their frustrations with the mainstream media in everyday conversations. The federal hearings called the Means of Communication and Racial Diversity (*Meios de Comunicação e Diversidade Racial*) held in 1998 is also an example of visual activism in an organized venue where individual testimonials brought to bare multiple perspectives on the issue of Afro-Brazilians’ marginal presence within public culture. Visual

activists question the authority of the dominant public representations that purport to display life as it is lived by their incessant acts of analyzing, gesturing towards, and undermining the seamlessness through which these images attempt to orient, construct, and fix the national, cultural, and social fabric.

To be sure, visual activists put forward their views within a vastly uneven terrain of power relations. Pointing at magazines and yelling at televisions remain generally unseen and unrecognized by commercial media producers, which renders these strategies futile in changing the content presented in these mediums. Visual activists working within the belly of the beast of commercial media establishments may find that their attempts to introduce alternative content into the media go unheard by the editors and other mediating powers. These marginal acts of speaking, looking, and gesturing are similar to James Scott's description of everyday forms of ideological resistance that we can find "close to the ground, rooted firmly in the homely but meaningful realities of daily experience" (1985: 348). If visual activists do have access to the means of media production, their products could potentially remain unwatched or unacknowledged by mass audiences and potential sources of financial support. These actions may not bring about immediate social change but they serve to mitigate marginalizing visual conditions in everyday life.

Acts of Looking and Visual Activism

The social and political implications of looking have emerged as key themes in this dissertation. Afro-Brazilian visual activists constantly pointed to the ways in which public images on television and in magazines (mis)represented them through the national cultural images of athletes and performers or as service providers, slum dwellers, or slaves. From the

point of view of many of my research participants, these images expressed a racial order as one where the national celebration of Afro-Brazilians in cultural roles masked their dominance within the lower sectors of employment. Part of what constitutes an act of resistance is to vocalize the problem of these images and insist that they be perceived within a racial logic that maps inequality, which is to insist that people see in new ways. Acts of looking that resist racial democracy see *negros*²², and recognize the patterns that organize their visibility and invisibility in public life. These resistant acts of looking then link these patterns to historical and contemporary processes of economic, social, political, and educational exclusion.

In order to achieve this way of seeing, the viewer has to see race and acknowledge its existence in order to perceive where and why *negros* are and are not present in public images. These resistant acts of looking directed towards public culture were developed by many of my interlocutors through a knowledge produced by a DuBoisian sense of double consciousness, which he describes as “this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others” (1990: 8). They articulate a sense of double vision that can see the world as others say it is – that is through racial democracy – and another that sees the world through the lens of their experiences of racism and racial marginalization. The national commercial media and the looks from other people indicate to my interlocutors that they are seen as racial others. Arriving at this way of seeing prompted them to see race and acknowledge its existence in order to perceive where and why *negros* are and are not present in public images. These resistant acts of looking and pointing may become generated out of an epistemological foundation of double vision that fuels the way in which many Afro-Brazilian visual activists critique these mainstream images.

Visual activists understand that acts of looking are not always innocent and can be loaded

²² I purposefully switch to the term negro in this chapter to draw attention to the congruence between Fanon’s statement and the contemporary insistence by many Afro-Brazilians to use the term. I think this calls attention to my argument for a reinterpretation of Fanon’s “Look, a Negro” moment as one for the potential for liberation or consciousness raising.

with racial and political meanings. The narratives of black professional media workers illuminate the ways in which they interpreted the various glances, stares, and evasions of looking as a refusal to see them as professional workers or as a refusal to include their proposed content within the media vehicles that employed them. These acts of looking that recognized their race in demeaning ways accompanied denial of their suggestions for content and misrecognitions of them as a professional journalists. Others' refusal to see them as professional workers exposed the contradictions of a racial order that claimed the non-existence of race or racism, yet excluded Afro-Brazilians from the image of middle class professionalism. My interlocutors claimed to lack a voice within mainstream media, felt disheartened, and lonely in their work, which drove them to segmented media production as a space to create their vision.

Segmented black media, vehicles like TV da Gente, are spaces of visual activism where their producers attempted to change, disrupt, or critique the field of vision by proposing new and different ways of presenting Afro-Brazilians. These media products provide a visual alternative to mainstream media. My interlocutors imagined that their creations offered Afro-Brazilian audiences other images of blackness to view, that would in turn provide a black viewer with a new way of seeing themselves with self esteem and pride. For all viewers, they offered images that reinterpreted the place of Afro-Brazilians through the lens of professional work, civic responsibility, and education.

Visual activism can be diasporic or transnational in its execution, reach, and resource acquisition. TV da Gente workers mobilized inspiration and visual images from the United States in their own acts of critical black representation. They sought after and received financial resources from Angola in exchange for their programs produced in Brazil. The circulation of images, television programs, and other media productions exceeds the boundaries of the nation, making them available to service local acts of black visibility and image production in far-flung

places. Digital technologies like television and the internet serve to quickly liberate images from the confines of their productive origins, leading to a global, transnational, or diasporic archive of images available for those who have access to and a need for their use.

My research interlocuters wanted to change the ways in which they and other Afro-Brazilians were seen. Their visual activism included a desire to be seen in ways that everyone else is, to not be seen as different, or to be seen as ordinary. Thus, their representations attempted to achieve this feat. But these attempts can be thwarted by the ways in which the visual is already ordered and the dominant perceptions that many people already have about Afro-Brazilians.

Looking at *Negros*

I chose the name for the conclusion from Frantz Fanon's widely cited narrative of racial interpellation and objectification in *The Fact of Blackness* to suggest that acts of looking can be both objectifying and emancipatory depending on the context of the interaction. Stuart Hall has pointed out that, "the racist interpellations can become themselves the sites and stakes in the ideological struggle, occupied and redefined to become the elementary forms of oppositional formation" (1980: 342). My research interlocuters insistence on seeing the patterns of where *negros* are and are not visible, both in images and the material relations of everyday life, was part of a larger activist project of illuminating and vocalizing racial inequality in the face of racial democracy's silencing mechanisms. It is within this milieu that many Afro-Brazilian activists demand that racial terminology be used in identifying themselves as *negro*, in labeling other people of African descent as *negro*, and in tracking governmental statistics with the category of *negro*. In short, seeing *negros* in specific ways has been a crucial part of black activism in São Paulo, and within other parts of Brazil.

Gestures of pointing out black invisibility, making connections to the racial order, and

producing images of a black presence participate within a project of visual activism. These actions render the current mainstream circulation of public images suspect by subjecting them to scrutiny and placing them within a larger framework of systematic inequality and institutional marginalization of Afro-Brazilians. These actions seek to unfix these mainstream images by calling into question their legitimacy to represent the social world. They also seek to replace these images with alternative renditions of how life is as they see it and of how life could be. They present plausible visions of Afro-Brazilians as ordinary, that seek to widen the range of available images of belonging for Afro-Brazilians in mediated representations and in so doing outline possible scenarios of more equitable relations of vision, in which *negros* are seen no differently than anyone else.

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