

Brazilian Telenovelas: Challenging the Discourse on Race and Class Inequality

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Abstract

Telenovelas have long been the most popular and widely consumed television product in Brazil. However, their role in society stretches far beyond that of popular entertainment. Brazilian telenovelas are often referred to as the narrative of the nation as they promote a specific vision of national identity in which Brazilians often recognize themselves. This thesis looks at how telenovelas of recent years have attempted to challenge the discourse of silence surrounding racism and the myth of racial democracy that has been maintained by the state for decades. It also examines how these new narratives have been interpreted by middle class, white Brazilians. I argue that telenovelas' appeal to emotion can help generate discussion and mobilize society around an important social issue. Yet, their strong reliance on (positive) emotional response from the viewer can limit their impact and lead to a reproduction of the very discourse and stereotypes that telenovelas are striving to challenge.

Keywords: telenovelas; race relations; race and class inequality; emotion; Brazil

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Chapter 1.

Introduction

Regina is a single mother who lives in favela Rocinha – one of the largest informal settlements in Rio de Janeiro – and sells refreshments at the Copacabana beach – one of Rio’s touristy upper-/middle class neighbourhoods – to put food on the table for her mother and her ten-year-old daughter, Julia. Today Julia came home from school crying because one of her classmates said that she had *cabelo ruim*. While literally it translates as “bad hair”, this expression is used to refer to Afro-textured hair typical for black people and implies the inferiority of African physical features, alongside other expressions like *nariz chato* (flat/potato nose) or *lábios grossos* (fat lips). Realizing that her daughter had her first encounter with racism today, Regina takes her to the mirror and asks to repeat that her hair is beautiful. Julia repeats the words several times as the tears roll down her cheeks and Regina explains that what happened to her at school today is a very old story that started centuries ago – a story of the struggle of their people.

This scene was shown in the 2015 telenovela “*Babilônia*” in Brazil, a country that had been celebrated for decades for its harmonious race relations and state-promoted ideology of racial democracy [*democracia racial*]. Unfortunately, research done over the past 50 years has proven this to be far from true (Da Costa 1985; Winant 1992; Sheriff 2001; Goldstein 2003), revealing instead not only that racial democracy was a myth but that this myth has been carefully maintained by the state until today through a discourse of silence that surrounds the issue of racism in Brazil both in the public and private domains (Sheriff 2001). Discourse should be understood here as an official set of stories and images of self-representation by the state, the story and image of the Brazilian nation, which the state promotes and the population reproduces. Indeed, the telenovela scene described above reflects on what normally would *not* happen in a similar real-life situation – which is an open discussion between the mother and the daughter of the racism she had experienced at school. In her ethnography done in Brazil, Robin Sheriff (2001) observes that intergenerational discussion of racism has historically not been common among black Brazilians. Although many of her younger interlocutors admitted

that they faced racism sooner or later in their childhood, their parents had not prepared them for these situations and explained what had happened merely as a silly behaviour on the part of other kids. Sheriff (2001) argues that the discourse on racism is largely silenced not only by the state and society as a whole, but by the victims of racism themselves. Therefore, Regina's words in the scene – “this is why we can't be afraid, this is why we have to speak out” – sound as a direct challenge to this discourse of silence.

My thesis looks at the various ways in which telenovelas of recent years have been attempting to challenge the discourse of silence and the myth of racial democracy; it also explores the difficulties and obstacles they have been facing in doing so, which, in some cases, has led to a reproduction of the very discourse and stereotypes they have been striving to challenge.

Telenovelas have long been the most popular and widely consumed television product in Brazil (La Pastina 2004; Rosas-Moreno 2014; Sá and Roig 2016). However, the role they play in society stretches far beyond that of popular entertainment. From very early on, telenovelas have “promoted a specific vision of national identity” (Porto 2011, 54) in which Brazilians have often recognized themselves. Lopes (2009) argues that “having achieved high credibility, Brazilian telenovela has become a public space to debate representative topics of nowadays modernity, converting itself in a ‘communicative resource’” (1), which, when activated, can promote “greater consciousness and motivation to act against the conflicts and inequalities of society” (ibid., 1). Rosas-Moreno (2014) points out that “because telenovelas are so pervasive in Brazilian society, being viewed by all genders, ages, races, literacy levels and social classes, they can substitute as non-traditional news sources and uniquely aid citizens in making daily life-affecting decisions” (3). In fact, she argues that telenovelas in Brazil often act as a more progressive story-teller than traditional news and encourage discussions around issues that are taboo subjects or largely avoided in mainstream media, such as racism or stigmatization and prejudice against the poorest segments of Brazilian society (ibid.).

The capacity of Brazilian telenovelas to generate debate around important social and political issues in the country is the key focus of this thesis. In particular, I look at how telenovelas in recent years have approached the topic of race and class inequality,

and how these new narratives are being interpreted by the upper-/middle-class, white audience.

My thesis looks at the recent shift in Globo's telenovela content from its traditional focus on upper- and middle-class characters (Porto 2011) to residents of poor neighbourhoods (informal settlements known as favelas or communities) in an attempt to break the stigma they have been facing in Brazil (LeBaron 2011; Ramalho 2015; Rosas-Moreno and Straubhaar 2015). While traditionally the subject of favelas has been avoided in Brazilian media and associated primarily with crime, violence and extreme poverty (Rosas-Moreno 2014), the recent telenovelas such as "*Salve Jorge*" (2012–2013), "*Babilônia*" (2015) and "*A Regra do Jogo*" (2015–2016) have attempted to transform this negative image by depicting its residents as hardworking, intelligent, ambitious people, who are eager and able to succeed in life. While some scholars critique the telenovela "*Salve Jorge*" for purposely emphasising the transformation of *Complexo do Alemão* (one of Rio's favelas) from a crime-ridden place into a safe and vibrant community only after its pacification (the occupation of favelas by special forces as part of government program since 2008), they also note that for many residents the feeling of shame was replaced with pride after their community was shown in the telenovela (Wood 2014). There has been research on how this shift in telenovela content has affected or has been received by the poor who reside in Rio's favelas (Wood 2014; Rosas-Moreno 2014). This thesis explores how these changes have been perceived by white, upper- and middle-class viewers.

Another important transformation in the telenovelas of recent years is the increased presence of black actors. As Joel Zito Araújo revealed in his documentary *A Negação do Brasil* (2000), between the 1960s and 1990s, black characters were virtually non-existent in telenovelas. When Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) was made into a telenovela in 1969, the protagonist was portrayed by a white actor who had his face painted dark in order to appear black, despite the fact that there were black actors available for the part. In the rare cases when black actors appeared in telenovelas, their participation was limited to the stereotypical roles of domestic workers, drivers or babysitters at best, and thieves or drug dealers, at worst. The number of black characters has definitely grown between the 1990s and the present. However, until the last decade, even when black characters or favela residents were not presented as criminals or trouble-makers, they would still be predominantly portrayed as domestic

help or babysitters for rich white families, thus reinforcing the divisions along racial and socioeconomic lines in Brazilian society (Araujo 2000; Rosas-Moreno and Straubhaar 2015). In telenovelas of the recent years, however, a lot more attention has been given to daily life in poor communities themselves: people's homes, neighbourly and family relationships, social and cultural life in the community, which helped put these neighbourhoods on the "map" of accessible places in the city (Ramalho 2015), as they were no longer associated exclusively with extreme poverty and crime.

Most importantly, telenovelas ("*Babilônia*", in particular) have finally started to talk openly about the existence of racism in the modern society and the prejudice that black Brazilians have been facing for decades on a daily basis. This change is crucial because, as was discussed in detail in Araujo's documentary (2000), the membership of black Brazilians in the society tended to be portrayed as essentially unproblematic; in other words, they rarely had to face racial prejudice on television screens. And when they did, these situations did not lead to the discussion of structural racism in Brazil but were explained in terms of personal racism of individual telenovela characters. This has to do with the long-established ideology and discourse of racial democracy, which presents the Brazilian society as non-racist and socially equal and discourages any discussion of race and racism in the public domain. As pointed out by Robin Sheriff (2001), this has resulted in a discourse of silence around racism and discrimination in the private sphere as well.

Considering the above, the recent shift in telenovelas towards not only the inclusion of black characters and poor neighbourhoods into their stories but an open discussion of the issue of racism in society is significant to explore. This thesis examines these new representations of lower-class Brazilians and race relations in telenovelas and explores how they have been perceived and interpreted by the white, middle-class audience. The questions I address in what follows are: (1) How are race and class represented in recent telenovelas and how do these representations differ from the established discourse on class and race? (2) How do white, middle class Brazilians interpret and engage with these new representations of class and race relations in Brazil?

The Role of Emotions in Telenovelas

While normally telenovelas are associated primarily with entertainment due to their strong reliance on drama and emotion, telenovelas in Latin America (and Brazil in particular) have taken up an educational role and have been used as tools for social change through this very element that characterizes them. Borrowing from Vanessa May's theorizing of social change (2011), I understand it as a process that manifests itself in gradual alterations in people's practices, attitudes or ways of thinking and when people adopt or resist those new ways of behaving and thinking, they contribute to further social transformations.

Through emotion and by appealing to viewers' feelings, telenovelas attempt to shape or transform their views on various social issues, such as homophobia or racial prejudice. The expectation is that, having developed an emotional attachment to a certain character, the viewer may change their attitude towards the group this character represents – same-sex couples or poor community residents, for example. It is debatable, however, whether such shift in the viewer's attitude would be permanent and whether it is substantial enough to result in an actual change in the society.

Based on this discussion among scholars, which I explore in greater detail in my theoretical chapter, I consider whether emotions and affect – while being powerful tools for engaging the audience with social issues and encouraging people to question their long-established beliefs and assumptions – are capable of producing long-term structural changes in the society. Also, is it possible that, because telenovelas rely so strongly on the emotional response from their audiences, that their success in producing any social impact can be easily compromised? What happens if the viewer fails to develop the necessary bond with the characters or if the story evokes negative emotions causing the viewer to reject it?

Here, I would like to define affect and emotions, highlighting the difference between the two. Throughout my thesis, I refer to affect as a bodily response. Brian Massumi (2002, as cited in Stewart and Lewis 2015, 238) defines it “as the sensation produced in the encounter of bodies and forces and as the tipping point between the potential and the actual – the energy of something moving into being”. I also use Eric Shouse's (2005) definition of affect as “a non-conscious experience of intensity” and “a

moment of unformed and unstructured potential” which is found prior or outside of consciousness (Massumi 2002, as cited in Shouse 2005).

I understand emotions as social and cultural phenomena “closely tied to knowledge systems, norms and values, which individuals do not always have to be aware of and are learned during socialization” (Hochschild 1983, as cited in Sūna 2018, 31). Hochschild (1979, as cited in Sūna 2018) also refers to those as “feeling rules” which are based on a cultural and historical context. In other words “individuals have cultural knowledge about particular forms of expression and behaviour that provides orientation for which emotions are appropriate in which situations” (Sūna 2018, 31).

Using the example of how telenovelas address the issue of race and the negative image of poor, predominantly black communities (favelas) in Rio de Janeiro, I explore how appeal to emotion can help a telenovela generate discussion and mobilize society¹ around an important social issue, yet jeopardise its success or limit its capacity because of a strong reliance on (positive) emotional responses from the viewer.

Telenovelas in the Brazilian Context

Although there is a number of television networks that broadcast telenovelas on Brazilian television (Lopes 2009), my research focuses exclusively on the ones produced by Rede Globo – the largest commercial television network in South America and the fourth largest in the world (Rosas-Moreno 2014). Since the first association that normally comes to mind when one talks about a telenovela is a soap opera, it is important to start with highlighting the key differences between Brazilian telenovelas and soap operas produced in Britain or North America. While North American soap operas are usually broadcast during the day and don’t collect very large audiences (Machado-Borges 2002), in Brazil, telenovelas are shown right after the national news program – during the most competitive time slot – and thus can attract around 40 million viewers

¹This link provides an example of how telenovelas may mobilize society and what I mean by this term in the context of my research:
<http://www.aparchive.com/metadata/youtube/63e0df8a0247ed0d363f92a69e5bee39>

daily (Rosas-Moreno 2014). Because younger children are usually in bed by 9 pm, these telenovelas can include more serious and controversial themes and discuss important social and political issues such as drug addiction, urban violence, domestic violence, homophobia, state corruption, and so on. Another distinction between North American soap operas and Brazilian telenovelas is that the former may go on for years, while the latter usually run for around eight months and have a clear beginning and end to the story. They are shown Monday to Saturday, right after the national news, and their plots and characters are constantly discussed in other entertainment and talk shows, popular magazines and tabloids, as well as the social media.

Television reception studies in Brazil highlight the strong participatory culture of telenovela fans who use online platforms to actively discuss and assume critical positions on the social issues raised in telenovelas as well as express opinions, make comments and value judgements about telenovela content in many workplace, public and private conversations. Hamburger (1999) refers to Brazilian telenovelas as open works that change in accordance with audience feedback (as quoted in Rosas-Moreno 2014). Lopes (2009) argues that the telenovela has become one of the most distinctive elements of Brazilian society, which she describes as a “narrative of the nation” (2). The viewers’ relations with the telenovela are mediated through various mechanisms such as TV ratings research, direct contact with the writers, the magazines and TV shows that are specialized in news and gossip about telenovelas, and the internet (Lopes 2009). Each telenovela has a profile, where the viewers can leave a comment or even a suggestion on how the events in the telenovela should develop (Rosas-Moreno 2014). The viewers are able to directly affect the plot of the telenovela that is being broadcast, as the authors often respond to the viewers’ reactions, emotions, and opinions on the developments of the plot and can modify it accordingly (ibid.). As such, telenovelas represent a very unique national cultural product, the study of which can offer numerous valuable insights into how the Brazilian society works.

Methods

To explore middle-class responses to recent telenovelas that explicitly address social issues, I spent three months in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, conducting ethnographic

fieldwork among upper- and middle-class Brazilians, most of whom reside in Copacabana neighbourhood. Copacabana was an ideal area for conducting my research because, on the one hand, being an upper-/middle class neighbourhood, it provided access to the social group I was looking for for my study, but on the other, it is situated very close to a number of informal settlements (favelas), which means that its residents have close contact with the poorer and predominantly black population of the nearby communities who travel to Copacabana daily to work as food vendors at the beach. In fact, as I discuss in greater detail in my ethnographic chapters, Copacabana beach is a place where the two social groups meet, yet the division between them is extremely visible, with the white, middle-class enjoying leisurely time by the water, while served by the poor who sell food and drinks all day under the scorching sun.

Another peculiar fact about the Copacabana neighbourhood is that it serves as the main setting for numerous telenovelas, which means that not only can one regularly see the characters use its various public spaces, including the beach, but it is also not unusual to witness the filming of a telenovela scene there.

During the three months that I spent in Rio, I carried out numerous individual and focus group interviews among middle-class Brazilians, as well as engaged in daily participant observation to explore the moments when telenovelas naturally “enter” people’s lives and conversations. I conducted my research in the Portuguese language and recruited participants through snowball sampling. I carried out focus group interviews (3–5 people) with respondents from different gender and age groups, as well as semi-structured in-depth interviews with individual participants. Both types of interview sessions often included watching selected short scenes from recent telenovelas followed by a semi-structured discussion. I carried out 16 scheduled and recorded interviews (focus group or individual). Most of my interviewees (12 out of 16 participants) identified as white and all of them would describe themselves as middle class. Four out of 16 participants were male. The age ranged from mid-twenties to mid-sixties.

One of the group interviews was conducted in the community of Vidigal (referred to as favela by the locals). An interviewee whom I met in a fitness class at Copacabana used to volunteer there with a local theatre group *Nós do Morro* and she introduced me to its founder, Guti Fraga, and casting associate, Sabrina. The activity of this theatre

group presented an interest for my research because its students are the (predominantly black) poor youth who grew up in the community of Vidigal. In the recent years, a number of young black male and female actors who started in *Nós do Morro* ended up getting a part in 9 pm (prime-time) Globo telenovelas and have become quite well-known in Brazil. One of these actresses (Mary Sheila) took part in the group interview I carried out in Vidigal. This interview provided a unique angle for my study since Guti, Sabrina and Mary Sheila discussed the difficulties black actors face when trying to secure a part in telenovelas, that are associated with the stereotyping of black characters. They also commented on the crucial role emotions play in the way telenovelas and characters are perceived by the audience, shedding light on how emotions can both enhance and impede the capacity of a telenovela (or individual character) to encourage a shift in perception or change in attitude towards a social group or a social phenomenon. Although my goal was to explore how telenovelas were perceived by their audiences, their observations and comments provided a particularly valuable input for my study since it offered a perspective “from the other side”. As a director, casting associate and actress, the three of them were able to shed a bit of light on the “inside process” of telenovela creation and how this process may be impacted by the nature of race relations in Brazilian society.

In addition to the scheduled and recorded interviews, my ethnographic fieldwork also included various casual conversations I happened to have with people at the beach, in my fitness class or friends that I made during the three months. I also regularly watched the telenovela that was on during my stay in Rio with my hosts. This particular activity allowed me to experience first-hand what the process of telenovela watching looks and feels like, and comprehend how emotional and intimate this experience can be.

Drawing on the insights from La Pastina (2004) and Machado-Borges (2002) who studied telenovelas and their reception among Brazilian viewers, I also engaged in participant observation in the moments when telenovelas spontaneously entered the viewers’ daily conversations, to understand how people incorporated telenovelas in their habits and daily practices. Tufte (2000, as quoted in La Pastina 2004) highlights the importance of distinguishing between reception and ethnographic approaches to studying audiences. He notices that traditionally reception studies have been short-term and focused on just one place of reception – a house, for example, while audience

ethnography “relies on long-term immersion, locating the process of engagement between viewers and media texts in the everyday life through an inductive, multi-method approach of collecting and analyzing data” (La Pastina 2004, 166). Throughout the two ethnographic chapters, I demonstrate how telenovelas were often referenced in daily conversations that I took part in or simply overheard, or how their plots or the social issues they raised were discussed in other TV shows and tabloids.

The Implications of Emotional Involvement for the Researcher

As someone who grew up watching Brazilian telenovelas, I was familiar with their ability to affect the viewer and evoke emotional response. I was not brought up in the Brazilian context, however, and have no ties to Brazilian culture or history; therefore, trying to understand how the unique role of telenovelas in Brazilian society and their vision as a reflection of reality influences the informants’ perception of the content was an important part of my analysis. My role as a researcher can be described, on the one hand, as an outsider – a non-Brazilian, and at the same time, as an insider – a white researcher among (mostly) white, middle-class participants and a long-time fan of Brazilian telenovelas – to which both white and black participants could relate. The fact that I was familiar with the plots and characters of many telenovelas both helped me understand my participants’ emotions when they talked about them, and helped them connect to me not as a researcher but as a fan of their favourite television product.

My emotional involvement with the object of my research (telenovelas) and its implications are important, especially considering my focus on emotion in telenovela watching. For instance, I argue in my thesis that the specific expectations the viewers have towards telenovela watching as a source of not just basic entertainment but a pleasing aesthetic experience, the expectation to be emotionally moved, to be able to relate to the characters and engage with the story on a personal level, and find a sense of comfortable familiarity – all of that makes the task of ensuring each new telenovela’s success truly difficult and challenging.

Indeed, I can say that this search for something very specific has often been part of my own experience, not so much as a researcher, but as a telenovela fan. Very often I would find it difficult to engage with a new telenovela if the cast, the setting or even its pace was not what I expected. For example, when I was growing up in Belarus, the first telenovelas that were shown on television there were set in Rio de Janeiro or somewhere else near the ocean and the beach. For me, just like for everyone else, who lived in a landlocked country with long cold winters, this was perhaps the most attractive and fascinating element of Brazilian soap operas. As a result, until today I am not able to enjoy a Brazilian telenovela that takes place in an urban setting like the city of São Paulo. Even for my research, I struggled to engage with those telenovelas and have actually never watched one that was not taking place near the beach. In conversations with my research participants, I would often hear similar comments – that the picture is too dark or they don't like a particular actor or actress (who are not necessarily even the protagonists of the telenovela), or they never watch a telenovela created by a certain writer, or the opposite – only watch telenovelas written by a certain person. My ability to relate to such sentiments on a personal level not only helped my participants connect with me but also allowed me to understand the implications of such specific preferences – namely that a minor detail, sometimes completely unrelated to the plot, can entirely undermine its effect on the audience.

Another significant issue I was aware of due to my personal experience as a telenovela fan is that because telenovelas run back to back – one finishes on Friday/Saturday and the new one usually starts on the Monday/Tuesday of the following week – it can be a challenge for the viewers to switch and be prepared emotionally for a new story. After eight months of watching a telenovela daily and having developed a tangible sense of attachment to its characters, the viewers (including myself) are very likely to feel resistance towards the new characters and may just feel too emotionally drained to be able to give in to a new story.

While I was doing fieldwork in Rio, one telenovela that became quite popular ended and the new one started. Although the new telenovela had a lot more to do with my area of interest, since it was addressing racism in a very direct and proactive way, I was finding it really difficult to engage with on the same level as I did with the previous one, which at some point simply became frustrating. If someone were to ask me why this was happening, I would have to say that I simply missed the old characters, the new

telenovela was not as funny, the quality of the picture was too dark and it was just not the same. It did not help that everyone around me seemed to have the same problem. The novela was a failure in terms of ratings from the start.

What is crucial to point out here is that if I had never truly engaged in telenovela watching, I might have concluded as a researcher that the new telenovela was likely met with resistance because of its strong emphasis on the issue of racism, which might have made the audience uncomfortable. Being a telenovela fan, however, I knew that I could not make such a conclusion. Although I realized the importance of what the writers and producers were doing in terms of the story, I just had to admit that even if the focus on racism was a factor for some people, the telenovela was simply too boring and difficult to watch. It just did not have the appeal we were all expecting from telenovelas, be it for the lack of humour, the dark picture or the unengaging plot. It could also be because it followed immediately after a story that had a huge success. In fact, over the years it has been a tendency that after a particularly successful telenovela ends, the next one is likely to have very low ratings, at least at the beginning.

All of the above is meant to illustrate my earlier point that the strong emotional engagement the viewers tend (and expect) to have with telenovelas makes them extremely vulnerable and susceptible to failure, which I could have overlooked had I not experienced this kind of engagement myself.

At the same time, however, my long-time personal engagement with telenovela watching has likely obscured other aspects of telenovela-viewing, as experienced by my interlocutors. For instance, it is possible that it has prevented me from fully understanding my participants' experience because of unexamined assumptions that this experience must be similar to my own. The greatest challenge, I think, was to remember that although my own interest in watching telenovelas and my passion for them is something I have in common with my participants, our experience may also be radically different because of the difference in our cultural background and relationship to the content. I am a foreigner, who became fascinated with Brazilian telenovelas as a child because everything I saw there was new, different and unfamiliar to me. I could probably identify very little with most of its cultural, social and political context. For my participants, however, this is a reflection of their reality and one of the most significant national cultural products. As a result, watching any given scene created neither a

feeling of reinforcement nor resistance in me. Of course, I sought to approach the content more critically now, as a researcher, but it still wouldn't cause a particular turbulence in me because of some kind of very similar or radically different personal experience. My participants, however, were constantly applying what they saw to their own daily experiences of similar situations, evaluating, interpreting and questioning the meanings consciously or subconsciously. This sometimes would make it difficult for me to understand why my personal emotional reaction to or interpretation of a given scene was different from theirs.

Donna Goldstein's observations of a similar issue while she was doing ethnographic research in one of Rio's favelas are worth mentioning here. She noted how, especially at the beginning of her fieldwork, she often struggled to understand her participants' humour and the way they related to various life situations. She was shocked at how some events, which she could only describe as tragic, would cause laughter in the community and become the object of everyone's jokes. Only after having spent a considerable amount of time among these women and having learnt more about their lives she would realize that such a different reaction to the same event was due to the fact that their lived realities were very different from her own, and that humour was used as a coping mechanism to be able to get through these tragic situations. Similarly, when she interviewed upper-/middle class Brazilian women, they would often comment on how their domestic workers (the poor black women from the community) would have a very different reaction from their own to various telenovela scenes. To them it seemed as if their employees were not able to understand the story right due to their low levels of education, while Goldstein observed that such differences in "reading" telenovela stories were due to different economic, social and cultural backgrounds of these two groups of women, which shaped their individual experiences and were now affecting their perception of these stories.

It was, therefore, a challenge for me to isolate my own emotion and sociocultural background and understand how various participants of my research must be affected by what they see, considering their race, class, gender, lived experience and so on. In-depth interviews and group discussions of the scenes that we watched together were very helpful in overcoming these obstacles, although certainly I couldn't remove my own subjective perceptions entirely.

The study of race relations in Brazil has long generated a fascinating and challenging literature in the social sciences, because it is a racially hierarchical society that is, nonetheless, governed by the ideology of *democracia racial*. The main contribution of my thesis is to understand how the discourse of racial democracy may be both challenged and reproduced in telenovelas. My analysis of how white, middle class viewers interpret the new class and race representations sheds light on how such representations may impact their understanding of race relations in Brazil when encountered in such a meaningful cultural product as telenovela.

Chapter 2.

Literature Review

Telenovelas in Brazil are often referred to as the narrative of the nation (Lopes 2009). I find this definition useful as a starting point for my analysis as it highlights two important aspects of telenovelas that can explain their potential to have a meaningful impact on society. One is precisely that they are narratives. It is useful to define narrative here, distinguishing it from the notion of discourse. While, as I said earlier, discourse is an official set of stories produced by the state, the range of national or cultural narratives is much broader and goes beyond the official discourse, as it encompasses the experiences that may be ignored or silenced by it. As Jackson points out, “in every human society, the range of experiences that are socially acknowledged and named is always much narrower than the range of experiences that people actually have” (ibid., 41–42).

Scholars both within and outside anthropology have been curious about the power of the narrative and the important role stories play in our lives. The approach to studying narratives varies across disciplines: while communication studies scholars look primarily (but not exclusively) at the stories’ capacity to “transport” the reader/viewer and somehow transform them through this experience (Green and Brock 2002), anthropologists emphasize storytelling over stories as a social process – rather than the product of narrative activity – in which the reader/viewer actively participates (Jackson 2013). I find it useful for my study to look at both approaches and the theoretical literatures they have produced, since the former highlights the capacity of telenovelas to affect the viewer due to the specificities of the genre and format, while the latter can offer insights into the relationship between telenovelas and their audiences as a process of active participation in the acts of story making and storytelling, as well as the construction and negotiation of meaning.

The other key aspect of Brazilian telenovela is that it is “read” not just as a story, but as *the* story of Brazilian society, or “the narrative of the nation”, as I emphasized at the beginning. Both the creators of telenovelas and their audiences see them not only as the national cultural product but as a reflection of their reality, both in the public and the

private domain. The issues raised in telenovelas are thus something that all Brazilians can relate to and believe to share in common as a nation, even though the audience differs across class, age, geographic location and so on. This points me to the second body of literature, relevant to my study – the one that explores the concepts of belonging to a nation and creation of “imagined communities” (Anderson 1983). Looking at how the feeling of belonging to an imagined community is created and sustained helps to shed light on my central question, namely, how can relying on emotion be both a powerful tool and a real obstacle for telenovelas in their efforts to produce meaningful social change?

Since in my study of the capacity of telenovelas to produce social change I focus specifically on race relations, the third body of literature key to my analysis relates to the history and theory of race within the Brazilian context. Here, I draw mainly on the work that explores race relations in Brazil as defined by its history of slavery and the societal structure it has left as a legacy, yet looks at them beyond formal structures and policies of the state, zooming in on how the impacts of both are manifested in the intimate sphere of personal relationships – the mutual, as well as self-perception of black and white Brazilians, and their interactions with each other on a daily basis (Sheriff 2001; Roth-Gordon 2016; Goldstein 2003).

Thus, my theoretical chapter engages with three distinct bodies of literature: (1) the storytelling and narratives; (2) belonging to a nation or an imagined community; (3) and race relations in Brazil. What connects these three areas in a way that helps make my research more informative is the role emotions play in each of them. Both the communication studies’ and anthropology’s approach to narratives and storytelling emphasize the presence and importance of emotions when the viewer is “transported” into the story or engages actively in its creation. Similarly, the creation of a nation or an imagined community is based on “the feeling of belonging” (Anderson 1983; Calhoun 2016); “national sentimentality” (Berlant 2002) and “affective citizenship” (Sūna 2018). Finally, as evident from the work I explore (Sheriff 2001; Roth-Gordon 2016; Goldstein 2003), the way race is constructed and related to is filled with affect and a range of feelings, such as shame, disgust, fear, pride and so on. The work of Ramos-Zayas (2012) is particularly pertinent for the discussion of how race and affect are intimately connected. In *Street Therapists*, she explores in depth how race relations and perceptions by different groups of each other are inevitably emotionally charged and based on affect; and how particular emotions or levels of emotional competency are

ascribed to certain groups by others and may serve not only as their defining characteristics but as an explanation for their success or failure in the economy, or society as a whole. Although Ramos-Zayas did her research among US-born Latinos and Latino immigrants in Newark, USA, her analysis of the interconnection between race and emotions resonates with the findings discussed by Sheriff, Roth-Gordon and Goldstein, who did their fieldwork in Brazil.

I therefore draw on Ramos-Zayas's exploration of this interconnection for my analysis of how race and race relations are presented in telenovelas and read/interpreted by their audiences, and in particular, the implications that "caricature" characters (in the words of my informants) and stereotypical representations of black residents of poor Brazilian neighbourhoods have for (re)producing and (re)shaping those relations in real life.

Storytelling and Narratives

I begin my discussion of the power of narratives by briefly considering two theories that demonstrate how communication studies scholars tend to theorize the process through which stories may cause a shift in readers'/viewers' beliefs and attitudes. The first one is the Transportation–Imagery Model, introduced by Green and Brock (2002) which is based on the idea that humans are "wired" to be especially sensitive to information in narrative format and that "stories about one's experiences and the experiences of others are the fundamental constituents of human memory, knowledge, and social communication" (Shank and Abelson 1995, as quoted in Green and Brock 2002, 316). The authors of this model explore the mechanisms of narrative persuasion (belief change), which occurs when images evoked by stories "are activated by psychological transportation – a state in which a reader becomes absorbed in the narrative world, leaving the real world, at least momentarily, behind." (Green and Brock 2002, 317) These transporting narratives, according to the authors, have the power to transform individual's real-world beliefs:

In the Transportation-Imagery Model, a narrative account induces in some recipients a powerful experience of "transportation." Constituents of the narrative, chiefly its evoked scenes, then take on new meaning as a result of their links with the experience of entering the narrative

world. A prior belief can be changed by an imagery-driven juxtaposition with new information. Thus, the beliefs of the recipients may be affected to the extent that there has been a powerful transportation experience (ibid. 323).

The second communication studies theory I find useful for my research is the Parasocial Contact Hypothesis (Schiappa, Gregg, and Hewes 2005), since it looks specifically at the possible impact of media on intergroup relations and highlights the affective aspect of the process. The Parasocial Contact Hypothesis (PCH) states that a negative, stereotypical perception of minority groups by a majority can be improved through a prolonged exposure in media and that its effect is similar and can be as effective as real-life exposure to/interpersonal interaction with the groups that are prejudiced against. PCH is based on Contact Hypothesis developed by Allport, 1954. The authors of the PCH believe that:

The reduction of prejudice through intergroup contact is best explained as the reconceptualization of group categories. Allport (1954) understands prejudice as a result of a hasty generalization made about a group based on incomplete or mistaken information. The basic rationale for the Contact Hypothesis is that prejudice can be reduced as one learns more about a category of people. (as quoted in Green and Brock 2002, 93)

The authors of the Parasocial Contact Hypothesis emphasize that in order to cause sufficient motivation for attitude change, the contact (personal or media) needs to be successful in generating some sort of intimacy or affective tie toward minority group members, which resonates with Tufte's (2000) and Fuenzalida's (1993, 1996, 2007) discussions of the educational potential of telenovelas and the possibility of social learning achieved through centering the narrative on drama and securing the feeling of pleasure, personal identification and emotional involvement.

Valerio Fuenzalida (1996) looks more specifically at Latin American telenovelas, pointing to Elizabeth Lozano's (1992) argument that a telenovela is akin to a myth, that is, a popular narrative that reflects collective culture and imagination. It represents the basics of the established social order, yet at the same time, displays individual behaviour and actions that may challenge or undermine the existing cultural and moral system. Since, as a narrative, the telenovela uses affective language, it is believed to have greater capacity to impact, incentivize or encourage certain behaviours or attitudes than, say, educational or analytical programs. Fuenzalida (1996) argues, however, that while

this effect may be strong, it is unlikely to be long-lasting and may evaporate quickly due to the context of media reception, in which consecutive programs with “new emotions” may interrupt or “neutralize” the previous ones, thus preventing the emotional effect produced by a particular program from being reflected upon and truly internalized.

Although affective and inspirational in general, television, according to Fuenzalida (1996), has a very low capacity to produce desired behaviours or sustain them over time, the reason being that a strong but short-term emotional effect cannot substitute or overpower the influence of social and cultural institutions such as family, education system, community, religious or social groups, all of which promote and constantly reward certain types of attitude and behaviour, while discouraging others. Brown and Cody (1991) tested and disproved the hypothesis that viewers’ involvement with the characters of the prosocial Indian soap opera “Hum Log” would be positively associated with their prosocial beliefs about women, such as women’s equality, freedom of choice or family planning. The interpretation they gave to their findings was that the intended effects of prosocial television content were not so much dependent on the viewers’ involvement or even awareness of the issues, as on their perception of the positive and negative role models, as presented on television. For instance, because positive role models consistently reaped negative consequences for their prosocial beliefs, while traditional role models kept being rewarded, more (female!) viewers identified the negative role model (Bhagwanti) in “Hum Log” for female equality as the most important role model to emulate than did the positive models of a self-sufficient female character (Badki) and a career-oriented young woman (Chutki). In other words, as Brown and Cody explain (1991), “the message through ‘Hum Log’'s role models was that it is best to be self-sacrificing like Bhagwanti and thus avoid the troubles that Badki and Chutki reaped when they pursued non-traditional women's roles” (137).

In other words, a telenovela scene or character that question or defy the established social norm may provoke a strong positive response from the viewer, yet this response does not necessarily indicate a change in the viewer’s attitude to that norm in real life, but rather a willingness to make an exception because of the affective bond they have developed with that particular character. As long as telenovelas present challenging characters as a deviation from the norm without really questioning the existing social structure, a real shift in the attitude or behavioural pattern among the audience is unlikely, and therefore cannot result in a structural change in the society.

Because through my research and ethnographic fieldwork I discovered that the way viewers perceive telenovela narratives is mediated by their own experience, which, in turn, is shaped by their gender, class, race and cultural background, I decided that it was important to look at the other side of the interaction process between the telenovela and its audience, and found some anthropological theories helpful for this purpose. When anthropologists study narratives, they tend to step away from seeing them as a collection of “fixed and finite meanings” and instead focus on the “action of meaning-making” (Jackson 2013, 37). They are thus interested in several interconnected things at once. One is, of course, the content of the story, but with the focus on how the viewer/listener may relate to it. “The reasons why a story is particularly appealing for a particular audience might be found in people’s reactions to the cultural relevance of characters, plot, and/or theme of the story” (Maggio 2014, 93). Another point of interest is various storytelling techniques that storytellers may use to obtain certain effects, such as involvement, detachment, sympathy, and so on; the way they negotiate shared knowledge with the audience and adjust the tone, register or vocabulary accordingly; and “to what extent they show their personal selves as opposed to making themselves mere medium for the telling of the story” (ibid., 93).

In other words, anthropologists are interested in the relational dynamics between the actors involved in the storytelling: the storyteller, the listener, the characters of the story and so on. The reason why all of that matters lies in the notion shared by the anthropologists that stories and storytelling are like journeys, not only because of their transporting effects, but because they are about our journeys through life; and in making and telling stories we are able to rework our realities as well as give new meaning to our experience (Jackson 2013; Maggio 2014). “Because every experience is first and foremost a story, telling a story is an experience... that restructures past events in the same way as the experience of recovering from an illness changes the experience of falling and being ill” (Maggio 2014, 93). Arendt (1958, as cited in Maggio 2014, 99) points out that “individual experience is given public meaning through the intersubjective relation created by the storytelling situation.”

Storytelling, therefore, can be understood as a strategy for transforming private into public; and through that, giving life, legitimacy and recognition to the private.

Therefore, it is also a vital strategy for “sustaining a sense of agency in the face of disempowering circumstances. To reconstitute events in a story is no longer to live those events in passivity, but to actively rework them, both in dialogue with others and with one’s own imagination” (Jackson 2013, 34).

Thus storytelling, according to anthropologists, gives meaning to our lives but not just in the sense of an intellectual grasp of events. Rather, as Jackson (2013) puts it, it works “at a “protolinguistic” level, changing our experience of events that have befallen us by symbolically restructuring them” (35). In other words, “storytelling gives us a sense that though we do not exactly determine the course of our lives we at least have a hand in defining their meaning” (ibid., 35). Maggio (2014) highlights the peculiar way in which narratives, storytellers and listeners become interconnected in the process of storytelling, noting that a story must be listened to in order to exist, just as an experience acquires meaning through narration; yet when told, it does not remain fixed but is inevitably changed by the listener, “if only for a few, yet determining particulars” (90). “In turn, it could very well be argued that a story is the author of people, because we are changed by the stories we tell as much as those we listen to (Frank 1997, as cited in Maggio 2014, 90).

This way of looking at narratives and the processes involved in storytelling offers valuable insights for my research, as it helps better understand the relationship between telenovelas, their writers and the audience, the impact they have on each other and the process of meaning-making and negotiation, in which they all become involved. It also connects to another vital point highlighted in the literature discussed above – that “for every story that sees the light of day, untold others remain in the shadows, censored, or suppressed” (Jackson 2013, 31). As Habermas 1989 (cited in Jackson 2013, 32) observes, “the lifeworlds and voices of marginalized classes also tend to be ‘privatized’ by being denied public recognition” (32). In regard to my research, this emphasizes the importance of considering not only whose stories get to be told in telenovelas and in what way, but how audiences choose either to interact with these stories, engage with them and with each other when retelling or discussing them, or to ignore and sometimes even reject them completely.

Finally, anthropologists emphasize the existence of two kinds of stories – ones that are “official”, approved of and serve to sustain the status quo, the established

boundaries, hierarchies and divisions in society; and other kinds that can challenge those boundaries and question the legitimacy of authorities that tell the official stories. Malinowski (1974, as cited in Jackson 2013) talked about an important distinction among Trobrianders between sacred myths which are true and serve to give legitimacy to the existing social order; and tales, or legends, that are actually experienced. Jackson sees this distinction as an opposition between public and private domains or, quoting Herzfeld (1997, in Jackson 2013), a “coded tension between official self-representation and what goes on in the privacy of collective introspection” (45). As Jackson poignantly observes, “in every human society, the range of experiences that are socially acknowledged and named is always much narrower than the range of experiences that people actually have” (ibid., 41–42).

This closely relates to my analysis of the official state discourse of racial democracy in Brazil and the discourse of silence surrounding racism that has prevailed for decades not only in the public, but also in the private domain (Sheriff 2001) – both of which I discuss later in greater detail. It also reveals the importance of looking at how telenovelas have impacted these two domains, creating opportunities to challenge both the public and private discourses. On the one hand, raising the issue of racism in telenovela stories has led to debates and discussions of it in popular television talk shows and, of course, on social media. At the same time, it has opened up space for discussions of these issues at home, between family members and friends. Telenovelas have started to tell personal stories of how racism and discrimination are experienced and how the feeling of shame and humiliation make people remain silent and unwilling to talk openly about it, which was followed by real people sharing their real stories of similar experience in talk shows. In other words, through their stories, telenovelas have given legitimacy and meaning to the crucial experience shared by a large portion of Brazilian society, which, until then, by being not told, or silenced, was denied true existence.

As was mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, when looking at storytelling and the effects of narratives on our experiences, it is important to consider the role emotions play in this relationship. Cheryl Mattingly’s ethnography (2008) of the practice of occupational therapy in a North American hospital explores the connections between narrative and healing. She suggests viewing the world of disability as a socially constructed experience and reveals various ways in which daily clinical interchanges get “transformed into a dramatic experience governed by a narrative plot” (i), emphasizing

that what connects the narrative and the lived experience is not some artificially imposed narrative coherence, but narrative drama.

Through her fieldwork, the author observed that “therapists seem[ed] to require a recounting of past events in order to situate their current work” (6) thus making storytelling essential to their practice as it offered a way of making sense of what was happening. Yet, she also realized that their stories were more than just after-the-fact accounts of experiences or cultural scripts for interpreting them and came to see narrative “as an aesthetic form with rhetorical powers, one which could become a persuasive tool for convincing others to see the world in a certain way” (5). Due not only to their content, but also presentation style and highly connotative language, stories mean to be provocative and request a different response from the audience than does denotative prose. By making audiences care about the events that take place in them, narratives don’t simply recount experiences but create experiences for their listeners (Mattingly 2008).

Although Mattingly’s subject of analysis was the connection between narrative and illness, and the effect it has on the process of healing, many of her observations can be applied to the context of my own research. For instance, she observes that:

Narrative’s well-known propensity to offer an emotionally charged, symbolically provocative rendering of experience has been routinely linked to its power to illuminate personal experiences of illness and healing. Telling stories of one’s life may allow the ill or the disabled, who are so often voiceless, to give voice to their personal experience (14).

I argue that, similarly, addressing the issue of racism in telenovelas as a deeply personal and emotionally charged experience “has given voice” to the viewers who have been subjected to racism in real life.

Furthermore, Mattingly notes the stories’ capacity to organize personal experiences into culturally intelligible scripts, which – as Brown and Cody (1991), discussed above, also pointed out in their analysis of the Indian pro-social soap opera – in turn provides models of behaviour in real life:

Stories can encode cultural models about what is normal by providing examples of violations of proper behaviour. Since the stuff of narratives is the abnormal, the improper and other departures from

the norm, stories offer rich vehicles for passing along cultural knowledge about such matters as how to identify the appropriate social role... (2008, 13).

As such “stories can provide a means for allowing individual actors to make sense of and ‘come to terms with’ difficult or unfamiliar experiences of illness [or other] by fitting personal experience into ‘pre-existent cultural models’” (Mathews et al. 1994, 789, as quoted in Mattingly 2008, 14). Mattingly, therefore, defines stories as places in which one is able to “give expression to an experience which is intensely personal” and, as part of the same process, “give a culturally informed meaning to their experience” (14). She emphasizes at the same time – as do other anthropology scholars discussed in this chapter – that, as social acts, narratives are highly sensitive to context and can be understood as a speech act co-constructed in a relationship between the text and the reader (or viewer and audience). It is thus important for my research to understand storytelling as an active process of (co-)creation and negotiation of meanings, focusing not so much on how people react to stories that are told to them by someone else but how they themselves participate in the story-making process as a strategy to claim some agency over their own life and experience, and fit that experience into their socio-cultural context.

Imagined Communities and Nation Belonging

Benedict Anderson (1983) defines nation as an imagined political community – the one that is imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign (6). It is *imagined* “because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion”(6). It is imagined as a *community*, because, “regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship” (6). In his book, *Imagined Communities* (1983), Benedict Anderson described how participating in the “ritual” of newspaper reading could create the sense of belonging to a nation. Calhoun (2016) explains:

Reading the newspaper gave common news content to the discussions of a nation, but also a ritual demonstration of a kind of belonging. Each person who read the morning paper over tea or coffee could imagine his countrymen doing the same (12).

This is similar to how telenovelas are watched in Brazil with families and friends gathering in front of the TV screen every week night at a certain time; and even those who don't watch telenovelas systematically are generally aware of the plots and issues they raise and often eagerly participate in conversations about them. Telenovela watching can, thus, be understood as a ritual in which all Brazilians participate in one way or another and a shared experience they can bond over.

Interestingly, in his analysis of Anderson's imagined communities, Calhoun (2016) notes that Anderson emphasized the importance not only of common content but also form of cultural support for the formation of national identity. He talked about novels as an example of such form, as they would typically involve the intertwining of multiple plot lines, modeling the situation of multiple biographies in national narratives:

They did not just impart a message – though some did that by celebrating national heroes or national tragedies. They cultivated a way of imagining that in turn supported the integration of self and nation. This was never arbitrary nor an illusion. It was a way of constituting the nation through shared imagination (14).

This way of constituting, or imagining, a nation, however, may not only create the feeling of belonging, but that of non-belonging as well. Laura Sūna (2018) draws connections between Anderson's imagined communities, emotions and belonging, linking those to the notion of "affective citizenship". This notion has to do with the dismantling of "citizenship as a purely rational and administrative exercise of state authority" and shifting the focus towards the role of affect in production of regimes of inclusion and exclusion. "From these perspectives, affect is deployed by the state to control and exclude" (Gregorio and Merolli 2016, 935), in particular when it comes to ethnic, racial and queer bodies. As Gregorio and Merolli emphasize, "what is at stake is the cohesiveness of the community, and affect is mobilized in the service of this cohesion" (936). It is crucial to recognize, however, both the emancipatory and exclusionary potential of affective citizenship. Quoting Gressier (2014, 6), Lähdesmäki et al (2016) note that the study of non-belonging allows to explore "how identity politics and discourses of belonging and exclusion are invoked as a means of access or a denial of rights to political power and economic resources" (239). As the authors state, looking at simultaneous belonging to a minority and a nation may reveal processes of negotiation in the recognition of belonging for "vulnerable" groups in subordinate positions in society, and highlight its crucial dimension, which is the access to belonging.

It is possible to identify oneself with a particular group, but in order to belong, the question is whether the person can belong or not. Minorities and marginalized and oppressed people are often confronted with explicit and implicit inequalities, discrimination, and exclusion caused by limited or blocked access to belonging. The struggle to belong, and sometimes also a sense and a condition of non-belonging are important points of view in dealing with vulnerable groups (ibid, 240).

Sūna (2018) discusses the processes of inclusion and exclusion in her analysis of reality television:

In the TV shows, processes of inclusion and exclusion, as well as the creation (or refusal) of belonging are made visible by means of different, culturally diverse protagonists... The forms of communitisation can correspond with real social groups. At the same time, they can also address "imagined communities" (31).

Sūna's analysis of forms of belonging in media focuses on their emotional and affective dimensions. Belonging is understood here as a feeling of affiliation and defined as an emotionally charged social location produced in relation to social groups, geographic space, and so on. Emotions, in their turn, are understood as social and cultural phenomena "closely tied to knowledge systems, norms and values, which individuals do not always have to be aware of and are learned during socialization" (Hochschild 1983, as cited in Sūna 2018, 31). Hochschild (1979, as cited in Sūna 2018) also refers to those as "feeling rules" which are based on a cultural and historical context. In other words "individuals have cultural knowledge about particular forms of expression and behaviour that provides orientation for which emotions are appropriate in which situations" (Sūna 2018, 31). The feeling of belonging to an imagined community that is based on cultural norms and context was in other words defined by Straubhaar as cultural proximity. His cultural proximity theory states that audiences tend to choose television programmes that are most relevant to them in cultural terms; also, this choice may be determined by specific group affiliation (La Pastina and Straubhaar 2005).

Berlant (2002) also talks about national sentimentality, which is the way of building a nation "across fields of social difference through channels of affective identification and empathy" (34). She explains:

National sentimentality operates when relatively privileged citizens are exposed to the suffering of their intimate Others, so that to be virtuous

requires feeling the pain of flawed or denied citizenship as their own pain. In the discourse of national sentimentality, identification with pain, a universal true feeling, would thereby lead to structural social change. In exchange, populations emancipated from the pain of failed democracy would then reauthorize universalist notions of citizenship in the national utopia (35).

This relates closely to telenovelas' attempts to address racism and produce social change in Brazil by appealing to the viewers' emotions and making them identify with the characters who suffer from racial prejudice and discrimination. Daniel White's article (1992) on the use of affect in Japanese television with the goal of educating the public and instilling or reinforcing certain morals and values is quite informative here as it sheds light on the role emotions play in bringing the nation around a certain social issue. Interestingly, White reveals that affect and emotions are used for these purposes in Japan not only in entertainment programming such as reality shows, but documentaries as well. For instance, he notes that tears in the audience while they are watching a documentary about Alzheimer's disease are considered to be an indicator of social maturity – a sign of improved understanding among the public of the challenges that this disease brings. Emotion and ethics are thus closely connected with each other in Japanese media spheres. "Emotional evocation is dependent on the ethical consensus that what is happening is tragic and, in fact, should [emphasis by the author] evoke tears" (ibid., 14). Thus "intense sentimental affects become the very medium of documentary communication" (ibid., 15).

This observation by White, as an anthropologist, runs contrary to the argument by Fuenzalida (1996), who believes that, unlike telenovelas, documentaries have to rely on neutral language and cognitive learning, leaving no room for emotion and thus not being able to reach broader public. White does point out that "melodrama as a genre makes for an ideal form through which to introduce difficult, complex topics into the public sphere" (16). Emotional response and tears, in particular, are thus a means to reach to the audience and the indicator that the desired effect was produced. In White's words, "emotional evocation thus becomes necessary to communicate the meaning of the story, and tears serve as affective evidence that the story, and its appropriate understanding, has "landed," as one might say in English" (17). White's research shows, however, that this function of emotions doesn't have to be limited to melodrama genres.

The following abstract reveals the difficulties of introducing the sensitive issue of mental illness to the Japanese public and forming a certain attitude towards it. I find that, in many ways, it is pertinent to the challenges of addressing the issue of racism in Brazil:

Characteristic of these forms of suffering in Japan is the lack of a public discourse in which to root a normative understanding of the appropriate ethical and emotional reactions to abnormal bodies. Suffering in these circumstances remains a private affair, susceptible to anxiety over public shame and the unpredictable reactions of others. For a public broadcaster with a responsibility to represent public views as well as to inform them, constructing a public narrative for a stereotypically private and multivalent experience of sickness is challenging; in short, few precedents for its narration exist, causing a sense of unease for producers. One strategy for negotiating this discomfort is to translate ethically unclear situations into typical melodramatic scripts of suffering and strength (White 1992, 16).

Similarly, the myth of racial democracy maintained by the state and the discourse of silence surrounding racial discrimination and prejudice in Brazilian society has resulted in the situation where racism is not only experienced privately but there is a feeling of shame attached to it, which results from the country's history of slavery, the notions of racial superiority and the socially constructed meanings for skin colour and beauty standards for facial features and hair; as well as the actual conditions of poverty, lack of access to education or jobs other than in the service sector or manual labour. At the same time, middle class white Brazilians, until very recently, have not been educated on how to relate to this part of their history and its legacy in their society, and therefore tend to ignore or avoid acknowledging this issue altogether.

Telenovela writers and Globo in general are thus presented with challenges quite similar to the ones faced by documentary producers in Japan and seem to be employing the same strategy, that is, using melodramatic scripts of pain, suffering and inner strength. Curiously, although Globo is not a public broadcaster but a private corporation, it nonetheless positions itself as a public educator in some sense (perhaps because television traditionally has been the primary source of education for many Brazilians) and claims to be committed to social responsibility, as evident from their rhetoric and mission statements on the company's website.

Another interesting observation White makes is that some viewers object to such approach saying that it "pushes" for a narrow or very specific understanding of the issue "and employ[s] emotion, unfairly, to do so" (1992, 18). At the same time, White argues

that while for Western producers of documentaries departing from the “rational argumentative” approach and appealing through emotions rather than facts and logic might be questionable in terms of ethics, for Japanese producers, “such sentimental narrations are ethical not despite of their emotional evocations but precisely because of them” (18); and to abandon such forms would be, in fact, “an insensitive and irresponsible response to the needs of the Japanese public as producers imagine them” (18). In other words, the latter are relying on learned communication styles in Japanese culture and the viewers’ expectations which are rooted in it.

All of the above resonates with what came up in my own interviews, when some of the informants referred to telenovelas as being manipulative in the way they approach social issues, that is, by evoking emotional response; yet others argued that this was not in order to manipulate but to make people understand the suffering of another person. It is also fair to say that the expectations of telenovela audiences in Brazil are to be moved and to learn through emotional connection to the character. Given these similarities, White’s conclusion is quite informative for my study and can be easily applied to the Brazilian context:

Emotion and public responsibility become mutually constitutive in feedback loops of Japanese production culture: as NHK [Japan’s public broadcaster] experts imagine the emotional needs of their audience, constructing narrative devices to communicate both affectively and effectively, audience members cultivate the capacity to be more or less affected, communicating that information back to producers in various communication technologies such as viewer comments, surveys, and most importantly, ratings (1992, 18).

For the purposes of my study it is useful to look at Vanessa May’s (2011) analysis of how self and belonging may be connected to the process of social change. May notes that belonging helps connect individuals to the social. Our sense of self is constructed through our interactions with other people, as well as through relation to collectively held social norms, values and customs She emphasizes that the social should be understood not so much as abstract social structures, “but as something made up of the concrete, imagined or virtual relationships we have with people, collectives, the symbolic or abstract realm of ‘cultures’, objects, as well as our built and natural environments” (374). Belonging thus helps explore the relationship and the mutual influence between self and society, as well as reveal how daily practices may be generative of social change. As May observes,

The world does not change unbeknownst to us; we do not simply wake up one morning to find the world changed beyond recognition. Rather, change tends to be constant and incremental and is introduced piecemeal into our lives in the form of, for example, new technologies, new institutional practices, new forms of 'culture' (374).

In other words, May argues that social change manifests itself in gradual alterations in people's practices, attitudes or ways of thinking and by adopting or resisting those new ways of behaving and thinking, people contribute to further social transformations.

Finally, May emphasizes the importance of studying the notion of belonging in relation to social change as it may shed light on the questions of "who is allowed to take part in the reflexive arguments that contribute to changes in society, who is excluded from these and on which grounds, and the effects that such inclusion and exclusion have on people's sense of self" (375). She also stresses that belonging should not be automatically considered superior to non-belonging, since the latter can actually be even more productive for social change, when, "as a result of questioning who 'we' are, people construct alternative identities and ways of life" (ibid.). It is therefore useful to explore how experiences of non-belonging can contribute to social change.

Race in the Brazilian Context

Any discussion of race in Brazil needs to start with the work that completely transformed the way race relations had been conceptualized in the country for centuries before it was written, and which still has a strong impact on Brazilians and their self-identity today. *The Masters and the Slaves*, by Gilberto Freyre, first published in Portuguese in 1933, radically reinterpreted the relationship between the former "masters" and "slaves" defining it as one of mutual respect, equality and harmonious coexistence – a thesis that has later become subject of numerous debates and is referred to today as "the myth of racial democracy" (Da Costa 1985; Winant 1992; Sheriff 2001; Goldstein 2003).

One of the main arguments in *The Masters and the Slaves* (1986) was directed against the common assumption of the time that racially mixed populations were physically and culturally inferior to unmixed ones which, in turn, was used as an explanation for the many social, economic and political problems that the country was

facing. Freyre's goal was to prove that "physical, cultural, or psychological disabilities that had previously been attributed to racial mixture could in fact be explained in terms of malnutrition, disease, or the social pathology of the great slave plantations" (Maybury-Lewis 1987, lxxxiv). Furthermore, he argued that, instead of being a source of Brazil's weakness, miscegenation and cultural diversity should be seen as one of the country's great strengths, a democratizing factor that makes Brazilian society unique, helping it avoid the problem of being divided into two irreconcilable groups – the black and the white – as it happened in other slave-holding societies in the Americas (Freyre 1986). In other words, for Freyre, miscegenation was precisely the reason why Brazil was able to avoid the racial problems that existed in the United States. In fact, he notes how much the two countries have in common, yet differ in their treatment of the black population.

Thus, Freyre (1986) was convinced that "in Brazil individuals of the most widely varied social origins and personalities, differing likewise in race or religion or by the fact that some are the descendants of Negro slaves while others are of white European or caboclo ancestry, have risen to the highest positions" (xv). He argues that, although miscegenation was necessary due to the shortage of Portuguese women in the new land, the colonizers gladly accepted the union between the white man and the Negro woman because "consciousness of race [...] was practically non-existent in the cosmopolitan and plastic-minded Portuguese" (3). Such claims by Freyre were widely accepted in Brazil, since they meant that the country no longer had to be ashamed of its colonial past – the Portuguese turned out to be more tolerant of other races and less cruel as slave-holders compared to their Anglo-Saxon counterparts, while racial mixture was not only no longer seen as a sign of social and physical inferiority, but in fact was an attribute of a culturally robust and unique society (Maybury-Lewis 1987).

Freyre's theses became part of Brazilian self-image (Maybury-Lewis 1987) which persists today in the state's official discourse (later discussed in the work of Robin Sheriff 2001), as well as in the minds of many Brazilians, despite the abundance of documented evidence against it (Da Costa 1985; Winant 1992; Sheriff 2001; Goldstein 2003). It also resulted in Brazil being seen by social scientists in the rest of the world as "a country with a comparatively benign pattern of race relations" (Winant 1992, 174) for quite a long time. It was not until mid-1950s, when a series of studies sponsored by UNESCO closely looked at race relations in Brazil, that the concept of "racial democracy" became seriously questioned. Based on a large body of documented

evidence, the scientists came to the conclusion that “Brazilian whites were prejudiced. Blacks were not legally discriminated against but were ‘naturally’ and informally segregated. The majority of the black population remained at the bottom of society [...] and whenever blacks competed with whites they were discriminated against” (Da Costa 1985, 234). The scientists talked about the “intolerable contradiction between the myth of racial democracy and the actual prevalence of discrimination against Negroes and Mulattoes (as quoted in Da Costa 1985, 235) and “accused Brazilians of having the ultimate prejudice: to believe they were not prejudiced” (Da Costa 1985, 235).

As was mentioned earlier, the race discourse born out of Gilberto Freyre's claims regarding the uniqueness of Brazil's history of race relations is still decisively promoted by the state. Robin Sheriff's (2001) analyses the impact of this discourse on race relations in the country today. For Sheriff, one of the greatest puzzles of Brazilian society is that “although racism is abundantly evident in Brazil's bifurcated social structure, in the interactions that constitute everyday life for Brazilians of African descent, and in the derogatory ways that blackness is figured in speech, Brazil is renowned throughout the world as a ‘racial democracy’” (4). Sheriff believes that *democracia racial* is “best defined as a set of discourses – patterned ways of talking about issues related to color, race, class, equality and inequality” (7). The author argues that there exists “a mainstream set of cultural understandings, an epicentre of power [...] from which the core statements of *democracia racial* radiate. The overwhelmingly white Brazilian middle class – who are in many critical cultural senses dominant without necessarily representing a true economic or political elite – occupy this epicentre” (7). Sheriff's own ethnographic study is built mainly around the talk and understanding of race among the poor, with some white, middle-class interpretations at the background. She points out, however, that “these middle-class words represent, in sociopolitical and cultural terms, something more like a foreground” (7). Therefore, my own focus on the ways race and class are perceived by white, middle-class Brazilians and whether/how these perceptions are influenced by telenovelas, is meant to contribute to the understanding of how the discourse of racial democracy impacts Brazilian society.

Sheriff looks at discourse as both her method and focus of study. She argues that “the ways in which Brazilians talk and do not talk to each other define, no less than the material structures in which talk is embedded, the peculiar and contested character of racialized inequality in Brazil” (9). She pays special attention to the pervasive silence

surrounding the issue of racism and argues that while this silence has been interpreted by many as a confirmation that Brazil is, indeed, a racial democracy, it needs to be conceptualized as “a form of cultural censorship that has deep roots not only in the specious claims of *democracia racial* but also in the psychology of oppression” (60). As both a national ideology and a system of etiquette, *democracia racial* stipulates that Brazilians should avoid discourses that figure their nation as divided along a rigid colour line (Sheriff 2001). The importance of my own research is thus in analyzing what happens when the rules of etiquette are broken and the discourse of silence is challenged by direct and open discussions of racism in such a meaningful cultural product as telenovela, which occupies a prominent space in both public (media) and private (family) sphere in society.

Another researcher whose work I will draw upon is linguist and cultural anthropologist Jennifer Roth-Gordon who discusses how “ubiquitous racial inequality, notions of white superiority, and a national disdain for racial prejudice play out in the mundane experiences of everyday life” in Brazil (2016, 18). Roth-Gordon describes racial inequality, and racial hierarchy on which it is based, as not just something that exists by itself in society but something that people actively negotiate and produce; in other words, as does Sheriff (2001), Roth-Gordon understands race as a discourse. She emphasizes, however, that it is not only phenotype that constitutes race, but a whole range of cultural and linguistic practices. These embodied practices convey racial meanings, and Brazilians are constantly engaged in the process of racially reading bodies.

Stoler (1997, 187) says that “race draws its coherence and stability not from biology or ancestry, but rather from the ‘interpretive space’ between ‘seen’ and the ‘unseen’ (as quoted in Roth Gordon 2016, 45). Thus, on the one hand, phenotypical features are constantly noticed and “readily assumed to provide insight into a person’s character and racial capacity” (Roth-Gordon 2016, 45). For instance, phenotypically black bodies constantly run the risk of being misread as lazy, criminal and not trustworthy (ibid.) At the same time, blackness and whiteness are not only visibly significant but also “powerfully imagined, ascertained from cultural and linguistic practices that do not always neatly ‘match’ the bodies who engage in or embody them” (45). This means that race and class are deeply interconnected in Brazil and are rarely seen as separate phenomena (ibid.). Historically, wealth was linked to whiteness and

poverty to blackness and slavery. As a result, the acquisition of attributes associated with a certain socioeconomic class, such as money or education, were assumed to increase the whiteness of phenotypically black individuals (ibid.) This led to the emergence of the “mulatto escape-hatch” theory which argued that, since race and class are flexible, darker-skinned individuals could enjoy the same social status as white Brazilians once they achieved higher levels of education and relative prosperity (ibid.), which, in turn, confirmed that there was no structural racism in Brazil.

Although quantitative studies conducted over the past few decades have demonstrated that race matters even when class is held constant (Roth-Gordon 2016), this tight connection between race and class still serves as a camouflage for racism in Brazilian society. And while many Brazilians recognize the issue of extreme income inequality in their country, they fail (or refuse) to link it to race, always explaining prejudice and discrimination as directed against an individual’s social status or place of residence (favelas), but not skin colour or origin (Sheriff 2001; Goldstein 2003; Roth-Gordon 2016). This tendency to reduce race to class, pointed out by both Sheriff (2001) and Roth-Gordon (2016) has only recently been challenged in telenovelas by introducing black characters who, through hard work and determination, have achieved higher education, professional success and levels of economic prosperity normally associated with the middle class, yet still face prejudice in work and public space due to their skin colour and former residence in a favela, or community.

Emotions and Affect in Race Relations

In *Street Therapists*, Ramos-Zayas reveals how race is closely linked to emotions, pointing out that “emotional (in)competence” of a certain group (being too aggressive or too passive, for instance) is often more readily accepted as the explanation for their low social standing than the neoliberal system, societal structure or any other circumstances. She also highlights that while positive emotions are perceived as an individual quality (reflected in phrases like “she’s not like most blacks”), negative emotions are often seen as typical of a (racial) group, for example, black Americans are “lazy” or “aggressive”. As the author observes from her fieldwork in Newark:

Various racialized populations assessed their own emotional style against the emotional competency of others, so that groups were able to explain particular material conditions as consequences of the “attitudes” or “ways of being” of other minority groups, rather than the structures on which these conditions were played out. Because of the multilayered nature of emotions, these assessments were prone to creating a slippery sense that political economy did not really matter. (2012, 7)

In telenovelas, the same pattern is evident when we look at stereotypical characters: black characters or favela residents, as well as Northeastern Brazilians, are often too emotional, likely to get into trouble or lose a job because of their temper and lack of education or inability to behave appropriately in public.

Conducting her research among the Latino population in Newark, Ramos-Zayas also notes how they find it necessary to present themselves as emotionally different from their black neighbours in order to secure better jobs, for instance; or because “being emotionally different from black would presumably allow them to sidestep conditions of heightened policing and surveillance (18). That resonates with Roth-Gordon’s (2016) description of how poor black youth tries to observe certain etiquette to appear “white” (as do the white as well), for example, when talking to the police or applying for a job.

The above-mentioned ethnographies, therefore, offer valuable insights into how race relations have been traditionally understood in Brazil and how this may mediate viewers’ perceptions of the ways these relations are reinterpreted or reproduced in telenovelas. Ramos-Zayas’s work emphasizes the significance of affect and emotions for self- and mutual perceptions of racial groups and their relationships with each other.

Chapter 3.

Education and Entertainment in Brazilian Telenovelas

Brazilians are well aware of telenovelas' intent to appeal to their emotions. In fact, they expect to be moved and often judge the quality of a telenovela based on its ability to evoke feelings. The pleasure of watching telenovelas is mostly derived from the emotional effect they produce, which, in turn, depends largely on the ability of the viewers to recognize themselves in the characters, identify with them, or at least find the character convincing or believable so they are able to empathize with their feelings. When I asked viewers about the reasons why a particular telenovela was or wasn't successful, the most frequent response was "it [didn't] touch [ed] me" or "it [didn't] please[d] the audience". The Portuguese words they used were "[*não*] *mexeu comigo*" or "[*não*] *agradou*". At the same time, the viewers believe that telenovelas are there not only to provide pleasure and entertainment but to teach them something, to offer moral lessons or to provide guidance in everyday life or in situations, in which they don't typically find themselves but might encounter one day. Gina, a first generation urban migrant, says that she not only relates to many characters, especially the ones who are poor and have experienced hardships in life, but frequently finds something to learn from telenovelas – how to manage life's challenges or difficult relationships, for example. Another informant told me that her 80-year old mother watches telenovelas to keep up with modern life, to educate herself on current social and political issues and even catch up on the latest trends in the language. She quotes her mother: "if you don't know telenovelas, you don't know life!"

Thérèse is a well-educated, middle class woman who lives in Copacabana. She is fluent in English and lived in the U.S. for a while. She is also fond of telenovelas but doesn't have to rely on them as a source of news and information. She watches them primarily for pleasure and has confessed to me that, at times, she finds telenovelas' attempts to address social issues boring and unnecessary. "Telenovelas today have turned into NGOs and want to handle social issues but it's not what novelas are for." At the same time, however, she admits that she is gradually starting to change her opinion,

especially after talking once to her friend from the periphery. Thérèse once complained to her friend that telenovelas have become too heavy and boring because of their social content. Her friend, however, argued that, while it might not be particularly useful for an educated woman like Thérèse, who grew up in the city, it may be the only accessible source of information for people where her friend comes from. For instance, he said, people in smaller rural areas might not know what a transgender person is. Thérèse's friend, thus, believes that a telenovela that addresses this issue educates people and gives them an opportunity to understand transgender people better, so that if one day they meet a transgender person or learn that their friend or family member wants to go through gender transition, they will know how to react to the situation. Curiously, one evening I was sitting at Copacabana beach next to a group of young women in their late teens or early twenties. Suddenly, I overheard one of them mentioning that someone they know is transgender or wants to transition. Another person from the group replied: "Oh, that's like this girl from telenovela - Ivana! She is a woman but has started hormonal treatment to become a man and has told her family that she is transitioning". This incident was interesting as it demonstrated how a telenovela can spontaneously enter a person's daily life and how viewers continue to interact with telenovelas beyond the moment of watching (Machado-Borges 2002). In this case, the telenovela and one of its characters served as a frame of reference for the viewers in their real lives when they were presented with a relatively unfamiliar situation.

Another example of how a telenovela can serve as an educational resource for its viewers was brought up by one of my informants, Adriana:

As a lawyer, I think that it's very important that the current telenovela talks about domestic violence and shows that, when your husband forces you to have a sexual intercourse with him, it is a crime and can be considered rape; because there are women who think that rape is only when someone you don't know forces you to have sex with them.

Indeed, "*O Outro Lado do Paraíso*" (2017) did not only show scenes of violence committed by the husband against his wife but, at the end of every episode that contained such scenes, a message on the black screen would be displayed saying: "Violence against women is a crime. Report. Call [phone number]".

A similar message with a phone number would also appear at the end of each episode that contained scenes of discrimination against a black character, encouraging

the viewer to report cases of racism if they witnessed or experienced them. Thus, this particular telenovela not only touched upon certain social issues within its plot lines but openly called for action in real life, directly connecting fiction and social reality.

As I was watching various Globo telenovelas, I came across some scenes of more ubiquitous daily life situations that had a clear educational or informational purpose. In one of them, two friends go around their neighbours' houses in a small town hit by a malaria epidemics and explain what measures can be taken by the community to reduce cases of malaria, urging the residents to empty all of the containers they left outside after the rain and explaining that this would prevent mosquitos from breeding in standing water. In another scene from the same telenovela, a doctor is telling a middle-aged woman about the importance of a breast self-exam. She explains that many women don't do it thinking that it is complicated and takes a lot of time or that many simply don't know that it is possible to do a self-exam; yet, performing this procedure regularly can prevent breast cancer from going undiagnosed. The scene proceeds with the doctor showing the woman how to perform a breast self-exam. While both scenes described above were organically integrated into the storyline, their slow pace and the amount of detail made it clear that the information was intended for the audience. And while such scenes may seem boring to viewers like Thérèse, Brazilians from remote rural areas may benefit from them.

Two points are important to highlight here for purposes of this thesis. One is that Brazilian telenovelas combine in them the entertainment and the educational function, which the audience recognizes and expects from telenovelas. The other point is that even when the scene is meant to be largely educational and almost didactic, as in the two examples above, the emotional component is still present due to the nature of the telenovela genre. Following the lives of telenovela characters every night, six days a week, for a period of eight months, the audience develops an intimate relationship and an emotional attachment to them. As I mentioned in the literature review, Shiappa, Gregg, and Hewes (2005) did a study on American TV series and the (parasocial) relationship that develops between the characters and the viewers due to their regular exposure to the show. I argue that similar processes take place when Brazilians watch telenovelas. Because of the emotional bond they form with the characters, a ubiquitous event like a family dinner or a visit to a doctor may be perceived on a personal level, as part of the viewer's life or the life of a close friend. Thus, a scene explaining the

importance of a breast self-exam, despite its didactic nature, still draws attention because it is relevant to the characters that the audience cares about, while a similar scene in an educational program might not be met with the same interest.

Valerio Fuenzalida (1993) points out that population groups with higher levels of education and better access to multiple sources of information may choose educational television programs of more general and abstract character, where information is presented in a conceptualized manner, with specialists debating on a given issue, or in other words, a more analytical and rationalized programming. People with lower levels of formal education may prefer testimonial programs where learning derives from stories of vital personal experience, rather than abstract generalizations. Fuenzalida, thus, distinguishes two distinct forms of learning: one is rational-analytical and the other is narrative-experiential. These two forms of knowledge employ different types of language: one conceptual and the other affective (Fuenzalida 1993). Telenovelas offer a narrative experiential form of learning and consistently use affective language, even in more didactic scenes, like the ones described above. The inclusion of real people's testimonies of an experience similar to the one lived by its characters is also a common feature of this programming. Various telenovelas, for instance, have had 2 to 4-minute testimonies, at the end of each episode, of people who experienced violence, suffered from a disease or lived through some other traumatic experience. The subject of such testimonies always correlates with the social issue addressed in a given telenovela and these personal accounts are highly emotional, as a rule.

Emotion is thus the key element of any learning that occurs through watching of telenovelas. The audience is asked to empathize with the character; and through this empathy, the viewer not only learns about someone else's experience but, as one of my informants emphasized, may be able to "see this other person's side of things" [*enxergar o outro lado*] and maybe even change their opinion about them. According to Sabrina (the casting associate at *Nós do Morro*), this capacity of the telenovela to enable the viewer to see "the other side [*o outro lado*], whether it is the side of a black person, a transgender person or a gangster [*o bandido*]", makes the telenovela very powerful. The viewer's affection towards the character, however, is key to producing such effect. This brings us back to the theories discussed earlier – the Parasocial Contact Hypothesis and the Transportation-Imagery Model, which claim that viewers may change their opinion of a social group if they develop a "relationship" and an emotional bond with the character

representative of that group. Two Globo telenovelas, which featured same-sex relationships and were shown only two years apart from each other, but received radically different responses from the audience, offer a good example. *Amor à Vida* (2013) featured a character, Felix, who discovered his homosexuality as the story developed and, at the very end of the telenovela, finally accepted it and found true love. Despite the fact that the telenovela itself had rather low ratings most of the time while it was on air; and although Felix was a villain who, at the very beginning of the story, went as far as stealing his sister's newborn baby and leaving her to die at the garbage dump (the baby was found, of course, and later reunited with the mother); the character somehow turned out to be a huge success. When I asked my informants about the reason for such popularity, they exclaimed: "because the actor was amazing and created such a believable, funny and memorable character!" The fact that Felix was a villain seemed only to add to his popularity because the audience saw his evil nature as the result of his internal conflict and emotional suffering from having to hide his true desires, as well as from being rejected by his own father. Thus, when both Felix and his father finally accepted his homosexuality and the viewers knew that the last episode would show his first "gay kiss" [*beijo gay*] (as it became known in Brazil), the scene was watched by millions of people, including those who didn't see the rest of the telenovela. As my informant Adriana told me, when Felix and his partner started kissing, one could hear cheers from the windows – "it sounded like when a soccer team scores a goal!" People who were watching the scene were excited to see Felix happy and the character's story was vividly discussed in magazines and talk shows weeks after the telenovela had ended. In fact, the actor is still referred to as "Felix" by Brazilians, as opposed to his real name. Definitely, Felix's success was important for the Brazilian LGBT community. Brazil is in many ways a conservative country – in the sense that the Catholic Church historically has had (and still does) a lot of influence. During my fieldwork, I heard several times on TV that, for many years, the country has held the world record for hate-based LGBT murders. Thus, such a strong positive reception of a gay character in a primetime telenovela could be considered a meaningful achievement. Yet, whether this has produced an actual shift in the societal thinking or behaviour is hard to tell, considering a very different reaction of the public to a gay female couple in the telenovela that was broadcast two years later. "*Babilônia*" (2015) also had a same-sex couple among its characters, only this time, they were two happily married and accomplished women in their sixties. Also, this time the "gay kiss" happened in the very

first episode. According to the internet articles published at that time, *“Babilônia”* caused heated debates both in social media and “in the streets” even before its premiere, as soon as it became known that two acclaimed Brazilian actresses, Fernanda Montenegro and Nathália Timberg, would be portraying “a lesbian couple” in the telenovela. The authors were accused of disrespecting family values and the country’s religious leaders were calling for boycotting the telenovela. It was rejected by the majority of the conservative audience in Brazil and its ratings remained very low throughout the eight months that it was on air. Images with the words: “Say no to *‘Babilônia!’*” were also circulating in social media.

Such a drastically opposite reaction from the audience towards seemingly the same issue puzzled me when I first learned about it before starting my fieldwork, so I kept asking my informants for possible explanations, and the most common response I got was that it [the gay kiss] was simply too early shown to the public. My informants were convinced that the most important difference between the two scenes (the one with Felix and the other from *“Babilônia”*) was that the former happened at the very end of the telenovela when everybody had already “fallen in love with Felix”; while the latter was shown in the very first episode when the two women were still complete strangers to the viewer. “They simply didn’t give the audience a chance to develop affection towards the characters”, says Thérèse, “because the Brazilian viewer is very forgiving – once they have fallen in love with the character, they will forgive them anything.” Indeed, some of the most popular characters in Brazilian telenovelas were villains, and Felix was both a villain and gay, yet Brazilians absolutely adored him. The failure of the elderly female couple to produce a similar result was not so much due to the fact that they were gay, but due to the lack of affective relationship between the audience and the viewer, which needed more time to develop. In other words, the conditions necessary to produce a shift in the perception of one group by the other, which is a sustained and non-superficial contact between the two (or parasocial contact, according to Shiappa, Gregg and Hewis 2005), were not observed. If we consider the authors’ (ibid.) argument that negative attitudes can be changed through positive contact, and that prejudicial beliefs need to enter into conflict with new beliefs based on positive experiences, then we can see why the reaction to the “gay kiss” was so different between the last and the first episodes of these two telenovelas.

“Babilônia” is a good example, however, of how telenovelas can have a positive impact on society even when the ideas they promote are not widely accepted and even actively rejected by many of its viewers. According to a Brazilian news site, as soon as the “gay kiss” happened, the reaction on social media was immediate. Various internet users commented on the scene and it became one of the most discussed issues, “mostly in a positive way”, according to the source. The news article went on quoting a Rio de Janeiro deputy of the state, who commented: “A “gay kiss” in the first episode. A kiss between two older women, portrayed by two grand actresses. *‘Babilônia’* started well.” It then quoted an internet user who wrote: “my father switched the channel just because of the ‘gay kiss’ scene.” What this means is that telenovelas have great capacity to generate active discussion around the issues they raise, and not only in the private sphere, among friends and family, but in the public domain as well. *“Babilônia’s”* “gay kiss” received attention not just from its regular viewers and social media users, but also from the country’s political and religious leaders. Regardless of whether they approved of the scene or not, Brazilians of different classes, social positions and religious convictions engaged in the public debate on same-sex relationships, family values and what they meant for their society.

Black Characters and Discussions of Racism in Telenovelas

The importance of affect and emotion in the relationship between the viewer and the telenovela character may explain why Brazilian audience is often so fond of antagonists (or villains), as my participants noted. Such characters normally bring conflict into the story and therefore create more intense and emotional situations. The villains of recent years, as was pointed out to me, have also become more complex and controversial, or “more human”, in the words of my informants. Although “evil”, they may also have a hidden gentle or romantic side, or a highly dramatic background story which explains how they turned out to be villains. Both the intense drama around these characters and their complexity help do develop a stronger bond in the “relationship” between them and the audience. A controversial character that has both a good and a bad side is much easier to relate to or even identify with for most people. And such process of identification, in its turn, can facilitate emotional learning (Fuenzalida 2007). This may lead to a very curious effect, as it did with Felix, and as I also witnessed with

another character from the 9 o'clock telenovela that was coming to an end when I arrived in Brazil to do my fieldwork.

“*A Força do Querer*”, like many other recent telenovelas, had part of its story develop in a community, or a favela. Unlike these other telenovelas, it focused mainly on the drug trade in the favela and the characters who were involved in it, as opposed to regular community residents. These characters were normally referred to in the telenovela, as well as during my interviews, as *traficantes* [drug traffickers] or *bandidos* [gangsters]. When I saw the first few scenes with one of such characters – Sabiá – portrayed by a beginning black actor Jonathan Azevedo, I thought that it was a typical example of Globo and the author doing a disservice to the black Brazilian community – a young black actor cast as the leader of drug trade (*chefe do tráfico*) in a favela (in the next chapter, I will discuss stereotypes reproduced by black characters in Globo telenovelas in more detail). Dangerous and vicious, armed with a rifle, Sabiá was walking around the favela shooting and ordering to kill, kidnapping the rich for ransom, and, without a doubt, being a villain in every possible way.

As the story developed, however, the viewer started discovering a different side of this character, the one that was brave, strong, honest, fair, sometimes funny and somehow very likable. To quote my interview participants, he managed to charm [*encantar*] the audience; and when I asked what was so charming about Sabiá, several of them said that he was *muito humano* – very human(e).

The development of Sabiá’s “relationship” with the audience becomes even more fascinating when analyzed alongside another – white – character, whose journey in the story went the opposite way. Rubinho entered the story as a quiet, soft-spoken young man who was working towards a university degree but temporarily had to take up a job in a restaurant. Tired of financial difficulties and desperately wanting to become rich, Rubinho enters the drug trade in the community and eventually becomes Sabiá’s right-hand man. His personality changes radically, however, as he gains access to more and more power and money. Eventually, he not only betrays his wife, leaving her and their son without any financial support, but turns against Sabiá wanting to become head of the drug trade and, in the end, attempts to kill him. In the last episode of the telenovela, Sabiá kills Rubinho as the latter is about to shoot a policewoman chasing them (another character that became very popular in the story), thus saving her from imminent death.

As I was watching the scene with my hosts, they cheered loudly as Sabiá pulled the trigger and turned into a hero of the telenovela.

This scene, as I discovered later, contained more symbolic meaning than was obvious on the surface. Certainly, I recognized the significance of a black favela resident, who was leading the drug trade, turning into a hero in a very popular primetime telenovela. Yet, it was not until my interview participants pointed it out, that I saw another level of meaning. Gina and her daughter, Priscila, considered the fact that one of the *bandidos* in this telenovela was a “handsome, white guy with blue eyes”, extremely significant. “Because, before, only a black actor could play *o bandido*”, Gina explained. Priscila added that “before, to watch a scene where a man like Rubinho – handsome, with blond hair and blue eyes – is a gangster would be impossible”. Thus, when telenovelas attempt to challenge established stereotypes and break social taboos, they can do so not only by introducing black characters who are successful and well-educated, but also by showing that a white person can, too, be a criminal and a drug dealer. And the reversed positions that the black and the white character in this story ended up occupying makes the audience, at the very least, question the social assumptions they have been used to.

The actor, Jonathan Azevedo, and his character, also demonstrate how telenovelas can bring attention to an issue in more than one way. Initially, Jonathan Azevedo was hired by Globo to appear in only a few episodes of “*A Força do Querer*”. The character was meant to die shortly but the audience liked him so much that he ended up signing a contract until the end of the telenovela. When this information came out on a news site, a woman posted the following comment: “I’m sorry, but the part of a drug dealer suits him very well. I’m actually afraid of him, if I were to meet him in some public place, I don’t think I’d ask for a selfie.” This comment provoked a strong reaction in the social media from the actor’s fans and colleagues, and led to a broader discussion of racism in Brazil. The comment was defined as “racist” on various news sites; the author of the telenovela tweeted about it; and Jonathan himself responded on media to the incident, saying that he felt it was his role, as a public figure, to make sure that these questions would be discussed. He also said that he had experienced racism many times in his life but never let himself become discouraged and now, as before, intended to work even harder in order to demonstrate to young black people that “everything depends on you”.

What happened to Jonathan Azevedo is, no doubt, something that black Brazilians experience every day, but it was the fact that this happened to a prime-time telenovela actor at the peak of his popularity that made everyone pay attention and reflect on the issue. The viewer's emotional attachment to the character, and therefore to the actor, made the incident impossible to ignore. Before reading about the case in the media, I had heard about it more than once from (white) Brazilians with whom I had informal conversations at the beach, as well as later, from my informants during interviews, which means that the incident produced a certain impact. What happened to the actor was now personal to the viewer and resulted in an open and lively discussion of racism in society – something that was hardly happening in Brazil at all until recently (Rosas-Moreno 2014), thus helping to break the discourse of silence that has existed around the issue of racism for decades (Sheriff 2001). It is important to note, however, that while the actor's public response helped to draw attention to an important social issue, it nonetheless contained the risk of presenting racism and inequality as a personal matter. His words "everything depends on you", while, no doubt, is encouraging for many, dangerously steer the focus away from the fact that racism in Brazil is a structural problem, which needs to be addressed at a structural level, and it is not just a matter of individual attitude. This resonates with Ramos-Zayas's (2012) observations of how racial inequality is often both presented by the state and perceived by the population as a matter of individual qualities and ability to fit within the system, rather than the dysfunction of this system. My point here is that when telenovelas address the issue of racism, it is crucial that they address it as a structural problem and not just a matter of personal attitudes. Otherwise, although it may encourage and help individual people deal better with racism, it is highly unlikely to result in any meaningful change in the society.

As for Jonathan Azevedo's success as Sabiá, what makes it particularly significant is the actor's personal background – my white, middle-class informants clearly felt it was important to emphasize to me that the actor himself grew up in the community. "Just like Sabiá", they would say, "only he grew up to be a very decent person!" During the time that the telenovela was broadcast, and in the following weeks, Jonathan Azevedo made appearances in several talk shows and entertainment programs. The sharp contrast between the personalities of Sabiá and the actor, the way they talked, dressed and carried themselves, was fascinating. In a society, where class, race and

space overlap, reinforcing stereotypes and creating multi-layered prejudices (Penglase 2014), the “sweet, gentle and intelligent” Jonathan who was an adopted child and grew up in one of Rio’s communities, can help break, or at least shake up those stereotypes. The fact that someone thought the role of a drug dealer suited this person well also helped to expose the injustice of racial discrimination. Once again, however, my participants’ comments conceal the assumption that no matter where you grow up, if you really want to, you can be a decent person. While this may help break some stereotypes by showing that not every black person from the community is a “bad guy”, it does not consider the social structures that make it more likely for a white person to go to university and a young, black man from a favela to be recruited into the drug trade. In other words, the viewers’ fascination with the character of Sabía and their admiration for the actor Jonathan Azevedo are an example of how emotion in telenovela watching can help fight prejudice and perhaps improve race relations to some extent, but fails to take a step further by addressing racism at a structural level and, as such, is not sufficient to produce an actual social change.

“*A Força do Querer*”, contributed to the discussion of racism not only by creating juxtaposition between the white and the black character and reversing their “traditional” roles, but also through the personality of the actor and his life experience. Curiously, neither of the two effects seems to have been planned by the author or the network from the beginning, considering that Jonathan Azevedo was not supposed to stay on screen for longer than a few episodes. This reveals how a telenovela can sometimes make an impact in unpredictable ways, although normally its efforts to address racism or any other social issue are more intentional.

Race versus Class in Brazil

The most common way telenovelas raise the question of racial inequality in Brazil is by including black characters into plots and displaying scenes in which they experience prejudice and discrimination. Another important tool is to introduce a character in a “non-typical” role, the one that Brazilians would not normally associate with a black person. Unfortunately, both in telenovelas and real life, most black Brazilians have been stuck at the bottom of the social ladder. Due to the country’s

history, social politics and education system, the majority of the population living in communities are black. Most of them are poor, lack education and are locked in low-paid menial jobs. What's worse, they systematically experience prejudice and discrimination as favela residents, being frequently perceived as criminals and drug dealers, regardless of their true life styles. For many decades, telenovelas have been largely reproducing (and thus reinforcing) these stereotypes, giving the few black actors that they cast the roles of domestic workers, baby-sitters, drug dealers and criminals. It is only in the last few years, no more than a decade ago, that Globo telenovelas have started to break these stereotypes by introducing black characters that are well-educated and belong to the middle-class.

One of such characters was Paula in "*Babilônia*" (2015) – the telenovela I discussed earlier in this chapter. Paula's character was challenging several stereotypes at once. First, she was a black woman who got into university through affirmative action and became a successful lawyer. Besides that, although she had a prestigious and well-paid job, she was still residing in a community at the beginning of the telenovela – not because she couldn't afford to move out but because she grew up there and her boyfriend was a successful owner of a local bar. The telenovela was, thus, showing that, contrary to the general assumption in Brazil, community residents are not necessarily all poor and uneducated, nor do they only make money from drug trade or other criminal activities.

There was a short scene with Paula that I found particularly interesting to discuss and sometimes watch together with my research participants. In this scene, a white, middle-class woman (Inês) is expecting to be interviewed for a job in the law firm where Paula is a lawyer. When Paula enters the room, the woman asks her how much longer she needs to wait for her interviewer and adds: "You could at least have offered me a glass of water." This phrase indicates that when Paula entered the room, Inês automatically assumed that she was a secretary. It didn't occur to her that she might be a lawyer and, in fact, the very person she was to have an interview with. The scene thus reflects what Roth-Gordon (2016) discusses in her book, *Race and the Brazilian Body* – that, in Brazil, money and social position may "whiten" a person, but only to an extent. It also reveals that, while there is a tendency in Brazilian society to reduce race to class and explain racism as prejudice against poverty, and not race (Roth-Gordon 2016;

Sheriff 2001), what Inês sees first, when Paula enters the room, is not the way she is dressed or the way she talks and carries herself, but her skin colour.

The first person I showed the scene to was Taysa. Taysa is an extremely interesting research participant because she is a young white woman who grew up in the community of Babilônia – the one that the telenovela was named after – but today lives in a middle-class neighbourhood and works as a journalist. Although nowadays, there are more light-skinned people living in communities due to active migration from the Northeast, before, the overwhelming majority of Babilônia residents were black, which made Taysa, who has blond hair, very fair skin and blue eyes, really stand out. “When I was growing up in the community, I was one of few kids with fair hair and blue eyes, so for me, I was wrong, I was different from the others.” After watching the scene with Paula together, we started talking about the differences in the way Taysa and her friends from the community were treated when she was younger. Taysa told me that when she got admitted to a school with predominantly white, middle-class students, her mother instructed her not to tell anyone that she lived in a community. She would tell everyone that she lived in the neighbourhood just below morro da Babilônia [the hill of Babilônia]. And although Taysa felt bad about lying, she didn’t have the courage to tell the truth, as she saw her friend suffer from prejudice because her mother lived in the community:

The girl didn’t even live with the mother; she lived with her grandparents [outside the favela] but I saw her suffer from prejudice. And so I became more and more afraid to tell people where I live. When I revealed it to some people, they would say “mas voce nao tem nem cara de morar no morro” [but you don’t even look like someone from the hill].

Later, when Taysa and some of her friends moved out of the community and, indeed, were residing in the neighbourhood below, no one would ask her any further questions when she said where she lived. “When my [black] friend said it though, they would ask ‘but do you actually live in Ladeira [the neighbourhood below] or on the hill nearby?’”

Taysa’s personal experience confirms what was demonstrated in the telenovela scene, as well as in Roth-Gordon’s ethnography (2016) – that race matters even when class is held constant. What was curious though was that Taysa found the scene with Paula, although generally true, a bit exaggerated. Because Paula was very nicely dressed, Taysa believed that, in real life, most people would not have mistaken her for a secretary. Yet, my two other participants who were black had a different opinion. They

said that what happened to Paula was happening every single day to black Brazilians, regardless of how well dressed they were. Each of them then told me a story of a similar experience in their own lives. Sabrina is an actress who, while attending a social event at a movie company, was mistaken by a (white) colleague for a server and was asked to take care of her personal belongings. The other participant is a university professor who was approached by a student's parent in the corridor and informed him that one of the washrooms needed to be cleaned. Both of them related to the scene with Paula entirely and emphasized that this was a very typical situation to occur in Brazil. It is, thus, interesting to see how viewers may interpret telenovela scenes differently, depending on their own background (class, race, and so on) and personal experience, as it supports my earlier point made in the theoretical discussion that telenovela watching should be understood as a process of meaning making, in which both the storyteller and the reader/viewer equally participate.

The fact that telenovelas today feature characters living in favelas is significant. Since their introduction and until recently, telenovela stories revolved around upper- and middle class, white Brazilians living in prestigious neighbourhoods and luxurious mansions, with a few poor characters thrown in to create conflict or tell a classic Cinderella story. As one of my participants said, the conflict between the rich and the poor has always been present in telenovelas but it never touched upon the racial issue or contextualized poverty in any way. Before, the poor just happened to be poor in the stories. Today, the telenovelas talk about the roots of social inequality and expose the key role that race plays in it. They challenge the established stereotypes by including black characters who are not criminals or drug dealers, but hard-working and ambitious people; and they demonstrate the amount of prejudice and discrimination these people had to face on their way to success. All of my white participants have noticed that the roles black actors play today have changed a lot compared to what they used to be less than a decade ago. One woman, while naming all the black characters in "non-typical" roles that were present in telenovelas at that time, exclaimed: "There is even a black girl from a favela who is very smart and so she goes to a private college. Where would you have seen a smart black woman before?!" In her opinion, this change in the way black Brazilians are represented in telenovelas is crucial "because they show that a black person, too, can be smart, and honest, and successful".

When I was watching “*Babilônia*” episodes before starting my fieldwork in Brazil, I noted that it was unusual that the female protagonist, Regina, was a woman of African descent, who lived in a community and sold refreshments in a tent at the Copacabana beach (*Praia de Copacabana*). I didn’t realize how unusual it was until I got to Rio de Janeiro and saw the Copacabana beach myself. The space at *Praia de Copacabana* is shared between two groups of people – those who go there to enjoy the beach and relax, and those who work hard in the scorching sun, serving the former food and drinks, and trying to make some cash. The first group is predominantly white or lighter-skinned, while the second is overwhelmingly black. This latter group are people who reside in Rio de Janeiro communities. They don’t have formal employment and commute daily from their homes up the hills to Copacabana and other upscale beaches to work either as *camelôs* – walking the beach end to end and selling snacks and souvenirs – or as *barraqueiros* [tent owners] – selling coconut water and renting out beach chairs. Only after observing this beach dynamics for a while and realizing how big the social gap between the two groups is, did I appreciate the full significance of a *barraqueira* being the protagonist of a prime-time telenovela. It became even clearer after a comment my host, Nazaré, made as I was going to the beach one day. “Don’t ever buy anything at the beach!” she advised. I guessed that, perhaps, she was worried I would buy something not very fresh on a hot day and get a food poisoning, since I was not used to Brazilian food yet. “No, not because of that! Because they steal!” “They do?” – I thought of all the people I saw dragging their heavy bags with food and other items, stepping heavily on the sand, sweating, panting and stopping every couple of minutes to put the bags on the ground and wipe their faces from the sweat. I was having trouble imagining one of them grabbing my purse and taking off... “Yes. They are all drug dealers... if they’re not, then they have ties to drug traffickers in their favelas where they live”.

My host was a white woman in her sixties who never “had to work because she has always been well provided for by her husband”, as she proudly told me one day. Her reality, therefore, could not be further from the one all these people, whom she considered thieves and drug dealers, were living. Telenovelas like “*Babilônia*” and characters like Paula and Regina can thus be one of very few ways for white, middle class Brazilians to better understand the reality of poorer and less privileged people in their country. Certainly, middle-class Brazilians are not oblivious to the living conditions in communities or unaware of the prejudices its residents face. But when they watch it

happen to a familiar character, especially the one they like and care about, this superficial awareness could potentially transform into a more personal concern and gradually lead to a change in attitude and behaviour. It is important to note, however, that the more the viewers are able to relate personally to a given story and the bigger overlap they can find between a character's experience and their own, the more likely they are to engage emotionally with that character.

One of my participants, Gina, is a good example. Gina is a woman in her fifties and a mother of two – Priscila, 34, and Mateus, 28. I met her daughter Priscila at the beach when I stopped to watch a fitness class one evening. She was waiting for her boxing class to begin and we started talking. After learning about my research, Priscila told me that her mother was fond of watching Globo telenovelas and offered to arrange an interview with her. As we talked a bit more that evening, Priscila told me that her mother was an immigrant from the Northeast and, out of six children, all of whom moved to Rio de Janeiro, was the only one who didn't live in a favela. "Isso e uma ascensão" [this is [social] uprising], she pointed out proudly. When I asked her about telenovelas that address social inequality, she mentioned Gloria Perez, an author who is particularly dedicated to raising various social issues, and said that her current one ("*A Força do Querer*" [The Power of Desire]) talked about *preconceito* [prejudice] against Northeasterners. I realized that this hadn't occurred to me even though I had been following this telenovela, analyzing it in terms of how race relations were being portrayed in it. I asked Priscila to elaborate and she explained that Ruy, a rich young man who was in love with another man's (Zeca's) fiancé, felt entitled to getting her because Zeca was just a poor urban migrant who recently had moved to Rio de Janeiro from a tiny northeastern village. In order to get what he wanted Ruy used the money and power of his family to make Zeca lose his home and job in Rio so he would be forced to move back to his hometown. Priscila said that the way Ruy was looking down on Zeca, treating him as a minor obstacle on the way to his goals, represents how Northeasterners are looked upon in Rio. This prejudice, she explained, is based on the fact that Northeasterners are believed to be poor and uneducated – something that her mother, Gina, also talked about in our interview. Indeed, Roth-Gordon (2016) argues in her book that Northeasterners are considered symbolically black (128) in Brazil because, although many of them have light skin, they do not possess other attributes of whiteness, such as education, culture, higher social status and so on. Having focused on racism and

prejudice against black Brazilians, I overlooked this dynamics between Ruy and Zeca and its symbolic meaning in the society. For Priscila, however, who is a daughter of a migrant from the Northeast and a first-generation *carioca* (Rio de Janeiro resident), this aspect was a lot more apparent and carried particular importance.

My interview with Gina thus was interesting because she was both a poor migrant from the Northeast who had first-hand experience of how people like her are defined and being treated by the white middle-class in a big city, and at the same time someone who now belonged to this middle-class as a successful owner of a law firm in Copacabana. The most defining feature in Gina was her pride of the fact that she managed to succeed in Rio de Janeiro despite having been a poor, uneducated woman from the Northeast when she first arrived in the city. This identity was still very strong in Gina, after over 30 years living in Rio, and this fact was highlighted by how strongly she identified with a character from a 2004 telenovela “Senhora do Destino”. Maria do Carmo, the protagonist of the telenovela, was a poor young woman from the Northeast who moved to Rio de Janeiro to build a new life for herself and her four children. Gina and her husband did not have any children when they moved to the South but she still sees herself in Maria do Carmo in many ways – as a young woman from the interior, a *nordestina*, a hard-worker and “a real fighter who, despite all the hardships and prejudices that she had to suffer, came out as a winner in life”. “Foi uma Nordestina que deu certo!” [This was a Northeasterner who worked out/succeeded], she says, referring both to her favourite character and herself.

Gina is an example of how telenovelas sometimes bring additional meaning to people’s own lives, valorizing their personal everyday experiences and validating their life choices (Fuenzalida 1996) and thus evoking deeply personal emotional responses. By enabling viewers to recognize themselves in characters, telenovelas, in a way, provide proof and confirmation of the value and significance of their own lives. Gina is rightfully proud of her achievements in life but the existence of the character of Maria do Carmo means that these achievements are made known to other people. This character represents people like Gina, telling other Brazilians their story, proving that a Northeasterner is not just a poor uneducated migrant who “sempre fala errado” [always speaks incorrectly] but a hard-working citizen who deserves respect and acknowledgment for all the hardships they managed to overcome in life.

Gina and her two children spend quite a bit of time naming all the successful “real life” *Nordestinos* they can remember and telling me their stories. Gina states that before nobody knew anything about people from the Northeast, except that they were poor and uneducated; no one knew or took interest in the places they were coming from. Before, it was only *Nordestinos* who were coming to Rio in search of a better life, but today, after telenovelas have featured *Nordestino* characters and have shown scenes from the Northeast, cariocas and other big city-dwellers want to go to these parts of Brazil; and the attitude to people like Gina is starting to change. This is why following Maria do Carmo’s story is not simply entertainment for Gina but a deeply personal and meaningful experience. She tears up talking about the character and says, “the scenes from that telenovela were most real things in my life”. In another telenovela that Gina brings up, the story is taking place in the Northeastern region of Brazil, in the interior of Pernambuco state. “There were a lot of things I identified myself with”, she says, “because I’m not from Pernambuco but I’m from Ceará” – the neighbouring state. “And so I lived through a lot of experiences of its characters. I was touched when seeing their houses because my home was just like them. Many sad things, the poverty... I’ve been through that” – Gina tears up again – “there were scenes when I had to leave the room because it felt like I was living through them”.

Northeasterners occupy an interesting space in the Brazilian society. On the one hand, as urban migrants from the poor states of the country, they experience a lot of prejudice, to the point that they are considered symbolically black (Roth-Gordon 2016). A lot of them stay in favelas when they come to big cities because it’s the only place they can afford; they take menial jobs, as many black Brazilians do, working as cleaners and *empregadas* [domestic workers] in upper- and middle class homes. Yet, Northeasterners themselves may often look down on black or darker-skinned Brazilians despite sharing so much social experience with them. Priscila, Gina’s daughter, tells me that Northeasterners can be extremely prejudiced against black people: “In Brazil, the Northeasterner himself suffers a lot of prejudice for being a Northeasterner. But a white Northeasterner does not like a black person. Oh my! [lowers her voice] A white Northeasterner hates the black! He’s [a Northeasterner] a racist!” Gina explains to me, meanwhile, that her mother was white “just like you; and my father was... I’ll show you! [starts looking for his picture in her phone] Oh my! You have no idea how much they

suffered to be together! When I was little and went to visit my grandparents with mom, my dad didn't even come with us because they didn't want a black to enter their home!"

Gina and Priscilla define themselves as *morenas claras* [light brown]; I would simply describe them as white. Perhaps because Gina's father was black or because she personally has occupied an inferior social status and suffered prejudice in Rio de Janeiro, she is very sympathetic towards black Brazilians. When I tell her that I'm looking specifically at how the issue of racial prejudice is raised in recent telenovelas, she describes in detail a scene from the current seven o'clock telenovela where a young black man, Don, who had been adopted by an affluent family years ago, gets arrested for trying to get into his own luxury car when visiting his original family in a community. Normally dressed in a smart suit, that day he had to change into shorts and a T-shirt borrowed from someone in the community because his own clothes got soaked in the rain. The scene demonstrates that, despite his privileged social status and education, as soon as he finds himself in a favela wearing *favelado* [favela resident] clothes, Don loses his acquired "whiteness" in the eyes of the police and is treated exactly as any other black person in the community – as "a potential criminal" (Penglase 2014, 141). This scene confirms Penglase's (2014) argument that race is not the only criterion for discrimination in Brazil but that black Brazilians suffer multiple prejudices based on their skin colour, income and place of residence. The policemen were not interested in Don's explanations – the fact that he was found standing next to an expensive car in the community, wearing "favelado" clothes, was enough to incriminate him. I had watched this very scene with one of my hosts a few days before my interview with Gina. When I asked Betty, who is a white, middle-class woman, why the guy was being arrested standing next to his own car, she sighed and replied: "*O Brasil e assim – o negro não pode ter carro*" [Brazil is like that – a black person can't own a car].

When Gina finished describing this telenovela scene, I asked her: "and is that something that could happen in real life?" – "Every day!" – she exclaimed, "every day!" Gina went on sharing her own story of being judged by appearance. She told me how she walked into a car dealership one day looking for a new car. Because it was Sunday and she was just taking a walk with her husband, she was wearing a T-shirt, shorts and flip-flops. In other words, "*malvestida*" [badly dressed], her children clarify, and the three of them start laughing. According to Gina's story, seeing her dressed like that, one of the dealership employees tried to hide behind the computer at his desk not wanting to offer

her customer service and kept ignoring her, until a younger sales agent came up. A few days later, Gina came back “with a purse and wearing high heels” and the sales agent, who had tried to hide before, ran up to her with an eager smile and asked if he could help. She said “no” and asked to be served by the other agent who had helped her the other day. With this story Gina wants to demonstrate that the prejudice that characters like Don encounter on the screen is also a real life experience for many Brazilians, including Gina, which is why she relates to these stories so much. Just like Don, although she is now a successful business woman who lives in Rio de Janeiro and can afford to own a car, she may still experience prejudice and lose her “whiteness” if she is not dressed appropriately to be associated with the white, middle-class. A purse and high heels make it easier for her, perhaps, than for a black person, to be recognized as middle-class. Yet, when she is not displaying any clear attributes of a certain socio-economic status but is wearing shorts and flip-flops instead, her other characteristics become more visible to others. Paired with casual clothing, her physical features probably allowed the dealership agent recognize her as a Northeasterner (“because *Nordestinos* have big heads”, she says) and thus place her in an entirely different category. The similarities between her own experience and that of Maria do Carmo or Don allow Gina not only to relate to telenovela stories and feel a connection to their characters but also to re-create and re-evaluate her own story, giving her “individual experience a public meaning”, as pointed earlier in my Literature Review chapter (Arendt 1958, as cited in Maggio 2014, 99). Similarly, as mentioned in my earlier discussion on storytelling and narratives, this re-telling and re-evaluating of the events over which Gina had no control (such as the experience of extreme poverty, life hardships and prejudice) enables her to “at least have a hand in defining their meaning” (Jackson 2013, 35).

The importance that Gina places on the story of Maria do Carmo signifies that characters like her or Paula from “*Babilônia*” play a dual role: (1) breaking stereotypes and challenging the assumptions of others about the group they represent; (2) and serving as a validation of the experience lived by the people they represent. Maria do Carmo not only gained respect from a broader audience for her courage and resilience, but inspired and helped raise self-esteem among those who identified with her most – urban migrants from the North, like Gina. Similarly, Paula was an inspiration to many young black women, not only because she was an accomplished lawyer but because of the dignity and pride with which she was embracing her African origins.

Race and Fashion Trends in Telenovelas

In her book, *Dreaming Equality*, Robin Sheriff (2001) describes the language expressions used in Brazil to refer to African physical features: *cabelo ruim* [bad hair], *nariz chato* [flat nose], *lábios grossos* [fat lips] and so on. Sheriff explains it as a manifestation that race is discursive and that the inferiority of black phenotype/physical features is inscribed in the language itself. Donna Goldstein (2003) conducts a similar analysis of race, class and gender relationship in Brazil. She explores the ways in which racialization and racial and class domination are both masked and perpetuated through conventional assumptions of beauty, attractiveness and sexuality that are linked inseparably to race. In the minds of both lighter- and darker-skinned individuals there exists a clear hierarchy of beauty as defined by race, where “whiteness” and European facial features are at the very top of the scale and very much envied and desired (for marriage, in particular); the mixture of black and white features, or being a *mulata*, puts one in the category of something exotic, sensual and erotic, and therefore desirable, although not as much as the “white” beauty; while “blackness” is not simply perceived as less attractive, but is (still) associated with slavery, dirty work and ugliness. As a result, for decades, black Brazilian women used to straighten their hair every day. Curly, Afro-textured hair was considered (and sometimes still is) an embarrassment, something ugly that needed to be concealed. This has started to change radically, however, in the very last few years, and a lot of my informants considered Paula’s role to be crucial in this change.

Besides being a popular entertainment and an integral part of life for many Brazilians, the telenovela is a very powerful fashion dictator. Several of my informants talked about the influence telenovelas and their characters have on fashion trends in Brazil – from hairstyles and clothing, to make-up and accessories. The actors and actresses are invited to various programs and talk shows to discuss their character’s wardrobe and give fashion tips. One of such programs featured Sheron Menezes, the actress who represented Paula in “*Babilônia*”. She offered tips on how to wear a turban with curly hair and how to use African style accessories, thus, turning *cabelo ruim* into a symbol of beauty and African culture. This is crucial because when a black actor or

actress appears in a telenovela, a lot of black Brazilians feel that they represent them, as I observed both in the comments of my interlocutors and on social media.

One of my black participants in a group interview explained the significance of this capacity of telenovelas to launch fashion trends:

When I was a child, everyone straightened their hair. Guys, I didn't have any frame of reference! There was no frame of reference on television! That's why it took me so long to accept my hair.

When I asked Sabrina if the popularization of curly hair was a recent thing, she replied that it was very recent and added:

My daughter has curly hair. She thinks it's beautiful! She didn't suffer through what I suffered, like, oh, I need to straighten my hair. I thought that my hair was awful, because that's what I learned – my hair was ugly!

Paula's character and Sabrina's story, therefore, represent another tool telenovelas can use to reshape the relationship between the white and the black population in Brazil, as well as encourage other changes in society. Because the viewers often grow to love and admire telenovela characters, they become eager to imitate them in all sorts of ways, from fashion style to a way of thinking. A popular character, therefore, becomes something of a role model to its audience. And since the personalities of characters and the actors who represent them often merge in the minds of the viewers, these actors can have an even more powerful impact on society if they choose to engage in a debate on a social issue and take a moral stance. But even when the result is only a seemingly minor change such as the acceptance and popularization of *cabelo crespo* [curly hair] among black Brazilian women, it is, nonetheless, a meaningful shift as it raises self-esteem among these women, and black Brazilians in general, redefines the beauty standards that were previously based on racial hierarchy, and by doing so, contributes to greater racial equality in society.

I believe, therefore, that, although minor and subtle, the transformations described above can be looked at as signifiers of social change, if change is understood in May's (2011) terms (discussed in more detail in my Literature Review chapter) as a process which manifests itself in gradual alterations in people's practices, attitudes or ways of thinking. As May points out, such change can be incremental and is introduced piecemeal into our lives in the form of new practices or new forms of culture. And by

adopting or resisting these new practices or forms of culture, people contribute to further social transformations.

In this chapter, I explored various ways in which telenovelas, through emotions, could produce a positive impact on society. It is important, however, to also examine the limitations of this capacity, which I mentioned briefly above and will discuss in more detail in the next chapter.

Chapter 4.

The Limitations of Emotion as a Driver of Social Change

In the previous chapter, I discussed the capacity of telenovelas to generate public debate around a social issue and have an impact on society by appealing to emotions of the viewers and encouraging affective learning. Although emotions can be a powerful tool in this regard, it is necessary to recognize their limitations and analyse how their very presence and key role in telenovela watching can limit the effect they are meant to produce.

If we compare earlier telenovelas with the most recent ones, the change in terms of the presence of black actors, as well as the characters they portray, is evident. As I stated in the previous chapter, Brazilian telenovelas until as late as the last decade were predominantly white, with very few black characters present and even fewer being other than a domestic worker, a gangster or a slave. When asked about this change, the majority of my informants confirmed that it was a very recent and significant development.

However, the representation of black Brazilians in even the most recent telenovelas is still far from being equal and there are a number of issues with how they are represented, which means that, while breaking taboos and challenging stereotypes in some cases, in many others telenovelas still often end up reproducing them.

Stereotypical Characters in Telenovelas

Earlier I analyzed the character of Sabiá, portrayed by the black actor Jonathan Azevedo who grew up in the community of Vidigal in Rio de Janeiro and used to be part of the local theatre group *Nós do Morro*. I had an interview with the founder of this group (Guti Fraga) and the casting associate (Sabrina), and learned that a lot of black actors who end up in Globo telenovelas are former students from *Nós do Morro*. As a casting

associate, Sabrina often gets calls from agents looking to hire actors. Most of the parts they are sought for, however, are those of maids, drivers or criminals, as has been mentioned before. Sabrina told me about an incident when she got a call from an agent and heard “I need two rapists and a safe box breaker”. “On instinct, I got so offended that I hung up the phone and he called back instantly to apologize”, she says. Both Sabrina and Guti agree that it is extremely hard for their students to get a meaningful part in a telenovela and point out that the first to succeed in their theatre group was Thiago Martins – a young actor who grew up in the community, just as the rest of its members, with the only exception that he was white. Over the last few years, other actors from the group have followed his steps, “but he was the first because it was definitely easier for him”, they emphasize. Sabrina and Guti proudly tell me about each of those actors, including Jonathan Azevedo whose recent success as Sabiá is something they are most excited about. Sabrina is sharing:

A new miniseries with Johnathan Azevedo is coming out. There will be another actor and an actress from the theatre group and the telenovela “*Babilônia*” who will be office workers (*funcionarios*); she will be in a relationship with a cool guy (*cara bacana*) and will have a cool story. And I am thrilled because all three of them will have decent jobs – one will be an engineer, another – an office employee, and the third will be a doctor.

In this comment, Sabrina touches upon two important issues that I will be discussing in more detail in this chapter: (1) while black characters definitely appear more often in telenovelas today, to see them in the role of an engineer or a doctor is still so rare that it is more of an exception than a rule; (2) in order for a black character’s presence in the telenovela to be meaningful, they need to have “a cool story”, in other words, the character needs to have depth, which unfortunately is not always the case. Often black actors seem to appear in telenovelas “for a check mark” – they may have “a cool job” but don’t truly participate in the storyline and their characters don’t develop in any meaningful way. Again, Sabrina highlights this issue by saying:

Before there were actors so apt that I just wanted them to have access to auditions, not quotas [meaning that they were talented enough to get a part in a telenovela by merit, not just to fulfill the “black character” quota]. Today it’s better already. But sometimes black actresses don’t get hired as a result of colorism – because they are not seen as black but rather as *mulatas*.

This last sentence confirms that black actresses can be hired just to “fulfill the quotas”, simply based on their skin colour. At the same time, it highlights the third important aspect that I will be discussing later – the reproduction of caricature and stereotypical images of black Brazilians, as well as poor community residents in telenovelas. Going back to the issue of socio-economic status of black telenovela characters, I found the following half-joking comment by Guti, the founder of *Nós do Morro*, particularly pertinent:

In *Nós do Morro*, the most important thing has always been to break the stereotype, which is not the black stereotype, but the stereotype of a thug/criminal (*bandido*). Because it's like if someone is running [from the police or trying not to get caught] – they are from *Nós do Morro*! [the rest of the interview participants are laughing because Guti means that his students only get hired for the parts of thugs and criminals, but also that the group is a community theatre, which means that all his students are black youth from the community/favela who are often thought of as criminals and thugs by other social classes in Brazil]. Well, great! Because we can make money with that [the actors of the group], survive and gain space! And also no one can speak better of our own reality than us.

This brings us back to Jonathan Azevedo's part of a drug dealer Sabiá that was analyzed in the previous chapter. On the one hand, this part brought him success and opened a lot of doors career wise, as well as raised public debate on the issue of racism in Brazil. On the other hand, according to one of my informants and Jonathan's colleague, actress Mary Sheila, the actor was hired for a small part of a favela drug dealer and stayed till the end of the telenovela only due to his talent and, as a result, the popularity of his character. Had it not been for the actor's personal and professional qualities, this role would have just served to reproduce the stereotypes that are already entrenched in middle-class Brazilians, which was demonstrated with the racist online comment on the actor's suitability for the role that I discussed previously.

As such, the character of Sabiá and the contribution he ended up making to the country's debate on the sensitive issue of racism was more an exception than a rule. The rest of the time, unless the authors purposefully and explicitly address the problem of racism and prejudice against community residents in the plot (which was not the case with Sabiá) when they hire a black actor for the part of a drug dealer, a slave or even a personal driver for a white character, such characters only serve as a confirmation bias for Brazilians' deep-seated beliefs about race, class and spaces like favelas.

It is necessary to note, however, that having been hired for the role of Sabiá, Jonathan Azevedo received a chance to succeed. As his colleague and friend Mary Sheila pointed out, this role was very easy for him to excel at because he grew up in a community. And as Guti said, nobody knows the reality in the community like its own residents. As a result, “Sabiá was a major turn in his life” and led him to getting another role in a miniseries, this time as a *funcionario*, and that’s what Guti meant by black actors gaining space. Although this is only an individual success story that does not change the existing structures, Guti was trying to emphasize that this is how telenovelas may slowly and gradually bring about the change – by including more black actors and allowing the characters they portray break the existing stereotypes.

The Importance of a Meaningful Presence of Black Characters in Telenovelas

In the previous chapter I analyzed black telenovela characters, such as Paula or Regina, who not only belonged to (or joined eventually) the middle class but also had their own stories that were central to the telenovela plot. As several of my informants have pointed out, until very recently black characters, whether they were maids or even (rarely!) doctors or lawyers, they would neither have a story of their own, nor a family or friends. Unfortunately, such characters are still present in telenovelas today. “*A Força do Querer*” – the telenovela that featured Sabiá – also had a black female character (Leila) who was an architect. The actress who got the part (Lucy Ramos) said in an interview that she was thrilled about this role as it was different from what she normally would get invited for. She had previously declined parts in a couple of other telenovelas because they were traditional roles of maids or baby sitters.

Unfortunately, however, Leila’s character lacked depth and a captivating story. It was not developed enough and remained static throughout the telenovela until she left the plot altogether. After leaving “*A Força do Querer*”, the actress commented in an interview :

I wish Leila would stay longer in the telenovela. I was very happy to see a black woman in a position like that, an architect and so on. I thank Gloria [the author] for having given me this opportunity. For

placing us on the 9 o'clock time slot, the primetime television, and for avoiding placing us where people have the habit of placing black actors. But I think Leila could have done more.

One woman during a conversation at the beach brought this up saying that she thought there should be more characters like Leila and that if she were black she would want to see someone like her in a primetime telenovela, since it is important to be represented. She added that it was unfortunate that Leila's character was not given enough strength, because the actress was quite talented. "It seemed like they included her in the story just so that it would have another black actor participating but didn't really know what to do with her. It's a shame". This example demonstrates that simply having a black character in a telenovela is not enough to have a meaningful impact. Although the actress highlighted in another interview that even such brief appearance of a black female character who was strong, successful and independent was important because it represented all black women and young girls, it is not sufficient to produce change in the perception of black women by others. For that to happen, the author also needs to write a powerful story that the audience will want to follow and it has to make the viewer care, especially considering how important emotions and pleasure are when it comes to telenovela's success. The challenge with creating an appealing and powerful black character is that, when it comes to telenovela watching, the audience wants to see something familiar and something that they can easily relate to, recognize as part of their daily life. The black audience, no doubt, will be happy to see a character that represents them and breaks the stereotypes associated with race and class in their society. Middle- and upper-middle class, white Brazilians, however, might see such character as not believable and their story as unrealistic, which might lead to a lack of interest in them or even a rejection.

When "*Babilônia's*" low ratings were discussed on social media, a blog writer on Terra web portal published an article with the following heading: "The main reason for the rejection of *Babilônia* was the homophobia of the viewers, right? No, wrong." In his blog post, the author quoted Fernanda Montenegro, "one of the greatest actresses of the country", as he pointed out, who portrayed one of the partners in the same-sex elderly couple that was so poorly received. In an interview for GloboNews, the actress stated that although telenovela's low ratings were blamed on the issue of same-sex relationships, she believed that the true reason was not the homophobia but the racism of the viewers:

It was the first telenovela in which two thirds of the cast were black, who were not subservient, who succeeded through their own enormous efforts, and who were in mixed-race relationships. Thus, they made it all about homosexuality, but I am certain that no one is going to talk about this blackness [negritude], rising and victorious, because racial prejudice can actually get you into jail. And so they want to see the black I don't know where, one here, one there in the telenovela, but the black front gaining space in a 9 o'clock telenovela? I never heard and no one talks about it.

In other words, the actress believed that what really made the audience uncomfortable was not her character but the large presence of black actors who were middle-class or were ascending to middle-class in the story. Interestingly, most of the people I asked about this telenovela replied that they weren't really following it and did not remember much about it, which may mean that they were not really able to relate to the characters and develop an emotional attachment that they normally develop with the characters that appeal to them. Since most of my participants were white and middle- or upper-middle class, it is not surprising that they failed to identify with the main character who was a favela resident selling coconut water at Copacabana beach. However, when I brought up "*Babilônia's*" low ratings and possible explanations for it with Taysa (who grew up in a community but works as a journalist and belongs to white, middle-class now) she recalled one particular episode of a reality or talk show she used to watch where there was a greater than usual proportion of black participants. "It seemed like it made people uncomfortable because they are not used to seeing so many black people in one space".

Another conversation comes to mind, where Sabrina, a black actress and film producer, talked about a film project she had recently made:

In my movie, the cast was all black – black middle-/upper-middle class. I am tired of being treated like a maid. When I presented it, the critics reacted as if I was making science fiction. That doesn't exist! I was told: "Sabrina, I understand what you were trying to do but haven't you exaggerated?"

All of the above supports my earlier argument that a simple presence of a black character in a telenovela has no value in itself. Just as it happened in Sabrina's case, telenovelas may represent black Brazilians in middle and upper-middle class roles but society itself has not changed structurally, so what the viewer sees on the screen does not resonate. Also, to make the presence of a black character meaningful, the authors need to create a character that will appeal not only to the black, but to the white

audience as well. Considering that emotion and pleasure are what the viewer seeks most from telenovela watching (the telenovela has to please [*agradar*] and touch the feelings [*mexer*], creating a character that will please and evoke strong positive emotional response is key to telenovela's success and, therefore, its ability to impact the viewer's opinion or attitude towards a certain social issue or social group. This, however, may be difficult because of the stereotyped perceptions of the black population by white Brazilians. The latter are so used to seeing the black in inferior social positions and at the margins of their society that when they are presented with a black middle-class character (or an actual person, as Sabrina's and Fred's personal accounts from the previous chapter show), they are unable to recognize the situation as part of their reality; and the reason why they are unable to do so is simply that it is not the reality they have known all their lives. As a result, they either remain indifferent to it or, in some cases, reject it altogether.

I found it curious that several of my informants pointed out that lately they have been enjoying period/history drama (6 o'clock) telenovelas more than the recent primetime ones (9 o'clock), which tend to deal with contemporary issues. It made me wonder if it was because telenovelas that are based on the history of Brazil, by nature, don't have the capacity to question the traditionally established social order. As accounts of the past, they simply reflect the class and race relations that have existed for centuries in Brazil and thus the viewers' beliefs and ideas about their own society are comfortably reasserted, rather than probed and challenged, as it may happen in modern telenovela plots.

The Importance of Positive Feedback and Strong Participatory Culture of Telenovela Fans

As I have stated earlier, to present the white audience with a provocative story or an atypical character that will evoke an emotional response strong enough for them to be willing to open up to new ideas that contradict their existing ones and not simply dismiss or reject them can be a true challenge. Yet, it has to be pointed out that it is the white, upper-/middle-class viewer who is Globo's specific target because, as a commercial enterprise, Globo is primarily interested in making profit and being able to

sell the products advertised during commercial breaks, as well as in telenovelas themselves; and middle- and upper-middle class Brazilians are the very group that has the capacity to purchase those products. In other words, while telenovelas are generally believed to be the national heritage and the unique cultural product catering to all Brazilians, and while individual authors' intentions may well be such, it is still the white, upper-/middle-class audience that Globo strives to win over and, at the end of the day, they will only sell what this group is willing to "buy".

In practice, it means that as soon as a new telenovela goes on air, Globo starts carrying out focus group interviews among São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro residents (the two largest and most urbanized cities in Brazil) and monitoring the audience ratings measured by Brazilian Institute of Public Opinion and Statistics (IBOPE) in these two cities. As my informants pointed out, "Globo doesn't care about ratings anywhere else" meaning that their target group is the urbanized middle class population (which is predominantly white). These ratings and focus group opinions have direct impact on the fate of a given telenovela as its author and producers are asked to make changes to the plot or topics it addresses in accordance with the audience's preferences and desires. For instance, if the viewer finds a particular storyline or the characters involved boring or not appealing, the author will be asked to reduce the amount of scenes with them. On the contrary, as it happened with Jonathan Azevedo and his character Sabiá, because the viewer was captivated with the character, he gained a lot more space in the storyline than had initially been planned and, instead of just a few episodes, stayed until the very end of the telenovela. The viewers can even make the decision whether a particular couple will stay together or break up or demand change in a given character's life trajectory. For instance, in "*Babilônia*", a young female character was meant to become a prostitute but the backlash from the audience was so strong when they saw it coming that her storyline went in an entirely different direction.

Such dependence on public opinion can be both constraining and facilitating for the author's work. On the one hand, it can be extremely challenging and even discouraging for authors because sometimes they simply don't get a chance to tell the story they want to tell. Instead, they have to constantly adjust to the tastes and desires of the audience and comply with Globo's demands. As one of my informants, who writes plays for theatre, told me – it can be very disheartening for the author to have to satisfy the viewer's every whim and abandon the ideas that they perhaps have been carrying

out for months. It also means that the author may have a sincere intention to produce an impact with their story and bring meaningful social change, but they can lose a chance to do so if they make just one mistake – pick an actor who fails to charm the audience immediately or present a storyline that doesn't capture the viewer's attention from the very beginning.

On the other hand, however, such constant direct feedback from the audience essentially serves as a “barometer” that measures where the society stands at a given moment on various social issues and how people's opinions and perceptions change over time. It may also enable the author, if they are flexible enough, to make timely changes to their story necessary to keep the audience interested and still get their message across. Curiously, having observed the ways in which storylines were developing in several telenovelas, I have come to the conclusion that authors sometimes seem to resort to a “trick” of first securing the audience's interest in the telenovela and letting a character win them over before introducing a problem or conflict of socio-political nature into the plot. In other words, being aware that aesthetic pleasure, emotion and intimate connection with the characters are what the viewer seeks most from a telenovela, the authors seem to introduce lighter and more entertaining storylines at the beginning, and then gradually allocate more time to characters and scenes that raise a certain social issue. Such tactics seems to increase the chances for a telenovela to result in success, as well as encourage an active discussion of the raised problem in society. That was the case with Ivana, for instance – a young female character who decided to go through gender transition but not until the telenovela had been several months on air and was getting strong positive response overall and towards that character in particular.

Once again, as it happened with Felix who was introduced into the story as a villain and whose inner sufferings were revealed gradually as he started to realize that he was a homosexual, Ivana entered the story as a charming girl from a rich family who had everything one would need to be happy yet was torn by some deep internal conflict that even she couldn't identify. After watching her struggle for months and “suffering” together with her, the viewers (and Ivana) finally found out that the source of her misery was her inability to identify with her own body image and to conform to the lifestyle appropriate for a young woman from an elite respectable family imposed upon her by

her mother and society in general. Ivana was a boy trapped in a girl's body and the only way for her to find happiness and peace was to set her true self free.

Ivana's character gained a lot of attention in media and the actress reported getting a lot of positive response from viewers. Since there is a habit among telenovela fans to address their comments directly to the character, the actress mentioned that people would say to her things like: "Be strong, we're with you!" She also highlighted that what impressed her most was that once her character's desire to go through gender transition was revealed and she started hormonal treatment, the viewers started to refer to her as Ivan [male name], as opposed to Ivana [female name] to acknowledge their acceptance and support for her decision.

As I mentioned in Chapter 3, such response from the public in the country that holds the world record for hate-based LGBT murders is impressive. However, a conversation during one of my group interviews made me question whether this can be understood as a sign of true social change. One of my informants, when asked about her opinion on Globo telenovelas, said that she found them very manipulative. When the other interview participants asked her to elaborate, she explained that telenovelas are constantly trying to shape your opinion on something by appealing to emotions. In other words, they make you sympathise with characters like Ivana by showing how much she suffers and what a good person she is. As a result, people start supporting her decision to go through gender transition not because they necessarily believe that this is any individual's basic right and such practice should be accepted widely in the society but because they have attached themselves to the character that is sweet, beautiful and charming, and therefore, they are willing to make an exception for her. This point is essentially illustrated by the drastic difference in the reception of the "gay kiss" in the last episode of *Amor à Vida* (2013) and the first episode of *"Babilônia"*, discussed earlier. It is, indeed, problematic to claim that Felix's success led to a wider acceptance of same-sex relationships in Brazil given the pushback that the elderly telenovela couple received a year later.

Similarly, when I was watching *"A Força do Querer"* with my hosts, every time Ivana appeared on the screen, my hosts would comment on how lovely she was and how they felt sorry for her and were hoping that she would be able to go through with her life changes. Yet at the same time, when talking about same-sex relationships or

transgenderism in general, they would say things like “the world is coming to an end!” or “I don’t think that this will ever be accepted in society”. It was also puzzling to me how Nazaré, who had a very firm opinion on the “naturalness” of the existing racial hierarchy in her society and would make comments like “the black should be removed to the outskirts as they have been in the United States” or “I would never marry a black man”, was nonetheless fascinated by the character of Sabiá, as well as the actor who portrayed him. Once, when I was in my room, I heard both of my hosts laughing and commenting vigorously on something they were watching on TV. I became curious and decided to join them in the living room. It turned out they were watching a show that featured Jonathan Azevedo who was showing his wardrobe used for the character of Sabiá. Jonathan was trying on various outfits and making jokes about his gangster character, and both Nazaré and Betty were laughing loudly and saying how funny and charming the actor was. Finally, Nazaré turned to me and exclaimed: “*Mas ele é negro mesmo! Assume os seus raizes!* [He is black indeed! Accepts his roots/heritage!]. I was thinking a lot about this comment and what it might signify. Did it mean that Nazaré finally admitted that black people, just like the white, had something to be proud of and deserved her respect? Or was it a condescending comment and a look down on an inferior culture that, nonetheless, was exotic enough to be entertaining?

Exoticism, Caricature Characters and Racist Humour in Telenovelas

The incident described above brings us back to one of the comments I highlighted earlier, made by my informant Sabrina [the casting associate] about black women perceived as *mulatas*, which, in turn, links to the issue of exoticism and stereotyped characters in Globo telenovelas. Just like Sabiá may be an exciting and appealing character for my host despite her racial prejudices because of his colourful gangster personality (the kind she hopes to never encounter in real life), a lot of black telenovela characters, female in particular, end up recreating stereotypes associated with race, sexuality and pleasure in Brazil. When a character like this is inserted in a telenovela plot, her presence, unfortunately, does not serve to challenge the ideas of racial hierarchy but, on the contrary, reinforces them. While the latter stereotyped image of a

black female slave (the equivalent of 'mammy' in the North American culture) was very common in telenovelas of the past and at times still resurfaces today, for now I am going to focus on the image of the exotic and eroticised *mulata* and the implications it carries for defining (or rather reasserting) interclass and interracial relationships in Brazil.

A good example of this would be the female character from "*Babilônia*", Valesca – a black woman living in a community, whose relatively lighter skin colour would place her in the category of *mulata*. Young and sexy, Valesca represents a popular culture image of a seductress, the sexualized *mulata* (or *morena*, as women of her type more frequently referred to in Brazil) who is desirable and dangerous at the same time. This image is strongly based on the interconnectedness of class, race and sexuality in Brazil. Goldstein describes a fantasy that exists among the black women she met in the community of achieving socio-economic ascension and escaping poverty by marrying or seducing a more economically stable man, who is also assumed to be older and whiter. Valesca is a young attractive woman who seeks opportunities to leave the favela and move to the "*asfalto*" [a middle class neighbourhood] and therefore makes white, middle-class men the target of her sexual appeal and seductive powers. Although, traditionally, the man in this fantasy is expected to be considerably older and is referred to as *coroa*, to make the storyline more attractive for the viewer, Valesca finds a young and handsome, but naïve man from Rio's middle-class neighbourhood who blindly falls in love with her and finally takes her out of the favela while she also seduces his best friend. Goldstein (2003) points out that:

because the mulata is so much a product of national ideology about both race and sexuality, it forms a particular set of images that is much more protected and even exalted as a positive reading of national identity, and not one that is criticized as an overly exoticized or overly sexualized image of black women (112).

This representation, according to Goldstein, has also been absorbed and internalized by black women themselves as it has empowered them in a certain way. Because blackness is (still) frequently equated with ugliness, "being a successful seducer enables them to negate this oppressive equation" (111) However, this strong association of race, skin colour and sexuality has also not only locked black women in the position of inferiority but, as Goldstein warns, has real-life consequences. Giacomini (1990, as cited in Goldstein 2003) suggests that the cult of sensuality built up around the *mulata* has actually served – in varying historical circumstances, and perhaps in the contemporary

case as well – as a justification for sexual attacks on black and mixed-race women” (115). She has also carried out a contemporary study of professional *mulata* dancers who work in Rio nightclubs, at Carnival and traveling shows promoting the city of Rio de Janeiro and pointed out that these young women “continually needed to develop a defensive dialogue about their sexuality so that they were not confused with prostitutes” (as cited in Goldstein 2003, 114) because of the existing association of black or mixed-race female bodies with sexual availability.

Considering all of the above, a character like Valesca dangerously reproduces the stereotype of a young black woman who is willing to extend sexual favours to a white man in exchange for a material gift or, as an ultimate goal, an elevated socio-economic status. Such imagery goes back all the way to the writings of the anthropologist and social historian Gilberto Freyre (1986 [1933]) who, describing the earlier colonial context and the relationship between European men and “Indian” women, writes that “the women were the first to offer themselves to the whites... they would give themselves to the European for a comb or a broken mirror (85, as cited in *ibid.*, 116). Thus, the image of contemporary *mulata* (or *morena*) looking for a *coroa* can be understood as a reproduction of the relationship model between the colonizer and colonized which was based on racial inequality and assumed superiority of the former. This fantasy is an illustration of how “race is embodied in everyday valuations of sexual attractiveness, and that attractiveness is gendered, racialized, and class-oriented in ways that commodify black female bodies and white male economic, racial, and class privilege” (Goldstein 2003, 106).

What is curious is that alongside the highly stereotyped oversexualized character of Valesca, “*Babilônia*” also introduced another female character who actively resisted and defied this very stereotype. I have already discussed the character of Paula – a young attractive black woman who grew up in the community but got into university through the system of quotas (affirmative action) and became a successful lawyer in a highly prestigious law firm. At the beginning of the telenovela, Paula was in a relationship with a bar owner from the community but later they broke up and she briefly dated Pedro, a white upper-middle class young man. One scene that featured an interaction between Paula and her rich white boyfriend was particularly interesting. After visiting the bar owned by her ex-boyfriend, Paula returns home with Pedro and he jokingly says “It’s good that you’ve evolved so much” Paula clearly dislikes the comment

and asks: “why? Because I left the favela, changed the address?” Pedro responds: “No, because you changed the boyfriend. Before you were with a surfer and now you’re with me – an engineer, successful, blue-eyed...” Paula interrupts her boyfriend asking if he thinks he is better than others just because he has blue eyes. Pedro tries to explain saying that what he means is “the social condition, the cultural level”. Paula points out that her ex-boyfriend is a successful business owner who brought up two younger brothers on his own and deserves all of her admiration, unlike Pedro who can say a thing like that without even realizing how racist and arrogant he is being. Pedro is surprised and asks in response “How can I be racist if I’m dating a beautiful amazing *morena*?...” At this point Paula decisively interrupts: “Negra! [black]” – making it clear that she rejects the stereotype attached to her based on the colour of her skin and, in contrast, emphasizes the heritage she is proud of.

This scene directly addresses the issue that has existed for decades in Brazil – which is Brazilians denying the existence of racism in their society based on the argument that cross-colour relationships are very common among them. Goldstein states that the women in the community where she did her research believe that white men “logically” cannot be racist if they date or find attractive darker-skinned women. White Brazilians also present this as evidence that their country has no issue with racism, unlike the United States, for instance, and that they have a non-racist national culture. As I discussed earlier in my thesis, such ideas have been referred to in academic circles as “the myth of racial democracy” (Da Costa 1985; Winant 1992; Sheriff 2001; Goldstein 2003) and were first presented by Freyre in the 1930s. According to him, the desire and willingness of Portuguese colonizers to enter into sexual relationships with darker-skinned women and their idealization of *mulata* image “fueled miscegenation [the mix of races] and contributed to the lack of racial prejudice” (as cited in Goldstein 2003, 116). Goldstein explains how this thinking is still affecting the way many Brazilians see interracial relationships today and serves as an excuse to deny the existence of racism in their country:

Indeed, much of Brazilian exceptionism hinges on this construction of the *mulata*, because *mulata* is the positive sexualized product, the celebration of miscegenation – a representation that Brazilians recognized and embraced, and which other countries denied. It is precisely this embracing of racial mixture that has enabled many Brazilian intellectuals to still argue that the “Brazil is different” claim is a valid one (ibid., 119).

The scene between Paula and her boyfriend, where this issue is brought up to the surface, is therefore significant as it encourages viewers to re-think the assumptions that have long been taken for granted, such as that being attracted to a darker-skinned individual or being in a relationship with one “logically” means that you are not racist; or that the exoticized and sexualized image of a *mulata/morena* is a positive cultural product that celebrates the mixing of races and embodies the idea of racial democracy. Paula’s decisive rejection of the term “*morena*” being applied to her and the emphasis she puts on the word “black” [*negra*] is the assertion of her identity and the challenge to racialized hierarchy supported by stereotypical images like *mulata*.

Yet the strong statement that Paula’s character makes in the telenovela seems to be weakened by the presence of the character like Valesca side by side. Valesca is the reaffirmation of everything that Paula has been rejecting and the inclusion of both characters into the plot seems counterintuitive if the author was striving to make a statement. It has to be noted, however, that, unlike Paula, characters like Valesca are very typical for telenovelas. Earlier, when poor neighbourhoods and their residents were not included in the plots, such characters would appear in the capacity of maids [*empregadas domesticas*] in upper-middle class homes. In his documentary *A Negação do Brasil* (2000), Joel Zito Araújo points out that the humorous image of a black maid, often cunning and deceitful, has been always present in telenovelas. More than that, a crafty maid seeking to take advantage of her position in a rich home has often been a source of humour and entertainment. As my informants have explained, because telenovelas are usually filled with a lot of drama, there needs to be a counterbalance to these deep emotions, which is normally provided by some lighter storylines and humorous characters – *o núcleo cômico* [a comic core], as they have referred to it. It is also common, as they have pointed out, that this humour would be built around poor characters (perhaps because their lack of education or attempts to succeed in life through questionable means lend themselves conveniently to various comic situations). Since these poor characters are also most likely to be black, it results in telenovela humour essentially being class and race-based. The recent shift from exclusive focus on white upper-/middle-class homes to the inclusion of poor neighbourhoods and communities in telenovelas has resulted in the appearance of characters like Valesca who is, in a way, the same cunning maid but now placed in her own environment – the favela.

In other words, the character of Valesca fulfills the entertainment/pleasure function of telenovelas. Her storyline provides a source of positive emotions which is necessary to make the experience of watching telenovelas lighter and more enjoyable. Without the humorous core, this experience could be too heavy and intense. Therefore, telenovelas and their creators are reliant on humour as an important source of pleasure for the viewer. The problem is that this humour has traditionally been class- and race-based. One of my informants in a focus group interview admitted that older telenovelas would have a lot of racist jokes and she used to find them funny. "Today I find it absurd". Yet most of telenovela viewers are used to that kind of humour and feel familiar with it, which makes it very difficult for the authors to simply get rid of it.

The telenovela "*O Outro Lado do Paraíso*" that started running while I was doing fieldwork in Brazil raised very serious social issues such as racism and violence against women. The author seemed to be very committed to addressing these two topics and, unlike "*Babilônia*", this telenovela avoided including stereotypical black or poor characters that would normally be a source of laughter in the plot. Unfortunately, the comic characters and situations that the author introduced instead of the ones that would commonly be expected, failed to please the audience. The telenovela received extremely low ratings from the very beginning and when I discussed it with my informants they all agreed that it was too heavy and depressing and lacked the humorous component. My informants simply did not find funny the characters and plots that were meant to comprise the comic core. One of my informants said that she was trying to analyse which plot lines and characters were meant to be the source of humour in this telenovela and observed that she couldn't really identify them. She also noted that because of political correctness one couldn't really make fun of anything in telenovelas anymore. "You can't laugh at it anymore. It just has become boring. The most fascinating and loved characters in the past were racist – but everybody laughed and adored them. And now you can't show anything like that. Where has the humour gone?"

Thus, because the audience has been exposed to a certain kind of humour for decades, it is extremely difficult for the author to replace it with something different but equally entertaining for the viewer. Brazilians have very specific expectations from their telenovela watching experience and any change has to be introduced gradually, which may require a compromise such as placing a stereotype-breaking character like Paula alongside a character like Valesca, who may weaken the effect that Paula is meant to

produce but will also ensure that the viewer will recognize her as something familiar, something they feel comfortable with, and therefore, will be willing to accept. The coexistence of these two characters is, therefore, an example of how reliance on the emotional aspect can limit the capacity of telenovelas to be promoters of social change.

Similarly, when telenovelas contain plot lines that develop in communities, the way these communities and their residents are represented can also be based on a lot of existing stereotypes about the poor and their lifestyles. On the one hand, it is certainly a positive change that, in recent telenovelas, poor characters are not only shown in their own homes surrounded by their family members, but also have developing storylines, central to the telenovela plot, and complex, dynamic personalities. On the other hand, even as protagonists, these characters end up reproducing the existing stereotype of what someone living in a community looks and acts like. A young woman living in a community may be hardworking and honest but she will also be poorly educated, impulsive, unreserved, often irrational about her actions, and demonstrating poor judgement when making life decisions (possibly due to lack of education). She is also likely to be raised by a single parent or raising her own child without a father as a result of teen pregnancy. She is likely to be vulgar, loud, dressed in revealing clothes and will often get involved in arguments or fights with the neighbours in the street. As a matter of fact, such scenes and conflict situations caused by her unbalanced character often become the comic core of the telenovela. As a result, while such characters may break certain stereotypes by showing that community residents are not necessarily thieves or drug dealers but honest, hardworking people who care about their families and friends, they also confirm the bias many middle- and upper-middle class Brazilians hold about “*favelados*”, as people who reside in communities are often referred to. For example, my informants in a focus group interview noted that when a disagreement occurs between strangers in a public place, it is possible to hear one call the other “*favelado*”, especially when the former visibly belongs to a higher social status than the latter, implying that it is the uneducated poor who always tend to get involved in fights and arguments. Sabrina, the casting associate from *Nós do Morro*, commented:

I don't live here but I've been visiting the community of Vidigal regularly for 12 years. So when I see those stereotypes [referring to telenovela characters from favelas], I don't even know what to say because I've never seen a person talk like that [talks in a fake loud voice].

Curiously, when the group interview was over, my other informant who brought me to Vidigal said that she disagreed with Sabrian's comment and that although there might not be people like that in the part of the community where *Nós do Morro* operates, if we were to go further up to other parts of Vidigal, we would see people talk and act exactly like that. This indicates that middle class Brazilians may perceive the stereotypes they see in telenovelas as accurate and reflecting the reality. If so, the stereotypical and sometimes almost caricature characters in communities serve to confirm their assumptions and reinforce their prejudice against these neighbourhoods and their residents.

Another form of prejudice that exists against communities and the people who live there is, of course, their criminalization and the belief that they are likely to be involved in illegal activities ranging from pickpocketing in the streets to armed robberies and drug trade. This was evident from my host's comment that I brought up earlier in my thesis when she warned me not to buy anything from food vendors at the beach because they are all from favelas and therefore have links to drug trade. Therefore, when telenovelas show criminal activities or police operations in communities, there is always a risk that they contribute to the negative image of favelas being dangerous and violent places.

However, the telenovela "*A Força do Querer*" that became widely popular while I was in Brazil raised a different kind of concern among its viewers. It was accused of glamorizing drug trafficking in favelas and making it look appealing to the young audience. Because of the personal charisma of both the actors and the characters they were portraying, Sabiá (the chief of drug trafficking) and Bibi (a young woman who gradually got involved in drug trade throughout the story) gained extreme popularity among viewers. The characters were featured in several magazines and talk shows; their storylines were followed with great interest and actively discussed on television and in social media. As it normally happens with popular characters, their dressing styles also gave rise to popular fashion trends. The problem was that the majority of the scenes that featured one or both characters had to do either with drug dealing and violence or funk parties in the community. This made the public worry that telenovela fans, younger ones in particular, would want to follow not only these characters' dress and hair styles but their lifestyles as well, as they would see Bibi and Sabiá spend money on luxury items, enjoy the wealth gained from the drug trade and having the time

of their life at *baile funk* parties organized by the community drug dealers. The concern was so prominent that it made the author and the actress portraying Bibi respond explaining that while this lifestyle may seem attractive on the surface, the telenovela, if followed carefully and analyzed, actually shows the cost of the choices made by these characters and the consequences they have to live with because of them. The concern is, however, that not every viewer will be analyzing so deeply what is happening to the characters in the telenovela.

Guti, the founder of the theatre group *Nós do Morro*, brought up the same issue in our group interview in Vidigal. In his opinion, because telenovelas can be so affective and popular characters extremely appealing, the authors and producers have to be very responsible about the effect they may produce. Certainly, if one watches the telenovela from the beginning to the end, they will most likely arrive at the conclusion that such lifestyle is not worth the risk and that the consequences may be extremely serious. However, as he points out, if young girls watch just that one scene where Bibi, all glamorous and powerful, is arriving at the favela funk party, they will say “let’s go dancing to the favela tomorrow!” because who doesn’t want a life like that?!” Guti is thus referring to the affective power that telenovelas have on their viewers, which can produce both a positive and negative impact on the society.

In this chapter I have demonstrated that while emotional engagement of the viewer with the telenovela plot and its characters can help create positive change in society by reducing prejudice, breaking stereotypes and encouraging acceptance of differences through appeal to the viewer’s feelings, it can simultaneously act as a deterrent of such change because of the audience’s specific expectations towards telenovela watching and the importance of positive emotions and pleasure in such experience.

Chapter 5.

Conclusion

This thesis has examined the capacity of Brazilian telenovelas to generate debate around important social issues in the country. In particular, I looked at how telenovelas in recent years have approached the topic of race and class inequality, and how these new narratives have been interpreted by the upper-/middle-class, white audience. I explored the recent shift in Globo's telenovela content from its traditional focus on upper- and middle-class characters to residents of poor neighbourhoods in an attempt to break the stigma they have been facing in Brazil. My thesis also examined the new representations of class and race relations in telenovelas which attempt to challenge the discourse of silence and the myth of racial democracy that have been maintained by the state for decades.

An important part of my research was also to examine the difficulties and obstacles that telenovelas have encountered in their attempts to address the issue of racial inequality and produce meaningful social change. In particular, I explored how appeal to emotion can help a telenovela generate discussion around an important social issue, yet jeopardise its success or limit its capacity because of a strong reliance on (positive) emotional responses from the viewer. I argued that because of these difficulties telenovelas often end up reproducing the very discourse and stereotypes they have been striving to defy. My goal, therefore, was to find out to what extent emotions can alter the audience's perception of social issues and examine how they can act as both a driver and a deterrent of such change.

My ethnographic study has revealed that emotion plays a key role in the relationship between telenovelas and their audiences. Telenovelas constantly appeal to the viewer's feelings, and the viewer expects to be moved and touched by the telenovela. In fact, deep emotional engagement with the storyline and the feeling of personal connection with the characters are the primary sources of pleasure for the audience in telenovela watching and the main measures of its quality and success. This relationship, however, is not simply direct and one-sided, as telenovelas don't just affect viewers, producing a specific kind of emotion like anger, shame or sympathy, and cause

a shift in their previous beliefs or attitudes towards what they see. Rather, the viewers constantly question, evaluate and interpret telenovela narratives, applying them to their own personal experiences, knowledge and convictions, and negotiating their meanings both internally (in an inner dialogue with themselves) and externally (with friends, family and in social media). In other words, based on my interviews and observations, I have noted that viewers engage quite critically with telenovela content and, more importantly, often actively participate in deciding what should be included and excluded from it – through social media comments, talk show discussions, opinion polls and ratings, and sometimes even through direct messages (letters) to telenovela writers and actors. Thus, telenovela fans in Brazil often act as co-creators of the narratives and their meanings.

What this means for my investigation of whether and how emotions in telenovela watching can impact the viewer and result in social change is that this does not happen directly – telenovelas don't just change viewers' beliefs and attitudes by appealing to their feelings of compassion, guilt, anger or sympathy. Instead, they provoke critical thinking and activate the processes of meaning negotiation when telenovela narratives reinforce or clash with the viewer's personal experience and pre-existing belief system. In some cases, this may lead to a re-evaluation of previous personal experience or a shift in perception of a particular social issue or social group. For instance, both my participants and telenovela fans interviewed by Globo have noted that after watching a certain telenovela they have changed their attitudes towards same-sex marriage, transgender people, drug addiction, and so on, because they were able to learn more about the issue or were exposed to other people's personal experiences that were inaccessible and unknown to them before. For example, a mother commented in an interview on television that after watching the telenovela about a young woman (Ivana) going through gender transition she changed her attitude and reconciled with her transgender daughter because she was finally able to understand her life choice.

At the same time, I sometimes observed that while a viewer was clearly emotionally engaged with a character's storyline and was genuinely rooting for them, their overall attitude towards the social group that that character represented remained unchanged. For instance, both of my Airbnb hosts, with whom I was watching the same telenovela, were very sympathetic and supportive of Ivana, yet commented that, in their opinion, "this is just crazy and the world will probably never accept that [transgender

people]” This means that, in the given case, while the telenovela did evoke the feelings of empathy and compassion, those did not result in an actual shift in my participants’ belief systems, either because the issue was not personally important enough for them to be willing to engage more critically and re-evaluate their previous convictions, or because the alternative view of the issue offered by the telenovela failed to challenge their own assumptions due to their own personal experience, sociocultural background, previous knowledge of the issue, and so on. In other words, even when the viewer is emotionally involved in the content, unless they are willing to actively engage in the (re)negotiation of meanings, they can make an exception for the given character and genuinely support them, but that does not mean there will be an actual shift in their attitudes or beliefs to the social issue or group that this character represents.

As mentioned previously, in my thesis I have also explored in what ways the affective nature of telenovela/viewer relationship and reliance on emotion can simultaneously serve as both a driver and a deterrent of social change. For instance, including favelas into the plots not just as centres of drug trade and criminal activities but as functioning communities with social and cultural life is a significant shift in the telenovela content. The fact that these places are now shown as intimate spaces and homes for many Brazilian families, as opposed to dangerous, off-limit zones, allows the telenovela to create some sense of connection between them and the audience, because the notion of home as an affective space filled with personal experiences, emotions, memories, and so on is something that anyone regardless of class and race can relate to. These new representations of favelas can, therefore, lead to an important shift in the perception of these places by the upper- and middle-class audience. It is all the more significant given that the insight telenovelas offer into the life in these communities may be the only way upper- and middle-class viewers get to learn about the lived realities of these places, as Brazilians are highly unlikely to enter favelas, unless they live, volunteer or have relatives there.

That being said, because at the end of the day telenovelas are a reflection of real life, or at least are believed and expected to be such, they also show the other side of life in the community, with its dangers and insecurities of informality, in which drug gangs often take up the role of the state and fill in the spaces from which the government is absent. Given that the telenovela genre relies heavily on drama by its definition, those representations can also be quite powerful and affective, which ultimately serves to

reproduce the stereotypes associated with favelas and ends up reinforcing their image as dangerous and unpredictable spaces. It can also have a negative impact when, again due to the genre specificity and the need to entertain the audience, telenovelas end up glamorizing life in favelas, which was a concern for many viewers, including one of my participants, Guti Fraga, regarding the telenovela that was on air during my stay in Rio. This telenovela received a lot of criticism for making life in the favela look attractive, with *baile funk* dancing parties and the easy money coming from drug trade. Guti pointed out that this may be especially dangerous for the younger generation and teenagers, who are easily affected, yet may lack critical thinking.

A similar dual effect often ends up being produced when it comes to the characters who live in the communities. On the one hand, it is important when community residents are presented as anything other than criminals, and especially when they are shown as hardworking individuals, caring parents, loving partners or older siblings who serve as role models for the youth in the communities. Such characters have been appearing more and more often in telenovelas in recent years and the importance of such presence should not be underestimated. At the same time, however, the same characters are also often presented in ways that reproduce racial stereotypes and reinforce the image of poor black people as excessively emotional, unbalanced, irrational, likely to provoke a conflict or get into trouble because of being hot tempered and unable to control their emotions. For instance, a young black male or female character may lose a job or get in trouble with authorities because of these emotional characteristics. On the one hand, this might be interpreted as an attempt to show that they are imperfect as any human being, yet deserving empathy and compassion as virtuous and decent people. On the other hand, however, this results in the viewer's condescending attitude to such characters, based on the logic that such characters experience difficulties in life through no fault of their own but due to the emotional and psychological characteristics of their racial group, as well as their "culture". This is very well illustrated in *Street Therapists* where Ramos-Zayas poignantly observes how lower socio-economic status of black residents in Newark is blamed not on the neoliberal system or bad economy but rather the aforementioned psychological characteristics of Afro-Americans who are believed to have difficulty finding or keeping a job because of their "aggressiveness" or inability to control emotions and comport themselves in an appropriate manner. She also notes how positive personality traits in Afro-Americans,

such as being hard-working, are seen as a characteristic of an individual, while the negative ones, such as laziness or hot temper, are ascribed to their racial group as a whole. Curiously, the author also points out that the perceptions of Latino and Brazilian population in Newark are very much influenced by the ideology of racial democracy dominant in their home countries. Applying that to the Brazilian context, such affective perception of a racial group, in combination with the notion of racial democracy in which many Brazilians still believe, means that portraying favela residents in the manner described above can be dangerous and not at all beneficial for society as it serves to reinforce the existing stereotypes which result in racial prejudice and, more importantly, conceals the flaws in the socio-economic system that is based on structural racism.

Once again, unless the viewer already possesses awareness and knowledge of the issues of racism and inequality in their society and is willing to critically engage with these representations, they will only serve as a confirmation of their previous assumptions about the informal settlements and their residents. In order to produce a change in the existing race relations, telenovela writers need to go beyond presenting racism and prejudice as singular cases and individual experiences, and address racial inequality at the structural level of their society, encouraging the viewers not simply to empathize with individual telenovela characters (or perhaps individual people they personally know in real life), but to question the existing social order and social structures that are the legacy of their political history.

My thesis thus contributes to the understanding of how the use of emotion in media can help (or fail to) bring about meaningful changes in the way people perceive and relate to social issues or other social groups. While there have been a lot of studies of how stories, in general, and television, in particular, can have such impact on the audience, these studies often describe it as a direct process, where the viewer or reader is affected by the story and transported into the narrative world, which results in some kind of internal change or shift in perspective when they “come back from the journey”. Or, having formed an emotional bond and an intimate connection with the character (akin to the one we form with friends), we alter our perception of the issue or group this character represents and then transfer this new attitude to real life.

I argue, however, that the process through which the media can bring about such change is much more complex and should be understood more in the way

anthropologists understand storytelling and narratives – namely, as an act of co-creation between the author/storyteller and the audience, where every meaning is negotiated and re-evaluated based on the viewer's personal experience, which, in turn, is shaped by their class, race, gender and the larger social and cultural context. It is not only that the impact of what the viewer sees is mediated by that experience, but that previous experience also gets re-evaluated, reshaped and transformed by the story, as the viewer engages in the storytelling process through the inner dialogue with herself, as well as other viewers. Thus, simply appealing to emotions and producing affect through drama is not enough; the viewer's pre-existing assumptions and belief system need to be critically challenged, which does not mean to separate or exclude emotion, but to see it as an integral part of cooperative storytelling and co-creation of meaning between the storyteller and the audience, as opposed to merely a tool for producing specific desired changes in their attitudes and behaviours.

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