

TORNAR-SE NEGRO & THINKING BEAUTIFUL

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I was born in the Congo.
I walked to the Fertile Crescent and built the sphinx.
I designed a pyramid so tough that a star
that only glows every one hundred years falls
into the center giving divine perfect light.
I am bad.
I sat on the throne
drinking nectar with Allah.
I got hot and sent an ice age to Europe
to cool my thirst.
My oldest daughter is Nefertiti.
The tears from my birth pains
created the Nile.
I am a beautiful woman.
I gazed on the forest and burned
out the Sahara desert.
With a packet of goat's meat
and a change of clothes,
I crossed it in two hours.
I am a gazelle so swift,
so swift you can't catch me.
For a birthday present when he was three,
I gave my son Hannibal an elephant.
He gave me Rome for mother's day.
My strength flows ever on.
My son Noah built an ark and
I stood proudly at the helm
as we sailed on a soft summer day.
I turned myself into myself and was Jesus.
Men intone my loving name.
All praises all praises,
I am the one who would save.
I sowed diamonds in my back yard.
My bowels deliver uranium.
The filings from my fingernails are
semi-precious jewels.
On a trip north,
I caught a cold and blew
my nose giving oil to the Arab world.
I am so hip even my errors are correct.
I sailed west to reach east and had to round off
the earth as I went.
The hair from my head thinned and gold was laid
across three continents.
I am so perfect so divine so ethereal so surreal.
I cannot be comprehended except by my permission.
I mean...I...can fly
like a bird in the sky...

-“ EGO TRIP”
NIKKI GIOVANNI

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ABSTRACT-

In 1990, the census reported that Brazilian’s population was 55.3 percent *branco*, 39.3 percent *parda*, 4.9 percent *negro*, and 0.5 percent *Indio*.¹ In response to complaints that these racial identities were not sufficient, the IBEG conducted a survey where they asked people “Qual é sua cor?” This survey resulted in a list of 134 different racial identities that reflect the complexities of race in Brazil due to a history of miscegenation. At the two extremes of this racial spectrum is *branco* and *negro*. These two extremes have cultural and historical significance that I examine through scholarly research. In the field, I examined the implications of this historical spectrum in the lives of young people of Afro-descent in Bahia by discussing the ways in which racial identity is created and understood today as well as what elements are involved in this formation. My intentions were to examine how the creation of these racial identities is a reflection of internalized racism in that it values whiteness over blackness, paying specific attention to how these identities also endorse a hierarchy of beauty that idealizes European traits. Instead, through my research at CEAFFRO I met a group of individuals who identity as being of

¹ Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics. “What Color are You?” In Robert M. Levine and John J. Crocitti (eds.) **The Brazilian Reader: History, Culture, Politics**. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999.

Afro-descent and affirm their identity as Afro-Brazilians. Therefore, this paper is about the affirmation of an Afro-Brazilian identity and the role of aesthetics in this formation.

METHODOLOGY-

My methodology consists of two forms of collecting field data: observation and interviews. Since our arrival in March, I have been observing various aspects of Brazilian society. Without realizing that I was analyzing the images in front of me, I would note the physical appearances of television host or popular actors or persona as well as how Brazilians perceived these people: such as Diego from Big Brother and Xuxa. I took cues from the media (television, movies, and magazine) of what is the Brazilian standard of beauty. Unlike my original proposal, I realized it was not necessary for me to experience the culture of hair salons and my time was best spent analyzing the media and working closely with my organization. I spent the majority of my time getting to know the group of students who form the “Dialogo de Cotistas” at CEAFFRO, in Salvador de Bahia.

Salvador is a large city in the costal northeast of Brazil. To tourists and Brazilians alike it is associated with the image of the traditional Bahianas, the art form of caboeira and carnival. In addition, Salvador is perceived as one of Brazil’s cities with the strongest African presence both culturally and demographically. According to the 2000 census, 73.2 % of the Bahian population identifies themselves as either *pretas* or *pardas*². Salvador is the ideal location for my research due to its concentration of people of Afro-descent. My original methodology was to interview Afro-Brazilians about these issues but since being in the field, I have learned that there is a difference between Afro-

² IBEG 2000 census:
<http://www.ibge.gov.br/home/presidencia/noticias/20122002censo.shtm>

Brazilian and of people of Afro-descent. I thus decided to change my methodology and spoke to people of Afro-descent.

The group of students, the cotistas- which literally means quotas, is a physically diverse group of students who all attend the Universidade Federal de Bahia but study different majors. They meet at CEAFFRO, a program in conjunction with CEAO- Centro de Estudos de Afro-Orientais and UFBA to discuss their experiences at the university. CEAFFRO's mission is "enfrentar todas as formas de racismo e sexismo para promover a igualdade de oportunidades entre os negros e não-negros e entre mulheres e homens, por meio de ações educação e profissionalização direcionadas á comunidade negra, com foco na identidade racial e de gênero".³ Since 1995 they have worked in conjunction with UFBA and CEAO to establish a dialogue between the university and organizations involved with the Black movement in Bahia. UFBA like many of the Federal Universities in Brazil has a predominately white and middle class to wealthy student body. The quota policy at the UFBA as well as other federal universities is slowly but shortly changing the student body to "café com leite".⁴ The majority of the cotistas identify or acknowledge being of Afro-descent and come from various peripheral neighborhoods that are range from forty-five minutes to two hours outside of the main city center.⁵

I initially passed a survey/questionnaire to the cotistas to get a general sense of who they were as well as collect data from as many of the students as possible. I then used these surveys to select six girls in which I interviewed discussing some of the survey

³ **Compromisso Institucional** , CEAFFRO pamphlet- "To combat all forms of racism and sexism, to promote equal opportunity between black and non-blacks and between women and men, through the means of education and vocational education for the black community, with a focus on racial identity and gender. (Translated by Ayana)

⁴ ISP Field Journal, Event (5.4.07), p.2

⁵ ISP Field Journal, Table 4: Number of Students of Afro-descendent, p. 16

questions in depth. I spoke to Claudia, Daiane, Carla, LÍria, Larissa and Alessandra asking them questions about standards of beauty, racism, their childhood, their involvement with CEAFFRO & the “dialogo de cotistas” and most importantly, how and what is the significance of their racial identity. In addition to interviews, I spent a lot of time observing the students as a group since one’s self-love and self-acceptance is obvious in the way one carries himself/herself or as Carla said when she linked her blackness to her way of being.⁶

TERMS:

Cotistas: generally means quotas referring to Brazil’s affirmative action programs; in this context to refer to the students in the CEAFFRO program “O dialogo de Cotistas” who are students at UFBA.

UFBA: Federal University of Bahia

Rastafari: not the religion or a person that practices the religion; Brazilians use rastafari to refer to the hairstyle of dreads.

Black or Black Power: this is also referring to a hairstyle, the afro; some people also use afro but it is mostly called “Black” or “Black Power” because of the hairstyle’s connection to the Black Power movement in the United States during the 1970’s.

Cabelo crespo: naturally curly or wavy hair

Novelas: Soap-opera programs

Tornar-se (negro): translated means to become (black); refers to the formation or process one goes through in claiming a black identity

Pelourinho: located in cidade alta (the high city) in Salvador, Bahia. This is the historic district of Salvador and now is also the tourist attraction due to the architecture, churches, and arenas for live music.

⁶ ISP Field Journal, Interview with Carla (5.29.07), p.37

TERMS FOR RACIAL IDENTITIES-

****Note:** Throughout the paper I use a number of various terms, sometimes interchangeable. When someone said the identity in Portuguese, I will write it as such, otherwise I will use the English translations**

Preto(a): more politically correct term for a Black person, the American equivalent to African-American; a dark brown to black skin complexion with kinky hair and a medium to wide nose and lips⁷

Negro(a): Black person

Pardo(a): Brown person; dark brown

Branco(a): White person; people with a pale/light skin complexion with straight to slightly wavy hair and narrow nose and lip⁸

Indio(a)/Indígena: Indian/ Indigenous

Amarelo(a): yellow⁹

Moreno(a): a person with medium brown skin with straight to wavy hair, a narrow to medium nose and lips¹⁰

Mulatto(a): a person with medium to light brown skin with kinky hair and medium to wide nose and lips¹¹; mixture of white and Negro¹²

Afro-descendente: A person of Afro-decent; not necessarily the same as identifying as Black or Afro-Brazilian since they possess an African genotype but may not have the phenotype¹³

Afro-brasileiro: an identity combining African ancestry and a Black identity¹⁴

Negão: slang for a black person

⁷ Peeve, Penn R.. "Race and Social Mobility in a Brazilian Industrial Town" **Luso-Brazilian Review**, vol. **14**, no. **2** (Winter, 1977), pp.238-9.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics. "What Color are You?"

¹⁰ Peeve, Penn R.. "Race and Social Mobility in a Brazilian Industrial Town", pp.238-9.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics. "What Color are You?"

¹³ ISP Field Notes, Thoughts (5.17.07), p.12

¹⁴ Ibid.

Negõna: slang for a black female; also used to mean pretty black girl

Sarará: mulatta with reddish kinky hair, aquiline nose¹⁵

Puxa-para-branca: resembling white more than a mulatta¹⁶

Cabo-verde: black; person from Cape Verde¹⁷

Cabocla: mixture of white, Negro, and Indian¹⁸

INTRODUCTION:

This paper is as much about me as it is about the cotistas and racial identity in Brazil. My research is about the quest for self-love, defining your racial identity and really believing that people of non-European ancestry are beautiful too.

I began my background research for this topic years ago. I have twenty years of field research since everyday, my life as a black woman in both the U.S. and in the world is about occupying the space of the other (the non-white). I reference the world because it's important to remember that the standard of beauty promotes Eurocentric traits over all other ethnic traits. This is not just a problem in the United States and Brazil or countries that have a history of slavery. The trend towards promoting Eurocentric physical traits over all others is a product of colonialism and imperialism that has left no corner of the world undisturbed. It is for this reason, why Asian women are going under the knife to "fix" their eyes to create eyelids, why most of the female Bollywood stars in India wear blue & green colored contacts, why "good hair" is still something both desired by many African-Americans and why a pretty young Brazilian woman of Afro-descent would correct someone with *morena* when they call her *negra*.

¹⁵ Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics. "What Color are You?"

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

While doing my research, I realized that this too was my own quest in claiming my racial identity and truly believing that black is also beautiful. I do not have white skin, blue eyes, long blonde hair and big breast- all traits that are praised by dominant American culture. I have just the contrary, brown to dark unevenly tanned skin with red undertones that come from my father's Carib heritage. I have chemically straightened brown hair and a number of physical features that I vacillate between loving and hating: my nose, my thighs, my butt, and my hips. Even though raised in a household that promoted black self-love to the extent that my mother made Santa brown and I could only play with Black Barbie dolls, I am still not content with all of my features that show my African heritage. Despite my insecurities, I could never identify myself as something other than black like many people of Afro-descent do in Brazil. The difference is that in America, the language does not exist while in Brazil it does. Even though both the United States and Brazil had a period of colonialism and slavery, the racial identities created are different due to the nature of Brazil's history. The U.S. uses the "one drop rule" referring to the fact that one-drop of African blood makes you black while Brazil does not have the same genetic qualification for race. Brazil's racial history allows for people of Afro-descent to vacillate along the racial spectrum and identify as something else rather than black.

How is it that Brazil, a country that received the largest number of slaves has such a small black population? If one believed the 2000 census they would believe that this is true. More than half the total Brazilian population, roughly 91 million, 57%, identified as being *branco*, 38.4% as *pardo*, 6.2 % as *preto*, .45% as *amarela* and .4% as *indígena*. According to IBEG census, since 1940 the *preto* population has decreased from 14.64%,

reaching a low in 1991 with only 5% and starting to grow more recently in 2000 to 6% of the population. Corresponding to this decline is the decline of the *branca* population in Brazil that has fallen from 63.47% since 1940 but is also recently increasing. The *Parda* population in Brazil, however, has been growing since 1940 from 21.21% to 38.45% of the population.¹⁹ The under representation of Afro-Brazilians population in the census and the reality proves that there is a large disparity. The 1990's IBEG investigation shed some light on the situation where it yielded a list of more than a hundred terms people used to describe their racial identities.²⁰ That means the disparities in the census derive from the fact that people of Afro-descent were not calling themselves *pretos* but were identifying with a series of other racial identities like , *puxa-para-branca*, *moreno*, *cabo-verde*, *cabocla*, and *mulato*, to name a few. The racial identities operate on a “continuum from black to white, according to a clustering of critical phenotypic traits, namely, dark to light skin color, straight to kinky hair, and wide to narrow nasal and labial features” where one identifies depending on these features.²¹

Why would one negotiate along this continuum instead of identifying themselves as negro is a reflection the historical and cultural space people of Afro-descent have occupied in Brazilian history. In a newspaper article discussing the belief that “Fortaleza does not have black people” even though 67% of the population is, a man shared his experience where “um dia, uma senhora na rua me chamou de moreno. Eu disse pra ela que eu não sou moreno, sou negro. E ela disse: não fala isso aqui, não é bom nome!”²²

¹⁹ IBEG 2000 Census

²⁰ Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics. “What Color are You?”

²¹ Peeve, Penn R.. “Race and Social Mobility in a Brazilian Industrial Town” p.238.

²² “Negritude” **O Povo**: Vida & Arte Cultura, 13 de abril de 07. “ One day a lady on the street called me moreno. I told her that I was not Moreno, I was Black. She said that I should not say this here, [black] is not a good name”.

The woman's response highlights society's association with black; that it is a bad thing and not an identity one would want to claim. When I asked Carla to define racism, she too gave me a similar example,

I was at the bus stop and a *negro* woman with skin darker than mine was there with her young son. She was pointing to the mud on the street and telling him not to make friends with people the color of mud. She said that people with this color skin [black people] were not good people. The boy was a little kid and agreed with his mom. The mom continued and said that your father is *negro* and he is an animal, he is a monkey, he is King Kong, and not a good person and that you should stay away from people like that. I interrupted the woman and told her to stop and the woman responded, asking me why I was ease-dropping? She went back to her son and said see, how *negro* people listen to other people's conversation, they are not good people. I told the woman that she should keep her ideas to herself but should not pass them along to her child since he was obviously *negro* and she was only going to confuse the boy later.²³

When I asked her why this was racism she said because the woman did not believe she was black, she must of thought she was *morena* or *parda* but her son is going to have problems with his identity because she told him to deny everything he is. Similar to passing for white, where one lives as a white person making the decision that it is better to be the other, negotiating an identity on the spectrum, calling yourself *morena* or *padra* over *negro* can mean that you are pledging allegiance to an identity that you think is better. It is my belief that this denial of Afro-descent, either through passing or not identifying, is a manifestation of racism, where one does not want to identify as black because of societal prejudices. The students at CEAFFRO and Marta also share this thought as she defined racism as an ideology that affects all aspects of life where differences in race and culture become a question of inequality and inferiority where one has more value than another.²⁴ In Brazil, a country with a colonial past, the value is

²³ ISP Field Journal, Interview with Carla (5.29.07), p. 38.

²⁴ ISP Field Journal, Interview with Marta (5.30.07.), p.42.

placed on Eurocentric culture and values with African and Indigenous culture being at the lower end of the hierarchy.

THE HISTORY OF RACE IN BRAZIL:

As history is the reason why many of the girls identify as being *negras*, examining history will also provide insight for why many Afro-Brazilians do the opposite. During the more than three centuries of slavery in Brazil, Brazil received the largest number of African slaves. It was also the last country to abolish slavery. When slavery was finally legally abolished on May 13, 1888, more than 3 million African slaves had been sent to Brazil.²⁵ Apart from the Portuguese's colonizing ideology was the thought that blacks were soulless and deserving of their maltreatment. They also justified their actions using social Darwinism where the stronger both physically and culturally were supposed to dominate the weaker and savage.²⁶ Racism in Brazil begins here, not just with the first European contact with African slaves but with their contact with Indigenous people.

Through horrific slave practices that both demoralized the body and the psyche the Portuguese start to promote the Eurocentric ideal over all other. European or white, having a soul and a human with African or black at the other spectrum as soulless and an animal. It is also slavery that turns the body of a black person into an object. The future implications, a reflection of the historical space the black body once occupied, is that black people start to believe that to be black is to be ugly and to possess animal-like features. The body of a Black woman occupied an even worse position where, to be a

²⁵ Ferreira, Ricardo Franklin. **Afro Descendente: Identidade em Construção** (Rio Janeiro, RJ: Rallas Editora, 2000), p.39.

²⁶ Schwartz, Lilia K. Moritz. **Raca como Negociação: Sobre Teorias Raciais em Finais do Século XIX no Brasil** (Belo Horizonte, MG: Os Autores, 2000), p. 19.

black female was not to be a female at all as Sojourner highlights when she says “that man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place! And ain’t I a woman?” Discussing her own experience as a slave in the United States, she illustrates how white women were granted privileges of femininity and grace while Black women worked in the fields and had their femininity taken away from them.²⁷ In addition, female slaves were sexually exploited by the slave masters creating a strange dichotomy where black females were not considered women and at the same time viewed as overly sexualized beings. White women were filled with grace, pure and represented virtue while black women did not. This portrayal is present in modern Brazilian society with tales of Xica da Silva, the African slave who used her sexuality to gain freedom, which was later turned into a movie and a novela. The protagonist, **Taís Araújo** also starred in “Cor de Peçado”, “The Color of Sin”, whose opening has the title displayed on her bare chest linking her black body to all things sinful and devilish.²⁸

As a product of these forced interracial relationships, other racial identities were created, such as mulatto. Even though some people of Afro-descent identify as *mulattos* today its origins are rooted in the demoralization of Africans during slavery. Alessandra explains, “to those who do not know they feel complimented [when someone calls them these things] but who knows *mulatta* and the significance are offended. It is offensive.

²⁷ Truth, Sojourner. “Ain’t I a Woman?” delivered in 1851 at the Woman’s Convention in Akron, Ohio.

²⁸ ISP Field Notes, Observation of “Cor de Peçado” (5.7.07), pp.7-8.

Mula is a donkey. During slavery the whites considered slaves mulatta. It's a prerogative term. Those who know what it means, who know the history, are offended".²⁹

After the abolition of slavery in 1888, Brazilian society experiences an intense *embranquecimento* period, which literally means whitening. The *embranquecimento* and *mestiçagem* in Brazil has historically been viewed as a prime example of white supremacy in Latin America.³⁰ Even though during the three centuries of slavery, there were many interracial relationships between Portuguese, Indigenous people and African slaves, this period is distinctly characterized by a series of political practices that sort out the removal of African presence from all Brazilian society "utilizando-se de metáfora de um poderoso rio, que correspondia à herança portuguesa, que deveria "absorver os pequenos confluente das raças Índia e Ethiopica", o Brasil surgia representado da particularidade de sua mesclagem".³¹ The ideology still subscribing to the ideas of social Darwinism was put forth by Os Institutos Históricos e Geográficos who supported this notion that a whiter Brazilian population would mean a Brazil without conflict. This corresponds to a large European immigrant wave from Italy, Switzerland, Germany, Holland, Norway, Denmark, England, Australia and Spain sponsored by the Brazilian government to promote miscegenation that would dilute the Brazilian population: genetically and culturally.³² The history of miscegenation is a reality in Brazil that was aided by this ideology. It is also a product of the country being shaped by the arrival of the Portuguese, the genocide of large number of Indigenous persons and the arrival of

²⁹ ISP Field Notes, Interview with Alessandra, p.45

³⁰ Twine, France Winddance. **Racism in a Racial Democracy: the Maintenance of White Supremacy in Brazil** (New Brunswick,NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001), p.87.

³¹ Schwartz, Lilia K. Moritz. **Raca como Negociação: Sobre Teorias Raciais em Finais do Século XIX no Brasil**, p. 22. "Using the metaphor of a powerful river, that corresponds to Portuguese heritage that would absorb the small Indian and Ethiopian influences, leaving Brazil to appear as mixed-race."

³² Ibid, 26.

slaves.³³ Even though all the cotistas identified as being of Afro-descent many of them also recognized their other descendents, “I identify as of Indian-decent, Afro-decent and European decent even though I still do not like to admit this [European decent]”.³⁴

Also during this period, the Brazilian elites assumed a white identity as well as all of the associated European values. They established a dichotomy with a scale called “gradiente étnico, de tal maneira que a pessoa cujas características a aproximam do tipo branco tende a ser mais valorizada, e aquela cujas características são próximas do tipo negro tende a ser desvalorizada e socialmente repelida”.³⁵ As the dominating class with all the resources mainstream society is a reflection of their values and their ideals. Xuxa, one of Brazil’s most famous blonde hair, blue-eyed and white skinned celebrities is this ideal personified. She is just one example of the media images portrayed as a norm although she represents a select few. Amelia Simpson also concludes in her analysis, that the average Brazilian can not conform to the images portrayed in the media. She says “the media cut[s] across class lines to offer the same dream of happiness through the purchase of a refrigerator, a pork roast, or a Xuxa doll, to the rich who can buy them all and the poor who can afford none”.³⁶ The media is able to cut across class lines because in 1990 Brazil was ranked fourth in the world in number of television sets. It is also important to note, that in Brazil, the poor is predominately black meaning adding another factor where Xuxa becomes another commodity they cannot afford. Líria reiterates this point with “when we are children we want to be what we cannot, genetically we are black

³³ Ferreira, Ricardo Franklin. **Afro Descendente: Identidade em Construção**, p. 40.

³⁴ ISP Field Notes, Interview with Larissa (6.2.07), p. 48.

³⁵ Ferreira, Ricardo Franklin. **Afro Descendente: Identidade em Construção**, p. 42. “Ethnic gradient where a person with characteristic close to white [ones] is valued. The traits that are closer to black tend to be condemned and repelled”.

³⁶ Simpson, Amelia S.. “Xuxa and the Politics of Gender” in **Luso-Review**, vol. 30, no. 1: **Changing Images of the Brazilian Woman: Studies of Female Sexuality in Literature, Mass Media and Criminal Trials, 1884-1992**, (Summer, 1993), 99.

but we are faced with a European culture that the whites dominate”.³⁷ It is also for this reason that all of the young women interviewed played with white Barbie dolls while growing up. Only two, Daiane and Alessandra could remember having a *morena* doll but she too did not resemble them. Carla explained further that her dolls were all white and had light eyes, fine & small noses and straight hair, “now they are starting to have them [black dolls] but few people buy them because they do not think they are beautiful. People prefer the white dolls- they [black people] will always buy a white doll for their kids.”³⁸ Barbie is the unrealistic white ideal that even white women cannot live up to while Xuxa is the “realistic” standard of beauty. Xuxa is the ideal because of her beauty (with an emphasis on her European features), her youthfulness, and her privilege not only as a white-Brazilian but apart of the upper class. Since the 1990’s Xuxa’s presence in the media has declined but there are other Xuxa-like figures in the public eye. But even their presence is not needed as the media constantly represents the dominating culture in a flattering light in a way that promotes white ideals & whiteness and negates blackness. In Luis Caldas’s song, “Fricote” he condemns an African traits when he sings “nega do cabelo duro/ que não gostar de pentear/quando passa na baixa de tubo/ o negão começa a gritar”.³⁹ In novelas, blacks are generally limited to roles of drug dealers, drug addicts, unemployed people, overly comical to the point of caricatures, criminals or slaves.⁴⁰ In addition, according to one of the cotistas, Brazilian novelas love to reenact slavery as if this is the only history or role Afro-Brazilians have played in Brazilian society. The same student also noted that when there is an Afro-Brazilian in a significant role in a novela,

³⁷ ISP Field Notes, Interview with Líría (5.31.07.), p. 44.

³⁸ ISP Field Notes, Interview with Carla (5.28.07), p. 39

³⁹ Caldas, Luis. **Fricote**. “Deny your rough hair/ that does not like to be combed/ when pass by/ *negão* starts to shout” .

⁴⁰ ISP Field Notes, Events (5.4.07), p.2

the person is a “type of black person” meaning that he/she for various reasons is more accordance with Eurocentric values and traits.⁴¹

The notion of a “type of black person” speaks to of miscegenation. It was believed that the process of miscegenation would give people of Afro-descent the opportunity to be more respected by create a possibility for them to ascend the social scale.⁴² Following this logic is the notion of *boa aparência*. Emilio Willems in 1949 while writing about the lack of racial prejudice in Brazil because of miscegenation describes advertisements in newspaper ads that request people of *boa aparência*. He notes “this phrase has almost become a kind of nightmare to many mulattoes who are always worried about their *aparência*. To have *boa aparência* (“to be good-looking”) means to look like white people”.⁴³ This “type of black person” that is portrayed in the media usually has more visible European physical traits such as a thin nose and smaller lips, has a light skin complexion and more often than none has straight hair. According to Marta, “this type of person” is what people mean when they refer to a woman of Afro-descent as *negra linda* or *negra bonita*; a black person that is closer to the white standard of beauty.⁴⁴ Even the magazine, *Beleza Negra*, meaning Black Beautiful, has pages after pages of women of Afro-decent with *cabelo crespo* chemically treating their hair to make it straight. Illustrated by *Beleza Negra*, notions of what is good appearance has not changed. This is supported by Grocaine who defined it as *cor morena, lábios grossos*, and *olhos pequenos*.⁴⁵ Alessandra said “boa aparência é não ser negro, ser lindo(a) com

⁴¹ Ibid, 2.

⁴² Ferreira, Ricardo Franklin. **Afro Descendente: Identidade em Construção**, p.42.

⁴³ Willems, Emilio. “Racial Attitudes in Brazil” **The American Journal of Sociology**, vol. 54, no. 5. (Mar., 1949), 405.

⁴⁴ ISP Field Journal, Interview with Marta (5.30.07), p. 43

⁴⁵ ISP Field Journal, Grocaine’s Survey Results # 12, p. 23. “*Morena* colored skin, thick lips, and small eyes”.

cabelos lisos, etc.”⁴⁶ A friend of Alessandra, who has braids went to a job interview where she and two other girls of Afro-descent were denied the job while three girls with “straight hair, pale skin, in accordance with the standard of beauty [dominant standard]”got the job.⁴⁷

Where as Alessandra references this example to prove a case of racism, there are some people who would argue that this is not because racism does not exist in Brazil. What may appear to be naïveté might actually be, but is also a reflection of the myth that Brazil is a racial democracy. In 1933 Gilberto Freyre published *Casa Grande e Senzala* and coins the idea that Brazil is a racial democracy. He interpreted Brazilian’s history, particularly, the miscegenation of the population to mean that discriminate could not exist where everyone is of mixed ethnicity; the people of Brazil are *mestizos*. This myth took hold in academia where other historians, specifically Americans, began to make comparisons between race relations in their home country and in Brazil. In 1949 Willems also concluded,

the nonexistence of racial prejudice in Brazil has been traced back to the Portuguese, who mingled with colored people whenever they established settlements. However, there are some indications that, at least, in southern Brazil, deviational attitudes of race behavior may be found among white minorities; yet sometimes it seems difficult to distinguish them from class prejudice. Contrary to this situation in the United States, public opinion in Brazil is strongly opposed to any kind of racial discrimination.⁴⁸

The racial democracy myth also took hold in Brazilian society; aided by the military dictatorship in 1964 that banned racist speaking. This ban, which was included in the Institutional Acts, prohibited the discussion of racism which only further helped promote

⁴⁶ ISP Field Journal, Alessandra’s Survey Results #20, p.27. “To be good looking is not to be black. To be pretty is with straight hair and etc.”

⁴⁷ ISP Field Journal, Interview with Alessandra, (5.31.07), p.45

⁴⁸ Willems, Emilio. “Racial Attitudes in Brazil”, p. 402.

the myth as well as switch issues of racial discrimination to class issues.⁴⁹ Both the myth and its consequently debate about class is something that is still disputed alike by academics and Brazilians. Daiane, while responding to how other people identify her racially spoke to this sentiment “ if I identify as being *negro* than I am *negro*. But some people think that depending on where you live, what neighborhood you are from, where you study, what you study can define if you are *negro* or not. Depending on your neighborhood, your color or race can change- you can be a different type of *negro*”.⁵⁰

The promotion of the myth is still visible in Brazilian society and makes itself present in different facets of society. The overall absences of people of Afro-decent in the novelas except a few cases when there is an interracial family promotes the idea of *mestiçagem* or Brazil as a *mestizo* population and supports the myth. Besides novelas, there is little to no representation of people of Afro-decent in the media besides soccer players and musicians. Their image in these arenas says to people of Afro-decent that this is the only acceptable space for *negros* in society. Believers of the myth and dominant society use their image to defend the idea of racial democracy stating that “black people make up the soccer team, therefore we [Brazil] do not have racism”.⁵¹ These Afro-Brazilians that are at the for-front of society help endorse the myth since they usually do not challenge or acknowledge racism. A recent article, “Negros têm muito de europeu no DNA”, reported on a study conducted by a geneticists at the Univeridade Federal de Minas Geraid (UFMG) where he analyzed the genetics of 120 *negros*

⁴⁹ Agier, Michel. “Racism, Culture and Black Identity in Brazil” **Bulletin of Latin American Research**, vol. 14, no. 3 (Sept., 1995), p.251.

⁵⁰ ISP Field Journal, Interview with Daiane (5.28.07), p. 35.

⁵¹ ISP Field Journal, Event (5.4.07), p. 3.

brasileiros.⁵² The article included the names of some famous Afro-Brazilians, Milton Nascimento, Djavan, Neguinho da Beija-Flor, Frei David Santos, Ildi Sliva, Sandra de Sá, Seu Jorge, and the soccer player, Obina who participated in the survey that concluded that half of the 120 people have European ancestry. It is not that the article or the research is groundbreaking, it is a historic fact that many Brazilians have ancestors from different ethnic backgrounds, yet the article is presents the issue as it is world-shattering news. The reference to famous Afro-Brazilians is done in a way as to denounce or at least question their affiliation with an Afro-Brazilian identity.

AFRO BRAZILIAN IDENTITY-

In sum, with such a history, one wonders how someone constructs or claims an Afro-Brazilian identity when society from all angles is telling you to value the other. Ferreira, during his discussion of psychology and people of Afro-descent, concludes that it is easier to construct a racial identity when such an identity is associated with positive things like intelligence, hard-working and beauty. When that identity is associated with things like ugliness and laziness, forming of an identity becomes problematic. The individual feels as if they need to deny or separate themselves from aspects of the group. In the case of many people of Afro-descent this means they try to articulate with European culture and deny their African origins.⁵³

Having a strong and positive Afro-Brazilian identity, then, can mean strongly aligning yourself to aspects of African culture that others might condemn. For Daiane, the significance of her black identity is related to other's denial,

⁵² “Negros têm muito de europeu no DNA” **Tarde** (Salvador, Terça-Feira, 29/05/07)

⁵³ Ferreira, Ricardo Franklin. **Afro Descendente: Identidade em Construção**, p. 64. “

I think that *negra* have a custom to deny, they do not like to say they are *negra*. 'I am not *negra*, I am *morena*...I am *cabo verde*'. They don't like to assume their racial identity- they are embarrassed. They don't like their nose; do not like a lot of things- their hair, their lips, and their butt. They do not like what to say what they are. I like it. I like to say what I am. I like all of my characteristics that say I am *negro*. I love my features: my butt, my nose, my eyes. It's because of this, that I love to say I am *negra*.⁵⁴

Larissa, even though, she defined her race as *indio-descendente*, also identifies as being of Afro-descent. She too, like Daiane, takes pride in her physical features that show her heritage. She thinks people with *morena* or *negro* color skin are beautiful even though she prefers *morena* colored skin more because it is like hers. Her preference is not a racist one; it has more to do with pride and self-love. She believes her ancestry is evident in her features and she likes this about herself. She thinks people who are also beautiful are people who also posse physical features that show off their ancestry.⁵⁵ Carla's identification as *negra* is a recent development. Before she entered the university and in conjunction became involved in the black movement in Salvador, she identified as *padra*. Carla has a strong kinship between her hair and her racial identity. When Carla was fourteen she straightened her hair because she wanted to be considered pretty but since her participation in the movement, she now wears her hair naturally, *cabelo crespo*. When Carla came home with her new hairstyle , her mother told her that she looked horrible, unkempt & dirty and that she was never going to attract a boyfriend if she continued looking this way. To this day, Carla's mom does not like her hair but Carla continues to wear her natural and sometimes in braids,

⁵⁴ ISP Field Notes, Interview with Daiane (5.28.07), p.35.

⁵⁵ ISP Field Notes, Interview with Larissa (6.1.07), p. 47.

which her mother really detest.⁵⁶ For Carla, hair is one way in which she contests the Eurocentric standard of beauty and at the same time affirms her racial-identity. Connected to that thought, she also finds people with “*cabelo crepo ou rastafari*” most attractive. Society has said not to value these characteristics so she likes to put special emphasis on them.⁵⁷ This is common among many people in the black movement; in fact, many of the cotistas have braids, dreads or wear their hair naturally. Similarly, other students, in the surveys, linked their affirmation of a *negro* identity to specific features that they believed dictated their racial identity.

Claiming an Afro-Brazilian identity is more than one’s phenotype representing their genotype because not all of the cotistas that claim an Afro-Brazilian identity have pronounced African features. In addition, many of the cotistas have ancestors from different ethnic groups. Claudia and Alessandra are two examples of this. Claudia has a very small petite frame. When you look at her one notices her large eyes and her shoulder length wavy hair. I was most surprised to learn that Claudia identifies strongly as a black women because based on her physical appearance I would not identify her as black. Claudia, on the other hand, believes “you can see traces [physical characteristics] of everything and nothing particularly African, Indian and White but I consider myself to be *preta*. But I am aware that I am from a country with a history of miscegenation of people from all races”.⁵⁸ Claudia exemplifies the fact that identity is both your own perception as well as others. Alessandra is also well aware of this fact. Alessandra resembles a family-friend of mine that is from the Caribbean and has a light skin complexion and naturally loosely curled hair. On her survey she identified as *padra* but

⁵⁶ ISP Field Notes, Interview with Carla (5.29.07), pp. 38-9.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ ISP Field Notes, Interview with Claudia (5.28.07), p.33.

during the interview, she could not explain *parda* because it has no significance to her life because she identifies as *negra*. “I consider myself *negra* but you asked color and because in the university when have you to identify your race, I am not considered *negra* in color; I am *padra*, of this color [pointing to her skin] but I consider myself *negra*”.⁵⁹ Like Claudia, Alessandra referenced the ethnic diversity that exists in her family when asked if she had characteristics of a person of Afro-descent. Once again, Alessandra responded that others perceive her identity differently, “I am of African descent but I am considered *mestizo* because I have various characteristics. My great-grandfather was Senegalese and my grandmother is Indian”.⁶⁰ Claudia and Alessandra exemplify how an Afro-Brazilian identity can be problematic in relation to the history of miscegenation. The question then becomes, what is that makes someone *negro*, how do you determine someone’s racial identity?

According to Ferreira, one of the stages in claiming an Afro-descedente identity or *tornar-se Afro-descedente* is the stage of impact where one discovers reference to an ethnic group. During this stage, one’s first socialization happens with their family, people in their neighborhood, with their community and school.⁶¹ In addition to physical characteristics, one’s *Afro-descedente* identity is also formed in relation to a one’s family. This is evident through many cotistas who specifically named relatives who were of Afro-descent or where *negro* when asked why they identify as a person of Afro-descent. Claudia, for example, could not understand “Quando você se tornou negro?”⁶² because she has identified as such all of her life. Her affirmation is a reflection of

⁵⁹ ISP Field Notes, Interview with Alessandra (5.31.07), p. 45.

⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 45.

⁶¹ Ferreira, Ricardo Franklin. **Afro Descendente: Identidade em Construção**, p. 75

⁶² “When did you start identifying as black?”

growing up in her house and living with her family, “Minha avó é bem preta. Eu não posso negar que sou afro-descendente por que ela é minha avó!”⁶³ For Claudia, her racial identity is connected to her family. She could never deny her racial identity or heritage because that would be the equivalent of denying her family. Carla’s racial identity is also strongly linked to her family,

I remember of a lot of my grandmother who lives in the interior when I think of my blackness and my connection to black culture. She is an ancestor of slaves. She has a lot of characteristic of Africa. For example, the collective and taking care of others versus a Eurocentric culture that’s capitalistic, individualistic, competitive, thinking others are inferior, not look at each other, not help each other. This is not like African culture. When I say I am of African descent, I think of this collective culture- helping the world [as the owner of a restaurant, Carla’s grandmother says that if someone is hungry she is going to feed them no matter if they have money or not], not wanting more than another.⁶⁴

Carla’s racial identity, therefore, is not only connected to her relationship with her family but with larger African culture such as the spirit of collectivism. Other cotistas expressed similar connections to black culture. Ana identifies as a person of afro-descent “por causa da religião do candomblé que sotiendo várias resistências, sempre prevalezem por parte da minha família maternal”.⁶⁵ Even Marta’s identity was significantly affected by her connections to black culture. At the age of twenty-one, Marta started to affirm a stronger black identity through more interactions with black culture. She was born in Rio de Janeiro and moved to Salvador in 1987 when she was eighteen years old. According to Marta, this move was influential in her *tornando-se negro* because in Rio she spent a lot of time in spaces occupied by whites. Once in Salvador, she went to Pelourinho and

⁶³ ISP Field Notes, Interview with Claudia (5.28.07), p.33. “My grandmother is really dark (really black). I cannot deny that I am of Afro-descent because she is my grandmother!”

⁶⁴ ISP Field Notes, Interview with Carla, pp.38-40.

⁶⁵ ISP Field Notes, Ana’s survey #18, p. 27. “Because of the religion candomblé that has always been prevalent in my mother’s side of the family.”

began to participate more in black culture through the arts. Every Tuesday in Pelourinho, Gerônimo plays to a crowd of a hundreds dancing, drinking, and singing along to his songs on the steps of a Igreja do Passo. Two out of three times I went to Pelourinho to listen to him play, he played “Eu sou negão”. The words, “E ai chegaram os negros/com toda a sua beleza/com toda a sua cultura/com toda a sua tradição... /Eu sou negão/Eu sou negão/meu coração está em liberdade/ em liberdade” are like an anthem of Afro-Brazilian pride.⁶⁶ He speaks about the beauty and the culture Africans brought, presumably to Brazil. The chorus of the song both proudly affirms a black identity and links that affirmation to Liberdade, one of the oldest peripheral communities in Salvador that was once described to me as “an old black neighborhood” implying that families have lived there for generations.

In addition to one’s phenotype, family, and exposure & participation in black culture, a person’s consciousness was also repeatedly mentioned by all of the girls as a determinant of someone’s racial identity. Ferreira defines consciousness as knowing racism is still apart of the Brazilian experience.⁶⁷ His definition is similar to Líria’s who believes it is about perceiving what it means to be black in a society that does not want blacks in the for-front.⁶⁸ Marta, the coordinator of the Cotistas, also believes this is true for her own identity and passes this sentiment along to the students in the cotista program. Identifying as *negro* is a process of resistance against everything has society has decided you are. It is also a political process because once someone affirms their identity, the various spaces you occupy; your neighborhood, the university, your workplace, others

⁶⁶ “So the blacks arrived/with all of their beauty/with all of their culture/with all of their tradition.../I am black/ I am black/ My heart is in Liberdade/ in Liberdade”.

⁶⁷ Ferreira, Ricardo Franklin. **Afro Descendente: Identidade em Construção**, p.84..

⁶⁸ ISP Field Notes, Interview with Líria, (5.31.07),p.44.

interaction and perception changes to your affirmation.⁶⁹ Carla's affirmation of a *negra* identity is also aligned with this ideology as her affirmation is also a political one and connected to struggles in the past and in the present with people around the world.⁷⁰ To Carla, a person's consciousness is the most important determinant as it means,

being proud that you are *negro*, loving that you are *negro*...before I thought it was a question of skin. Now it is about, do you want to identify as this [a *negro* identity] in addition to characteristics and skin color. When I see and talk to a person with dark skin and they say they are not *negro* they say that they are *morena*- It is about what that person perceives and what I think. There is a Steve Biko quote that says '*Negro* is an attitude.' I think it is also this. In addition to physical, it is having an attitude of wanting to be *negro*.⁷¹

Larissa and Alessandra also share this sentiment and mentioned how besides observing a person's physical appearance they have to talk to the person. This illustrates that any identity, including a racial identity, involves how you perceive yourself as well as how other's perceive you. On the streets of Salvador, one is well aware of how others perceive you because they make their perception known, usually calling after you using your racial identity to specify. When called *morena*, only Carla said that she was offended because she has affirmed her identity as a *negra* and wants to be called as such. It is also her opinion that identities like *morena* and *padra* support the myth of Brazil as a racial democracy and she does not believe the myth is valid and so accepting another identity besides *negra* is accepting that the myth is true.⁷² Both Claudia and Daiane seem to share the same philosophy where other's perception of their identity is not important to them. This being said, Claudia is aware that calling someone *morena* is a common practice in

⁶⁹ ISP Field Notes, Interview with Marta, p. 43

⁷⁰ ISP Field Notes, Carla's survey # 19, p.26.

⁷¹ ISP Field Notes, Interview with Carla, p.38- 40.

⁷² Ibid

Brazil, or at least in Salvador. She is not offended because “me acho *preta*, me acho *negra*, não me acho *morena*”.⁷³

Both Daiane and Líria are also not offended when someone calls them *morena* but they have a preference in the language people use. Daiane said she really feels good about herself when someone calls her “*minha preta*” or “*negão*”.⁷⁴ Líria’s preference is for “*negona*” because it reinforces that she is *negra*.⁷⁵ This language is an example of a strong affirmation to a black identity. Identification and use of these terms is a representation of “that attitude of wanting to be black” that Carla mentioned. In affirming a strong black identity, one is disassociating a black identity with all the negative attributes society has placed on it. In her survey, Daniela who identifies as *negra* does the same thing when she describes her skin as “*sarará/linda*”.⁷⁶ *Sarará* is considered a pejorative term to refer to someone with brown color skin, someone with kinky hair and possibly light eyes. By referring to her skin as *sarará linda*, she is valorizing all of the features she has been told to condemn or deny. *Raça Brasil*, the first black magazine created in 1996, is also doing this using images. In its’ May issue, the editor in chief’s letter tells the magazine’s readers “*ocê e o que você é. Por isso, seja você mesmo: valorize seus cachos, seu black power, suas trancinhas e o seu estilo*”.⁷⁷ One of Carla’s biggest complaints was that black children grow up in Brazil with only one standard of beauty that supports European traits and body type. Black children grow up wanting to conform to this standard because they are never presented with an alternative that says

⁷³ ISP Field Notes, Interview with Claudia, p.32. “I think of myself as black. I consider myself black. I do not consider myself *morena*.”

⁷⁴ ISP Field Notes, Daiane, (5.28.07), p. 36.

⁷⁵ ISP Field Notes, Líria, (5.31.07), p. 44.

⁷⁶ ISP Field Notes, Daniela’s survey #2, p.18

⁷⁷ **Raça Brasil** (Maio 2007), p. 4. “You are what you are. Value your locks, your afro, your braids, and your style.”

black is beautiful too.⁷⁸ The only images and message they receive is that their features are inferior to white features. The pages of *Raça* are examples of an alternative standard of beauty that promotes black traits. The pages of *Raça* show that Afro-Brazilians are beautiful and come in all shades, sizes, hair styles & textures.

Apart of consciousness is knowing one's history. All of the girls mentioned the importance of education in promoting the history of people of Afro-descent in Brazil and its ability to help formulate a black identity. Through education, people of Afro-descent will "learn the history, learn that *negro* isn't the things that *branco* have said. *Negro* is not a slave, barbarian... *Negro* is a normal person, a human. Also, *negro* is a fighter".⁷⁹ Rodrigo's survey response illustrates this point where he describes his African ancestors as "kings, queens, princes, princesses, those who were slaves".⁸⁰ He is aware that before Africans were slaves in Brazil they were apart of a rich culture. Daiane attributes her strong *negra* identity to the fact that she knows her history and strongly believes that through the teaching of history people of Afro-descent would be more likely to affirm an Afro-Brazilian identity.⁸¹ CEAFFRO also shares this philosophy. CEAFFRO's programs are founded around three principals: ancestralidade, indentidade and resistência. Marta believes that CEAFFRO works with self-esteem. The walls of CEAFFRO are covered with their mission as well as faces, and facts about leaders in the black movement. There are numerous posters like "Saude de Mulher-Africa, mae da humindade"⁸², "As Orixás do Abdias fundação cultural palmares cultural afro-brasileira nossa identitidade"⁸³ or "Eu

⁷⁸ ISP Field Notes, Interview with Carla, p. 40

⁷⁹ ISP Field Notes, Interview with Claudia, p.34.

⁸⁰ ISP Field Note, Rodrigo's survey #4, p.20.

⁸¹ ISP Field Notes, Interview with Daiane, p. 35

⁸² ISP Field Notes, Observations (6.1.07), p.11. "Health of Mother-Africa, mother of humanity"

⁸³ Ibid (5.29.07), p.11. "The Orishas of Abdias, cultural foundation of Palmares- Afro-Brazilian culture, our identity"

assumo minha negritude. Afirme sua auto-estima. Declare sua raca etnia”⁸⁴ that make connections to African history, Afro-Brazilian culture and the need to affirm a black racial identity. CEAFFRO provides the students with information, continues to educate them and provide them with a space where they can discuss these things,

Before I did not think there was a distinction between *negro* and *morena* but CEAFFRO has helped me realized some things. I learned that *negro* is intelligent too. I start learning my history- still many people do not know their history. I know my color. It’s like you will never be like Xuxa with a thin nose or things like that so why deny your blackness. I know my history and because I know this I am more likely to affirm my blackness, to valorize my race because I know I come a rich culture... Its fundamental when we debate about race in school. People still need to know that being different is not horrible. I have more confidence, value more. I read a research that people who think they are beautiful are more capable of doing whatever you want. Know that you are different and that’s not bad- have value in your difference. Its not worst or better.⁸⁵

The rest of the girls also mentioned that their participation at CEAFFRO has impacted them and even changed the way they think about racism as well as their own racial identity in some degree.

CONCLUSION-

Some might read this work and believe that the topic is a superficial one. They might say that examining how one’s formation of a strong black identity is effected by aesthetics is insignificant when institutionalized racism still exist. Why should we care if people of Afro-descent think they are beautiful when so many still live in poverty? Do not have access to education? Are discriminated in the workplace and do not access to the same opportunities as whites? Why should we care if they are calling themselves *morena* or *cabo verde*? People who believe this is a superficial topic decided that institutionalized

⁸⁴ Ibid (5.11.07), p.8. “I assume my blackness. Affirm your self-esteem. Declare your ethnic race.”

⁸⁵ ISP Field Notes, Interview with Daiane (5.28.07), p.36

racism is more important than internalized. They do not realize that racism, as someone, so brilliantly put it “has a first, a middle and last name”⁸⁶ meaning that it appears in various aspects and forms in society. What would it matter if black people had all the rights in the world but did not have the self-esteem that can come from something as simple as thinking you are beautiful to actually go out and occupy a high job title in the workplace or enroll in the university? I believe that the students I interviewed are proof that it matters. It is like the poster in CEAFFRO says, “I assume my blackness. Affirm your self-esteem. Declare your race” or as Carla said, “when you affirm your identity- your negra identity -than you can fight for equality”.⁸⁷ Education and re-socialization society and people appear to be the best way and only way to confront this. Teach people about their history; educate people that racism is about valuing certain differences over another when in reality to be differences do not make one person, one culture, one’s beauty more valuable than another. Brazil recently passed a law that will integrate Afro-Brazilian history into the schools’ curriculum. Brazilian children from a young age will soon receive the foundation to affirm a strong racial identity so they can affirm at a younger age. Marta’s daughter at the age of seventeen has affirmed her racial identity even though it took her mother four more years. This could be due to the fact that she played with black dolls or lives in Salvador at a time where the black movement and other Afro-Brazilians are pushing their culture, their issue and their self-love to the front of society. In an ideal world, more people, including myself, would subscribe to Daiane’s mantra “Me acho, me basta”- what I think is enough. She does not depend on the images of the media or society to tell her that she is beautiful and that she should be

⁸⁶ **O povo.** “Negritude”

⁸⁷ ISP Field Notes, Interview with Carla, p.38

proud of her black identity. She affirms this within herself, without societies input. This is the path we should all follow. This is the path Brazilians of Afro-descent, Indio-descent, and even European descent that do not fit in with the standard of beauty should follow. As Ferreira highlights, there are aspects of Brazilian society that makes it unfavorable for any citizen to develop a positive and articulated identity.⁸⁸ The construction of an Afro-Brazilian identity, than, is not just a problem for people of Afro-descent but a problem for all of Brazil as it still struggles with its myth of a racial democracy that is inhabiting the creation of a Brazilian identity.

⁸⁸ Ferreira, Ricardo Franklin. **Afro Descendente: Identidade em Construção** p.48.

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Beleza Negra (nº 6)

Raça Brasil (Ano 11 nº 110: Maio 2007)

"Negros têm muito de europeu no DNA" *Tarde* (Salvador, Terça-Feira, 29/05/07)

"Negitude" *O Povo: Vida & Arte Cultura*, 15 de Abril de 07

APPENDIX-

1. I believe I could do this project in the U.S. It was actually my own lived experience as a Black woman living in a society that promotes a Eurocentric standard of beauty that acted as inspiration to examining this issue. As I noted in my paper, I am continuously struggling to love my body, particularly features that are considered African or Black that are not valorized by dominant society. I use the word inspiration because I had to adjust the issue specific to the Brazilian situation. I believe that the different racial identities used by people of Afro-descent in Brazil are unique and different to the United States. Where as in the U.S., we have terms to describe skin complexion they are not necessarily synonymous with racial identities as they are in Brazil. For example, if someone in the United States asked me “What color I was or my race (like the IBEG in their census or a common question) I would not respond brown while in Brazil *padra* is both a color and a race.

2. Yes. I could do the examination between how much of claiming an identity of a person of Afro-descent is related to the issue of aesthetics. The language would change from people of Afro-descent to claiming a Black identity in relation to such features like hair, nose, butt, etc. I believe in the United States, the paper would be more about aesthetics since it is my personal opinion that in the United States, that the identity of a person with African ancestry is not as negotiable.

3. I do not believe the ISP modified my learning style. I have written similar style papers before where I had to analyzed law documents and conduct an interview; the paper was one hundred percent primary sources. I was however, not used to considering television

programs, images, and interviews, casual conversation as primary sources and thinking about how I would combine that with secondary sources like scholarly journals.

4. My secondary sources are all the background information about the construction of racial identities in Brazil and related issues like the myth of racial democracy. My primary sources are interviews and observations of Brazilian society and are the majority of the paper.

5. I chose to exclude much of the information collected on the surveys as it was relevant but did not contribute any new or additional information. However, when there was a survey that provided additional insight, I did include it. I used the same methodology for the interviews and observations. I consciously made an effort to include data from each of the girls, but some of the girls, had more to say about the issue than others.

6. I thought the field exercise would prepare me for the ISP but there were significant differences that I had to adjust to. I imagined that I would form relationships with the cotistas and the organization but realized due their busy schedule and the fact that I would not be spending all of my time with them that this was not likely. As a product of this, my data collection process was different and more formal than I attended or expected it would be.

7. It influenced my methodology section the most. I wanted to make sure that my approach would provide me with the most information as well as the information that would be most helpful. I also was continuously making sure I was being ethically during my examination and that I would not do something that would violate the trust of the students as well as misrepresents my intentions.

8. I wanted to gather as much information as possible to represent the diverse identities and background of the cotistas. I was only able to accomplish this by passing out a survey that not everyone completed. I did receive more than half of the surveys back and still was able to receive different perspectives.

9. Yes, due to the nature of the ISP period.

10. My original topic did not change but my key informants did. Once I got to the field, I learned that there was a difference between Afro-Brazilians and people of Afro-descent. Instead speaking to Afro-Brazilians, I quickly learned I wanted to speak to people of Afro-descent. This meant, quickly identifying those who claimed this identity.

11. I found a few scholarly journals that I used to write my original literature review about race in Brazil. I found out about CEAFFRO from another collage who had previously done research there and noted their class on Black Aesthetics. My advisor provided me with more literature relating to my specific topic as well as theories on identity formation in general. Marta is the coordinator for the cotista group and provided me with information about CEAFFRO and the group of cotistas. It is for that reason that I interviewed her. I selected the six females from their answers on the survey and well as my observation of them during classes. My observations of the media as well as other parts of dominant society were not an active search as it was constantly present and available for me to note and observe.

12. I conducted an interview to collect as much information as possible from a large number of people. I then used that as well as my observations of the girls to interview them. I thought the conversations would be more informal but they were somewhere in between formal and being a conversation as I would often ask more questions as well as share my experience when appropriate but not to guide the interview. As I also mentioned, I observed the cotistas and their reaction with other students paying attention to how they carried themselves. I did so by attending their classes. I also watched television, listened to music, read magazines and visited newsstands. I also went to black cultural events in Salvador to get to know the city better to understand the regional context of Salvador and its role in the formation of an Afro-Brazilian identity. This was the most effective method due to time constraints.

13. I think my advisor was extremely helpful and provided me with lots of information as well as guidance. From the very first meeting Marta understood my project and provided me with a framework that we both agreed was important. She also was helpful with negotiating the relationship between the cotistas and me. She was particularly helpful during the end and continuously calmed my nerves about the interviewing and writing process, helping me outline the format as well as review my interview questions.

14. Most of the cotistas' classes were not related to my topic at all and did not really provide an opportunity to talk to the students. I however, do not view this time as a waste since it did help them get used to my presence and open up.

15. I feel like I understand race and racial identities a little more in Brazil.

16. No, I felt adjusted to the culture before the ISP. I did, however, realize how easily I could pass in Salvador for an Afro-Brazilian. This was an interesting dynamic, especially, when I participated in activities with the cotistas and others were not aware that I was a foreigner.

17. To be very honest, I learned a lot about myself. I realized that my personality, my shyness, my own self-doubt was inhibiting me from completing the project like I had imagined and I had to work very hard to change this.

18. I would definitely recommend them to do it because they will learn about the topic as well as their own struggle for self-love. They will also discover more similarities between Brazil and the United States. I think it is also important to note, that if I was a man or a white female, this study would be very different. I shared the same sentiment as girls when they spoke about being called *morena* because at least twice a day I was referred to as *morena* by someone and I wanted to say, "No, I am black". There is still lots of debate about this issue and even many Americans did not understand my topic or my logic. I believe someone could also examine and argue the other opinion.

19. Yes. I believe that it is a really important issue that many people dismiss as being superficial but when you live in a society that tells that you are not beautiful you will not have self-esteem or consciousness that you deserve equal treatment and rights. Institutional racism still exists but I am still a firm believer that the psychological consequence of racism, the belief of inferiority, is far worse since you are oppressing yourself. One could have all access to all the opportunities in the world but you will not believe you are worthy of them, what is the point of ending institutional racism if you are still oppressed in your mind?