THE JEITO OF THE BRAZILIAN MULATA: RACE AND IDENTITY IN A RACIAL DEMOCRACY

by
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A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of George Mason University in Partial Fulfillment of The Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy Sociology

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Date: ____________________________ Spring Semester 2016
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Fairfax, VA
DEDICATION

This is dedicated to my mentor, teacher, friend, and colleague Dr. Nancy Hanrahan who believed in me, supported me, and inspired me to think in ways I did not know were possible.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the many friends, relatives, and supporters who have made this happen. My committee, Dr. Nancy Hanrahan, Dr. Amy Best, and Dr. John Dale have read countless iterations of this project and were constantly supportive, interested, and patient on this journey. I would also like to thanks my friends Jeffrey Johnson and Daniel Afzal for challenging me. My son Aidan McCoy who inspired me to become a better person and who has spent 12 or his 13 years watching me work towards this goal. And finally, I would like to thank my partner, Brian Dexter for being the anchor and calm I needed to finish my dissertation.
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ABSTRACT

THE JEITO OF THE BRAZILIAN MULATA: RACE AND IDENTITY IN A RACIAL DEMOCRACY

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Thesis/Dissertation/Project Director: Dr. Abcdefabc Defabcdef

This dissertation examines the complicated and incredibly important role of the one of the most emblematic of Brazilian national symbols: the mulata. A mixed-race woman who demonstrates the perfect blend of African and European traits, the mulata has become synonymous with the Brazilian nation, its people, and its racial system. Using interview material from 44 Brazilian women, this dissertation contributes to existing research in three specific areas. First, the interviews reveal the ways in which the mulata anchors the racial categories used institutionally and individually. Secondly, this dissertation addresses what a mulata is and what she means experientially. And finally, the interview material also investigates the how the mulata has direct consequences on the expression of identity and identity formation; interrogating the connections between the mulata at the individual level and the mulata as national symbol.
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND METHODS

“The mulata is the symbol of Brazil just like Mickey Mouse is an American symbol. And you (pointing to me) do not look like Mickey Mouse (laughing)! It’s a commercial image that sells, the men like to look but she is kind of a character, the way Mickey Mouse is. The difference is that Brazilian women are all mulatas in one way or another. So it’s a character that kind of exists. When you think about Brazil, we are our women” (Patricia).

This powerful observation encapsulates the essence of this project. Both subtle and overt, the complicated connection of the mulata to the definition of Brazilian identity is consistent and draws attention the ways in which racialized, gendered, and nationalized identity formation occurs. But who and what is the mulata? Aside from her exalted position in Latin American literature, her sensual idolization in the social imaginary, and her deconstruction in race theory, the mulata is simultaneously enigmatic, problematic, and hugely important. In Brazil, the need to understand the mulata is socially, economically, and politically urgent. Through and on her physical and symbolic body cross a constellation of social and historical forces that in essence tell the story of modern Brazil from an international, national, collective, and individual perspective. The mulata: a mixed race woman who is a constant reminder of the long and cruel legacy of slavery, living proof of racial democracy, the half-naked samba dancer from Carnival, a prostitute, an image used to entice Western men as tourists, a symbol of beauty, a border between white and non-white, a cultural repertoire, a racial category that does not exist.
These contradictory definitions (re)produce an interlocking system of meaning, a reality that is symbolic and embodied by Brazilian women of all shapes, colors, sizes, and ages as well as by the Brazilian nation. At the heart of this web of performances and identities lies a simple but difficult puzzle; how can every woman and no woman be a mulata? In other words, what is the significance of mulatice (being a mulata) when it is revered and admonished, symbolic of the nation yet used in a derogatory manner at the individual level? How does the mulata position function and why does the figure of the mulata present itself everywhere?

In the Brazilian social imaginary the mulata occupies a peculiar symbolic and material space that is located at the intersection of the historical legacy of slavery and the possibility of racial harmony. On a very basic level, the mulata is a mixed-race female, most commonly in Latin America. Her mixture is specifically African and European, the perfect blend of sensual and exotic “Otherness” with the beauty of European features. In the Brazilian context, stemming directly from sociologist Gilberto Freyre’s myth of racial democracy, the mulata embodies both a physical and a symbolic racial hybridity. Physically, she is the culmination of the best attributes of each racial category while symbolically she represents the strength and future of the Brazilian nation because she is linked to racial democracy. She is the embodiment of racial democracy yet this myth actually heightens and perpetuates racial discrimination in a particularly gendered way in that it overemphasizes the physical attributes of African females that have led to the purported sexuality, beauty, and strength of a so-called Brazilian race. As such, the
mulata rather than the mulato is the pivotal intersection of race, gender, sexuality, and nation.

This dissertation will investigate the ways in which the mulata, in all of its manifestations has direct consequences on the expression of identity, on identity formation, and on the racialized and gendered status orders as understood and materially experienced by women. The results of this analysis contribute to and articulate three frames that are not addressed in existing literature. The first frame looks at meaning; what a mulata is and what she means to individual women. This is an important contribution because it interrogates and contextualizes a term that is usually taken for granted as a racial category. The second frame places the mulata as the lynchpin of the Brazilian racial order. The mulata in this sense justifies and is evidence not just of a racial hierarchy but the very essence of what it means to be Brazilian (known as Brasilidade). Finally, the third frame interrogates the connections between the mulata at the individual level and the mulata as national symbol. The interplay between these two offers new insight into identity formation.

**Unpacking Mulatice**

For a samba to be Brazilian
It has to have tambourine
It has to have a mulata
Our samba defies
When it has the waggle
Of the hips of a mulata

-Piva, *Tem Que Ter Mulata*
The Birth of a Race: Brazilian People

The mixing of the white European and African created one of the most celebrated Brazilian physical features: the “mulata”. Queen of carnival, the Brazilian mulata are acclaimed in hundreds of songs. Without the mulata, Brazilian Carnival would not be the same.

-From brazil-travel.com

Brazilian racial classifications are informed by a system of skin color gradations linked to Freyre’s racial democracy where skin color/race is more fluidly informed by context and non-biological characteristics such as class status, occupation, and residential location as well as the more American understanding of race as bipolar, black or white. Racial democracy essentially rests on the premise that because of the historical legacy of slavery, all Brazilians are mixed race, therefore negating the possibility of pure racial categories. Yet statistically and experientially, non-white Brazilians face racial discrimination in employment opportunities, education, health discrepancies, and in common everyday interactions. As one woman I interviewed told me, “look, if you aren’t white you are basically negro.” Yet, this same woman responded to the question “how do you classify yourself racially?” as “parda” which is a mixture of indigenous, white, and Afro-descendancy. In essence then, both racial ideologies inform and produce a system of identities and statuses.

The mulata is noteworthy because she does not easily fall into any particular category. Mulata is not necessarily a color, it does not exist as an official racial classification, nor is it a common term of racial self-identification. Yet, the mulata is influential in three analytically distinct ways. First, the mulata is the embodiment of
Freyre’s vision of the Brazilian race; she represents the physical culmination of the ‘perfect’ racialized mixture and thus an object on which to hang democratic hope.

Secondly, because of this idealized racial image, the mulata is the quintessential Brazilian national symbol; she is the symbolic ‘Mother’ of the Brazilian nation both nationally and internationally. This international aspect is, not surprisingly, enmeshed with a cultural industry that seeks to draw tourism. This tourism has been particularly linked with a formal and informal sexual tourism. And finally, the mulata is a professional category encompassing a racialized and sexualized category of samba dancers and prostitutes. Though analytically distinct, these three images of the mulata are interrelated and are fundamentally linked by their important position in the Brazilian social imaginary.

The mulata is also a concept that acts as an identity (though not one that women use to describe themselves racially), a national symbol, and a commodity. Occurring within a subtext of class and racial hierarchies, the mulata can be performed, ignored, rejected, invoked, and deployed for personal, cultural, social, racial, economic, and political reasons. The mulata encompasses the characteristics of racial mixture, an historical reference to slavery and to Freyre’s influence, a cultural knowledge of samba, and a sense of belonging to a collective of people who share a racial hybridity and a sense of Brazilian-ness.

She is also an icon in music and literature, often associated with sexual allure and beauty. Particularly in this context, the emphasis is on the body; its shape, its sensuality and its seductive powers that are necessary wrapped up in notions of a racial Other. Representing, as is often the case the dichotomous impossibility of the revered and the
vile, the sacred and the profane, the virgin and the whore; the mulata, particularly in her corporeal existence captures the dialectical tensions of a subjectivity granted through domination and objectification.

Professional mulatas illustrate this tension as a category that fuses sexuality with national-cultural symbols. Occurring within the context of a particular class structure, professional mulatas walk the fine line between dancers and prostitutes. Typically of the lower classes, especially from the favela areas, professional mulatas are non-white women who are able to draw on their racial mixture (and its purported sexual allure) to become professional samba dancers (passistas). By some accounts however, these passistas are themselves considered to be prostitutes or at the very least promiscuous. The professional mulata can also be the poor woman who capitalizes on the ideal of the mulata to attract foreign husbands, through tourism and sexual tourism.

The mulata plays an enigmatic role, influential but not actively present in official discourse nor in the experiential realm of self-identification. Encompassing a kind of catchall category of racial mixture (African and European), mulato/a is not a category found on the census or used in everyday talk. The term is often used in music and national discourse, in academic discourse, and in reference to other women’s identities. More commonly (especially in self-understandings) this particular racial mixture is expressed as morena. Morena is, like most racial or skin tone categories in Brazil, ambiguous. This term can refer to someone whose skin ranges from very light brown to much darker brown, a white person who has gotten some sun, or even a very dark
skinned person who has other European traits such as straight hair or more European facial features such as a thinner nose and lips.

Experientially, the mixed race color categories resonate with many people, who, according to Michael Baran in his 2007 study of race in Brazil, “prefer to self-identify with the inclusive term morena, which can be used in various linguistic contexts to refer to almost any combination of physical features” (Baran 2007, 384). The emphasis here is on self-identification because it highlights two very important issues. The first is that many critics of the multiple color classification system argue that it fragments the Afro-Brazilian population and masks the subordination of all non-white people. This claim is important to consider in the context of attempts at political and social mobilization for Afro descendant groups. However, this claim fails to account for the realm of the experiential, where individuals can express their experiences and identities on their own terms. Mizia, a student interviewed by Baran said that, “I am morena and I will always be. There is no way to change that.” For Mizia, morena is not just a polite word meaning ‘negra,’ but, rather, it represents a strong identification with her white father and her negra mother. She accepts that her color-race is given at birth and she is proud of that; yet, she does not accept the one-drop system that rejects ‘morena’ as a category (Baran 2007, 402).

Though there is no consensus as to why morena has become the preferred term, there are clearly historical and ideological explanatory possibilities. Historically, the term mulato/a is embedded in the not too distant era of slavery and forced miscegenation. Perhaps more intriguing are the ideological implications, the internalization of white
supremacy. Because morena is a term more closely associated with some aspect of whiteness or European features, it creates a symbolic distance between the African and the European. Mulata on the other hand, draws attention, at least in the social imaginary, to one’s link to Africa; or as many people in Brazil say, “a foot in Africa,” and the revealing, “a foot in the kitchen.”

This project’s focus on the term mulata as opposed to morena is precisely because of its cultural, political, historical, social, and economic power. The position of the mulata is uniquely situated to reveal the ways in which notions of self and taken for granted racial and gender categories are constituted by and through a complex process of identification with particular opportunities and life chances. The mulata can also be conceptualized as a status because it constitutes, through stereotypes and cultural forms, a source of misrecognition and differential treatment for non-white women. While identification as a mulata, particularly a professional mulata offers potential economic and symbolic benefits, the entrenched racialized status order provides a counterweight to that potential being fully realized. In other words, the status of the mulata as a national icon, as a sexual symbol, as a tourist commodity, and as a symbol of racial harmony may be hierarchically above the black woman, but the mulata herself reinforces notions of racism and sexism against those who are non-white.

The persistence and (re)production of the multiplicity of symbolic forms of the mulata occurs beyond the level of the individual. Institutional dissemination through the media, political apparatuses, the educational system, and various cultural outlets such as literature and music reinforces the mulata as an influential status symbol. It is however,
important to note that this institutional reproduction distinguishes between the symbolic mulata and the actual mulata, the icon and particular bodies and skin tones. Further, it is crucial to reveal the ways in which the physical and symbolic manifestations of the mulata correspond to racial and gender status orders and are played out on and through corporeal bodies. Ultimately, if the mulata exists as a symbolic and material form in national consciousness then she must be fundamentally embedded in both the process of subject formation and in an institutionalized status order.

Chapter Overviews

Drawing on interviews with 44 Brazilian women, this dissertation seeks to unpack the varied and often contradictory roles of the mulata that have significant impact on identity formation. While the three frames discussed above are overarching interests, each chapter uses a specific theme to address the frames. The literature review in chapter 2 addresses relevant literature demonstrating the relative absence of interrogation of the concept of the mulata, her meanings, and her role in identity formation at individual and national levels.

The first theme, addressed in chapter 3, reveals a disconnect between the official and unofficial racial classification systems and an essentialized and biological understanding of race. A recurring quote from my interviews, “We are all mixed,” calls into question the tension between racial democracy as a myth or a reality. This “mixed” national identity has ideological impact on racial identification. I also interrogate the ways in which the myth of racial democracy is fundamentally gendered, where women’s
relationship to racial mixture has consequences on individual expressions and understandings of race and the opportunities open to them.

Chapter 4 addresses the second theme, focusing on the Vargas regime’s operationalization of Freyre’s myth. Situating the mulata and her transformation historically recontextualizes the mulata as a specific “invention.” Over his 18 years in power from 1930-1945 and 1951-1954, Vargas utilized the concept of racial democracy to create a sense of national identity in the young country and to market this identity internationally. From tourism, to Carnival, to samba, to census categories, Vargas installed Freyre’s vision as the architecture of modern Brazil. Solidifying a sense of a racially unique people, these institutional and capitalistic efforts changed the Brazilian social imaginary. The development of the mulata through Vargas’ political, social, economic, and cultural efforts not only turned her into a national symbol but also solidified her as the anchor of the racial order.

From myth to accepted ideology, racial democracy as embodied in the figure of the mulata became internalized and embodied. Beneath all of the fluidity and ambiguous racial categories, discussions of the mulata expose an innate sense of race as biological and deeply embedded in the blood and soul of a person. In particular, the focus on the Afro-descendant body, the butt, the ability to samba, etc., are linked intrinsically to biological difference. This third theme in Chapter 5 illustrates the extent to which mulatice is assumed to be embodied and innate, demonstrating proof that Brazilians are indeed their own unique race with their own ways of experiencing the world; also known as their jeito or Brasilidade (Brazilianess). Chapter 5 also highlights the experiential
aspect of mulatice at the individual level. If all Brazilian women have a jeito about them, how does that translate and produce meaning in the everyday lives, bodies, and experiences of women?

While this jeito (because of mulatice) is purportedly an internalized and embodied experience and identity for all Brazilian women, mulatice counter intuitively also creates distinction among women. Chapter 6 explores the fourth theme of distinction in overlapping manifestations. First is that race (based on racialized characteristics) and class positions affect the way in which the performance of mulatice is judged. How particular women act out mulatice results in a reification of a racial hierarchy. The second form of distinction lies in a difference between authenticity and commodification. The idea is that there are certain women and certain performances that come from an inner essence and some that appear to be based on the commodified version of the mulata. In other words, some women perform mulatice more authentically than others. These layers of distinction highlight the overarching frames of this project. As the concept of mulatice moves between national symbol and individual identity, its meaning is expressed and performed differently. This in turn creates and recreates the racial order that at once masks the hierarchy within racial democracy and allows a hierarchy to exist.

**Location and Methodology**

All of the research was conducted in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Primarily this location was chosen for ease of access as my extended family lives in Rio. Additionally, I was able to draw on some of the relationships I had cultivated during my interviews for
my Master’s thesis. Rio however, is also a prime location to interrogate the position of
the mulata. The site of the largest Carnival celebration in the country and home to a
majority of the samba schools, the fantastical and idealized mulata image is firmly rooted
in the local culture of the city.

To answer the questions I have articulated, I interviewed forty-four women over
the age of eighteen in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in July and August of 2010. Each interview
lasted between 30 minutes to one hour and was conducted based on a prepared protocol
of open-ended questions (see Appendix I). Many of the questions centered on the
respondents understandings of different racial categories and what a typical Brazilian and
Brazilian woman looks like. For example, I asked questions such as, “can you describe a
typical Brazilian woman?” And, “do you see yourself as a typical Brazilian? Why or
why not?” Such questions allowed the women to reveal their own conceptions of
nationality and racial identity.

The recruitment strategy started with the goal of speaking to approximately 50
women. To gain access to these women I relied on a method of purposive snowballing.
This method was particularly useful for this project because I wanted to speak with a
wide variety of women from different class, age (though over the age of 18), and racial
profiles. I began the interviewing with two women who had been the starting point of my
Master’s thesis research on domestic servants conducted in Rio in the summer of 2007.
Both women are former employees (domestic servants) of family members who agreed to
participate. What made these two women a great beginning of the snowball method was
specifically their employment in the realm of domestic service. Such women have access
to a wide array of social networks that span the middle and upper class women they work for to other domestic servants to their friends and family members. This gave me access to populations that are not always easily accessible, such as very poor women who may be unlikely to speak openly with people outside of their own neighborhoods. In essence, being introduced to such women by the initial two informants instilled a level of trust.

To avoid the double risks of over-sampling from a particular class, age, and racial profile as well as the possibility of racial-profiling, I used “purposive snowball sampling.” By asking my informants whether they knew anyone who identified similarly to them or who they thought might be interesting for me to talk to, I allowed the women themselves and the data to drive the sampling. I was able to gain access to 44 women of varied class, racial, and educational backgrounds. The occupations included a wide range: teacher, engineer, government worker, cashier, manicurist, domestic servant, homemaker, doctor, journalist, and many more. The following chart demonstrates the age range and racial self-identifications of the women.

Respondents by Age and Race

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RACE</th>
<th>Age 20-30</th>
<th>Age 31-40</th>
<th>Age 41-50</th>
<th>Age 51-60</th>
<th>Age 61-70</th>
<th>Age 71-80</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NEGRA</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WHITE</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MORENA</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PARDÁ</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WHITE/PARDÁ</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The issue of consent was approached in two ways. First, there was a consent form indicating my interest in interviewing as well as containing contact information as
per George Mason University’s I.R.B. guidelines. By checking the box indicating specific consent to be tape recorded, the interview participant gave permission for me to record the interview. Though I wrote the consent form so that in the case of illiteracy, it could be read to them, not one of the interview participants used this format. Additionally, the script allowed interview participants to give permission for interviewing separate from permission to record the interview. All interview participants, regardless of the format of consent, were given the opportunity to terminate the interview and/or recording at any point. The interview participants were allowed to choose the location of the interviews to ensure their safety, privacy, and comfort.

Regarding privacy, I have used pseudonyms in my analysis. A pseudonym key was kept separate from my notes, memos, and other materials that did not leave my residence. The consent forms were also kept separately and remain at my residence. The audio recordings were transferred directly into a digital format (mp3) and stored on a disc file to be kept at my residence. The names of the informants were not on the recordings, rather, I used a ‘session’ system linked to their pseudonyms. For example, ‘Maria” was known only as Session #1 on the tape recording and Session #1 was written with her pseudonym on the key.

All interviews were conducted in Portuguese, a language I speak fluently. I was however, attentive to the methodological issues raised in the acts of translation and interpretation. I transcribed the interviews directly into English from the Portuguese audio files to limit the variances that can arise from multiple interpretations. The process of transcribing the interviews directly into English from Portuguese involved some
translation decisions regarding word choice. For example, the use of “inho” at the end of a word can mean little, a little bit, or can be dismissive and a bit sarcastic. Take the word “bonitinho.” Depending on context and body language this could mean cute, pretty, sweet, or “kind of.”

Finally, the method of analysis of the transcribed interviews was inductive, I allowed the themes to emerge from the data. Through the interviews, transcription process, and subsequent analysis of the interviews, I found that certain thematic patterns and similarities surfaced. This inductive process emphasized the words of the women over my own theoretical assumptions. This process also had the goal of minimizing my subjectivity and maximizing the subjectivities of each woman. Both an analytical tool and a feminist approach to correcting the silencing of their voices, inductive analysis provided a useful framework in which these women’s experiences could be expressed.

This study used the interviewing method, which is highly compatible with feminist goals and aims to make visible voices that have been previously overlooked or ignored. The interviews were guided by a commitment to improve the lives of the women studied, and were concerned with relations of power both within the communities being studied and within the interview relationship. Rather than simply engaging in objective, dispassionate research I actively attempted to avoid treating the women as objects of investigation, which would have simply reproduced their subordinate positions by relegating their words and experiences to a marginal position within the analysis. This work also intended to emphasize the ways that power is embedded in the research process. Committed to the bases of feminist ethnography, I was sensitive to my own
relative power within the interview process and remained alert to the emotional vulnerability of these women, being careful not to judge their opinions and actions. I reminded them of both my confidentiality and motivation to bring these experiences to light, overcoming systematic silencing in the literature.

Additionally, feminist scholarship prioritizes women’s voices and issues that were previously marginalized, ignored, and defined by others. By prioritizing women’s voices, this type of ethnography allows story-telling, oral traditions, and other “unconventional” sources of information to constitute legitimate ways of understanding lived experience providing insight into women’s encounters with the everyday world and the social organization of that world (Etter-Lewis and Foster 1996).

An important aspect of sensitivity to power relations was the issue of my own position as an insider and an outsider. I am a dual citizen, American and Brazilian, which certainly helped me gain the confidence of some of the women. Knowing that I was Brazilian and had spent a lot of time in Brazil put many of the women at ease, especially those who were skeptical of what they interpreted as American egotism. Yet I was still an outsider, a white middle class, American-educated woman. This led some women to ask many questions regarding the purpose of the interviews. I was open and honest in each situation, attempting to mitigate the drawbacks and utilize the opportunities that both positions entail (Twine 1999; Patai 1998).

Rooted in the tradition of grounded theory, interviews comprise an important aspect of strategies of inquiry attempting to negotiate the relationship between meaning and structure. As an analytically inductive approach, an interview-based ethnography
attempts to allow emergent interpretive frames to “bubble up.” My strategy was certainly embedded in this kind of emergent method yet did not fall directly in-line with straightforward grounded theory. Instead, I used Dorothy E. Smith’s model of institutional ethnography as a basic frame. Smith’s approach highlighted two very important dimensions of the aim of my project. First, Smith’s feminist commitments to an exploration of power between informant and researcher as well as within the discipline of sociology itself enables other researchers to use her approach as a tool rather than a methodological equation. Secondly, institutional ethnography puts emphasis on the complicated relationship between the macro and the micro as it plays out on and through individual subject positions and bodies.

What makes this approach useful to my own project, is its aim of connecting the ideological and structural contexts of national and local settings with the material and lived experience of the individual. More than simply making sense of the everyday world, institutional ethnography attempts to expose the “constitutive work…how the local course of action is articulated to social relations” (Smith 1987, 154). What this allows is simultaneously a deeper understanding of the complexity and interconnectedness of institutions, norms, and individuals as well as a feminist goal of consciousness-raising. This process of discovery and exploration of the everyday is focused on experience as embedded in matrices of social relations (Smith 1987, 2006).

Because this project is concerned with discourse, not as a postmodern abstraction but as a window into individual’s experiences and processes of meaning making, I focused on conducting interviews. Rather than seeing the coding of these interviews as
moments for discursive analysis, I have done what Marjorie DeVault and other feminist scholars call excavation. Excavation refers to, “the process of uncovering and articulating what has been hidden or unacknowledged and the sense of discovery that accompanies that process. It refers to a kind of investigation that begins with what can be seen and heard but holds in mind a sense that there is more to find” (DeVault 1999, 55-56). This ‘something more to find’ is where feminist excavation and institutional ethnography are complementary.

The question that arises in the process of excavation is connected to listening. On the one hand I am aware of feminist concerns with the act of listening, of understanding that language is also connected to larger social processes (DeVault 1999). This makes an emergent approach more important as it allows the researcher to be guided by the topics and words and themes from the standpoint of these particular women. At the same time, it would be unethical to say that my questions and even my listening are not themselves seeped in particular theoretical interests. Here, Burawoy’s extended case study method proves useful to the extent that it provides the researcher with the means to excavate for particular themes without an agenda. According to Burawoy, “The extended case method applies reflexive science to ethnography in order to extract the general from the unique, to move from the ‘micro’ to the ‘macro,’ and to connect the present to the past in anticipation of the future, all by building on preexisting theory” (Burawoy 1998, 5).

Thus, the act of listening is emergent while seeking to expand on, re-write, and/or correct existing theories through excavation.
Finally, in an attempt to move between local and extra-local understandings of experiences and context, I utilize content analysis, particularly of images. While the fields of cultural and visual Sociology and Cultural Studies are known for their use of such a method, expanding my research into media images is a particularly useful tool. Text and images are not merely representations of culture but also reflect the values and ideologies of a culture.

Bringing these multiple methodological commitments into the framework of institutional ethnography fundamentally aided in achieving the goals of this particular project. Because I was particularly concerned with questions of race, gender, sexuality, and identity, the body became central to the dialogue, central to the everyday experiences I wanted to capture. As Lois McNay points out, “Embodied existence is not understood as some self-evident state or arena of authentic experience. Rather, habitus is an heuristic device that, by focusing on ‘the perspective of the perceiving subject,’ calls attention to certain practical and sentient dimensions in the constitution of subjectivity and agency,” yet this is a starting point that also involved, “trying to locate any situated experiential perspective within a more objective understanding of social structures and systems” (McNay 2008).
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The contribution of this dissertation lies in three overlapping areas that are relatively absent in existing literature. First, is an exploration of the meaning of mulatice at individual and national levels. Second, is the interrogation of the role the mulata plays in the overall racial order of Brazil. And third is exploring the relationship between the mulata as individual and national identity. These themes will be addressed through the concepts of mulato/a as a racial category, the sexualization of the mulata, and identity and misrecognition.

In order to situate these contributions it is important to see how other scholars, particularly in the realm of race theory, have understood who and what the mulata is. Broadly speaking, there are two ways in which the mulata is presented in existing research. On the one hand, the mulata is presented as the female manifestation of a racial category. This category is assumed to be real; that is, used as an operating category in everyday life. The literature in this vein spans Latin American experiences, further solidifying the mulata as an apriori reality across differing cultural contexts. On the other hand, the mulata is presented as a sexualized woman. This second manifestation focuses on the ways in which the mulata is represented, pointing to her sexualization as a form of racial domination. While analytically distinct, both views are premised on the existence and acceptance of mulatice as a fundamental racial category.
Mulato/a As Racial Category

Perhaps the most telling problem in existing literature on race in Brazil is the simultaneous presence and absence of mulato/a as a racial category. According to the IGBE (The Institute for Brazilian Geographic Statistics) in the history of the Brazilian census, from 1872-2010, mulato has never been used as an official category. This absence is confusing because the term is used quite liberally in literature. To further complicate this, Brazilians themselves do not often use mulato, but mostly by academics describing different racial identities. One possible explanation lies in the work of Carl Degler (1971) among other scholars such as Skidmore (1993) who describes the mulato as any combination of black and white ancestries resulting in a range of differing skin tones, hair textures, and other physical features. In this sense, the mulato is an umbrella term for black and white mixture.

And yet, Degler waivers throughout his text between using mulato as a general term and a more specific racial category. For example:

“More recently, Rodrigues Alves, the Brazilian writer, provided another example of the way in which mulattoes are differentiated from blacks, especially in Bahia. Alves pointed out that if one goes into an office and sees that the chief is a Negro and hears him say, “I am a Negro,” the chief’s aid will say, “No, Sir, you are not a Negro, you are a moreno”” (p. 110).

And so while the mulato category is supposed to encompass racial mixtures such as pardo (brown) and moreno (brown), it still is used in specific situations. More concerning however, is that in this excerpt, the interview data that Degler refers to uses the word moreno, which is much more commonly used by Brazilians. Why then does Degler insist on mulato when moreno is specifically used?
The disconnect between academicians using mulato and everyday Brazilians using other terms also points to the ways in which American race theory and academic discourse in general has significantly had an influence on Brazilian conceptions of race. Robin Sheriff’s ethnography in a shantytown outside of Rio de Janeiro (2001) attempts to make sense of the very complicated racial classification system in Brazil, at least the unofficial self-classification system. While she does not use the term mulato as often as Degler, she still assumes that mulato is an important and perhaps even meaningful way to discuss a mixed-race identity. She interviewed 72 households, encompassing 419 respondents and 76% of those respondents self-identified as nonwhite, preferring terms such as *pardo* and *moreno*. And while mulato does not appear often in her interview material, she still refers to this concept as significant:

“...Race-color terms are only occasionally used to actually classify individuals in truly racial terms. In what I call the discourse of description, color terms are used in a primarily adjectival rather than a nominal sense...If a speaker refers to a man as mulato, in most ordinary everyday contexts, his meaning will be much closer to “he is a man with medium brownish skin” than “he belongs to a distinct racial group called mulato”” (p.36)

This is not to say that mulato is an entirely irrelevant term. Historically, it was often used in connection to the process of whitening within Gilberto Freyre’s theory of racial democracy. Continuous racial mixing over generations, in Freyre’s theory, would eventually produce a whitened population. Much of the confusion over the term can perhaps be linked to the idea that a mixed-race person (a mulato for all intents and purposes) could over time and with some social mobility become more white. In this sense then, mulato is a transitional stage rather than a racial identity (Nascimento 2007;
The possibility of becoming whiter is linked to what is known as the mulato escape hatch. Unlike the United States where one drop of black blood makes one black, the existence of an in-between category such as mulato is a way of “escaping” one’s African background. Clearly rooted in racist eugenics ideologies, the less fully black a person is, the better the chance she has to rise socially and economically (Skidmore 2010; Degler 1971). While this certainly brings meaning to the category of mulato, it does not necessarily line up with the ways in which individual Brazilians self-identify in everyday terms.

Scholars such as Elisa Larkin Nascimento (2007) and Angela Gillam (1999) have understood that mulato is not an identity or term that is most prevalent today. Instead, the idea of brown-ness is most aptly described in the ambiguous term moreno. The move to moreno, which can encompass anything from brown hair to brown skin and everything in between, is ideological and in many ways practical. It is ideological in that the idea that everyone is mixed is built on the Freyrian notion of continual and continuous miscegenation. In practical terms, most Brazilians are brown in some manifestation (eye color, hair color, skin tone) and so moreno functions as a catchall category that is both about race and color.

And yet even scholars such as these fail to account for what precisely this term and others like it, such as mulato, mean to those who utilize them. This assumptive stance, does not interrogate the why people choose specific concepts, where and they are
used, and ultimately what those concepts mean to them. Beyond taking for granted that these categories are real and indicative of racial identification, it seems that the major omission is figuring out value and role these words/identities/terms play at the everyday level of meaning-making and navigating social and institutional channels.

Robin Sheriff’s (2001) work begins to dig at these deeper level meanings but stops at the point at which the terms make sense within a racial order. For example, in one interview, Sheriff asks a woman if she identifies with the black race even though she identified as *parda* because of her white skin and kinky hair texture. The woman goes on to describe an encounter she had on an elevator where white women were using racial slurs to describe a black man. She then put a stop to the conversation by speaking up and saying that she too was black. While the example is interesting, the analysis does not interrogate the fact that she was accepted as white even though she believes she is not. What does that mean to her? What does that mean in institutional settings? Does this woman confront interpersonal racism often? Many of these questions reveal the limits of existing literature on racial identity in Brazil. It is not enough to know how people identify; we must also uncover the meanings lying beneath the surface.

### Sexualizing the Mulata

If the concept of mulato/a is not situated within a racial discourse, it is discussed in a related but distinct way. As a specifically racialized, gendered, and sexualized form, the mulata, the mixed-race woman has taken on a semi-mythical dimension. Her existence is at once creation myth in the Freyrian theory of racial democracy and the
concrete result of a brutal legacy of slavery and forced miscegenation. As in the above discussion, the mulata does and does not exist.

The sexualized mulata is linked to professional and recreational samba dancing, Carnival, prostitution, and is a national icon of Brazil. While much has been written about her in these various manifestations, there is a relative absence of writing exploring the effects of such a powerful figure on Brazilian women’s identities (Bandyopadhyay and Nascimento 2010, Pravaz 2008, Caldwell 2007, Giacomini 2006, Piscitelli 2004, Goldstein 2003, Vianna 1999, Gillam and Gillam 1999). Both nationally and internationally, the mulata as a sexualized figure has become synonymous with what it means to be Brazilian, capturing the assumed essence of a people fundamentally tied to African exotic Otherness.

This conflation must certainly have an impact on how Brazilian women see themselves and others. bell hooks (1992) draws attention to the ways in which the Black female body in particular has been constructed and represented as simultaneously hypersexual and grotesque. Through its animalistic desires, the black body becomes the site of the projections of white male sexual fantasies. At the same time black female subjectivity is denied based on these same animalistic and primitive qualities. The black female body has historically been objectified, commodified, and scrutinized. This strong association between dark and brown skinned bodies with sexuality is prominent in Brazilian culture, “The possession of Africanized features, particularly the size and shape of the hips and buttocks, is also central to the sexual appeal of the mulata women” (Caldwell 2007, 60).

One example of this can be seen in how Brazilians conceptualize themselves. Brasilidade or Brazilianess, is centered on a notion of sensuality and sexuality as an inherent quality of those who belong to the Brazilian nation. Historically this can be at least partially attributed to Gilberto Freyre’s myth of racial democracy that has had a direct impact on modern Brazilian social thought. According to Freyre, being Brazilian is the experience of miscegenation and mixed raciality so that all Brazilians have some claim to African ancestry. Because this belief is so ingrained in national consciousness, even those who identify themselves as white are quick to establish their connection to the more positive aspects of Africanness (namely shapely bodies, samba dancing, and sexual allure) while also distancing themselves from the negative aspects (Parker 2009).

The duality that bell hooks points out is mirrored in this adoption of Brazilian sensuality. In *Bodies, Pleasures, and Passions: Sexual Culture in Contemporary Brazil*
(2009), Parker claims that the mulata herself embodies and represents sensuality. She then also expresses two important dualities through her corporeal existence. The first is that she is the living proof of the ideology of racial democracy, the idealized mixture of African and European. As an ideology, racial democracy attempts to negotiate and neutralize the legacy of slavery by focusing on the product of (forced) miscegenation. Relatedly, the mulata embodies the paradox of Brasilidade, namely that this innate sexuality and sensuality symbolically and physically located in the body of the mulata is a source of pride and shame.

More specifically, the mulata is often associated with the state of Rio de Janeiro, the center of Carnival and beach life that has come to represent Brazil as a nation. Being from Rio is being “Carioca,” and implies particular conceptions of characteristics and physique. Mirian Goldenberg (2002) asserts that, “the female Carioca embodies, better than anyone else, the spirit of the city: the half-naked body, beaches, sun, Carnival, parties, youth, liberated sexuality...” (P. 8). As a combination of being Carioca and the sensuality and knowledge of samba through Brasilidade, the body of the mulata is the site of the (re)production of shame and pride, belonging and stigma.

The effects of this duality of pride and stigma on identity formation are hinted at in literature but not fully explored. For example, in Natasha Pravaz’s (2006) work on the link between samba dancing, samba lyrics, and the objectification of the mulata, she ends with the following:

“The contradictions at the heart of these samba lyrics exemplify the main tropes of Brazilian nationalist and racist discourses. These discourses deploy notions of “miscegenation,” “samba,” and “seduction,” as central elements in the production of a common identity for the nation, and the mulata becomes one of the privileged signifiers
in this equation. In this process, women’s subalternity in the social structure is denied, and embodying the subject-position of an idealized social type in the fleeting Carnival parades and cabaret shows becomes one of the only ways of social recognition for many white, black, and mulatto women in contemporary Brazil” (p. 54)

Illustrating how deeply intertwined the mulata is with conceptions of self and nation, Pravaz opens the door for an interrogation of the connection between a national and individual mulata identity.

Gendered national identities are also articulated in relation to the state, to ideology, and to conceptions of citizenship (Radcliffe 1996). The close connection between national identity and cultural symbols is both racialized and gendered, creating boundaries and a sense of belonging. In the case of Brazil, the transformation and adoption of particular ethnic cultural symbols such as samba, fused a cultural form with the myth of racial democracy. As one woman Pravaz interviewed said, “Of course, the one who really dances the samba is the mulata” (Pravaz 2003, 121). Defining a racialized sense of Brasilidade with gendered notions of nation, the mulata who can samba is Brazil, represents Brazil, and yet, is excluded from full citizenship for those very same attributes. Like the body itself, samba and therefore the mulata as a cultural form contains within it both emancipatory potential and disempowerment and oppression.

Imagine being embedded in a culture where the mulata is omnipresent. She is held up as the perfect racial mixture, the symbol of hegemonic beauty standards, demonstrative of Brasilidade, linked to sex, lust, and samba; the contradictory messages are inescapable. However, literature tends to focus only on the effects on women who identify as mulatas. Caldwell (2009) notes that, “Popular images of Brazil as a carnivalesque, tropical paradise have played a central role in contemporary constructions
of mulata women’s social identities” (P. 58). Or Giacomini (1990) whose work focuses on the relationship and consequences of professional samba dancers (also known as professional mulatas) to the ways in which they are represented. However, if all Brazilian women are seen to be mulatas (in some way) then all women’s identities should be affected by these images and representations. Additionally, who counts as a mulata is still an open question.

The ways in which conceptions and representations of the mulata inform and affect individual identity construction is not only theoretical. How people see themselves, how they use their bodies, and how they are perceived has concrete economic, social, political, and in this case, racial consequences. Because of the more fluid and contextual nature of racial identification in Brazil, the concurrent pride and stigma associated with the mulata form must certainly affect the racial order. Whether attempting to distance or associate oneself with attributes associated with the mulata, her racialized, gendered, and sexualized construction is embedded in the multiple processes of individual, national, and racial identification formation.

**Identity Formation and the Politics of (Mis)Recognition**

The politics of recognition is firmly grounded in notions of the self, in particular, Hegelian conceptions of identity formation and the philosophy of consciousness. “In this tradition, recognition designates an ideal reciprocal relation between subjects in which each sees the other as its equal and also as separate from it. This relation is deemed constitutive for subjectivity...” (Fraser and Honneth 2003, 10). In essence, this is a
psychological approach as well, “I” need “you” to recognize that I exist. Recognition is concerned with autonomy, self-expression, issues of justice, and identity often through an intersubjective approach. More recent social theory has made recognition claims central to discussions surrounding identity politics, political reform, and social justice. Recognition literature is simultaneously philosophical, psychological, social, economic, and political in nature and has become central to critical social theory and social movement literature alike. In particular, concerns with identity formation are concerned with the fact that, “Identity turns on the interrelated problems of self-recognition and recognition by others” (Calhoun 1995, 213).

Identity formation and recognition more broadly occurs within a web of social relations and historically specific contexts. One of the central concerns in this project is that marginalization, disrespect, and alienation are often consequences of social systems that produce and reproduce identities based on race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nationality, etc. Conflicting images of self, as discussed in relation to the mulata converge to reveal the multiple aspects of identity and the relationships those aspects of identity have to dominant notions of normality and social hierarchies.

The work of Patricia Hill Collins (1990) highlights the problems associated with the internalization of dominant norms and hierarchies. Complicating the “power to name arguments,” Collins demonstrates that the power to name in a damaging sense can also occur within marginalized populations themselves. Focusing her work particularly on African American women, Collins’ notion of “controlling images,” as internalized stereotypes about black women shows how the convergence of the subordinate side of
multiple dichotomies related to identity mask and perpetuate racial, gender, and economic oppression (P. 70).

The “Other” has been used as a powerful analytical tool to understand the relational or intersubjective process of relegating some identities as inferior. Used in postcolonial theory, feminist and black feminist theory, and even in philosophical literature, the Other has become a standard explanation for racial and gender hierarchies. Based on intersubjective or relational development of the self, “Othering,” as it is sometimes referred to, is often cited as a source of misrecognition or disrespect as Honneth (2003) argues. Fundamental to recognition literature, the Other paradoxically offers the potential for recognition and can also be the source of misrecognition. This category of Other, though central to social theory, also presents problems. Central to this project is that the Other assumes asymmetry in the power to name and dismisses the agency of individuals to resist and transform particular definitions of self.

Simone de Beauvoir (1952) may be one of the most well known philosophers to use the concept of the “Other” to describe the position of women in society. Her claim is that an “Other” is always an object to the “One” as subject, a relational understanding of situating the “Self.” Yet this process also relies upon the “Other” accepting such a role, or rather, an internalization of subordination. “No subject will readily volunteer to become the object, the inessential; it is not the Other who, in defining himself as the Other, establishes the One. ...the Other...must be submissive enough to accept this alien point of view” (de Beauvoir 1952, xxiv). Thus the intersubjective process of identity formation and recognition can be fraught with distortions, marginalizations, and power
relations. In the case of women, de Beauvoir points out that She recognizes him but He does not recognize her.

Collins (1990) claims that African American women are as likely as white women to “Other” each other, to claim who they are in relation to what they are not. Lighter-skinned women are not dark-skinned, straight hair is not kinky hair. Through this process, divisions and fissures erupt in attempts to collectivize relatively stable individual identities. Thus, misrecognition is not solely an externally imposed phenomena but rather is implicated in internal processes of self-definition and differentiation.

Identities are not static concepts, particularly in relation to ongoing political, cultural, and social shifts. Identities encompass not only identification and an awareness of self, but also the reflection of others onto the self. Another way of putting this is that identities are often constructed in their negation to other hegemonic identities such as the relationship between white and black or One/Self and “Other.” This is why identity and recognition are so integrally linked, identity is ultimately based on the ability to be recognized and to recognize others.

According to Craig Calhoun (1995), “We face problems of recognition because socially sustained discourse about who it is possible or appropriate or valuable to be inevitably shapes the way we look at and constitute ourselves, with varying degrees of agonism and tension” (P. 213). These struggles occur simultaneously as internal and social processes that are in constant dialogue with institutions, structures, and people. Part of this dialogue occurs even among those who may seem to possess similar identities as can be seen in this project.
Misrecognition in relation to identity is often a consequence of the internalization of dominant images. Articulating this internalization in this frame complicates the place of the mulata in the racial order and as a sexualized figure. If Brasilidade is premised on the racialized and sexualized aspects of the mulata, then mulatice is elevated to the status of an internal and natural essence. As a form of misrecognition, this “innate quality” is itself used to mask, justify, and exploit the very racial hierarchies it has produced.

This inner essence of Brasilidade is demonstrated on and through the body. Part of the misrecognition is that Brazilian women see their sensuality, beauty, and rhythm as natural. But the body, as Bourdieu (1984) notes, is the manifestation of the social conditions into which the body is socialized and expressed. Also known as habitus, embodied existence is central to my analysis. The body is both constituted by and constitutive of the context in which it is embedded. This means that there is no inner essence, no Brasilidade that transcends the racial, class, and gender order. Using this concept helps to uncover the ideological subtext of the mulata as crucial to justifying and understanding existing social hierarchies.
CHAPTER THREE: THE MYTH OF RACIAL DEMOCRACY

At the heart of understanding Brazil is Gilberto Freyre’s (1986) theory of racial democracy. Part myth and part reality, racial democracy fundamentally shapes how Brazilians see themselves and others. This chapter seeks to discuss how racial classification operates in relation to Freyre’s vision; the myth versus the reality of racial democracy. Specifically, why is it that the mulata, the anchor of Freyre’s theory does not exist as an official racial category or as a form of self-identification? The mulata as the living proof of the perfect racial mix of African and European should theoretically be an important and venerated racial identity. And yet, in an analysis of the racial classification system she is relatively absent. Crucial to this interrogation is the tension that exists between positive attributes of African women that are also used as forms of stigma. How, when and where the mulata fits into the racial order is fundamental to understanding the ways in which racial democracy is more myth than reality.

Unlike the American system, Brazilians do not see themselves in absolutes; instead, context and situation can alter racial identity. Robert Louis Gates, Jr.’s (2011), Black in Latin America, notes on a trip to Brazil,

“I couldn’t help noticing that those who called themselves black and identified me as black did so with a certain defiance, or apologetically. Many people wanted to be one of Brazil’s seemingly endless shades of brown, not black, and to assure me that I was brown, too. Were these categories, these many names for degrees of blackness, a shield against blackness? (P. 39).
There are two main similarities between the American and Brazilian racial systems. Both were shaped by the legacy of trans-Atlantic slavery and both hierarchically support white privilege. Beyond that, the similarities end. For an American reader, this is fundamentally important when attempting to understand the internal logic of race in Brazil. What often occurs is that Americans misrecognize the consequences of racial meanings and classifications by attempting to transpose American understandings of race onto Brazil. As evidenced in the above excerpt, race in Brazil must be understood in its own, unique historical development.

Brazil is often referred to as a racial democracy, an ideology popularized by the sociologist Gilberto Freyre. Freyre’s work from the 1940s focused on the miscegenation of the population and the resulting racial mixture, which he believed brought together the best qualities and traits of each race. His work resulted in two influential conclusions that remain relevant. First is the notion that race in Brazil is not important because all Brazilians come from racially mixed ancestry. The denial of racial differences can be seen in national discourse where social inequalities are reduced to class differences. And secondly, that racial classification is informed by a combination of somatic and socio-economic factors.

**Determining Racial Classification**

Brazilian racial terminology is complicated: *negro*, mulato, *moreno*, *pardo*, Afro-Brazilian, non-white. These terms and many others are utilized, conflated, changed, and confused in academic literature and when speaking to individuals. To illustrate this I will
use two profiles of women I interviewed. Each profile captures the situational and complicated web of racial classification.

Cristina is a 55-year old doctor. If I had to describe her racially I would say that she is white with olive skin and dark brown wavy hair. And yet, when I asked her to identify herself racially, the answer was surprising. On my birth certificate it says branca (white), but that is because anyone who isn’t negra (black) or parda (mixed) is branca. But of course no one thinks I am branca, I am really morena because my parents have Arabic blood in them. Or maybe I am branca because my hair is not kinky. I mean, I am clearly not white white, like a Caucasian, but I have no African in me either. But I am a doctor and that gives me more respect so maybe I’m kind of white. Oh wait [laughing], my husband is negro, so I must be morena, a mixture!

Cris is a 41-year old domestic servant. When I look at her, I see a very dark-skinned woman who I would racially categorize as black. This is how she responded when I asked her to explain her own racial identity:

My birth certificate says that I am parda but I think I am negra. I have the darkest skin of my sisters but I am the only one with good hair. My mother, grandmother and grandfather were all negros, but my father was mixed. My sisters and I all look different. One of my grandmothers was Italian and I think that is where my hair comes from. It’s really hard to say because it is person-to-person. Some people think I am parda, some say negra. Mostly I think I am negra, especially since I am a domestic. The family I work for are all white so that makes me negra.

The racial classification system in Brazil is based on a continuum of skin color encompassing dozens and perhaps hundreds of gradations. While the continuum does in fact span black to white and everything in between, the gradations are based on a wide variety of factors. This can, and often does appear to be ‘arbitrary.’ As Hanchard (2005) notes, “Brazilians prefer to use descriptions that emphasize the numerous, often arbitrary distinctions on the Brazilian color continuum, such as escurinho (very dark) or clarinho
(a little lighter-skinned), rather than oppositional categories like *branco* (white) and *preto* or *negro* (black) (P. 9).

In order to clarify both the interview material and its analysis, the following are the most common racial terms used:

- **Black** is referred to as *negro* or *preto*. Some people use these interchangeably while some prefer one over the other. *Negro* is synonymous with *negro* in the United States but does not carry the same problematic historical connotation. *Preto* literally translates to the color black and is used the same way Americans use black racially.

- Unlike the United States, where African-American is commonly used, Afro-Brazilian is mostly used in academia and in journalism. Afro-Brazilian or Afro-descendant is utilized in statistical analyses to demonstrate the bipolar effects of racial categories (the alternative to these is ‘non-white’ as a generalized category). Additionally, this term can be found in social justice movements such as Black Pride.

- **Pardo** refers to a mixed-race person who may have some indigenous ancestry in addition to black and white. This term is used in more official categorizations such as on birth certificates and the census. You will rarely hear someone use this in everyday discourse.

- **Moreno** is another ambiguous term that can mean mixed-race, especially referring to a mixture of black and white. Generally *moreno* means brown. But *moreno* as
brown can refer to skin tone, mixed ancestry, brown hair, and/or a white person who has a suntan.

- Finally, there is the *mulato* category, which is the subject of this project.

One of the main difficulties associated with research and writing about race in Brazil is the multitude of categories and terms. For example, statistics regarding life chances are almost always presented using Afro-Brazilian, non-white, or even mixed-race as a category. However, individuals describing themselves and others do not use those terms. The consequences of this can be seen in the writing throughout this project, where the terms used change and shift depending on the source of the information. The seeming inconsistencies in fact illustrate the complexity of race at all levels.

While the distinctions may in fact be subjective, they appear more so to Americans who understand race within the context of the one-drop rule. In the United States, one drop of black blood, despite physical and phenotypical characteristics made you unconditionally black. The rule evolved into legal code and later into hypodescentancy laws for children of mixed-race parents (Daniel 2006). In simplistic terms, you were black or white, a bipolar system with no grey area.

Brazil did not have a one-drop rule, in particular because of the sheer numbers of African slaves brought into the country. While estimates vary, between 3-5 million African slaves taken to Brazil, the percentage of the Brazilian population was and continues to be majority Afro-descent. Thus, the rates of miscegenation, forced and unforced, are much greater and more normalized in the Brazilian experience. Since
mixture was inevitable, many scholars concluded while race could be a contributing factor of inequality, what was more likely was that class was the operational factor.

In 1950 the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) funded a comprehensive study of race relations in Brazil. The goal of the study was to understand the assumed lack of racial prejudice in the land of racial democracy. It is interesting to note that this study included scholars from the United States, France, and Brazil, demonstrating the extent to which Freyre’s work had been established and accepted worldwide. The findings of the study produced two schools of thought. On the one hand, Fernandes (1969), a well-respected Brazilian scholar argued that the concept of race established during slavery combined with the capitalist class system resulted in discriminatory practices. This would then explain why the higher the class level, the whiter the racial identification. This meant that race was in fact in operation (Daniel 2006; Telles 2004; Winant 2001).

However, the majority of researchers disagreed with Fernandes, arguing that, “class inequalities and cultural attributes had more impact on everyday social relations than race or physical appearance” (Daniel 2006,180). This, despite the fact that the study did not entirely support this claim and that subsequent studies indeed demonstrated that racial discrimination existed in Brazil. Scholars of the São Paulo school and Fernandes believed that the choice to deny the existence of race was, “”the prejudice of having no prejudice”” (Daniel 2006,180). At this point Freyre’s elitist vision of a racial democracy was cemented in the Brazilian social imaginary; if not also in the rest of the world.
If class is seen as the main operational factor in inequality in Brazil, racial classification becomes very ambiguous. Coupled with the predominance of class is the historical absence of formal laws of racial classification, leaving individuals to subjectively define and interpret their racial identities (Telles 2006). The result is often a combination of culturally significant characteristics such as tone of skin, hair texture, eye color, shape of hips, etc. Multiple studies illustrate the wide variation in individual identification, asking respondents to self-classify. Harris (1970) elicited 492 different terms, Sanjek (1971) 116 terms, national survey (1976) 100+ terms, national survey (1995) 100+ terms. Examples of such terms are: “dark chocolate,” “Péle-colored,” “purple,” “coffee with milk,” and many others (Telles 2004, Sheriff 2001).

This does not mean that there is no official classification system. Brazil does indeed use a census system, giving respondents set options. The fact that a national census including racial classification does exist, seems a bit odd considering the overt negation that race is relevant in the racial paradise. Telles (2004) argues that there are three main systems of classification in Brazil. First is the ambiguous popular system of self-identification. Secondly, the census system using three main categories along a continuum: branco (white), pardo (brown), and preto (black). Finally, a newer system that Telles describes as the, “black-movement system,” where there are only two options: negro and branco (white) (Telles 2004, 80-81).

There is however, another factor to racial identification. Freyre’s myth of a complete racial mixture has also reinforced the supposition that race can be determined by non-physical characteristics. Socio-economic factors such as profession, place of
residence, and class can affect one’s racial classification (Telles 2004; Sheriff 2001). The social construction of race mediated by class is evident in interviews (from an earlier project) where women with physically white skin were self-classifying as non-white. The strength of socioeconomic factors in relation to skin color demonstrates that the racialized body is a fluid concept that can be affected by non-biological characteristics. In the following excerpt from an interview with a woman with seemingly white skin and light brown hair, it is evident that race is determined in complex ways, having as much to do with socio-economic factors as the somatic differences:

Daise, a 36 year old domestic:

N: What race or color do you identify as?
Daise: I am black, my dad was black and my mom was white.
N: So you aren’t mixed, like morena maybe?
Daise: No, I am black I think because I am poor. But I have a white soul.
N: What does that mean?
Daise: It means that I am cultured and have good manners even though I am poor and have dark skin.

This illustrates what Charles Wagley referred to as, “social race,” where color and other physical characteristics are important but not the only means of racial classification. “As the Brazilians say, “money whitens.” Once “whitened” by money, a “Negro” becomes a “mulato” or “pardo,” regardless of his actual color” (Deglar 1971,105). This racial flexibility is what results in the vast array of colors and identities that can change depending on context.

Such comments also reveal the naturalized and internalized conception of whiteness as a superior characteristic. The dichotomy between white and black or European and African is demonstrated here in the naturalized association of white with
particular moral and physical attributes that are regarded as opposite of African features. Whiteness then is not simply a skin color but rather is indicative of particular cultural and social characteristics deemed to be more appropriate and acceptable.

One of the tenets of Freyre’s theory was its emphasis on the *branqueamento* (whitening) of the population. While mixture was his hallmark, Freyre believed that the continual mixing of the races would one day lead to overall whitening. Though contradictory, miscegenation would occur as a result of white supremacy. “Ordinary black Brazilians believed their greatest chance for escaping poverty was to marry whites and light mulattos (Telles 2004).

These kinds of comments also demonstrate, as Winddance Twine (1998) suggests, that the valorization of whiteness is embedded not simply among the elites who profit from white privilege, but also among non-whites. This internalization also illustrates the extent to which race operates as a filter of meaning making, if not at the institutional level, certainly at the individual level. While the national and institutional levels of Brazilian society attempt to deny and/or minimize the impact of race through the ideology of racial democracy, the individual level is painfully aware of its relevance. In large part this is because the effects of race on life chances are so central to the everyday experience.

Robin Sheriff and other scholars of race in Brazil have found that despite the multitude of categories, race in still essentially bipolar in its effects (Sheriff 2001). However, socio-economic statistics tell a very different story. According to data from the Brazilian National Household Survey in 2006 (PNAD), people of African descent
comprised over half of the country’s population. They comprised approximately 73% of the very poorest and earned 60% less than whites of similar educational backgrounds.

As of 2006, the PNAD also showed that Afro-Brazilians accounted for 70% of the illiteracy rate.

Whether a person identifies as *moreno* (brown), *pardo* (yellow/brown), *mulato*, or *negro*, there is still a clear social and economic divide between white and non-white. Statistical research reveals that indicators such as life expectancy, wage differentials, employment, and educational opportunities reflect wide-ranging discrimination against those of African descent despite skin color variations. According to the IGBE (The Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics), the 2010 census showed that in urban areas, a racial wage gap exists where whites earn approximately 2.5 times more than blacks. Additionally, nationwide, blacks make up over ¾ of those living in poverty and less than 1/5 of those who are wealthy. These statistics are particularly important in light of the fact that blacks (through self-identification) comprise more than half of the overall population.

Many of the women I spoke with communicated this concrete difference between white and non-white, seeing its purpose as wholly negative where those of Afro-Brazilian descent stratify themselves hierarchically based on an internalized notion of white superiority.

Alda, a domestic servant discussed her family’s racial make-up:
I am negra and I am proud of that. My parents were black and my children are too. I am not ashamed to say it. But I will tell you that my oldest son has very light skin and a good, thin nose, but his hair is so kinky. My second son is even lighter but he still looks like a negro. But they would never say that they are negro, they say they are moreno.
There is so much talk about all of these small differences between black people, you know, all these colors. This stuff just divides us negros and then we hate each other.

Maria Magdalena: I think these colors are crazy! For me you are black or white, those are the only colors, those other colors like moreno (brown) or pardo (yellow) don’t exist. I think people with darker skin are, oh, I don’t know, I guess they don’t want to admit that they are black. In the end we are just black or white.

Clearly, there exist two competing yet interrelated ideologies concerning race within Brazil. The first are the conceptions that are grounded in the notion of racial democracy that can be thought of as a racial fluidity, based on physical features as well as non-biological characteristics. This fluidity is attributed to the influence of non-biological characteristics such as occupation, place of residence, and education on skin color classification. Secondly, there is the more essentialized and rigid categorization of black or white; this is known more commonly in the United States as the “one drop rule.” Both ideologies are complicated by the theoretical and material circumstances in which they are invoked, sometimes simultaneously. Scholars are divided on this issue, many of whom, like Sheriff, suggest that even though multiple color categories are used in common interactions, race has bipolar effects (Sheriff 2001). Whether a person identifies as moreno (brown), pardo (yellow), mulatto, or black, there is still a clear social and economic divide between white and non-white (Lovell and Wood 1998).

However, it is clear that many non-white women acknowledge that both essentialized notions of race and more expressive color gradations constitute how they understand themselves, their social positions, and also, how they are identified by others. If we start from the premise that individuals understand their identities to be shaped by
both ideologies of race, then we can begin to understand how the importation and use of essentialized notions of race can be construed at best as problematic, at worst, as a continuation of domination.

**The Gendered Myth**

The second major contribution of Freyre’s work is his emphasis on the positive attributes of African women. The myth of racial democracy perpetuates racial discrimination in a particularly gendered way in that it overemphasizes the physical attributes of African females that has led to the purported sexuality, beauty, and strength of the Brazilian race (Caldwell 2007; Telles 2004). Their physical endurance and sexual allure in particular, has shaped understandings of the social positions of women of Afro-descent. While all Brazilian women are assumed to have inherited the innate sensuality of the African, non-white women are affected differently by this African connection because African attributes are both revered and stigmatized.

For women who are categorized as non-white, racial differences between black and white are multiplied by a gendered aspect of racial discrimination where social identity is constructed by the confluence of racial democracy and dominant gender divisions. According to Kia Lily Caldwell, “As the Freyrian version of Brazilian history suggests, Afro-Brazilian women have been more closely associated with the slaves, and this with the realm of service and subordination, than with the masters” (Caldwell 2007, 57).
The main distinction lies in context, as noted earlier with racial identification. For example, a woman who is a domestic servant, despite skin color, becomes “darker” because of the work she is doing. But if that same woman dresses up and dances samba, she may take on a different racial identity. While it is clear that being non-white (of Afro-descent) relates to fewer socio-economic and educational opportunities, it is difficult to determine just who is non-white. A white-skinned woman who is a domestic may very well self-classify as *parda* or *morena*. For these reasons, statistical information almost always refers to non-white, Afro-Brazilian, or black as the category in order to demonstrate the bipolar effects of race. It is also crucial to note that *mulata* is never used as a category. This is because mulata is not a term used in officially in the census nor in individual self-classification as a racial identity.

The association of those of Afro-descent with slavery is concretized in the social standing of black versus white women. In 2010, 38% of non-white women were unemployed as compared to approximately 16% of white women. For those who are employed, domestic service continues to be a typical form of work in Brazil. And yet 60% of domestics are non-white (PNAD 2010). “African-Brazilian women embody the feminization of poverty…Eighty percent of employed black women are concentrated in manual occupations; more than half of these are domestic servants, and the rest are self-employed in domestic tasks (washing, ironing, cooking), among the lowest-paid in the economy. About one in four African-Brazilian heads of households earns less than half the minimum wage” (Hamilton, et al 2001).
The gendered divisions in the home and the labor market that relegate women to service and care work combined with stereotypes of Afro-Brazilian women as servants result in racial and gender discrimination. This discrimination together with the legacy of slavery has constrained black women in their employment opportunities (Caldwell 2007). In disproportionately high numbers, the work that Afro-Brazilian women are doing is service-oriented; they are domestic servants, nannies, cooks, and manicurists. As of 1998, roughly fifty percent of all Afro-Brazilian women as compared with twenty percent of white women were officially listed as domestics (Rezende and Lima 2004). In addition to structural constraints such as lack of education or racial discrimination, there is a clear historical and social relationship between domestic service and Afro-descendant women. This relationship is negotiated by both a specific gendered, racialized, and classed body as well as the construction of this body by the work it is doing.

Through the actual tasks involved in domestic service as well as the racial discrimination against those who perform the tasks, the social and economic position of the black female becomes reified. “Gender and class relations give rise not only to an occupational category but also to a social representation of submission and inferiority, embodied in the color black.” (Rezende and Lima 2004, 770) Like domestic service itself, the dark skin tone is still associated with being dirty, with poverty, and with slavery. Being Afro-Brazilian is correlated with cleaning toilets, scrubbing dirt off of floors, and literally doing someone else’s “dirty” work. (Goldstein 2003). The relational aspect of race between domestic and employer (the black servant and the white

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employer) reveals the ways that gender, race, and class become inscribed on a particular body and the labor it performs.

**Controlling Images: Mammies, Mãe Preta, and Maria**

The “Mammy” stereotype, as articulated by Patricia Hill Collins, the obedient and faithful black female servant, models the way that the relationship between a particular body and domestic service naturalizes racism, sexism, and classism (Collins 2000, 68). The Brazilian equivalent of this stereotype is the “Mãe Preta” that directly translates to “Black Mother”. This image continues to persist in Brazilian society through cultural and discursive means (Caldwell 2007). Like the Mammy, this stereotype acts as an ideology of domination over black/Afro-descendant women in particular. Unlike the Mammy, this stereotype of a dark-skinned woman continues to be conjured up in popular discourse as a tribute to the racial mixture of Brazil rather than being regarded as overt racism. Mãe Preta is in fact presented as the mother of the nation, further strengthening Freyre’s vision of a racial democracy. The continued use and existence of Mãe Preta illustrates the perpetuation of the conflation of black women with their role in the homes of white families.

An additional difference between controlling images in the United States and in Brazil is the existence of a stereotype “Maria,” a derogatory term/label used as a stand-in for a domestic. This name connotes a poor, non-white female body who is a domestic servant. The name Maria, common Latin American name, is often used in place of the servant’s real name, suggesting the unimportance of the personal identity of the servant.
as well as the commonality of having a servant. The commonality and everyday usage of Maria from the seldom-used Mammy in the American context, demonstrates the depth and acceptance of the conflation of the poor black woman with domestic service (and vice versa) at the level of the everyday, taken for granted. Though this label is not synonymous to the Mammy or the Mãe Preta, it demonstrates the link I between a particular body and domestic service, therefore reinforcing the racial and gender ideologies that relegate poor black women to service work.

To understand how this happens in the Brazilian context, one only need look as far as lyrics to popular songs, books, television, personal and employment agencies advertisements and even to leading social theorists. Gilberto Freyre’s well-known phrase: “A white woman to marry, a mulata woman to fornicate, a black woman to cook,” has been used by politicians and songwriters alike (Caldwell 2007, 50). Both physically and symbolically, the relationship between domestic service and darker skinned women has been solidified in national consciousness and even in the self-perceptions of black women.

In the interviews with women who are domestics, I asked about how they began this line of work, and why there were so many black domestics.

Cristina, a dark-skinned, 38-year-old domestic responded, I started working when I was 16 I think. I just started being a domestic for a family because I needed the money. It was hard leaving my house at first to live with a family I didn’t know, but I was able to do it and have been working ever since. I never thought of doing anything else, I mean, my mom was a domestic and I just always knew I would be too. Later in my life I realized that I like to bake cakes but I haven’t been able to do that for a living….Look, working as a domestic is sometimes good sometimes not…but it is work.
Jandira, a dark-skinned domestic said, God put this life here for me, we are here to suffer! Black women like me are here to be domestics, that is the path God put me on and it is where I will stay. I always thought I wanted to be a nurse’s aide but you can see that today’s world in Brazil doesn’t help poor people. So I always had to work as a domestic.

Andrea, a 40-year-old secretary recognized that her lighter skin tone played a role in her options to avoid domestic service,

Look, I never wanted to be a domestic and I am lighter skinned so I got lucky getting this job! But most darker women have to be domestics, there is nothing else for them! There is a lot of racism here, of skin color, social situation, class, education, everything! There really is a division in our society, the poor and the not poor don’t mix, there is no help, there is no caring for those who aren’t fortunate, it is very sad. There are a lot of people who have never come to my house and I think it is because I am poor, they treat me like I am sick or something. I may be poor but there is nothing wrong with me.

These negative stereotypes are naturalized and internalized by the very women they affect and ultimately reinforce black women’s inferior economic and social positions (Caldwell 2007; Collins 2000). It is a recursive system where the structural barriers and the naturalized conflation of black women with service work reinforce one another. In essence, the context in which black women are constrained towards and naturalized into particular socio-economic and employment options also becomes the most desirable for those women. The complete acceptance of the role of Maria/Mãe Preta and the prevailing ideology of domination demonstrates the naturalizing effects of racial, gender, and class oppression. This acceptance, both by the domestics and Brazilian society at large has resulted in the black female body as synonymous with the domestic servant.

This notion that constraints can be turned into preferences (Bourdieu 1984) reaffirms the embodiment and internalization of domestic service. The act of turning
constraints into preferences is more than survival, it is also a way of organizing and understanding one’s position in a livable and realistic way. There are also two consequences of domestic service as preference. On the one hand, it naturalizes and affirms the racial hierarchy. If women are seen to be “preferring,” or “choosing,” this career path, then there is no need to make racial institutional changes. On the other hand, Freyre’s myth of racial democracy is strengthened. Women who work as domestic servants are assumed to be darker in terms of skin color, despite what their skin color actually is. Freyre was clear that the whitening of the population would be a process occurring in stages. These women represent what occurs when you have not whitened enough.

The Mulata

The very stigma of African attributes that leads to oppression through servitude simultaneously exist as attributes of another form of oppression. The mulata who is not a real person or a racial category is also constructed as a sexualized fantasy. Freyre did not simply focus on the female product of racial democracy, but rather a sexualized female. While it is clear from the above discussion that domestic service is synonymous with a racialized body, there is another very strong association with the Afro-descendant body. Professional samba dancers known as passistas, sex workers, and prostitutes are also closely associated with the sexualized Afro-descendant body. The assumed innate sexuality of the African heritage of Afro-descendant women is most often seen in the representations of the mulata, the mixed-race woman. While the Mãe Preta/Maria
operates to naturalize the hierarchy of the labor market, the sexualized mulata validates miscegenation, lust, and even rape.

The sexualization of the mulata is a combination of white supremacy and racial democracy. Finding mixed-race women more sexually attractive and alluring reinforces the Freyrian vision of the “perfect” blend of Caucasian and African while simultaneously showing preference for approximation to whiteness rather than blackness. (Nascimento 2007, Telles 2004). While Degler argues that Roger Bastide’s assertion that the available sexuality attached to all those of Afro-descendancy effectively links blackness to prostitution is extreme, Bastide may in fact be correct in the case of women (Degler 1971).

Once again, context is crucial to understanding the racial dynamics of mulatice. These two prevailing ideological constructions of non-white women rest on a binary distinction of what being African means. Remember that the myth of racial democracy is still premised on white superiority. Blackness, being too African is associated with slavery, dirt, and poverty. That is why being a domestic identifies you as darker than you may in fact be. But sexuality stemming from African roots is linked to miscegenation and lust. This is the basis of Brazilian sensuality.

However, African sexuality is also a double-edged sword. Being sexy and sensual is an attribute of Brasilidade until it is utilized or exploited for profit. Women who are prostitutes or passitas are symbolically darkened and referred to as mulatas in a derogatory manner. Sonia Maria Giacomini asks the question, why is it that a racial category transforms into a professional category (Giacomini 2006)? The prominent role
of the mulata in Brazil clearly extends beyond discourse and into practice. As Nascimento (2007) notes, “Perhaps singular to Brazil, the role of the mulatto woman became a card-carrying profession…” (P. 60). Gillam and Gillam (1999) explains that this professional status has emerged from the international marketing of Brazil. It is not that professional mulata is an institutionally recognized occupation but that her professionalization marks a transition from a racial category to a status that can be affected by multiple factors such as clothing, hair, and occupation. “…The woman who is sexualized is thrust into the mulata subject position” (P. 66).

Mulatice is clearly gendered. The mulato, rarely mentioned in modern writing, has mainly been associated with being snobby and/or a tragic figure. The snobby label is linked to the idea that mulato men felt superior to black men because they were often able to rise socially. The tragic figure is the mulato who is pitied for being mixed-race (Gillam and Gillam 1999). These associations clearly stem from fear on the part of white men of mixed-race men gaining social mobility. And, as Collins notes, racial stereotypes are often centered around sexuality as a means of control (1990). So in the case of mulatos, if they were seen through a sexual lens, white women would be drawn to them, threatening white patriarchy.

Mulatas on the other hand are primarily constructed as sexual, thereby keeping them in a subordinate position compared to mulatos. The main purpose of the mulata in the form of passista appears to be as either sexual companion (or victim) in the abstract aim of whitening the population or as servant (Gillam and Gillam 1999). For poor women, who are disproportionately black, the inevitability of domestic servitude is
accepted as normal and natural. In this context the cultural repertoire of being a mulata can seem like an escape and a “step up.” Cultural repertoires are specific sets of strategies and actions that are embedded in particular cultural (and economic) contexts. Individuals in differing situations have different sets of cultural repertoires that they can draw upon and use to navigate social situations. The assumed sensuality and sexuality of the mulata identity brings about the attention of men both Brazilian and foreign, thereby increasing the possibility of social mobility through dating and/or marriage (Telles 2004).

The following interview excerpts demonstrate the internalization of these two cultural repertoires for non-white women across racial and class lines. These first excerpts are from self-identified white women.

Carolina: Beautiful mulatas have an opportunity to make more money. Mulatas from the favelas can dance as a way out. It’s similar to how people use porn as a way out.

Sonia: It’s impossible for people to leave the favelas unless they use their looks and dancing.

Denise: I think women from the favelas don’t have many choices. They can be domestic servants, they can prostitute themselves, they can become samba dancers, maybe they can get lucky and be beautiful enough to attract a rich husband or maybe even a gringo!

Simone: For women from humble beginnings, it’s a way to survive.

The following excerpts are from self-identified non-white women.

Claudia: I always knew I would be a domestic. What else do I have?

Tina: Look around! The only negras and mulatas you see are cleaning or dancing. You never see us as lawyers or teachers.
Cristina: I have a friend who is so lucky! She is beautiful, like the mulatas in Carnival! She met a gringo who took her with him to the United States! If I were beautiful I would have had that opportunity instead of being a domestic.

Not only do these statements illustrate the limited opportunities available to non-white women, they also illustrate an understanding of a hierarchical racial order. While all women of poor/non-white status have access to certain cultural repertoires, the subtext of the comments is that a racial identity itself can be utilized as social capital. Additionally, these women reveal the fluid and gendered nature of racial classification. By invoking beauty standards and even dancing ability as an aspect of mulatice rather than skin tone (though skin tone is implied), it is clear that understandings of race are driven by context, including gender, socio-economic status, and uses of the body.

**Conclusion**

Freyre’s vision rested on two principles. First, all Brazilians would be racially mixed to the point that race would become irrelevant. Second, over time, continued miscegenation would whiten population. This vision is more myth than reality, having ideologically complex results. While it is true that Brazilians themselves reiterate and believe that each of them is mixed race, discourse and socio-economic indicators reveal the continued importance of racial categorization. Despite its more fluid nature, race is still fundamentally relevant to individual identity construction, life choices, and institutional opportunities.

Brazilian women in general and non-white women in particular have been disproportionately affected by Freyre’s ideology. The hyper-sexualization of the African
woman and the simultaneous association of the African with poverty and servitude has lingering social economic effects both institutionally and individually. For the purposes of self-realization and identity formation, this myth has been particularly troublesome because it is ingrained into the whole of Brazilian society as an ideology of racial domination. As non-white women internalize a sense of subordination and inferiority, the rest of Brazilian society reflects that image back to them, a reinforcement of this negative image.

The multiple skin color classification system that is partially the result of the myth of racial democracy, gives an illusion of autonomous identity. But the adoption of what is posited as subjective choice of skin color, is itself indicative of an overarching racial hierarchy. The fact that domestics and other women in lower class positions self-identify as darker along the color spectrum indicates the ways in which the myth is constructed as a reality.

The myth is clearly gendered, pivoting on the lives of women and their bodies. The gendered myth of racial democracy affects how non-white women subjectively identify and what opportunities are open to them. Conflated with and often masked by class, the racial system in Brazil simultaneously encompasses fluid, context-driven classification and bipolar socio-economic effects. The most complicated category is certainly the in-between, not white and not black. Labeled *mulata, morena*, light brown, coffee with milk, *parda*, and many others, the mixed race woman holds a unique and infamous position. Sexualized and linked to domestic tasks, she is both the ideal Brazilian woman and the servant hidden in the kitchen. This racially ambiguous position
offers limited choices and ideological constructions of femininity. The following chapter will interrogate the historical context in which the mulata is constructed and how she came to be a symbol of Brazilian national identity.
CHAPTER FOUR: VARGAS AND THE MULATA: BUILDING A NATION

While the concept of the mulata is used frequently in relation to Gilberto Freyre (1986, 1959), his theory is not her origin. Mulatice was and is a reality throughout the Americas, a likely result of the merging of peoples of differing backgrounds. And yet the Brazilian mulata is unique both in her historical development and in her position as a national symbol. In particular, her symbolic importance makes her not simply a representation of Brazil but also crucial to understanding race. Contextualizing her “birth” and subsequent evolution beginning at Brazil’s colonization reveals the multitude of forces, that moved the mulata into the prominent and complex position she holds today. This chapter situates the mulata in history, where she comes from, how she became Brazil’s most famous export and symbol, and how she is the lynchpin of the racial order.

Contextualizing the Mulata in Brazilian History

For South and Central Americans, the experience of Iberian colonization has left a lasting impression. The architecture, urban planning, language, literature, cuisine, universities, and conceptions of identity formation among countless other examples, are evidence of Spanish and Portuguese influence (Skidmore 2010, Rama 1996). However, despite the more general similarities of a colonial past, the Brazilian experience is
distinct. From its relationship to the Portuguese Crown to its slave trade to its attempts at nation-building, Brazil in its past, present, and future must be situated in and through its difference from Spanish colonization.

The iconic figure of the mulata illustrates this point, making her historical appearance throughout the Americas between the mid to late 1500s, depending upon the arrival of the African slave trade and “discovery” of each particular territory. Latin American literature and music have long been captivated by the mulata of Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Colombia, Mexico, and of course, Brazil. At her most basic, she is the product of the white European with the African slave, a mix, a hybrid. Yet by contextualizing the mulata in the more specific geopolitical and socioeconomic history of Brazil, she becomes more nuanced and seductive. Following her transformations explains not simply her fixture in the Brazilian narrative over time but her story, which is the story of modern Brazil.

In order to contextualize the significance of the mulata today, she must be situated historically. This will be a rather brief historical analysis, covering the years from colonization through the mid 20th century. Drawing on two main trends throughout this 450-year period will establish a heuristic device through which the figure of the mulata can be understood. First, there is the development of a racial identity and the formation of racial dynamics and hierarchies. Secondly, is the development of a Brazilian consciousness and a national identity. Both trends occur within the confines of Portuguese influence, political turmoil, and economic growth but together offer unique explanatory power.
Colonization and Slavery

In the very early years of conquest, colonization, and settlement of Brazil by the Portuguese, the racial dynamics were largely confined to the relationship between white men and the Native indigenous populations. As in most of the Americas, the Native populations resisted, acquiesced, were enslaved, and many died of disease and brutality. Partially because of the lack of white women but also because of the objectification and dehumanization of Natives, many mestizo children were produced, also known as mamelucos in Brazil. Mameluco is the popular term for half white and half indigenous (Telles 2004, Deglar 1971). Though not treated as equals, mamelucos certainly had a place in early Brazilian society as servants and workers.

The establishment and growth of sugar cane and tobacco plantations in particular, necessitated more labor than the Native populations could handle, and in the mid 1500s the African slave trade to Brazil was fully established. Though estimates vary, more slaves were taken to Brazil than anywhere else in the Americas; somewhere around three million, or approximately 30-40% of all slaves (Skidmore 2010, Nava and Lauerhass 2006). These huge numbers have two implications. First, Brazil had a constant influx of new men, women, and children, contributing to a growing population where white Portuguese men were increasingly the numerical minority. Brazil has been widely considered the most brutal experience for slaves where African men in particular were treated as expendable and were literally worked to death. In essence this is a basic effect of capitalist practices, the Brazilian slave market had a constant over-supply thereby driving down their overall cost and value. An already inhumane and brutal system, slavery in the Portuguese colony took on especially horrific conditions.
This is distinct from the treatment of slaves in say the United States where fewer slaves were taken overall, making them more expensive and therefore more valuable to plantation owners. African women in Brazil, though also seen as expendable were useful as house slaves, in the fields, and as mistresses. This does not mean that African women were treated with less brutality but rather that they had multiple roles they could play in the colony, including being used to satisfy the lusts of the white men who came to Brazil without families (Skidmore 2010). Between the large numbers of slaves overall and miscegenation, forced and perhaps voluntary, the growing population of Brazil was “darkening” to an extent that the other slave owning colonies were not.

The second implication strengthens the argument the despite the similar histories of Iberian colonization and subsequent plantation-slave economies, the Brazilian experience was and is distinct. Simply at the level of numbers, resulting in the fact that today Brazil has more people of African descent than any nation except Nigeria, the racial demographics and experiences have been unique. As the last country in the Americas to abolish the slave trade in 1850, Brazil had approximately 300 years of forced and consensual miscegenation and the assimilation of millions and millions of Africans (Skidmore 2010, Nascimento 2007, Okpewho, Davies, and Mazuri 1999, Lesser 1999). The result of this can be seen in the volumes of writings and consternation over what to do about a nation built upon and by a people considered less than human. How does a country whose power rests in the hands of a white elite who by and large believed that Africans were degenerates, move forward with pride in its new “mixed” population?
This is one of the questions that frames the emergence and importance of the Brazilian mulata.

Many scholars (Skidmore 2010, Lesser 1999, Deglar 1971, Freyre 1959) have discussed the so-called triangle theory of Brazil, where three races of people, Africans, Europeans, and Indians combined to create a new civilization. And yet, Brazil is one of the most racially and ethnically diverse countries in the world. Waves of immigration from China, Japan, Germany, Italy, Syria, Palestine, Lebanon and many other nations introduced another layer of complexity to the construction of Brasilidade, the sense and identity of being Brazilian. The very immigration policies set up to entice more Europeans to Brazil, ironically encouraged an incredibly multicultural dimension. (Lesser 1999). Considering how complicated the construction of Brazilian national and racial identity became, it is even more astounding that the relevance of the mulata has remained constant.

There is however a second historical context that has seemingly contributed to a distinct Brazilian experience. The development of Brazilian consciousness, intellectual and social, that can be seen today, began in the earliest days of colonial rule. Though it seems obvious to say, the very fact that the Portuguese colonized Brazil while Spain colonized most of the surrounding territories should signal that there would be differences in Brazil that go beyond language. Yet aside from this basic difference, the circumstances, patterns of immigration, and development of an intellectual life in the Portuguese colony were distinct.
Developing a Population

From the moment of “discovery” in 1500 by Pedro Alvares Cabral, the territory of Brazil, was meant to attract the Portuguese monarchy. Though popular at the time, the idea of the exotic Other in far away lands, of absurdly fertile farmsteads, and free labor was easily applied to what Cabral found as he landed in Bahia. From its European birth, Brazil was depicted as sensual and seductive; distinct and alluring. However, the Portuguese Crown ruled over a relatively small home territory and could not spare its wealthy merchants and fortune seekers. Instead, the Crown set up the Brazilian coast as a series of trading posts, sending a mixture of merchants, sailors, soldiers, priests, and other middle to low-income men. This is significant because Brazil was not inundated with monarchic envoys to establish order and because these early Portuguese inhabitants were not necessarily educated or literate.

However, as trade grew and the establishment of new markets (especially gold, diamonds, and sugar) took hold, a small Brazilian population began to emerge. This population was, early on, primarily the result of unions between Portuguese men and indigenous women (known as mamelucos) and then with the importation of slaves and increased interest in movement to Brazil, a racially diverse population. The economic success of these early colonists led to another interesting difference from Spanish America. The Portuguese Crown did not set up local Brazilian universities, thereby forcing the newly burgeoning Brazilian elites to send their children back to Portugal and other European nations for their education.

The education of the new generation of Brazilian elites took on momentum in the mid to late 1700s which coincided with one of the most influential philosophical changes
in modern Western history; the Enlightenment. Rather than the development of a 
homegrown understanding of Brazil, European and Enlightenment ideals were literally 
imported and transplanted into the colony (Skidmore 2010, Nava and Lauerhass 2006). 
This makes sense given the writings of Brazilians from the 18th century; in style, form, 
and content, they were European or at the very least filtered thru a European paradigm. 
Even amongst those born and raised in Brazil, Brazil continued to be described and 
understood in and through its exotic and wild nature, as a people and place that must be 
civilized, tamed, and studied.

As was the case in most of the New World, Brazil was ruled from afar. The 
Portuguese crown sent envoys and representatives to maintain order and stability during 
the first few hundred years of colonization. However, in an unprecedented move, the 
Portuguese court moved and set itself up in Brazil in 1808. This transplantation of the 
court clearly signified an interest in the future of Brazil but also had the effect of enticing 
and luring foreign observers and visitors. In particular, because of the close relationship 
between France and Portugal, many French (and German) intellectuals, poets, artists, and 
writers were essentially imported into Brazilian life.

The result of this influx was a direct influence of European philosophies, 
literature styles, and political ideologies on an emerging Brazilian identity. The early 
 writings by whites in particular born and raised in Brazil diverged immensely from the 
 writings of say white men in Spanish colonies because they were not writing from just 
their own experiences and observations but rather from a perspective heavily influenced 
by foreign visitors and a European education. Much of the early literature and art was
modeled after the styles seen in many parts of Europe. Perhaps most telling, the first major work published on the history of Brazil was written by Robert Southey, a British writer (Nava and Lauerhass 2006).

As Angel Rama (1996) notes in The Lettered City, the development of an intellectual elite in Latin American colonies was fundamentally affected by the power of the Crown and prevailing trends and attitudes on the Iberian Peninsula in particular and the European continent more generally. In Brazil however, the development of a national identity, of a homegrown social, political, and intellectual culture was even more firmly attached to European traditions. The two main aspects of this attachment can be traced to the form of governance and the relative lack of institutionalization of Brazilian society. The relationship between the Portuguese monarchy and the Brazilian colony, especially with the Crown’s physical presence, was not overtly antagonistic. Though the Crown was relatively peaceful towards its budding society, because of strong industrial growth and natural resources combined with Enlightenment ideas about democratic rule, calls for overthrowing the monarchy were inevitable. From the late 1700s until the formation of a republic in 1889, the Brazilian territory was rife with revolts, manifestos, and political foment.

**Independence and Abolition**

The path to Brazilian independence, particularly in the mid 1800s also had to face the issue of slavery. It was not simply a matter of political and social change but rather the fact that Brazil’s economy was fundamentally based on labor-intensive industries such as coffee, sugar, and tobacco. By this time many other nations had abolished
slavery including the United States and France. Because Brazil had from its inception been open to outside influence, foreign visitors brought increased attention and pressure to the fact that Brazil had a thriving and legal slave culture up until 1888.

As Thomas Skidmore (2010) asserts, “Unlike abolition in the United States, which was achieved at the cost of a bloody civil war, abolition in Brazil was a gradual, drawn-out affair. How Brazil achieved abolition revealed much about the country’s emerging political culture” (P. 75-76). There are many reasons why abolition was slow to occur in Brazil and in some ways it is puzzling given the influence of nations like France on Brazilian thought. However, this once again highlights the distinct cultural and political development of a Brazilian national identity, especially in the arena of racial politics.

The struggle to end slavery in Brazil was indeed different from the struggles in the United States and Latin America. These differences are more cultural than economic and may help account for the longevity of slavery. First, Brazilian slaves were allowed to buy their freedom. Though difficult and rare, the idea that one could buy freedom did allow entry of some blacks (mostly men) into mainstream society. Second, many slaves revolted, ran away and started quilombos, communities of slaves. The vast territory of Brazil made it difficult for authorities to patrol and even find many of the quilombos that littered the country. The quilombos were essentially a counterculture where the unique Afro-Brazilian experience was developed, synthesized and maintained. Even today quilombos are mentioned in songs, movies, television shows, and poetry.
The effects of the quilombos on Brazilian culture, race, and identity cannot be underestimated. From the development of the martial arts/dance called capoeira (slaves would train for battle in circular formations, with two men “battling” in the middle. When a master would come upon them the two men would change their moves to dancing as a cover for their training), to the musical and dance style of samba, to religious practices such as Candomblé, to what is today the national food of Brazil, feijoada (a stew made from beans and meat scraps) the concentrated time spent in quilombos solidified not only a counterculture but a vibrant Afro-Brazilian culture that has become an integral part of modern Brazil.

As abolition seemed inevitable, Brazilian landowners began to recruit immigrants as sources of labor. It is important to remember that Brazil was not heavily populated and that many of its inhabitants were the children of slaves, the small white population, and Natives; in essence, a mostly mixed population from the onset. The efforts to attract European immigrants was not simply an economic decision but also one based on the concern with the relative “browning” of the population. This period in the late 1800s begins a conscious effort to “sell” Brazil, to create an image, to capitalize on, exploit, and create a Brazilian national identity to attract international attention.

But in these efforts, the familiar theme of what to do about the non-white population of Brazil collided with the European trend of scientific racism. As previously mentioned, Brazil’s lack of homegrown academic writings and its close connections to European traditions led to a whole-hearted embrace of white superiority. Yet, the intellectuals of Brazil at the turn of the century recognized that its unique racial history
would not allow it attempt to segregate non-whites from society. And so rather than negating its past, Brazilian elites decided to embrace racial mixture and to use its exotic landscape and “Otherness” as its future. This lay the groundwork for what would become Gilberto Freyre’s infamous theory of Brazil as a racial democracy.

**Racial Democracy: Fixing the African Problem**

Though not the first to discuss the concept, Freyre is today most closely associated with racial democracy. The concept of racial democracy was born out of necessity, in the context of eugenics style-scientific racism, but was in fact rooted in antiracist sentiments. The early 1900s in Brazil is known as the period of modernism, a time when the many artistic, academic and philosophical streams of European thought were brought back to Brazil. Even in the 1900s, the Brazilian elite were sent to Europe to study, continuing the strong influence of European thought on the newly independent country. Freyre and a number of other young European-trained, Brazilian intellectuals found a “solution” to the overwhelmingly non-white population of Brazil.

Though seeped in the current ideologies of the need to whiten and civilize the population, Freyre believed that the process of whitening was instead a process of racial harmonization and would result in a new population of people. This is what Nascimento (2007) calls, “the white magic of sorcery of Luso-Tropicalism,” the idea that was (and is) fundamentally anti-racist, that it births a new kind of ‘white,’ a semi-white race (P. 43) Freyre believed that Brazil, because of its majority non-white population, was not racially prejudiced and would miscegenate into the Brazilian race. The perfect blend of white European and African, the Brazilian nation would naturally evolve, through racial
mixing, into the best of both worlds: European facial features, intelligence and grace with African sensuality and exoticism.

**Vargas and the Creation of a New State**

Echoing the early accounts of Brazilian landscapes and terrain by foreign scientists, observers, and visitors as exotic, sensual, and Other, the sentiment that Brazil in all of its manifestations (people, land, music, food, etc.) is/was distinct became a rallying cry. The fruition of a national identity came with the dictatorship of Getulio Vargas in the mid 1900s and his utilization of Brazilian distinction. When Vargas seized power in the 1930s he established a ‘New State’ (Estado Novo) that had three areas of focus: a central government apparatus, a stronger international presence for the country (economically and politically), and a social welfare program. (Skidmore 2010,116) It is the second of these goals that incorporates race, popular culture and identity.

The combination of Freyre’s racial democracy and Vargas’ hunger for a Brazilian cultural and economic nationalism at home and abroad solidified Brazilian-ness, known as Brasilidade in national consciousness. Prior to Vargas the Afro-Brazilian community, despite elites claims that Brazil was free from racial prejudice, was not only subjugated but kept out of mainstream society. Uniquely Afro-Brazilian practices and traditions such as samba, capoeira, feijoada, Candomblé, and Carnival were treated as inferior, backwards, and sexually licentious. Yet Vargas saw an opportunity to use these as a way to set Brazil apart from the rest of the world. Not only did Brazil have an actual melting pot (Brazilian intellectuals often criticized U.S. claims of racial diversity) but they had soccer, Carnival, music, food, dance, and women that were beyond compare. What were
considered minority interests and sometimes even primitive and animalistic practices became national icons.

The assimilation of these practices paralleled the myth of racial democracy, simultaneously rejecting Afro-Brazilians as people while culturally appropriating their “best” traditions and attributes. As Skidmore (2010) notes, “The Vargas dictatorship had a keen sense of the political importance of popular culture as a way of cementing government support by making Brazil look good in the international context.” (P. 119)

However, as much as Vargas cultivated a new image of Brazil through its use of all things Afro-Brazilian, he also maintained the legacy of French influence. Again, as a parallel to racial democracy, the development of a uniquely Brazilian national identity rested on a balance between European finesse, beauty, intelligence, architecture, literature and arts with the exotic, sensual Otherness of Africa.

The development of this identity was also gendered. This can most clearly be seen in the popular saying, “a white woman to marry, a black woman to cook, and a mulata to fuck.” Rooted firmly in Freyre’s work, the idea of a Brazilian race centered on the production of the perfect woman and the woman to produce and over time whiten the population. More importantly, the media images that were disseminated internationally were the scantily clad samba dancers and female film stars such as Carmen Miranda. The cultivation of this image was not simply that ‘sex sells’ but also proved useful for attracting tourists and ultimately creating an internal and external social imaginary that the Brazilian woman is distinct, they have that certain something. The racial miscegenation project of Freyre’s myth used white women to purify the race and black
women as the vehicle through which that would happen. According to Nascimento (2007),

“In a society obsessed with the idea of “improving the race,” the subordination and sexualization of the mucama1 was then transferred from the maid to the mulata – the mulatto woman who evolved into a female mulatto samba dancer catering to the foreign and national tourist market. The mulata became “Brazil’s most important export product.” (P. 52)

Colonial discourse in combination with the increased commodification of Brazilian women and nation building projects has resulted in a situation where advertisements have become, “a self-fulfilling prophecy” (Bandyopadhyay and Nascimento 2010, 939). It is not simply that tourists have come to see Brazil as a sexual paradise through its women, but that Brazilians themselves have taken on this self-image as well.

**Nation and Gender**

Linking gender and nation is not unique to Brazil. In cultures throughout the world, feminized and masculinized images have been used to build, support, create, and destroy national social imaginaries. One obvious example of this occurs in war, where the enemy is cast as an “effeminate,” abstract “he,” who needs to be dominated. Cohn (2013) in, “Wars, Wimps, and Women: Talking Gender and Thinking War,” illustrates this by describing a cartoon circulated in the United States during the Iraq invasion:

“The cartoon depicted Saddam (Hussein) bowing down in the Islamic posture of prayer, with a huge U.S. missile, approximately five times the size of the prostrate figure, about

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1 The mucama was a non-white woman who was either a slave or house servant who also performed sexual acts with the master of the house. In some sense she was a concubine.
to penetrate his upraised bottom. Over and over, defeat for the Iraqis was portrayed as humiliating anal penetration by the powerful and manly United States.” (P.614)

Though both actors, Iraq and the U.S. are depicted as male, winning the war becomes a gendered symbolic fight over masculinity.

Yet there are many other ways in which gender and nation are linked. For women, often, their connection to the nation is biological, an essentialized role as national mothers. In these scenarios, women’s duties are fulfilled through the reproduction of more citizens. Men on the other hand are often depicted as national actors, involved in the political, military, and economic functions of the state. In other words, men are the abstract subjects of the state. What is glaringly apparent is that gender is central to nationalist discourse and ideology. As such a discourse, racial democracy must be understood in its gendered construction.

Latin America is replete with gendered national images. Cuba, often compared with Brazil because of its large Afro-Cuban population and its exportation of voluptuous mulatas, also has the mulata as a national symbol. She is used for tourism and for general consumption, on rum bottles and billboards. Despite the similarities, the Cuban mulata does not appear to function as an identity that is performed by all Cuban women:

“Blackness is a negative identity in the Cuban context such that many individuals of known African ancestry choose “softer” terms on the Black-White racial continuum. While the national symbol is La Mulata (a female of African and European ancestry), Cuban national identity – as exemplified in politics, the media...is largely mestizo (a whitened racially indeterminate male)” (Roland 2006, 160).

“Moulded by national practice and discourse, women and men become embodiments of the nation. Behaviors, senses of self and identities, all are imagined and
expressed through the body, which in Latin American nations is represented and lived as inherently gendered/sexed” (Radcliffe and Westwood 1996, 141). Linked partially to a Catholic tradition of female exaltation (and control) the overt gendering of the nation simultaneously creates a definition of belonging, an imagined community, while controlling the gendered behaviors of its citizens.

Through its colonial history, Latin America had strong ties to Roman Catholic traditions. Catholicism in essence became part of nationalist discourses. One specific example of this is the concept of marianismo, a form of essentialized female exaltation based on the importance of the Virgin Mary in Roman Catholicism. This strong belief in Mary as a sacrificing and virginal mother took on two overlapping manifestations. First, marianismo as a gendered ideology became the Latin American version of the American cult of true womanhood. As described by Patricia Hill Collins (2000), the cult of true womanhood described the ideal woman as possessing, “four cardinal virtues: piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity” (P. 72). In Latin America, emulating and embodying the characteristics of the Virgin Mary: piety, sexual purity, and reproduction, became the gendered norms of femininity (Chant 2003).

Though the Brazilian form of marianismo does not appear to be unique compared with other Latin American cultures, it is distinct in its second manifestation. Beyond simply being a gendered ideology, marianismo also functions as a nationalist gendered ideology. Nations throughout Latin America (and in other parts of the world) have female symbols that act as national “mothers.” For example, Mariana Grajales Coello, the ‘Mother of Cuba,’ and the Virgin of Guadalupe, the patron saint of Mexico. The
convergence of Catholic tradition with the formation of nationalist identities, transformed the notion of marianismo from an emphasis on purity and piety to the symbolic mother(s) of newborn nations.

Contextualizing this transformation within the project of racial democracy, Mary as mother of Brazil had to give birth to a new, mixed race population. According to Radcliffe and Westwood (1996), “Certainly as a sacrificing mother icon, marianismo’s regionally free-floating sign became grounded and ‘nationalized’ through association with a mulata who had been actively involved in liberation struggles” (P.142). These liberation struggles for independence occurred throughout Latin America and often involved people of mixed race. There are countless stories of mulato men and women inciting rebellion. Yet in Brazil, the mulata was not situated within liberation struggles as the instigator, but rather as the result of those struggles. She symbolized (and still does) the literal birth of a new nation and race.

As an interesting example of marianismo as the mulata, take the popular story of Saint Aparecida. One day three fishermen went to the river to catch fish for a feast. The fishermen were not catching anything to take back until one of them found something strange in his net. After dragging the net to shore, he found inside a headless statue of the Virgin Mary. Eventually, the fisherman also found her head. After cleaning and putting the statue back together they found that the Virgin Mary was black (rather than white as is popularly believed). After that point, the fisherman caught more fish than they could carry, which they believed was a miracle. In this story, you can hear overt alignments with the ideas of racial democracy and marianismo. Today, Saint Aparecida is still
venerated in Brazil, especially by nonwhites and is considered the patron saint of
expectant mothers.

Figure 1: Image of Saint Aparecida
Figure 2: Woman holding statue of Saint Aparecida

While marianismo is certainly present in Brazilian culture because of its Catholic
history, the incredible focus on the myth of racial democracy has changed the relationship
of women to the nation. The idea that (some) women can embody and represent an
idealized femininity that also reinforces nationalist agendas is important in Brazil.
Yuval-Davis (1993) argues that women are often hidden in theoretical discussions of the
state and state actors. The Brazilian example simultaneously reinforces and pushes back
against her argument. Though politically women are absent in the abstract theoretical
realm of citizenship and the state, they are fundamentally visible and present in
conceptions of national ideology. Interestingly, men are relatively absent in current
discussions of racial democracy. Where do men and the mulato experience fit in historically? The overwhelming focus on the mulata identity and relative silence regarding mulatos is provocative.

**The Ideal Brazilian Man**

The idealized new Brazilian man was and continues to be white. While women, specifically the mulata, are the mothers who give birth to the nation, white men are the political, economic, and cultural actors of the nation. White men will whiten the nation through the bodies of women. The role of the mulato since the colonial era, while important, has generally gone unmentioned. Because of widespread miscegenation, mulatos (men and women) were demographically significant. Increasingly, this ‘in-between’ racial category, also known as *pardo*, occupied a unique social and economic space which Degler (1971) has called, “the mulatto escape hatch.” The escape hatch was precipitated by the fact that many masters would educate their mixed race children and give them preferential treatment. Through manumission, increased acceptability, and simple demography\(^2\), mulato men often held (low paid) employment.

One possible explanation for the relative silence about mulatos in discussions of racial democracy and Brazilian symbols is linked to gender and sexuality. While there has been abundant documentation of the animalistic sexuality of Africans in general throughout the Americas, Brazilian discourse does not appear to dwell on this theme. This may be an ideological omission, meant to dissuade women from feeling attracted to

\(^2\) According to Skidmore, in 1885 in the areas of Minas Gerais and Sao Paulo, free blacks and mulatos made up 43% of the population (Skidmore 2010, 37).
men with African blood. If too much attention had been paid the sexual allure of African men, then how would the large population of mulato women and men work towards an eventual whitening of the entire Brazilian nation? The construction of ideal masculinity had to rest on a white ideal.

In an effort to begin the institutional socialization of this national social imaginary textbooks for schoolchildren were filled with images of the evolution of the Portuguese race, the Black race, and the Indigenous race into a white masculine ideal (see image below) (Nava and Lauerhass 2006). Men were called forth to promote nationalism through working for the Motherland and in more subtle messages, to continue the process of branqueamento (whitening the population).

![Figure 3: Textbook image of the Brazilian race](image)

This play on (white) masculinity was also manifested through the emphasis on the term *Motherland (Mãe Patria)* and also, interestingly, Vargas’ insistence that he was the
'Father' of the nation. Here, the symbolism is intense, Vargas as a white father births his population and its identity through the feminized national body. According to Nava and Lauerhauss (2006),

“the idea of nation was gendered to encourage schoolchildren to identify it with the unquestionable good of Mother. In one lesson, Patria is equated with “Mother” and “Love” on one hand and “Unity” on the other.

United, we will learn to love you as our beloved Mother!
United, we will learn to defend you as our just Mother!
United, we will learn to exalt you as Mother pure and good!
United, we will fight to raise you even higher and make you happier!” (P.102)

The Ideal Brazilian Woman
The second gendered theme focuses primarily on the production of the idealized Brazilian female. The centrality of the sexualized mulata to the discourse of racial democracy during the Vargas regime marks the historical turning point when the mulato plays a less significant role. This change can be seen in the explosion of music, film, theater, literature, and tourist propaganda featuring the sensual, beautiful, and exotic Brazilian mulata. One of the goals of the Vargas regime was not only to solidify a national identity but also to promote that identity domestically and internationally. In other words, Vargas wanted and needed Brazilians themselves to embrace and take pride in the idea of a mixed race identity. Overtly emphasizing the sexuality of the mulata was crucial to this project and rapidly became widespread in popular culture. For example, a Brazilian newspaper covering a beauty pageant in 1947 asserted that not only was the mulata a sexual object, she was also the solution to the racial issues of the country
(Daniel 2006, 75). She encompassed both the salvation of the primitive Africans and the fundamental belief in branqueamento.

The sexual discourse of the mulata encourages men to continue the process of branqueamento through reproduction. While the two emergent gendered themes of racial democracy seem to imply the importance of men and women in the process of nation building, overt references to Brazilian men faded with time. This can be attributed to the choices of the Vargas regime to “sell” Brazil through the body of the mulata in cultural productions such as Carnival and samba. Situated in a heavily patriarchal culture (Catholicism included), the emphasis on women did not and does not mean that women's position has increased in power. On the contrary, the selling of a hyper-sexualized image of a mixed race woman has performed a racialized ideological and reproductive function. Men as Subjects of the state could justify lusting after women of all colors as a source of pride. The visual "proof" of mulatice or its absence, rested on and through the bodies of women.

However, it is not simply through images that the mulata has taken on such an important role, but also in discourse in literature, popular magazines, poetry and music. For women, the discourse of mulatice as nation allows for a larger percentage of the population to feel that sense of belonging and to normalize her existence in the social imaginary.

As Kia Lily Caldwell (2007) notes,

“What images of the mulata as the embodiment of Brazilian national identity crystallized during the early decades of the twentieth century, sensualized images of mulata women have been prominent themes in Brazilian literature, folklore, and popular music since the colonial era…A 1903 carnival song titled, “Who Invented the Mulata? expressed popular fascination with women of mixed ancestry. The lyrics stated: If there were not a mulata
It would be necessary to invent one
Whoever invented her well deserved
A throne, a scepter, an altar” (P. 57-58)

Reflecting and perpetuating such ideologies are literary archetypes and narratives. Jorge Amado’s iconic novel, *Gabriela, Clove, and Cinnamon* offers a concrete example of the complex and uniquely important position of the mulata. The protagonist, Gabriela, is the, “stereotypical sensual mulatto girl….Gabriela has come to embody the ideal image of the Brazilian woman.” And in Azevedo’s, *O Cortiço*, “the mulata Rita Baiana who is compared to the Brazilian landscape, in a series of associations that evoke heat, the colors, tastes, and smells emanating from nature…Rita was the synthesis of all the elements of the Brazilian land” (Pinto 2004:15-17). Equating mulatas with essentialized notions of sensuality and allure, the Brazilian man (read, white), is enticed to desire and conquer her, as he conquered the land.

The emphasis on the mulata as visual proof of embodied racial democracy constructs masculine and feminine subjectivities in a racialized way. This gendered and racialized nationalism does however manifest distinctly from the rest of Latin America. In particular this is because of Freyre’s emphasis on the inherent and primal sexuality of the African. The myth of racial democracy clearly denotes the evolution of a new race through a perfect blend of Caucasian features and African sensuality. Here we see a new layer of gendering that assumes a female sexuality. To say that the mulata is the pivotal figure in the production of race relations is not to deny patriarchy but rather to assume it. The importance of the mulata as the seductress allows Brazilian men to be the actors in the (re)production of new generations.
In essence, Brazilian men’s transcendence occurs through their use of the mulata as a product of racial democracy; they are central to branqueamento. This transcendence is men's ability to create, to produce and leave a mark on the world. The ability of women to give birth is used as man’s tool to transcend; the children are his mark on the world. White men, entranced by the seduction of Africans and mixed race women, could claim to have “created” the perfect race. This is seemingly contradictory to the prominent place held by the mulata in social and cultural imaginaries. Yet her prominence is granted through his transcendence, not in her own right. According to De Beauvoir (1952), woman is Other and is constructed as pure sex, She is for Him. Firmly rooted in patriarchy, Freyre’s racial democracy establishes the mulata as Other through both her race and her gender.

Remembering that Brazil has since its inception, struggled with its racially diverse population, the focus on the mulata as a source of solidarity, national pride, and as a boundary demarcating inclusion and exclusion makes sense. As Yuval-Davis (1993) notes,

“The mythical unity of national ‘imagined communities’ which divides the world between ‘us’ and ‘them,’ is maintained and ideologically reproduced by a whole system of….symbolic border guards. These border guards can identify people as members or non-members of a specific collectivity…Gender symbols play an especially significant role in this.” (P.627)

The sexualized mulata identity functions as a symbolic border guard for the nationalist ideology of racial democracy.
Symbolic Borders: Sexuality, Race, and Nation

The importance of racial democracy and its manifestation in identity formation also involves sexuality. The concept of symbolic ethnosexual boundaries elucidates how the mulata identity is intrinsically involved in both individual and national identity formation. Joan Nagel (2000) describes ethnosexual boundaries, also known as ethnosexual frontiers as, “erotic intersections where people make connections across ethnic, racial, or national borders,” that are, “surveilled and supervised, patrolled and policed, regulated and restricted” (P. 113). Thinking about sexuality in the construction of symbolic borders enhances the project of racial democracy so that this is not only about national inclusion and exclusion but also about legitimating sexual relationships and racial hierarchies.

Ethnic and gender identities are performative, that is to say that they become real when and how the performance of those identities are accepted/rejected. Embedded within an implied heterosexual context, the mulata identity is not simply that of a mixed race woman, but rather a sexualized racial identity that represents a national community that has overcome its African heritage. Being sexualized also maintains patriarchal links, as men remain the subjects of the state, acting upon and through the bodies of its women.

According to Anthony Marx (2000), “The process of defining the nation with rules of citizenship is of obvious relevance for how racial categories are established and reinforced” (P. 5). In his account, racial identities are politicized by the state in an attempt to both consolidate power and to benefit the production of a modern nation-state. The production of certain physical and sexual characteristics linked to nationality contextualizes and shapes lived experiences as they are related to their place in the
nation. Therefore, a Brazilian race as a form of nationalism is produced in, on and through a gendered body (Radcliffe and Westwood 1999).

Race and gender figure prominently in the construction of national identities as they are embodied and experienced. As a political and social choice, particular variations of racial mixtures have become the focus of not simply an imagined community but a lived community. In a concrete way, the symbolic components of nationalism and racial democracy inform and are expressed by and through the body; especially the female body. And how each woman is positioned by her proximity to this idealized and imagined body provides the context for understanding identity formation, lived experience, and citizenship.

The mulata however is also a stage in the process of branqueamento. As a process, the assumption is that eventually, this project of miscegenation will result in an overall whitening of the population. Following the logical progression of continual miscegenation, in Freyre's vision, whiteness is the end product. This accomplishes two things. First, it positions women in Brazil in a permanent state of Otherness in De Beauvoir's sense. She is womb, she is sex, and she is the tool of nationalism. Secondly, if the mulata is only one stage in the process, then she can also be blamed for her own racialized Otherness. Her lack of “evolving” into whiteness represents a primitive stage in the development of the nation and can therefore be dismissed, scapegoated, and stigmatized as problematic.

To complicate matters, the mulata is also venerated, celebrated, and used as “proof” of the new Brazilian. In a sense, she needs to be displayed and coveted because she
justifies, both visually and symbolically, the success of the project. The mulata is a
national declaration that where African/Black blood weakened other cultures, in Brazil it
strengthened theirs. In essence, Brazilians have been from the earliest years of the nation
to today, persuaded to buy into the myth of racial democracy. As a national project,
mulatice positions women and men into differing states of inclusion and exclusion along
the symbolic borders of what it means to be Brazilian.

The Mulata as National Project

The Vargas regime approached his political reign as a public relations project both
nationally and internationally. When Vargas came into power, the young Brazilian
country had not yet solidified its identity. Additionally, Brazil had not found its foothold
in the international economy. While these interests may seem removed from the topic of
the mulata, they are in fact pivotal to her increasing social and cultural importance. The
development of and investment in samba/Carnival, soccer\(^3\), and Carmen Miranda/film by

\(^3\) When Brazil is mentioned in almost any setting, soccer is invariably brought up.
Closely tied to a sense of nation and Brasilidade, soccer was also utilized by the Vargas
regime in the creation of a national identity. Similar in its historical development to
samba, who played soccer, at least in the beginning, were the white elites. Introduced to
Brazil in the late 1800s by the British, soccer started as a game of the rich but quickly
spread to the favela areas. Soccer is a game requiring little beyond a soccer ball, making
it attractive to poor youth.

What is interesting about Brazilian soccer is that despite its prominent place in
Brazil and internationally, it has not propelled the image of the mulato to a place of
importance. While, the players are overwhelmingly mixed-race, the focus is on the style
and success that is seen as a result of the racial mixture of the players. According to
Daflon and Ballvé (2004), “to date, one of soccer’s greatest contributions is that it helped
instill in country a respect for ethnic hybridity, where the mixing is seen as an
advantage.” This discourse falls directly in line with the Freyrian myth of racial
democracy. And yet, the mulato has not become a symbol of the nation whereas soccer has.
the Vargas regime are demonstrative of the ways in which the mulata became the end product of nationalism.

Nowhere is the image of the mulata used more than in its connection to Carnival. Women wearing extravagant headdresses, tiny sequined bikinis and high heels while dancing the samba have become iconic of the event and increasingly of Brazilian women more generally. Though Carnival is celebrated in other areas of Latin America and the Caribbean (as the beginning of Lent in Catholicism), its evolution in Brazil is unique. The early beginnings of the celebration can be traced to the 1700s, yet the modern version that is known today is what is relevant here. The Vargas regime was instrumental in the development of the Rio Carnival as an attempt to solidify a national identity and to attract tourism. These efforts were in fact overlapping, since the creation and projection of a national identity could be used in international media efforts. Yet these simultaneous developments also had an impact on how Brazilian women were seen and how they saw themselves. The mulata as a national product for tourism became embedded in both national and individual identity construction at the individual level.

**Samba and Carnival**

Samba as a musical genre and a dance was not originally tied to Carnival as we know it today. Carnival’s early manifestations in Brazil were characterized by racialized class-based differences. The elite whites modeled their celebrations on European masquerade balls, held in great halls with formal dancing. This form of Carnival was known as *Carnaval do salão* (in a ballroom). Meanwhile, the poor celebrated what became known as *Carnaval da Rua* (of the street). These celebrations were considerably
rowdier, and included activities such as throwing filth at participants. The stark differences between the two fed into the predominant racial ideologies of the time, that blacks (who happened to be the poor) were animalistic and primitive.

Over time, the *Carnaval do Salão* changed as an emerging middle class took the celebrations to the streets. Parades, floats, costumes, and music (not samba) became the focus. The *Carnaval da Rua* also began to change because of laws and policies attempting to quash what were seen as wild and uncivilized activities and because of the emulation of the elite parades. Slowly, the working class and the poor began to organize themselves into what are today still called *blocos* (blocks). Dressing in costumes, parading around the city, and multi-day parties became the focus of *bloco* activity.

Though it is clear that the extreme forms of Carnival eventually began to merge into an early formation of what we see today, racialized class distinctions did and still do remain relevant. *Blocos* were predominantly those of the lower classes and were disproportionately black. Because of this, *blocos* were relegated to certain areas and were not permitted access to the larger parades themselves. This of course was symbolic of the social position of blacks in general.

By the 1920s, the *blocos* began to organize into samba schools. Samba, as a musical genre and a dance has its roots in various influences such as Angolan and Congolese dance circles, *maxixe*, and *marcha* (Brazilian styles of tango). Samba’s development occurred simultaneously but separately from Carnival. Partially because of its hip movements and sensuality and partially because it came from poor blacks, samba was initially rejected by white society as a sexual, animalistic, inappropriate rhythm.
Samba schools were routinely raided by police, members and spectators beaten and harassed. In hindsight, it could be argued that the schools were a challenge to authority and were viewed as forms of organization of blacks. Located predominately in the favelas, these schools were seen as a threat both to the racial order and the class order (Hertzman 2013, Skidmore 2010, Parker 2009).

The major change came with the rise of Vargas in the 1930s. Seeing samba schools as a way to incorporate blacks into an emerging Brazilian identity, Vargas helped to fund their activities and used Carnival as a political tool. The municipal government of Rio de Janeiro was allowed in 1934 to organize a city-wide Carnival parade that would invite all samba schools to take part. The parade would not only be a show, but also a competition for best samba school. Historically speaking this moment was crucial to the formation of a Brazilian identity. For the first time, samba was legitimated, not simply as a musical and dance form but also as a symbol of black integration into the nation.

The samba schools were also required to present a motif or story line in their performances. The subject matter had to be based on an event in Brazilian history, thereby turning a cultural event into a political tool of national propaganda. In essence, this was the signature of the Vargas regime.

“At the same point that elite writers such as Gilberto Freyre were turning to history in order to create myths of origin, the participants in carnival were being pushed to turn to history in order to create ritual, in order to present a reading of the Brazilian past to Brazilians in the present” (Parker 2000, 176).

As Parker notes, various developments seemed to converge during the time period of the 1920s-1940s. Freyre’s writings were taking on incredible importance, Carnival was developing and samba had become if not yet mainstream then at the very least not
demonized. Simultaneously, Vargas’ was creating a national identity that could also be used for international attention. Samba and its other musical offshoots such as bossa nova, increasingly became the official music of Brazil and perhaps even symbolic of Brazil itself.

If you consider the characterization of samba in the context of the tropical backdrop of the Brazilian landscape, you can begin to see how the mulata and samba merged into a national product. Samba is described as sexual, sensual, gyrating, African, primitive, rhythmic; but also, incredibly difficult to play, advanced technically. Those who dance samba have it ‘in the blood,’ ‘in the feet,’ display a natural sensuality unique to Brasilidade. These connotations of the dance, the music, and the dancers are strikingly reminiscent of Freyre’s myth of racial democracy. As the perfect blend of African animalism and European features, one could be discussing the mulata or the samba or even Carnival. These three cultural manifestations began to overlap not only in the social imaginary, but also in practice.

As an example, the following images came up in a search for Brazilian carnival:
The eerie similarities among the images point to the production of a Brazilian national icon, a collapsing of a musical and dance genre with Carnival as celebration with an ideological construction of Brasilidade. The argument here is that the mulata is central to this process and in effect is a product herself; the national icon. Though much has been written regarding the parallels between the development of samba (in the context of Carnival) and race, there is little mention of the fundamentally important place of the mulata.

The historical process leading to the development of samba as a musical form and as Brazil’s national music can be understood through the concept of transculturation. Originally presented by anthropologist Fernando Ortiz, transculturation describes the process of a cultural exchange that can happen internationally or nationally. The result is a new cultural form with a new set of meanings. In the context of Brazil, the white upper classes exchange with the poor blacks led to the creation of samba. According to Hermano Vianna (1999),

“This kind of transculturation – the sort that resulted in the transformation of samba into a Brazilian emblem – inevitably accompanied the racial mixing that Gilberto Freyre tried to make into a new definition of Brazilian authenticity during the 1930s” (P.36).

The argument is that the racial hybridity of which Freyre wrote would become the future of Brazilian identity. Samba then, paralleled and perhaps even strengthened the acceptance of racial hybridity, making the mulata increasingly the evidence of the success of racial mixture. While some of this transculturation was perhaps occurring naturally, much of it was constructed, implemented, and forced by Vargas. As Vianna
(1999) notes, a national Brazilian culture was fabricated (P. 45). The question is, how was this constructed identity successfully disseminated?

Interestingly, the strong connection between France and Brazil once again came into play. As discussed in an earlier chapter, Brazil historically was linked with France. From education, to the arts, to the intelligentsia, Brazilian elites were heavily influenced by and interested in France. Though this was not something Vargas himself set up, the timing for his nationalist project could not have been better. Freyre, along with other Brazilian elites, discussed the crucial influence of French poet Blaise Cendrars on the acceptance of, “all things Brazilian” (Vianna, 1999, 67). Essentially, the story goes that Cendrars visited Brazil in 1924 (as did many other important French figures) and fell in love. On that trip he took several Brazilian artists with him on a tour of the country. Those Brazilian artists (people such as Tarsila do Amaral, Oswald de Andrade, and others) claimed to have been fundamentally changed by the trip, crediting Cendrars for helping them discover the true nature of Brazil. (Vianna 1999).

What is fascinating about this story of ‘discovery’ is that Cendrars did not in fact expose these Brazilian elites to anything new. The foods, music, dancing, and rhythms had instead been reintroduced to them through a new lens. This new lens may have been the interest in black culture, the negróphilie, that had captured the imaginations of Parisian artists and intellectuals. And there are many anecdotal and historical events of Cendrars and other Frenchmen, such as Darius Milhaud, visiting favelas, frequenting samba clubs, and eating feijoada. So perhaps the sudden change in how Brazilian elites started to look at and understand their own culture was spurred on by the interest of the
French. Or perhaps it was in seeing an outsider experience Brazil that led them to appreciate what had been on their doorstep the whole time. (Vianna 1999).

Whatever the case may be, this change certainly helped pave the way for Vargas’ plan to work. When Brazilian artists and elites started to accept hybridity as their identity and something to be proud of, the idea of Brasilidade became authentic. Books, samba lyrics, paintings, sculpture, cuisine, radio and film constantly showcased the racial hybridity Brazil would become known for and Brazilians came to know of themselves.

Radio became an important tool of the Vargas dictatorship. While many political regimes have used media outlets for propaganda, Vargas’ use was distinct and quite clever. Interspersed throughout programming that focused on national news, he asked that Brazilian popular music be played. This music was almost always (in the early days) samba, in particular because it was the official, government sanctioned music. And this coincided with its use in Carnival, which was also government sanctioned. In the decade of the 1930s samba and Carnival became a sensation both within and outside of Brazil.

The missing link here seems to rest on the role of the mulata. The mulata is the embodiment of Brazil, as a national icon. She is synonymous with samba, Carnival, and the nation. Thinking again about the above images, what is the story of the prominence of the mulata in the context of samba and Carnival? Samba is the product of the transculturation of elite whites and poor blacks, or rather, African rhythms and European techniques. This perfectly parallels the production of the Brazilian race, a blend of African sensuality and European beauty. As mentioned before, the racial mixture of Freyre’s vision is almost always discussed in a feminized form. Therefore, “just as
samba is Brazil’s cultural synthesis of European and African musical elements, so too the mulata’s body is its biological synthesis” (Burdick 2013, 117). The mulata increasingly became the icon because she embodies the heart of all of the manifestations of national identity that Vargas promoted.

Brasildade, as constructed by Vargas rests almost entirely on the mulata. Every aspect of Brazilian culture and identity promoted by and developed lives in, on and thru her. Vargas’ instrumentalization of Freyre’s theory of racial democracy culturally and politically solidified not only her national symbolic importance but also the incredible focus on racial mixture as the essence of what it meant and means to be Brazilian. This means among other things that the so-called Brazilian race is defined by mulatice generally and the mulata specifically. Racial mixture in regards to the mulata is mentioned in every section of this chapter, pointing to the ways in which she is the foundation upon which the racial system was built.

While it is clear that the importance of samba as Brazilian emulates the rise in the symbolic importance of the mulata as Brazilian, who  a mulata is remains a source of contention. If everyone and no one is a mulata then what is her role in the lives of Brazilian women? This chapter addressed how and why the mulata became the lynchpin of the racial system and the definition of Brasildade. The next chapter will look at how the mulata as a national symbol is also a reference for individual identity construction. In other words, what is the connection between the national and the individual?
CHAPTER FIVE: THE JEITO OF THE MULATA

Everyone and no one is a mulata. To clarify, nationally everyone and individually no one is a mulata. When you ask what or who a mulata is, you get a relatively scientific answer about a mixed-race woman. When you ask women if they consider themselves to be mulata they say no. And when you ask what a Brazilian woman is, the answer is always that she is a mulata. And yet women of all racial identities use the mulata as a point of reference regarding their own individual identities. Mulatice supposedly distinguishes Brazilian women from all other women; they have a ‘jeito,’ about them. To say that Brazilian women have a jeito implies a certain something that is at once mystical and concrete; there is a distinct way about them. However, individually, some women have it more and differently than others. And so the question becomes, what is jeito in this sense? How do you know it when you see it? Throughout the interview excerpts there are examples: how a woman dances, the shape and size of her hips and buttocks, the color of her skin, her sexual and sensual personality, her joy, her smile, her beauty. In essence, the entire history and power of racial democracy as a national discourse can supposedly be evidenced in one woman’s walk. How does the national symbol of the mulata filter into individual identity construction?
**Experiencing National Mulatice**

While creating an imagined community is a project of the nation-state, building a national identity does not simply occur at the ideological and even institutional levels. These messages must ultimately be filtered to the individual, they must be incorporated into the work of subjective and intersubjective identity construction (Radcliffe and Westwood 1996).

Certainly, the state utilizes multiple sites for the transmission and reinforcement of such a project. Schools, media, national histories, geography, and national holidays, among other avenues, are ways of solidifying a coherent ideology regarding national identity that inform and project what an individual should, can, and will be.

How national identity is internalized and re-expressed by individuals is a tautological process. Surrounded by images and discourse, women are constantly reminded of what a Brazilian woman is. When she sees any aspect of herself in that image that becomes justification for the validation of that image as accurate. This process however is mediated by a host of socio-economic and cultural factors, altering the subjective and intersubjective expressions and understandings of national identity. In the case of Brazil, mulatice is internalized and articulated in the context of skin colors, body types, class levels, and many other variables that can be accepted/rejected by others (Radcliffe and Westwood 1996).

Such nationalist projects overlap gender, race, and sexuality, incorporating and excluding some women more than others (Yuval-Davis 1993). The performance of the mulata identity becomes crucial not only for inclusion in the nation, but also at the individual level. The ideological construction of mulatice allows for women to perform it
differentially, thereby resulting in distinct experiences and statuses. Mulatice as Brasilidade takes on varied meanings at the individual level.

This argument however is not that all Brazilian women want to be mulatas. In fact, the lived experience demonstrates remarkable tensions among women regarding racial classification. Identity formation is in essence a Hegelian intersubjective relational experience. For example, being white is relative to not being white. And even though the mulata is the symbolic embodiment of Brazil, her definition is so abstract that different groups of women perform it and relate to it differently.

As Radcliffe and Westwood (1996) note,

“The relation between subjectivity and identity, rather than being mediated only class relations, or nationality, is instituted in the interactions of gender, class, ethnicity, age/generation, nation, location, religion and occupation” (P.165).

Women in particular can self identify with the mixed race identity in two fundamental ways. First, the ideological component of the purported beauty, sensuality, and allure of the new Brazilian race is; as seen in these adjectives, highly gendered. The language constructs the Brazilian race through a gendered lens. Brazilian women then, no matter what skin color, can and do feel themselves to be ‘distinct’ from other nationalities of women. Secondly, Brazilian women of any skin tone can identify with and/or against the mulata image. This is because mulatice is not primarily biological, but also cultural; it is embodied and experiential.

If the mulata is one stage in the process of branqeamento, then white women for instance can simultaneously accept the “mixed race” identity of all Brazilians while also negating the mulata and all darker skin tones. This is also because the mulata identity is
not solely linked to race but importantly, to nation. In this national social imaginary the mulata is purely symbolic; not discussed in a concrete way but rather as an abstract distinction of Brazilian women in general.

Though the mulata identity is embodied and performed, it is very much imagined. Not one of the women I interviewed used this identity to describe themselves; it was only used in a symbolic sense. Not one of the women I interviewed had the "mulata" body, yet each woman considered herself to be a Brazilian woman. Seemingly paradoxical, these discrepancies instead point out the fundamental ways in which the ideological mulata is internalized and expressed. The relationship between individual women and mulatice is complicated and yet the overall theme is that the national mulata is expressed and lived by, on, and through individual experience.

In the following excerpts from interviews with Brazilian women of all skin tones, identities, and class levels, the complicated importance of the mulata identity is apparent.

When asked whether there is a typical Brazilian:

Denise, a seemingly white 56-year-old homemaker replied, "Of course, she is completely mixed. Brazilians are not a race, we are everything. An African body, voluptuous, Latina, not like anyone else in the world."

Luisa, a 54 year old, white appearing engineer, "The Brazilian woman is a mix, she has that large and flat nose, a large butt, a guitar shaped body. There is no other population in the world like the Brazilian women. She is sexual, beautiful, sensual, different. Brazil can be experienced through our women."

Aline, a 25-year-old journalist, self-identified black woman, "This is not about color because we are all mixed, this is about sensuality, the mulata is differentiated by her sensuality. It's about a sexy body, sensual, free, open sexuality."
Goretti, a 47-year-old government worker, self-identified morena, "She is any mix from morena to mulata, a large butt, a small waist, nice thighs, a beautiful body.

What is particularly interesting about these four excerpts is that each woman described the typical Brazilian as female. These answers are not unique, almost all of the interviews revealed a feminized conception of a Brazilian. While there are certainly institutional forces such as media involved in the dissemination of this image, the internalization of a gendered assumption is revealing. In particular, only a handful of respondents acknowledged having even heard of Freyre and the myth of racial democracy. What this indicates is that the mulata identity has taken on a life of its own, it has seeped into national consciousness as a reality rather than a theory.

The ways in which different racial categories relate to and describe the mulata is of particular importance. The discourse reveals mulatice as a source of solidarity and distinction, a way to distinguish Brazilian women generally, while providing context for racial hierarchies within Brazil. White women appropriate some characteristics of mulatice in ways that connect them to the nation and as distinct. Non-white women often feel that they only have certain traits connecting them to Brasilidade, while other characteristics keep them just out of reach of the mulata identity.

Even though not one woman interviewed described herself as a mulata, they each referenced her. Simultaneously an idealized, embodied Brasilidade and an ethnossexual boundary, the mulata identity is crucial to the identity formation and performance of all Brazilian women. As Nagel (2000) notes,
“While ethnic boundaries and identities are built by self and others from such social materials as color, language, religion, and culture, they can be seen to rest on gendered and sexualized foundations, and they often are associated with differences in class” (P.113).

Note the difference in the following excerpt with Maria, a 30-year-old manicurist and self-identified negra:

M: The mulata is a beautiful negra, white teeth, firm legs and a large butt, maybe even good hair.
N: Are you a mulata?
M: (Laughing) No! I am negra; I have bad hair and lots of cellulite!
N: Can you samba?
M: Yes of course, all Brazilian women can.
N: So this isn’t a trait of the mulata?
M: I think it is, but maybe a mulata is better at it, more fluid and sexy in her movements. I wish I could be like that.

Cristina, a 41-year-old domestic and self-identified negra:

I don’t want to sound racist but mulatas are different from other women. They’re happier, they like to dance, they get more attention, they have a way about them that is different, that’s more Brazilian. That is how I want to be seen.

Maria Telma, a 49-year-old domestic:

M: I’m a mix, my mom was a negra and my father was very white. I guess that makes me morena.
N: Not a mulata?
M: No, a mulata is different, mulatas have good hair and are so beautiful. Not me, I have kinky hair. Beautiful mulatas, not they are true Brazilian women!

Functioning ideologically, the mulata has become proof of Brasilidade. To be Brazilian is to be mixed to some degree. And yet despite the ideological belief of all Brazilians as mixed, there are women who identify as and experience whiteness. Though white women
are abstractly included as reproducers and as part of the white elite, they are not fundamentally linked to the nation. This omission is yet one more example of the ways in which the mulata has become synonymous with the national identity. The category of whiteness itself demonstrates the role of mulatice being inherent to Brasilidade. You can see the struggle that white women have with their racial identity, not because whiteness doesn't exist, but because the mulata holds so much cultural and social power.

Speaking with two self-proclaimed white women, Eduarda aged 27 and Marcelle, aged 29:

N: So why do you believe you are white?
E: I don't know, that is on my birth certificate but I think maybe I am parda because whites are people with very light skin I guess. So that would make me different, plus I am Brazilian, I'm not sure though.

N: So what do you tell people you are if they ask?
E: Nobody asks, they can see in my walk that I am Brazilian.

N: Marcelle, what about you?
M: I guess I am white because it is harder for me to get tan.

N: So do you feel like a typical Brazilian even though you have lighter skin?
M: Of course, I have dark hair, wide hips, and I can dance. All Brazilian women are like this.

Marisa, a 47 year old cashier:

N: How do you identify racially?
M: I am morena.

N: So you are not white? I am asking because you have light skin and blonde hair.
M: I can't be white, we are all mixed. I am just a little lighter because my mother and father are light.
These excerpts demonstrate the need for all Brazilian women to find their place in the nation relative to the symbolic mulata. This identity serves as a symbolic boundary of inclusion and exclusion as political and cultural citizens.

What makes a white woman white is in some ways, her ability to choose when and how to perform her connection to the nation through the sensuality and beauty of the mulata. Many white women draw a strong line, a symbolic ethnosexual boundary, between mulatice as nation and more essentialized understandings of the mulata. Mulatice as nation is the Freyrian social imaginary; that all Brazilians are mixed to some extent; thereby erasing racial distinctions. The essentialized understandings rest on inherent biological distinctions between Africans and Europeans. This boundary can be seen in the following excerpts with two women, Bette, a 27-year-old music student and Lucia, a 54-year-old teacher:

B: I am white, but I am mixture, I am a million different things.
N: What do you mean?
B: Its true that I have lighter skin but all Brazilians are mixed ancestry.
N: Can you explain how you think of yourself?
B: I don’t have a name for it, but I have mixed blood, I can’t say that I am one of those mulatas you see on TV but I do have things about me, characteristics that maybe aren’t in my appearance that you can tell come from my mixture, my love of music and love of rhythm.
N: Why aren’t you like the mulatas on TV?
B: Those women are, I don’t know, I guess it’s a race thing. I mean, they are African and European, they have those bodies, guitar shaped, thick, and strong. They have samba no pe (samba in their feet), they are very sexual, they exude sex.
N: But didn’t you say that you also have that rhythm in you?
B: It’s different. My skin is lighter, and, I don’t want to sound rude, but those women are more African and kind of sexually loose.
L: My birth certificate says I am white.
N: So you think of yourself as white?
L: My skin yes, but yesterday I was at a samba show, I identify with sambas, I sing along and feel the music inside of me in a different way, like something is calling me, so I know that I am mixed, I know that this is an African manifestation.
N: So you are mixed? Like a mulata or a parda? Or is this a racial thing instead of a cultural thing?
L: I think all Brazilian women are a bit mulata, it’s our Brasilidade. Some of us show it more than others.
N: So it’s a Brazilian race?
L: Yes, I think so, but it’s cultural too.
N: How do people show that they are mulata?
L: Darker skin, big butts, big legs, dancing samba, sensual movements.

The idea of a national mulatice, of the way in which all Brazilian women’s identities are informed by the mulata is clearly evidenced in the interview material. The conflation of Brazilian with the mulata is the strongest theme that emerges in discourse. All of the women, despite differences in lived experience acknowledge that Brasilidade is fundamentally tied to mulatice. Yet at the same time, the material reveals that mulatice is experienced and related to differently based on racial categorization. Non-white women feel that traits such as hair, skin tone, and beauty keep them just shy of true inclusion in the mulata, therefore true Brazilian category. White women however, experience mulatice as a form of inclusion in the nation and simultaneously a line of distinction from non-white women. Those same traits such as hair texture, are utilized by white women to distance themselves from the innate Africanness of non-whites.
The Embodiment of Mulatice

My Samba
-Nikki featuring Breno Barreto

I’ve got that swing from my country
And if you think you can learn
I’ll try to teach you to swing your butt

Your Hair Doesn't Deny It
-Lamartine Babo, Jo50, Raul Valenqa

Your hair doesn’t deny it, mulata
Because you are a mulata of colour
But since colour isn't contagious,
Mulata, I want your love
You have a very Brazilian flavour
Your soul is the colour of the sky

The impact of this distinction lies in an over-emphasis of the embodied and lived experience. While in practice, embodiment and the experiential occur simultaneously, heuristically they are distinct. Embodiment is the literal incorporation and expression of particular sets of behaviors and senses of self on and through the body. It is not simply how we think about the body but also how we use and view the body. The realm of the experiential involves a continual process of learning through doing and observation. Often, how we experience ourselves, is the result of what we (individually and nationally) have previously experienced and/or observed. Throughout the interviews, women were careful to distinguish between an embodied mulata identity “natural” to all Brazilian women, the experience of mulatice, and a more performative aspect that will be discussed in the next chapter. Central to the discourse, gender is fundamentally
highlighted in the embodiment, experience, and performance of the myth of racial democracy for women.

Embedded in Freyre's vision of a new race, the bodies of women in Brazil have been predominantly important. From slave auctioning blocks to dancing samba at Carnival, the emphasis on female body parts not only objectifies women but also over emphasizes the extent to which the body is the site of inclusion and exclusion. Hair texture, shape of nose, size of lips, color of skin, size of hips and buttocks; the seeming obsession with physicality has remained constant since colonial days. Though non-white men's bodies have also been subjected to scrutiny, women's bodies have been at the forefront culturally, socially, symbolically, physically, and nationally.

The emphasis on the embodiment of Brasilidade in the mulata is the result of the success of racial democracy resting on visual and performative 'proof.' Asked to explain the differences between white, mulata, and negra women, the respondents revealed the ideological underpinnings of Freyre's work.

Cecilia, a 40 year old, homemaker, self-identified as white:

C: I guess the difference is in color. Whites are light skinned with straight hair.
N: Wait, but you said you are white but you have very curly almost kinky hair.
C: Yes, that is true but I am Brazilian, we are all mixed with African blood.
N: So are you a mulata?
C: Maybe a little bit. A mulata doesn't have that black nose anymore, she is mixed black and white, the more white, the less African features. So mulatas don't have the wide noses or the thick lips. But a mulata does have a large backside, that comes from the African blood.
As seen here, there is confusion about classification because of the ideology of mixture. Yet, over and over again, the "ideal" Brazilian is referenced through specific body parts that seem to reveal an acceptance of the evolution of Brasilidade.

Cristina, a 39-year-old domestic, self-identified as negra:

C: I am Negra because I have very black skin. But I have good hair. My sisters though, they are mulatas because their skin is lighter because their grandmother came from Italy. But they have bad hair because our father is Negro. Mulatas are more beautiful, they have a pretty colored skin from the mixing of races, they have beautiful bodies with strong legs, and everything in its place.

N: What do you mean by that?
C: Well, they have good proportions, large butts, small waists.

This passage, in combination with comments about what typical Brazilians are, reflects the incredible importance of the proper evolution of the embodiment of racial democracy. So that if for example, a woman had the large butt and small waist but dark skin and "bad" hair, her stage in the process of branqueamento is perceived as having gone awry or as not evolved. In essence, the "we are all mixed," does not mean that everyone is mixed "properly," as can be seen by the visual evidence of embodiment.

In Brazil, Freyre's emphasis on the positive attributes of African women, their physical endurance and sexual allure in particular, has shaped understandings of the social positions of Afro-Brazilian women (Caldwell 2007). The myth of racial democracy actually heightens and thus perpetuates racial discrimination in a particularly gendered way in that it overemphasizes the physical attributes of Africans females that have led to the purported sexuality, beauty, and strength of the Brazilian race. Placing the focus on racialized sexuality mapped onto the female body implicates Afro-Brazilian
women in multiple axes of power and domination from social, cultural, economic, and political realms (Goldstein 2003). Thus, these crosscutting issues blur the boundaries of relational or dichotomous definitions of racial identity formation.

The Bundão

Netinho’s samba entitled, ‘Brazilian Girls:’
So much mixture
So much beauty
From the purest of which I am certain
Swing of the mulata, hair of a hot chick
Kisses of hazelnut, body of a mermaid
Parading on the sand, desires of the apple
So much mixture
So much beauty
The girls of Brazil
Do not fit on the planet (Burdick 2013, 117)

The ability to dance to samba, to understand samba, to feel samba is presented as a unique characteristic of Brasilidade. It is something in the blood. This is of course a tautological argument: only true Brazilians (with the racial mixture) can samba, but samba only exists in and through Brazilians. Much of this theory rests on the idea that specific physical attributes such as the butt and thighs, which are purported to come from an African ancestry, is what actually allows Brazilian women to samba. In other words, embodiment of mulatice is expressed through performance; the ability to samba with expertise. This performance occurs in many ways, through achieving standards of ideal beauty such as having a bundão, the way a woman walks and carries herself, her ability to
appreciate samba, her ability to dance seductively. And then her performance is attributed to her “unique” body parts, including the blood running through her veins. The corporeal body of the mulata is the subject of samba and is constituted by it. Peter Wade, in his work on music and nation in Colombia, discusses the ways in which music and nation can become embodied. He notes that, “the connections between music, dance, the body, and sexuality made of music an evocative and powerful mediator of the differences located in the sexualized cultural topography of the nation” (Wade 2000, 21). This embodiment is not simply about basic physical appearance, but also invokes a primal essence and distinction from all other nationalities. In the Brazilian context, this is the ‘jeito,’ (the distinction) of the Brazilian race; the seemingly unique way of the Brazilian.

This theme of the connection between music, dance, body, sexuality, and nation can be seen over and over again in the interviews.

Fernanda, a 24 year old parda woman:
“All Brazilians have samba in their feet.”

Maria, a 30 year old white woman:
“Brazilian women can all samba, it’s not something we learn, its something we are, maybe in the way we carry ourselves.”

Adriana, a 40 year old morena:
N: Can other people besides Brazilians learn to samba?
A: Yes, they can, but they will never be as good. This is what makes us different, we are born with samba running through our veins.”

There may in fact be some ‘truth’ to these ideas. Wade discusses the ongoing and interrelated process of the social and physical construction of the body. If you are born into a culture in which samba is fundamentally part of your early socialization, then the
body is physically altered by the experience of dance and rhythm. And then when the
dance itself appears effortless or natural, we fail to notice the ways in which it was
literally incorporated into the body through socialization (Bourdieu 1984). Samba does
courage a particular Brazilian identity that is embedded within the feminized ideology
of racial democracy.

One of the physical aspects of this argument is the link between specific body
parts and the ability to samba (read: to be authentically Brazilian). The emphasis on big
butts, guitar shaped bodies, small waists, and thick thighs, has become the ideological
framework for Brasilidade, the typical Brazilian. The construction of Brasilidade then
rests on the assumption of female mulatice, it is through her body and specific body parts
that the jeito comes to life. When asked what a typical Brazilian looks like, the
respondents focused on this aspect of embodiment:

Marcelle: “Strong thighs and a bundão.”
Tais: “Dark hair, natural boobs, a bundão, larger thighs, sensual.”
Aline: “It’s all about the bundão.”
Cristina: “A bundão, beautiful breasts, wide hips, and thick legs.”

A large butt is supposedly what allows Brazilian women to samba, it is not just
about ideal beauty but also performance. The bundão, meaning a large buttocks, is
clearly important to the construction of Brasilidade. And yet, the focus on the buttocks is
linked to an innate trait of Africanness. As problematic as that assumption is, this again
returns to the ideology of racial democracy. As Caldwell (2007) notes, a bundão is not
simply a physical preference or construction of ideal womanhood but is rather indicative
of a relationship between gender, race, sexuality, and nation (P.112). In other words, a large buttocks is not only a marker of beauty but also a marker of Brasilidade.

The extent to which this ideological construction can be seen to have permeated national and individual consciousness can be noted in statistics of plastic surgery. According the International Survey on Aesthetic and Cosmetic Procedures, in 2013 approximately 20% of all buttock augmentations were performed in Brazil (69,925 out of 319,960). Looking at a side-by-side comparison of 69,925 in Brazil and 11,959 in the United States, the difference is staggering. For purposes of argument, this is incredibly interesting given that the obsession with iconic celebrities (and their buttocks) such as Jennifer Lopez, Nicki Minaj, Iggy Azalea, and the Kardashians had peaked in 2013 in the United States.

N: Do you think there is a typical Brazilian woman?
Eduarda: Oh yes! A large butt!
N: So a large butt is what makes a woman Brazilian?
Eduarda: Absolutely, it is the defining feature of the Brazilian woman. There are even people putting silicone in their butts.
N: Why would they need to do that if they are Brazilian?
Eduarda: To look even more Brazilian.

N: What do you think makes a Brazilian woman different from other women?
Marise: A shapely butt and the way we use it!
N: What do you mean?
Marise: I mean, look at mine, it’s all natural and I am proud of it (pointing at her butt). When we samba (she begins to samba) see how it wiggles?
N: Can you be a true Brazilian if you don’t have a butt?
Marise: Well some people put silicone in now. It’s really all about how you use it!

It may appear counter-intuitive that the typical Brazilian body is one that needs to be surgically constructed. Yet, what these statistics suggest instead is that the typical Brazilian body is ideological and serves as a frame of reference for understanding one’s position vis-à-vis Brasilidade. The body, and the focus on particular body parts is symbolic and infused with meanings that transcend the body itself. As Parker (2009) notes, “The cultural configurations that shape this erotic body characterize it in terms of its beauty and its sensuality, its erotic potential” (P. 126). This erotic potential is fundamental to the myth of racial democracy, as the innate sexuality of the mulata is what invites continued miscegenation.

**The Experience of Mulatice**

The everyday lived experience of mulatice is shaped by myriad axes of stratification. The racialized body, especially particular body parts and attributes position women differently in the relationship to the nation, to themselves, and to each other. This experiential aspect orients women to differing ways of being, differing levels of connection and belonging. “…the co-existence of diverse trajectories of affiliation necessarily draws subjects into a continuous process of restating their positionality vis-à-vis the nation” (Radcliffe and Westwood 1996,165). Much of this positioning occurs discursively, as women interpret their collective and individual identities through institutional and social interactions. While being a mulata is embodied, it is also experiential, having a body and living in and through that body is a constantly shifting constellation of power relations and meaning-making.
The work of Livio Sansone (2003) on racial construction in Brazil rests on a division between race and ethnicity where ethnicity is the experiential aspect of a racialized body. In this conception the body and its phenotypical attributes lends itself to a particular way of experiencing the world, which emerges as an ethnic identity and then forms a specific culture. Culture, identity and the body are intricately bound up with one another in a system of meaning-making that structures one’s experience of the world and one’s place in it. Not to be confused with an argument for racial essentialism, Sansone is articulating a complex process where national and social arrangements of bodies have led to the construction of particular identities in relation to one another. These identities then form the basis for cultural distinctions such as aesthetic distinctions and color classification systems that are not necessarily linked or attributed to issues of racialization (Sansone 2003).

If ethnicity is the experiential aspect of a particularly situated racialized body, then ethnicity is also performative. How these ethnic identities are constructed, experienced, and performed is situated within specific contexts. These axes of power coalesce along national ethnosexual boundaries. As Nagel (2000) asserts, “The production of ethnic differences requires social and often political recognition, definition, and reinforcement as well as individual and collective assertion and acceptance to become socially real” (P.114).

The performance and subsequent acceptance of an ethnic identity is a crucial aspect of mulatice. The embodiment of racial democracy is not simply physical but also experiential. To be a "true" Brazilian woman, you must reflect assumed racial attributes that are related to the body and experience those attributes as forms of mulatice.
Dancing, beauty and the way in which a woman carries herself are markers of mulatice.

These kinds of markers are social in that they require others to read them as mulatice.

This is how mulatice is socially experienced.

Valeria, a 50 year old piano teacher, self-identified as white:

V: I remember learning in school that whites are European, Negros are African, and the Brazilian population is a mixture.

N: But you said you are white; does that mean you are not Brazilian?

V: Well, I guess I am parda or mulata then because as a Brazilian woman I have characteristics of mixed blood.

N: Such as?

V: My love of music, loving samba and rhythm, we all have a foot in Africa.

Belle, a 27-year-old self-described mulata:

Most Brazilian women, the real Brazilian women, they have certain kinds of bodies, very specific characteristics, accentuated body parts, a very feminine or theoretically feminine body, longer legs, thicker thighs, larger butts, of all skin colors, who maybe aren't beautiful but their bodies are amazing. There is a certain elegance in the way Brazilian women carry themselves, so that even if they don't have all of those characteristics, they act like they do. Now, this isn't as true for women who have Native blood but any woman with African blood, most of us, are feminine visions. We have feminine corporal anatomical aspects that come from a national foot in Africa."

Rita, a 43-year-old manicurist, self-identified as parda:

R: Even white women here can be beautiful Brazilian mulatas. They get butt implants, breast implants, and learn to dance like the African. Once you can shake your hips the right way, anyone can be a mulata!"

What is abundantly clear is that Sansone's assertion of meaning-making through embodied and experienced identity as linked to nationalist discourses is alive and well in
the Brazilian social imaginary. The mulata in her embodied and experiential social position serves as a reference point in identity construction and the maintenance of the myth of racial democracy. Notice also that embodiment and social experience are highly gendered, centered around feminine sexuality and expressed through cultural practice. Richard Parker (2009) refers to sexuality as the, "concrete mechanism of racial mixture," a quasi obsession of Brazilians and how they see themselves. In other words, "If lust for gold had originally drawn European explorers to Brazilian shores and continued to motivate the colonial enterprise and to structure the course of Brazilian history, sexual lust had uniquely marked the formation of the Brazilian people" (P. 23).

The essentialized notion that Brazilian women carry within their very blood, a sensuality and rhythm that marks them as distinct, affects how they experience their own and others’ bodies and identities. Body parts and attributes such as the bundão, skin tones, and hair textures are imbued with meaning. In turn, those meanings fundamentally shape the ways in which women who possess and do not possess those characteristics will experience and understand their own and other women’s bodies, identities, and self-awareness. Perhaps more importantly, those characteristics must be interpreted socially, experienced socially. So that if you are what might physically be labeled as mulata or mixed-race, you are supposed to socially experience that identity in very particular ways. What is available to you for work, whether or not you are considered beautiful or sexy, how your dancing is critiqued; this is the realm of the experiential that is connected to but distinct from embodied forms.
The Jeito of the Mulata

If sexuality was/is the mechanism of miscegenation, then the Brazilian woman, particularly the mixed-race mulata has become both the impetus and the end product all in one. Sexuality as a marker of Brazilian distinction (through women's bodies) parallels, (re)produces, and maintains the ideology of racial democracy because sexuality becomes an embodied and performed, therefore, socially experienced Brazilian identity. Sexuality and the lusting after Brazilian women, despite color differences, offers experiential 'proof' of a Brazilian race. Almost all respondents (as has already been seen in above excerpts) assert that Brazilian women are indeed 'different,' even from other South American women. This is where one can truly see the extent to which racial democracy in Brazil developed differently in comparison to other Latin American nations.

Carolina, a 28-year-old waitress, self-identified as white or morena:

C: The mixture of races results in a different sensuality, a sexuality that is attractive. Brazilian women are sexual.

Elena, a 54-year-old engineer, self-described as white:

E: There is no other population in the world like the Brazilians. She is sexual, beautiful, sensual, different. People experience Brazil through our women.

Claudia, a 57-year-old domestic, self-described as negra:

C: Brazilian women are different. They just are.

This assumed distinction of Brazilian women is an important theme in Brasilidade.
Wrapped up within racial democracy’s ‘birth’ of a new race of people, the true ‘essence’ of being a Brazilian is supposedly evidenced in, on, and through the bodies of women. Seen as mysterious, sensual, and inherent, the Brazilian mulata is living proof of the country’s origin myth. And as in most creation myths, there is a spiritual and mystical aspect. The mulata then is real and not, she is a goddess, a temptress, a fantasy and a flesh and blood woman. This parallels to some extent, Vasconcelos’ belief in a Cosmic Race, that out of racial mixing in Mexico, a stronger and more pure race would be born. However, this Mexican ideology rested in part, on negating blackness, rather than embracing it (or at least aspects of it) as was the case in Brazil.

One of the most important aspects of how Brazilians see themselves, is through the one aspect of Africanness that has been deemed acceptable; sexuality. Sexualization is often linked with ethnicity in national contexts as it provides justification for miscegenation (Nagel 2000). Brazilians are and consider themselves to be, “a uniquely sexual people in an exotic land” (Parker 2009, 9).

Luisa, a 62 year old homemaker:

There is no population in the world like the Brazilians. We are sexual, beautiful, sensual, and different.

Marisa, a 47 year old cashier:

Brazilian women are beautiful, sensual, we are a different kind of person, we carry ourselves a certain way.
Cristina, a 55 year old doctor:

We are very mixed here and in terms of temperament that makes us different from other people. Brazilian women are generally more exuberant, more liberal, more free with our bodies and we have a comportment of sensuality and happy living.

Esther, a 27 year old:

Brazilian women have the best of everything, we have captured the best characteristics of all the different races. The Brazilian body is a specific body, a certain femininity, a certain elegance in the way we carry ourselves.

Simone, a 35 year old teacher:

I was just in Turkey and people were yelling to me, “Brazilian Brazilian!” I said, how do you know? This guy said, it’s the way your carry yourselves, Brazilians have a ‘way’ about them. I think it’s true, it may seem weird but you can see it in our ‘jeito’ (way). Probably all Latinas are somewhat like this but Brazilians have it the most.

The responses clearly link female, not male, sexuality to Brasilidade. Focused on aspects of the female body and the ways in which that body is expressed, we can see how nationalist ideology informs the corporeal experience and expression. The word, ‘jeito,’ used in the last interview excerpt is an excellent example of the complex ways in which body and nation interact. Jeito is a word infused with multiple meanings, especially dependent on how it is said. It is a way of being, an assumed intrinsic quality of a person (positive or negative), a knack, savvy, it also implies an attempt to gain an advantage or use some method to achieve an end.

The national discourse and belief that Brazilians truly are unique, filters into everyday actions and bodily comportment. The mulata as the idealized conception of the Brazilian nation is something that women are living in, with, and thru. Not just an
ideological tool of the nation, mulatice is experienced on an individual level. While the national ideal has become internalized as a form of Brazilian distinction, the jeito, as the ideal is interpellated through multiple aspects of identity and power relations. These interpellations result in differing levels of connection and belonging as well as a racial hierarchy. Far from being a racial democracy, the so-called Brazilian race is stratified into subgroups distinguished by physical and symbolic inclusion and exclusion.

The incorporation of national mulatice into individual identity construction, bodily comportment, and experience draws attention to the incredible ideological power of the mulata. Simultaneously creating solidarity and distinction, the internalization of such an important yet elusive symbol masks the constructed nature of mulatice. The existence of racial categories, often informed by class based factors indicate the limitations of mulatice as an inclusive identity. The following chapter will interrogate these limitations. As this national identity filters and is articulated by individual women clear distinctions create differing sets of expectations, experiences, identities, and opportunities.
CHAPTER SIX: **THOSE MULATAS: PERFORMING DISTINCTION**

In the movement from the mulata as national identity to individual identity there is a fundamental shift in discourse and experience. While the mulata clearly embodies and solidifies a national symbol creating a Brazilian sense of belonging, she also represents and creates difference and distinction among Brazilian women. *Who* a woman is in terms of her racial characteristics and class position and *how* that woman acts out or upon mulatice from those racial and class positions creates clear hierarchies. This directly challenges the national discourse of racial democracy from an experiential perspective. At the same time, another layer of distinction articulates a boundary between authentic mulatice and commodified mulatice. While analytically distinct, these two forms of distinction are contextual and do at times map onto and reinforce each other. At the heart of this chapter is the interrogation of what, where and how distinction is delimited and articulated and of how national acceptance and individual rejection can and do occur simultaneously.

The notion that mulatice equals Brasilidade equals an innate embodied essence or jeito helps explain the comment that all Brazilian women are mulatas. Inclusion in the nation is not only a source of pride but also a source of meaningful identity, upholding the myth of racial democracy. Yet it is also abundantly clear that at the individual experiential level there is an intact racial hierarchy privileging whiteness and a very
specific kind of mulatice. There are mulatas who exist in the social imaginary, ideologically, and there are those mulatas, the constitutive Other(s). At issue is where the line or boundary is drawn between being an authentic, respectable mulata and the mulata who exploits, uses, and performs the identity as opportunity.

In order to investigate the ways in which the national symbolic mulata identity and the individually experienced mulata identity are distinct, it is crucial to first understand the contexts in which the mulata identity has been articulated and exploited. Though she is a national symbol and a specific body, she has also been packaged and commodified; sold to Brazilians and the international community alike. This commodification within Brazil has served two purposes. First, the commodified mulata who appears on billboards selling everything from clothing to butter takes on a mythical, taken for granted explanation of Brazilian history and inclusion. Her presence in film, music, television, and advertising makes her “real.” Media images in particular create messages of normalcy, articulating parameters of who we are and who we should want to be. The commodified mulata has not only been used to sell products but in the process has become a product herself.

The second function is that the barrage of images simultaneously creates a stereotypical caricature, somewhat akin to Aunt Jemima on syrup bottles or the Barbie doll in the United States. This caricature, or rather those who see it as such, do not see themselves as that kind of woman. These fabricated images appear humorous so that women who do look like the commodified images are performing, even selling themselves, as a drag queen would. These functions are not mutually exclusive; they exist
side by side in their contradiction. And it is through the contradiction that women along racialized class lines interpret the mulata identity for themselves and those around them.

**Carmen Miranda: Performing Mulatice**

Carmen Miranda may well be the perfect example of Brasilidade, known for her gigantic hats of fruit and flowers; she overtly demonstrates the performance aspect of mulatice. An international star in the 1930s, again coinciding with Vargas’ push to gain international attention, Miranda’s story exposes the overt construction of a national identity. She was not Brazilian, never even holding a Brazilian passport. Born in Portugal to white European parents, Miranda was a performer who through her own choices and her management team consciously constructed an image of Brasilidade to be sold on the international stage.

Miranda demonstrates the ways in which performance is linked to racial identity. Though technically white, her makeup, costumes, dance moves, and affected accent appeared exotic and tropical. Remembering that the 1930s in the United States was still a time of anti-black racism, Miranda offered American audiences a “safe” way to enjoy Africanness. She was seen as not white internationally and clearly this was not connected to skin tone or even place of birth. At least in the social imagination of an international audience (especially American), Miranda became the visual representation of a Brazilian woman; a mulata.
Set in the context of the growing acceptance of racial democracy, samba, Carnival, and Vargas, Miranda’s persona came to represent how Brazilians were seen and how they started to see themselves. Through the appropriation of traditional Afro-Brazilian, Bahian costuming, regional dance moves, and her stereotypical bananas and bangles, Miranda successfully created a kind of mulata that white elites could identify with. When accused of not being truly Brazilian, she responded, “Look at me and see if I don’t have Brazil in every curve of my body” (Vianna 1999:94). In fact, this quote brings to life Freyre’s vision of the new Brazilian race, Caucasian features with African sensuality.

That Miranda became an international superstar should not be entirely surprising. She was one of the first ‘Latinas’ to gain notoriety in the blossoming film industry. The importance of her fame cannot be overstated. Brazil had very little economic, political, or cultural standing internationally and just as samba started to gain attention, Miranda offered a visual image. Her costumes, her dancing, her exotic otherness invited
voyeurism and the promise of exciting sensuality. In essence, she invited tourism. As Brazilian musicologist Tinhorão noted, “The exporting of Brazil’s image….that Carmen Miranda balanced on her head, on her stylized tray, in the form of bananas and other tropical products, corresponded to a need for propaganda for the recently installed dictatorship” (Shaw and Dennison 2005, 190).

The former director of the now closed Carmen Miranda museum in Rio de Janeiro spoke of the international significance of the actress and singer for Brazil:

“She used that image to make herself into a big business, constantly touring and putting on shows in casinos and clubs. For the American audience of the day, she put Brazil on the map. It was through her music and her person that Americans discovered what Rio de Janeiro was, what Brazil was, how Brazilians behaved”

The quote reveals the ways in which Brasilidade is performative. The image of the tropical woman with exotic fruits on her head, giant bangle bracelets, and swaying hips became more than a stage performance, it became a cultural repertoire expected of all Brazilian women. In particular, the notion that it was through Miranda that Americans learned not just what Brazilian women looked like, but how they behaved is incredibly important to understanding the stereotypes of Brazilian women today. Just as white Brazilian men were encouraged to whiten the nation through the bodies of mulata women, Miranda’s persona invited white Westerners to discover Brazil through the bodies of mulata women.

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Miranda’s presence in the film industry was also instrumental to solidifying a national identity within Brazil. An early documentary entitled the 1933 Rio de Janeiro Carnival in Song and the famous musical film, Hello, Hello, Brazil! featured Miranda, popular songs from the radio and the newly government sponsored Carnival celebrations. Both films were highly successful, especially in Rio and in Paris (Shaw and Dennison 2004). Brazil, from that point to today is still known as, “a land commonly related to amusement and pleasure….hypersexualized and sexually available men and women, spending their days on a beach, dancing samba and celebrating carnival all year long” (Wood 2014, 16-17).

Yet again, in the realm of film and media in general, Brazilian men in the form of mulatice, are nowhere to be found. Starting with Miranda, the iconic image of Brazil comes in the form of the mulata. As Stuart Hall reminds us, a national culture acts as a form of discourse, solidifying a way for individuals to see themselves in a national context (Heise 2012; Hall 1996). If Brazilian culture was constructed and promoted around the image of the mulata then that discourse becomes the focal point for all Brazilians, not simply women themselves.

Heise argues that, “cinema is one of the means through which nations are created and reproduced in the collective imaginary. Films articulate ideas of national identity” (Heise 2012) As a film star, Miranda helped to solidify the image that Vargas was in fact working towards. The message to Brazilians was to embrace racial harmony, to take pride in the exoticism that made them different, unique, that Brasilidade. The message to
the international community was and still is, to come and consume Brazil’s exotic landscape, produce, and perhaps most importantly, its women.

**The Commodified Mulata**

As Carmen Miranda demonstrates, the mulata is not simply an ideological construction, she is also a product to be produced, sold and consumed. It was this aspect that Vargas developed as part of his plan to bring tourism to Brazil. Though immigration from Europe had been encouraged since the founding of the country, the efforts by the Brazilian government were doubled in the Estado Novo of Vargas. In the 1930s waves of immigrants from Italy, Spain, Germany, Lebanon, and Japan arrived to open arms. Brazil saw these immigrants as a potential workforce to replace slavery and as another way to continue whitening through miscegenation (Heise 2012).

One of the methods used to attract both immigration and tourism was by selling the mulata image. The mulata, as the embodiment of the exotic, tropical landscape of Brazil, becomes a product for advertising and selling the nation. As a commodity, the mulata can be used to sell the promise of an experience, much the way Las Vegas characterizes itself. The innate sensuality attached to the mulata body offers, as Parker (2006) notes, erotic potential. And because the mulata was and is sold as the embodiment of the nation, *she* in the forms of land and human draws on the imagination and symbolizes the potential of new experiences.

Estuáquio Neves, a Brazilian artist who produced an art piece entitled, *Objectification of the Woman’s Body*, brings attention to the ways in which women’s bodies, specifically black women’s bodies are used, “exhaustively for all ends”
(Cleveland 2013, 98). In interviews and writings, Neve discusses the historical importance of literary and visual representations of black and mulata women. Over time this shifted onto movie screens (Carmen Miranda, etc.) and finally into more modern forms of media such as fine arts and photography. (Cleveland 2013).

The objectification and use of the non-white female body extends beyond the arts. One of the most lucrative extensions of this objectification became tourism generally and sexual tourism specifically. To be clear, these two industries overlap unofficially. Though there is a vibrant sexual tourist industry in Brazil, mainstream tourism is promoted on and through the body of the mulata. And because the mulata body is constructed to evoke sex and sensuality, her body also becomes part of the lure of tourism. Take for example the following images:

Figure 14: Poster for Brazilian Carnival
Figure 15: Brazilian postcard
Figure 16: World Cup advertisement
Figure Pan Am advertisement
Figure 18: Postcard for Copacabana Beach
Figure 19: World Cup image
Each image is from a campaign to attract Western tourists. The unifying theme is that experiencing Brazil truly occurs through its women. This is where the line between tourism and sexual tourism becomes blurred. The mulata as true Brazilian is utilized as a product, a commodity to be consumed by tourists. In a way, the early colonial draw of Europeans to conquer the sensual, dark, and erotic Brazilian territory is echoed by the tourist industry. If the mulata is the symbol and main product of Brazil, then the tourist who consumes her is symbolically conquering Brazil. And of course, the advertising is meant to draw white Westerners, thereby continuing the whitening theory of racial democracy.

According to Caldas-Coulthard (2008), “Travelling is, above all, a social practice where places to be visited and people are constituted in discourse” (P.453). She goes on to note that tourism advertising is based on the construction of self and other, and of course, the mundane versus the exotic. It aims to excite the traveller by playing on ideas of who you would like to be by constructing the identities and environment of where you
will be. The locals at the destination must inherently be constructed as exotic Others in order to play on the idea of adventure and excitement.

When tourists visit Brazil, they come with a particular set of expectations; expectations that have been shaped by what Bandyopadhyay and Nascimento (2010) call a, “dominant visual gaze” (P.935). This is the perspective of the tourist that has been shaped by historical and social forces. As discussed in earlier chapters, the colonial period provides a stark illustration of the forces that early on shaped the ways in which Brazil, and its women, would be consumed. Letters and accounts from early visitors to Brazil exaggerated and promoted an image of a sexual paradise, ripe for the taking. And today, these images are still flourishing. “Tourists’ expectations become a reality in Brazil” (Bandyopadhyay and Nascimento 2010, 943).

Mediating the consumption of such constructions is the myth of racial democracy. As addressed earlier in this chapter, the commodified mulata, such as the images used in travel advertising, creates not only a version of reality for the tourist, but also for the commodified Other. This experience is amplified in the Brazilian context because of the extent to which what is exported is also fundamental to identity construction nationally. As an ideology, the myth of racial democracy is the mediator or filter through which tourists are drawn to Brazil and also as the mediator or filter for how Brazilians have come to see themselves and each other.

N: What do you think the impression is of Brazilian women internationally?

Cristina: A mulata, you know, we export samba, its not the samba that we experience, it’s a samba for exportation to attract tourists, especially gringos. The export is a spectacle, the half naked mulata.
N: What is the image of Brazilian women outside of Brazil?

Goretti: The media uses propaganda to sell the image of Carnival, mulatas on the beach in tiny bikinis on our postcards, these things only show sensuality and sexuality.

Roberta: I think it comes from samba and Carnival, naked women dancing in the streets and postcards of thong bikinis. It attracts tourists.

Aline: The mulata is a product not a person. We sell her on every street corner and poster.

Elena: We export the stereotypical mulata and samba. I mean it’s a stereotype but its still true right? I mean, walk around here and you will see women with gorgeous bodies just like on the postcards.

What is unique about the mulata as product is that the caricature used in advertising (largely evolved from Carmen Miranda) happens to also be the very image Brazilian women utilize in their own identity construction. So that even if the mulata is a product, she may not be a person but she is an identity. This identity, or rather its interpretation provides the basis for distinction between different forms of mulatice. Each of these quotes demonstrates a remarkable understanding that the commodified mulata is a product aimed at enticing male Westerners. The question of how Brazilian women are thought of by the international community and the subsequent consistent answers that they are thought of as the commodified mulata, begins to reveal an underlying tension. This tension is the distinction between a commodified and an authentic mulata.

While the women interviewed understand that the mulata image is a product when it comes to tourism but often fail to see that the same ideology is at play in their daily
lives. The very idea that there is an authentic mulata, a Brasilidade is as much a product of the ideology of racial democracy as the commodified version of mulatice. Whether they negate, accept, identify with, or attempt to create the mulata as product, it is clearly an active and meaningful construct in Brazilian women’s understandings of self and other.

N: Do you think that the image that foreigners have of Brazilian women has an impact on you here in Brazil?

Carolina: Absolutely! We have a lot of difficulty speaking with men from other countries because they assume everything we do is for sex or because many of them come here looking for and expecting sex. I see it all the time since I am a waitress, especially in the hotels I have worked in. Gringos come here to Rio for relationships with Brazilian women. I always tell them I am not that kind of woman.

N: What kind of women do the gringos come here for?
Carolina: The mulata! The shakey-shakey (she points to her butt and wiggles it). They come for the images they see in Carnival, the bodies of the mulata.

The very interesting aspect of this interview excerpt is that Carolina who considers herself white and mixed was speaking to me with her friend Adriana, who calls herself morena and, “a typical Brazilian mulata like all the women.” The parameters of distinction between authenticity and commodification are incredibly blurred. There is a clear articulation of the mulata as product and yet, women still identify with and as mulatas. Further, the very notion of Brasilidade belies the ideological function of mulatice and racial democracy. In other words, that kind of woman (commodified version) is no less a product than the typical Brazilian woman.
Race, Class, and Performance

The national discourse that Brazilian women are distinct, that they have a jeito; that they are all mixed is in essence the same discourse utilized by tourism.

“Advertising discourses present and manage bodies in accordance with shared vocabularies of body-idiom that are not individually controlled but hieratically set and symbolically charged. The body in this sense is used as a semiotic resource for interactional but also for commoditized purposes. In tourism advertising, embodiment and commoditization are inseparable concepts” (Caldas-Coulthard, 2008, 457).

The mulata body and the mulata performance are products sold both outside of and within the country through different mediums. The mulata as product for exportation functions as an ethnosexual boundary, reinforcing and reproducing the ways in which different classes and races of women relate to the mulata identity. All Brazilian women are mulatas because mulatas are synonymous with Brasilidade and the jeito. Yet when the exported mulata image becomes a reality internationally, many white and/or middle to upper class women draw a strong line between “those” mulatas and them.

Each of these respondents is white, middle to upper class women:

Eduarda: The exported image is always the mulata with the bundão at Carnival. This is what is always sold and exported. There’s even restaurants in the tourist areas that are full of pictures of mulatas as gringos picture them to be.

Marcelle: Look, Brazilian women don’t dream of being one of those mulatas. She is considered beautiful but since she is sold as an image of sex, of tourism even prostitution to foreigners, then we don’t want to be considered like that.
Eduarda: I bet about 90% of those kinds of women are prostitutes.

Marcelle: Not mulatas in general, the ones from Carnival.

N: What do foreigners think of Brazilian women?

Marisa: Gringos think only about samba and Carnival and mulatas. They come here for sex with them, it’s bad because they think we are all like that.

Denise: The mulata who sambas and is beautiful. It’s just a stereotype, its what we project to the outside world like soccer. It’s not positive though because you see tons of gringos coming here looking for that.

Again, it is important to note that Denise (a self-identified white woman), earlier in our interview mentioned that all Brazilian women can samba and are mixed.

There are some parallels of these boundaries in other countries in Latin America with large Afro-descendent populations. In Cuba for example, women are supposed to be sexually attractive and still uphold the ideals of marianismo. This means that taking that sexual attraction to sexual activity (especially with gringos in sexual tourism) is frowned upon (Roland 2006). Feminist literature often discusses the double bind of women, the damned if you do-damned if you don’t phenomenon of the female position; also referred to as the virgin/whore dichotomy. This is essentially the situation in Brazil: all women are mixed, therefore mulatas. This mixture lends an essentialized jeito that is tied to fundamental sexuality. Yet, those who exploit and perform this identity, who tend to be non-white and lower class, for tourists become viewed as constitutive Others.

The performance of the mulata identity is linked to the mulata as product and therefore seen as an act, a caricature, and importantly; inauthentic. Those who appear to
utilize and perform mulatice become constitutive Others and this fundamentally intersects with race and class distinctions. For example, speaking with Aline, a self-identified negra:

Look, the mulata can be very very dark skinned with a huge butt dancing the samba. Or she can be light skinned with a huge butt dancing as well. This is not about color, this is about sensuality. The mulata is differentiated by her sensuality. It’s about a sexy body, sensual, free, and open sexuality. This means anyone can become and act like a mulata.

Maria Telma: There are real mulatas but anyone can be a mulata.

N: How?
Maria Telma: Have a small waist, a big butt, even with silicone, put on makeup, dress nicely, and dance!

This suggests that those who play the role and use the identity for opportunity or economic advantage are a line of demarcation. This line however, is blurry. It does not easily divide mulatas from non-mulatas at any given time. Class, race, and their combination are mitigating factors in the deciding who is a respectable, authentic mulata and who is not.

If we assume then that class and race are fundamentally tied together, we get a clearer picture of the distinction between authentic, respectable mulatas and those mulatas. The uses, perceptions of, and meanings attached to bodies are contextualized within a classed and therefore racialized symbolic system of meaning making. According to Bourdieu (1984),

“The signs constituting the perceived body, cultural products which differentiate groups by their degree of culture, that is, their distance from nature, seem grounded in nature. The legitimate use of the body is spontaneously perceived as an index of moral uprightness, so that its opposite, a ‘natural’ body, is seen as an index of laissez-aller (‘letting oneself go’), a culpable surrender to facility” (P. 193).
Those who are perceived as using the body legitimately and therefore whose bodies are legitimate must be located within a particular social class. In light of the myth of racial democracy that emphasizes the base, essentialized sexual nature of Africans, the idea that some women are too sexual, too natural corresponds with Bourdieu’s assertion of the differentiation of bodies in social space.

Bourdieu also notes that (what we would call) the middle class, misrecognizes the ways in which class acts on their own identities. They view themselves as acting “naturally.” This misrecognition corresponds to the interview material where women see themselves as natural mulatas, the jeito of Brasilidade. The line that is crossed into illegitimate or not respectable mulatice is tied up with class distinction. Women, especially lower class women who utilize the mulata identity for profit or gain in some way, are flagrantly participating in the cultural economy of mulata as product. These women violate and vulgarly traffic a set of class-based practices for profit. In an attempt to actualize the practices associated with the idealized mulata body, lower class women are in fact challenging the misrecognition of the middle class (Bourdieu 1984).

The line of distinction is also about taste in the Bourdieuan sense. He notes that taste both unites and separates people. Similarly, the ways in which women appeal to, address, perform, use, and negate the mulata identity unites and separates Brazilian women along class lines. Practices of the body are grounded in class conditions and are therefore understood and classified through class conditions. In other words, the lower class Brazilian women who see the public display of mulatice as a potential form of capital do not see this as a performance, but rather an extension of an innate talent.
Those of the middle and upper classes classify the lower class women as vulgar, therefore classifying themselves as distinct from those women (Bourdieu 1984).

There are two levels of unification and separation. On the one hand, all Brazilian women are unified in their distinction of Brasilidade and so are separate from all other women, as can be seen in much of the interview data already presented. On the other hand, lower class women are separated as distinct. The question that must be addressed is whether lower class women themselves are unified or separated. Is there a line of distinction between lower class women who do perform the identity verses those who do not?

Asking Mariana, a clerk at a grocery store to explain how and why women become mulatas (professional ones):

Women from the favelas, like me are very very poor. I think many women are looking for a better life and dancing is a good way to do it. We all grow up with samba for fun, and then there are lots of opportunities to dance in the parades. Women are hoping to make something of their lives like to find a boyfriend or become a model.

Maria, a manicurist:
The mulatas you see on tv come from poor communities, the favelas. They are so beautiful and they love to dance because it is in their blood. They make money, if I were that beautiful I would dance in the parades too!

Tina, a domestic servant:
Mulatas dance because they love it. They have jobs, they can make money. I know that my neighbor is a passista (a professional samba dancer) and she does it to pay for her studies. It’s very smart, I don’t know why people think they are all prostitutes.

These excerpts that correspond to other interview material, demonstrate that the main line of distinction is firmly rooted in class and distance from necessity. The practices displayed by those in the lower classes appear vulgar and problematic to the
higher classes. The relational concern is that *those* mulatas will make them look bad. And yet, lower class women do not see this as an act or a performance. For them, mulatice offers opportunities for advancement in the world.

Prostitution, sexual tourism, and passistas (professional samba dancers) are three overlapping categories of practices that display and communicate the idealized mulata for profit. Each category is in essence a different mode of performance of mulatice. These predominantly lower class women utilize physical and performative aspects of mulatice as capital.

**Sex, Samba, and Cinderella**

The Vargas regime’s push to solidify a national identity in part for increased tourism is certainly linked to the sexual tourism industry in Brazil. The association of Brazilian women with sex, especially in samba and Carnival fundamentally eroticizes (and racializes) a sexist stereotype (Caldas-Coulthard 2008). Brazilian women are the way to experience Brazilian culture. This is not necessarily prostitution in the traditional sense. While there are certainly tourism companies and localized johns that offer sex in exchange for money, the tourist industry more generally capitalizes on and sells erotic potential as a way to truly experience the country. Or, as Piscitelli (2004) notes, “sex tourism is any travel experience in which the furnishing of sexual services by the local population in exchange for monetary or non-monetary rewards is the crucial element for success of the trip” (P.3).

Tourism is experiential and the female Brazilian identity has been sexualized; therefore, much of the tourist industry in Brazil promotes a form of sexual tourism or at
the very least, voyeurism. In the recent (2014-2015) edition of, *How to be a Carioca: The Alternative Guide for the Tourist in Rio*, the very least, voyeurism. In the recent (2014-2015) edition of, *How to be a Carioca: The Alternative Guide for the Tourist in Rio*, there are not only illustrations depicting all Brazilian women as voluptuous mulatas, but there are also tips on motel sex. For example, below is an example of the kinds of illustrations throughout the book. It accompanies Lesson 6 Dressing and Undressing, where you learn the “rules” of dressing like a true Brazilian. Importantly, though there are rules listed for men, the illustration(s) make clear that the tourist is assumed to be male. Note that even the sun and the statue of Christ are looking at the woman’s butt.

![Figures 21 and 22: Pages from book for tourists going to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil](image)

In another section of the book, giving information on motel rooms for sexual encounters, there is an illustration of a motel room with a man and woman naked in bed.

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6 This book came to my attention because it was given by my uncle, to my 12 year old son. He thought that my son would like to read it before his next visit to Brazil.
together (her breasts are exposed). And the accompanying text provides information on how to find the right motel for a one-night stand. The assumed sexual encounter with a Brazilian woman is at the heart of the more fluid concept of sexual tourism.

Piscitelli’s 2004 qualitative study of sexual tourism in the northeastern city of Fortaleza, Brazil entitled, “Shifting Boundaries: Sex and Money in the North-East of Brazil,” illustrates this fluidity. One of the most revealing aspects of her work is the notion of “middle class sex tourism,” also known as “elegant prostitution.” Capitalizing on the exported image of the Brazilian woman, women from both low income and middle-income backgrounds set their sights on attracting a gringo. Again, this can be for money or simply a relationship. One of the most important aspects of this form of sex tourism is that the women are extremely attentive to their physical appearance, catering to what they assume the gringos want. Skin lightening, dieting, exercise, revealing but not explicit clothing, relaxed hair, and other such physical attributes are meant to mimic the postcards and images of Brazilian women abroad. “Differently from the explicit sexualization of various forms of prostitution in Fortaleza, these meetings between foreign tourists and natives are, tough loaded with sensuality, shaded with uncertainties” (P.7).

The uncertainties reveal the problems that many of the women interviewed express; the idea that foreigners think all Brazilian women are sexually promiscuous. And so among Brazilian women, there is a stark distinction made between being sensual and using that sensuality for money or to catch a husband/boyfriend.

Sonia: Those women go up to the men who are here from Europe and the United States and act this way. The men expect this from what they see in ads and media. These women need this, they use this. But it makes us all look bad.
Luisa: The men like Brazilian women, their beauty, people are attracted to the Brazilian race. But some women really play this up. I think foreign men are always surprised and excited by the sexual openness and availability of some Brazilian women, the sexual nature, their spontaneity. The gringos come here to experience no sexual taboos. This does exits but its not all we have, and we are not all like this. But that’s all people think about, they come for the women, the sexuality, the vision of dancing and fun. Gringos come here and fall in love and take those mulatas back home. It’s like sexual tourism.

Maria: I see a lot of gringos walking around with Brazilian women. They love the mulatas and morenas. The gringos come here for sex, to watch women samba. It’s bad because they come here thinking we are all like that. I mean there are lots of mulatas looking for gringos to date, but it’s not everyone.

Cristina: You know, we have as lot of problems with sexual tourism so prostitutes and regular women seek out gringos. She becomes the spectacle, you know, the breasts showing, the postcard image. That’s what they are looking for and that’s what these women offer. What attracts a lot of the sexual tourism is this thing that we sell. Because that’s what is on our postcards and all of that.

Much of the sexual tourism occurs through word of mouth. Men, particularly from Europe and the United States hear tales of the beautiful women and sexual encounters other men had on previous trips to various cities in Brazil. Between the exported images and these stories, the Brazilian mulata becomes not simply fantasy, but a fantastical reality. That in essence is the basis of sexual tourism in all of its varied forms. If, as Parker (2009) asserts, Carnival has become synonymous with Brazil and the mulata synonymous with Carnival, then all that is Carnivalesque, a time when, “everything is permitted, when anything is possible,” is transferred to Brazilian women generally (P. 156).

The women who engage in sexual tourism, often perform characteristics associated with the idealized mulata body. Most of these women claim to be looking for profit in the form of a boyfriend or husband, earning money, or even a way out of Brazil (Piscitelli
This internationally circulated product of mixture has multiple consequences on Brazilians themselves. On the one hand, it offers an opportunity to women looking for economic and social advantage, and on the other hand, it reinforces the distinctions among Brazilian women themselves.

There is another way in which the mulata identity can be used as opportunity and that is the role of passista, also known as a professional mulata. The passistas are the professional samba dancers, the women who are constantly photographed during Carnival. Their costumes are outrageous, sparkly and colorful; with headdresses of feathers, sequins, and glitter. More iconically, they are known for dancing in thongs, pasties and mile-high heels. Sandra Giacomini (1992) uses the term ‘professional mulata,’ to emphasize the utilization of the mulata image for compensation. The mulata performance in this case is the opportunity.

The passista is also one of the driving forces behind sexual tourism. “Mulata dance shows largely center on the visual consumption of mulata bodies by foreign men….The professional category of mulata epitomizes Brazil’s appeal as a racial-sexual paradise while obscuring the pervasiveness of transnational cultural and economic practices premised on sexual objectification and racialized exotification (Caldwell 2007, 60). Whether televised, photographed, or samba shows abroad, the scantily-clad women promise an authentically Brazilian experience on and through the bodies of women.

Though passistas can come from virtually any class background, most are lower class from the favelas. Situated within favelas, the samba schools have historically been the way in which lower class and poor people (disproportionately non white) could be
involved in Carnival. Today, because of the intense time for training and practice, the passistas tend to be from the favelas where the schools are. For many socially and economically disadvantaged women, knowledge of the tourist industry and foreign appreciation of samba provides an incentive to pursue dancing as a career. Though not paid particularly well, this profession is still considered a viable alternative to being unemployed or a domestic servant.

Perhaps because the mulata identity is performed in exchange for money and status, passistas are often viewed, by the higher classes, similarly to those engaging in sexual tourism and even as prostitutes.

Marisa: The passistas come from all class levels, they live in the favelas, some are actual dancers but some are just selling themselves for money. I think some of them are hoping that they will be seen by someone who can get them more opportunities like modeling, dancing, or even a boyfriend.

Simone: Passistas are a community of women who like to dance, they come from humble backgrounds. It’s a way to survive.

Cris: A passista is a woman from the favelas and there is the questions of the dance that represents more than socio-economic issues but more that it represents Brazil, the expression of Brazilian culture. She is a sambista, who represents this very important thing in Brazil. She is very connected to the favelas. She is not really a prostitute but prostitution has capitalized on her image so they are kind of looked at as the same thing.

Maria Elena: Those passistas and mulatas have lots of economic opportunities like dancing in shows, as singers, and especially in prostitution.

These excerpts reveal the sentiment behind Giacomini’s concept of the professional mulata. Embedded within racial and economic contexts, it is clear that those who make money from mulaticé are “selling themselves.” Class, which is heavily
racialized in Brazil, becomes the boundary of distinction, the line that helps us understand how everyone and no one can be a mulata; while in the same breath someone can claim that the mulata doesn’t exist and yet call passistas, ‘those mulatas.’

For women, the economic realities of lower class life in Brazil make the utilization of mulatice an enticing opportunity. Whether for prostitution, looking for a foreign boyfriend, or becoming a passista, in this context mulatice acts as a cultural repertoire. Take for example, Goldstein’s 2003 study following the life of Gloria, a domestic worker who lives in a favela of Rio de Janeiro. Gloria’s life is a stark example of the dangerous and difficult experience of poverty set in the context of racism, sexism, and classism. While domestic service and other service sector work is a likely source of income for poor women, the possibility of social mobility often rests on the potential gains that come from performing mulatice. For the average, everyday poor woman, the utilization of mulatice does not often occur directly through samba and tourism. Instead, hope for opportunity rests on a (black) Cinderella fantasy.

A coroa, is an older man (usually non white but not necessarily) who is middle to upper class. Knowing that men generally, and coroas in particular are also entranced by the mythical allure of mulatice, these women hope to seduce and catch the eye of such a man. For some women, this thought informs their relationships with the man of the house in the homes they clean and cook in. For others, it is a daydream.

“Parables of upward mobility constitute a genre told by women among themselves. In these stories, the woman actively plots and pursues her goal, whether it be to simply obtain a favor from a coroa or, in its more complete form, to procure long-term economic sustenance from the relationship...As a method of escaping from poverty, however, marrying or seducing a coroa is based on gendered and racialized values of attractiveness in an erotic market” (Goldstein 2003:109-110).
For lower class women in Brazil, there is a separate set of standards and assumptions. If you have a foreign boyfriend it is through sexual tourism, if you samba well you are a passista, if you have a wealthier, older boyfriend/husband/lover, you must be sexually kinky. If you are white and have a foreign boyfriend you are worldly and travelled, if you samba well it is because all Brazilians have a foot in Africa, and if you have a wealthy, older man in your life you are a gold-digger at worst, lucky at best. Everyone and no one is a mulata.

Discussion

Brazilian women live a tension of simultaneously negating and relating to a mulata identity. Clearly, the relatability occurs on a symbolic level, rather than as an individual lived experience. The idea that some women pervert the ‘real’ mulata into a mockery, a commmodified mulata, rests on the idea that there is a true and real mulata. As a class-based analysis, this is of course a way for the middle and upper classes to distinguish themselves. Their mulatice is an essence, an innate and natural identity. Yet their distinction rests on a natural identity that is still safely distanced from actual nature.

There is a play on the word nature here, in that it has multiple meanings. Though the jeito of Brasilidade is purportedly a natural essence, it is still distinguished from the animalistic nature of Africanness. A good metaphor is the difference between wearing natural looking makeup and literally being natural (makeup free). Those who are seen as literally natural are unkempt, vulgar, mundane, or as Bourdieu (1984) notes, this shows an, “index of laisser-aller (‘letting oneself go’)” (P. 193). In an absurd social
classification system, the more literally natural and obvious mulatice appears, the more it is denigrated by those of the middle and upper classes.

Butler’s 1990 work on the performative nature of gender is illuminating on this topic. Using drag performances as her example, she illustrates the paradox that drag is parody of a parody. That if gender is socially constructed and only constituted in its performance and subsequent relational coherence, then drag is simply another way to perform gender. There is no reality, no substance, no nature behind any of the performances. “In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself – as well as its contingency” (P.187).

Like gender itself, the mulata is not simply a social construction, she is also an ideologically based, politically charged construction. The distinct performances of mulatice that occur along strictly policed class lines reflect the matrix of power relationships that relies upon the mulata as a mechanism of control. The very forces (commodification as one such force) that led to her “creation,” are performed and inscribed on and through the body as natural. As discussed in earlier chapters, the mulata as creation myth anchors and justifies the racialized, sexualized, classed, and gendered social order of Brazil. Who, how, and when mulatice is performed offers constitutive proof of naturalized distinctions that are seen as a result of differing amounts of African blood.

“Acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this on the surface of the body, through the play of signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal, the organizing principle of identity as a cause. Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are performative in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are fabrications manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means (Butler 1990, 185).
The unique aspect of mulatice in the context of Butler, is that there are two levels of performative distinction occurring. On the one hand is the notion of jeito, an assumed innate essence of Brasilidade that rests on racial mixture. Jeito has become fused with notions of mulatice, making Brazilian national distinction an ontological reality. At this level, every and any act, gesture, or body type can be incorporated into the organizing principle of identity. On the other hand, specific acts, gestures, and bodies are interpreted through class, race, and gender in ways that produce distinctions among Brazilians.

This calls into question the assumed ontological basis of Brasilidade because if jeito is an essence, how do some women have less or more of it? Butler’s assertion that drag is a parody of a parody helps explain this. The very fact that there are distinctions among Brazilians refutes the ontological assumptions of Brasilidade. The fabrication or parody of jeito as it is utilized and performed by women of differing classes and racial mixtures reveals the constructed nature of jeito to begin with. Unlike Butler, jeito is not meant to be seen on the surface of the body, but rather as the very fabric of the body, its constitutive force. And yet what is judged and used as distinctive qualities are the performances of the inner essence. “Thus, bodies would have every likelihood of receiving a value strictly corresponding to the positions of their owners in the distribution of the other fundamental properties…” (Bourdieu 1984, 192).

This performative distinction is also a reinscription of distinction. Brasilidade and jeito are supposed evidence of the fundamental racial mixture of all Brazilians. And yet, the reality of race and class distinctions resurfaces continuously. A racial hierarchy privileging whiteness finds an outlet in the class system despite the supposed erasure of
racial differences. The strong association of blackness with poverty and whiteness with wealth allows class to mask racial distinction. In other words, class becomes the ideological mechanism of racism.

The classed body inscribed and intricately tied up with race, becomes the basis for bodily comportment, tastes, and habits that are judged and evaluated for authenticity and readability. Just as Bourdieu asserts that the upper classes believe their tastes and dispositions to be natural (free from class socialization), so too do the upper classes of women in Brazil believe their mulatice to be natural. The jeito as mulatice is falsely naturalized as a form of unification and differentiation through the regulatory fiction of the myth of racial democracy (Butler 1990, 187).

The ways in which the upper classes perform mulatice becomes the norm, the accepted “natural,” innate Brasilidade against which all other performances are judged. This paradigm was in large part set by the persona of Carmen Miranda. By naturalizing their own performances, upper class women can distinguish themselves from all other women while simultaneously creating distinctions among those other women. Thus, the differing performances of mulatice at different class levels, with different physical features all appear as parodies to the upper classes, the same ways that drag appears exaggerated. This obvious misrecognition, masks the extent to which all women, despite race or class are parodying a parody.

The notion that there is in fact an apriori and innate mulata that is equated with belonging and identity in the nation is the standard against which women are judged. Racialized class positions simultaneously naturalize mulatice and create the basis for the
reinscription of distinction. Not only is the performance of this identity important in the creation of distinction, but who the performer is in terms of race and class, become central to mulata recognition and acceptance.

Performativity is fundamentally linked to distinction and recognition. In a continual cycle of production and reproduction, different bodies and performances are created and naturalized to justify existing inequalities. Bourdieu’s notion of habitus is useful to understanding this particular aspect of the Brazilian experience. If habitus is the internalization of existing cultural and social structures into the physical body, then any aspect of the performance of identity will reflect the very structures that created the performing body. Thus the differing racialized class performances of mulatice used as a form of distinction, simply reaffirm and reproduce the very inequalities that justify the existing social hierarchy (Bourdieu 1984).

The symbolic power of the white upper class can clearly be seen in the reinscription of distinction in the context of Brazil’s supposed racial democracy. The default and naturalized performance of mulatice is based on the performance of a white upper class form of mulatice. This is the initial step of misrecognition, where the dominant group assumes their identity to be natural. If certain performances of mulatice are assumed to be more authentic than others, then distinction is automatically created. The second step of misrecognition occurs in the evaluation of all other performances, therefore making all other racialized class identities to be parodies. Not only does the dominant group fail to see that their performance is also a parody, but this misrecognition becomes the basis for denying particular groups full participation in the nation.
CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION

The centrality of the mulata to identity formation is a dominant theme in this project. In some ways, the mulata functions as an ideological construction that is meant to create belonging while masking the production of social inequalities. The notion that there is a natural mulata marks an ahistorical and universal form of mulatice. This ahistoricity blends perfectly into mulatice as Brasilidade, in line with the Brazilian creation myth. Kenan Malik (1996) argues that, “The category of the Other eternalises human modes of perception. It takes historically specific ways of constructing identity and endows them with an eternal validity” (P. 222).

This eternal validity, a form of misrecognition, disconnects the construction of the mulata from her historical context. The myth of racial democracy was meant to alleviate what white elites saw as a threat to national progress and prestige. The large African population posed a problem that racial democracy could “fix.” This historical context reminds us that the mulata as creation myth was always built on white superiority. She (the mulata) was constructed to appease whites, not to include Africans in the nation. Therefore, the mulata as a national identity must be protected from imposters and those who are seen to abuse and use the identity for personal gain. Another way of thinking about this is that the purpose of the myth of racial democracy was to create marginalized identities.
This is the first of three ways in which this dissertation adds to existing literature. The mulata is the lynchpin of the racial system in general and of Brasilidade specifically. Rather than seeing her as the product of the racial order, she is the genesis and evidence of the racial order. It is from the figure of the mulata that the myth of racial democracy and Brasilidade develop and flow. This is both literal and symbolic. In a literal sense, the population of Brazil increased through the bodies of women, many of whom were products of (forced) miscegenation; mulatas. Symbolically, the mulata acts as Adam and Eve; the “true” beginnings of the nation. Without her, the system would crumble.

Returning to the idea that everyone and no one is actually a mulata demonstrates her importance. If everyone is a mulata, then to a certain extent the belief in mulatice becomes essentialized, ‘in the blood,’ and ahistorical. This ahistorical sense of mixture also helps to explain the relative lack of consensus and understanding of just who and what a mulata is. As evidenced throughout the interview excerpts, no one seems quite sure of how to define a mulata but they acknowledge her existence anyway. The insistence that everyone is mixed, and that the mixture is linked to mulatice betrays the extent to which Freyre’s myth/ideology has permeated Brazilian consciousness. This is the basis of Brasilidade and the jeito of Brazilian women. Thus, the distinction of Brasilidade necessitates the belief in mulatice, solidifying the belief in the mulata identity as the crux of the racial order.

On the other hand, the idea that no one is a mulata justifies a racial hierarchy. That the mulata is an ideal rather than a reality allows room for skin color gradations and other physical and social characteristics to become axes of stratification. Because the
definition of a mulata is so vague, women can simultaneously embrace mixture and reject certain aspects of mixture. While this seems like “choice,” the decisions are made within a larger racialized and classed context. As an example, a white middle class woman may embrace her “mixture” as a source of national pride or to justify her ability to dance samba well. Yet, she will also be clear that she is white, of European descent thereby distancing herself from Africanness.

The seeming contradiction does not disrupt the narrative of the mulata but rather reinforces it. Both explanations are related tautologically and must be accepted in their contradiction because to deny one is to deny the other. What is at stake is not simply a matter of what racial category a person is placed into. Instead, failure to accept mulatice is like removing the foundation of a house of cards. The very essence of what it means to be Brazilian is fundamentally tied to the racial order established through mulatice.

The existence of marginalized identities within this system lend further ‘proof’ to mulatice. The idea that some women are more authentically mulata than others serves to substantiate her as not only real but achievable. To believe that there are different kinds of mulatas highlights the concept that there is in fact a real and essentialized mulata against which all are judged. This pressure, acting as a form of recognition and/or misrecognition, reifies the existing racial order with the mulata as the centerpiece rather than exposing its fragile construction.

The importance of the mulata is not simply in relation to the racial order. The essentialized and ahistorical concept of mulatice is also the basis of Brasilidade. While the interview material shows a direct connection between mulatice and Brasilidade, this
connection is deeper and more complicated than I had at first anticipated. This is in part because the very fabric of Brazilian identity is wrapped up in mulatice as creation myth. Every aspect of what it means to be Brazilian is connected to racial mixture; warmth, openness, rhythm, sensuality, and most importantly jeito.

Jeito, the essence of what it means to be Brazilian exemplifies the second way in which this project moves beyond existing literature. There is an important relationship between mulata as national identity and individual identity. While the relationship is fraught with tensions stemming from questions around the commodified (read: inauthentic) mulata, national identity fundamentally filters into individual identity formation and experience.

The mulata as a national ideal is internalized, embodied, experienced, and performed by individuals. As products of the nation, ideals, images and discourse do more than just influence, they also inform and shape lived experience. The concept of jeito is illustrative of this. Used similarly to the expression that, “so-and-so has a way with children;” jeito refers to an intrinsic quality or way about someone. This makes jeito perfectly suited to express Brasilidade as both are assumed to be natural and innate. And because jeito can be seen, felt, and experienced, it also becomes evidence of true Brasilidade, and by that logic, authentic mulatice.

While all Brazilian women supposedly demonstrate this jeito (everyone is a mulata), individual women express, perform, and experience it differentially. These differences then result in both the reproduction of the racial order and in the distinction between authentic and commodified mulatas. Not only how a body is used and moves,
but what kind of body is making those movements becomes the basis for distinction among individual women. This results in a constant struggle over inclusion, over authenticity, and identification within the racial hierarchy.

This in and of itself, marks a fundamental problem in the underlying logic of jeito. While it leads to distinction(s) at national and individual levels, it is always misrecognized as authentic, natural, and real. In the processes of creating distinctions among women, what gets lost is that mulatice as jeito is inauthentic for all women. As a social construction, all women perform this identity to some extent. The idea that some people are better or worse performers does not change the fact that they are all performances. These performances are articulated and interpreted through race, class, and gender frameworks that are then used to reify those very same positions; or as Bourdieu (1984) notes, a reinscription of distinction. Mulatice as jeito then is a mechanism of social reproduction, misrecognized as distinction and as natural.

The interview data reveal the extent to which women of differing class and racial identities relate to and negate mulatice. However, no one can reject mulatice too adamantly because it is also the tie that binds to national identity. Patricia Hill Collins (1999, 1990) claims that African American women are as likely as white women to “Other” each other, to claim who they are in relation to what they are not. Lighter-skinned women are not dark-skinned, straight hair is not kinky hair, etc. Misrecognition then is not solely an externally imposed phenomena but rather is implicated in internal processes of self-definition and differentiation.
Women who are seen as and see other women as not mulata enough or too mulata create distinctions that often lead to misrecognition, what Nancy Fraser (2005) calls the, “depreciation of such identity by the dominant culture and the consequent damage to group member’s sense of self” (P. 446). This can clearly be seen in the comments women make about themselves such as not being as beautiful as a mulata, not dancing as well as a mulata, or putting others down for being “too” mulata. Distorted self-images are laden with the depreciation of particular aspects of identity. The internalization of such beliefs are acted out on and through specific bodies and their positions in the social hierarchy. Drawing attention to the ways in which mulatice acts as a form of misrecognition goes a long way to explaining persistent patterns of social and institutional racial inequalities within Brazil.

The internalization of national identity by individuals also reveals the extent to which mulatice is a national ideological tool. While women judge themselves and others based on physical characteristics and bodily comportment for authenticity, there is no interrogation of the constructed nature of mulatice. The assumed ahistoricity of mulatice at the national level is evidenced in the comments and criticisms of individual women about butt size, the shake of hips, skin tone, and even the way a woman walks. And yet, if mulatice as jeito is an essence that is in “the blood,” then it makes no sense to criticize some women for how they demonstrate that “inner” essence.

This leads to the third and final way in which this project adds to existing literature. It became very clear to me from the very first interview that the idea of the mulata invokes strong reactions. I struggled to find literature that dealt with the
meanings people attribute to mulatice. And those meanings are varied, contradictory, and complicated. Asking what a mulata is, is only a small part of this dissertation. More importantly, what she means to Brazil as a nation and to individual women demonstrates the incredibly prominent role mulatice plays in identity construction and meaning making at all levels.

The meanings of mulata also reflect the social position of the speaker. For example, white women were the most likely to articulate the mulata in a eugenics-influenced textbook definition of mixture; the product (meaning offspring) of one black parent and one white parent. They were also quick to point out, or complain about, the problematic ways in which the mulata is commodified, hyper-sexualized, and involved in sexual tourism. Lower class, darker skinned women on the other hand, were more likely to be ambivalent about what a mulata is, or even envious of her supposed beauty and innate dancing abilities. What this suggests is that the contradictory meanings that individual women hold regarding mulatice are themselves indicative of the ideological nature of the mulata identity.

The category of the mulata is taken for granted in offhand comments about everything from race to samba to beauty. However, I have found that this category is not actually racial but rather cultural, social, and political. It seems odd that everyone and no one is a mulata and yet that very paradox helps explain the varied levels of institutional, economic, political and social inclusion and exclusion in Brazil. Marginalized groups’ lack access to resources such as education, political influence, and social recognition. The contempt and silencing of such populations only serves to reaffirm the inferior status
of some women and the distinctions among all women. Defining a racialized sense of Brasilidade with gendered notions of nation, the mulata represents Brazil, and yet, is excluded from full citizenship for those very same attributes. Like the body itself, the mulata as a cultural form contains within it both emancipatory potential and disempowerment and oppression.

The production of mulata as a cultural symbol and as a commodified national symbol is particularly troubling. On any postcard, t-shirt, advertisement, etc., the body of the mulata as a sexual icon and/or samba dancer is used to attract tourists and to represent Brasilidade. Both symbolically and physically this has also (re)produced the status of the mulata as a sexual commodity in the form of prostitution. Scores of European and North American men flock to Brazil to find themselves a mulata, or the idealized image they have been sold. In effect, non-white women have become caricatures of themselves, they have become the Mickey Mouse of Brazil. Humans reduced to instruments of national advertising, the mulata has become a culture industry. This culture industry sells Brasilidade through the depiction of its women as seductive and sensuous beings yet this industry is crosscut by racial ideologies that turn non-white women into sexual objects rather than subjects of sexual encounters.

Perhaps most telling is that every woman interviewed mentioned that mulatas are symbolic of Brazil.

N: When you think of Brazil, what comes to mind?
Roberta: Soccer, Carnival, and women are our symbols.
Valeria: Samba, beaches, beautiful women.
Bette: Mulatas!

Elena: I don’t only think about soccer. But mostly when you think about Brazil you think about the mulata, soccer, and samba.

Marilia: Carnival and women in tiny bikinis.

Claudia: Me (pointing to herself and laughing)!

Cecilia: The mulata and samba.

The commodified image then, is not only a tourism marketing strategy, but has become fused with the mulata as myth and internalized by women of all classes and races. In collapsing Brazil into the mulata and vice versa, Brazil takes on a human form and women are dehumanized. Brazilian women themselves perpetuate the very ideologies that divide them, living as and believing in a caricature as if it were real.

By reproducing mulatas as cultural and national symbols, racial hierarchies are reinforced. Purporting to be the land of racial democracy, the Brazilian nation holds up its mixed race women as national icons symbolically. On the ground, women of Afro-descent find themselves stereotyped, discriminated against, and blamed for the sexual objectification of Brazilians. Used as servants, discriminated against in every sector of society, scorned, and commodified, the place of the non-white in Brazil has been as colonizer for progress without the benefits or recognition. The instrumentalization of the mulata as a national and cultural symbol does not change exploitation but rather rationalizes and hides it.

The quote that opened this dissertation explained that even though the mulata is a national symbol the way Mickey Mouse is to the U.S., she actually does exist in real life.
The main difference it would seem, is not that the character actually exists, but rather that unlike Mickey Mouse to the U.S., Brazil exists because of the character. This fundamental distinction necessitates all Brazilian women to accept the ideological mulata to some extent. A source of pride, shame, frustration, beauty, talent, and exotic seduction, the mulata not only parallels but has become the history of Brazil.

Esther: If you walk on the beach here, you see the history of Brazil everywhere. One woman’s butt, another woman’s bad hair, another woman’s thighs and hips. A little part of Africa is inside all of us. This is what makes a Brazilian woman different.
APPENDIX I

Interview Protocol
1. What does it mean to you to be a Brazilian woman? What does she look like?
2. Do you think of yourself as a “Brazilian” woman? Why or why not?
3. Can you think of someone who is an ideal example of a Brazilian woman?
4. What is it about that person that makes them ideal?
5. How do you think people outside of Brazil would describe the ideal Brazilian woman?
6. How do you feel about the stereotype of the ideal Brazilian woman?
7. What race and color do you consider yourself to be? Why?
8. What characteristics does a Brazilian woman have, physical and cultural?
9. How many years of school have you completed?
10. What is your occupation?
11. Of what race or color is your spouse, boyfriend, partner, significant other?
12. What is his/her occupation?
13. What do you think of samba dancers?
14. What is the place of samba in Brazil?
15. Have you heard of the myth of racial democracy?
16. If yes, what does it mean to you?
17. What race or color is a Brazilian?
18. Describe race relations in Brazil in terms of equality, racism?
19. How old are you?
20. What area of Brazil are you from?
21. Have you ever joined or considered joining a social movement for women? If yes, which ones and why?
22. What do you think of the Women’s Movements?
23. What about the Afro-Brazilian Women’s movements?
24. Do you have friends or family that consider themselves to be Afro-Brazilian or Negro?
25. Please list in order of most important to least important the identities you have (for example, gender, nation, race, color, occupation, age, religion, etc)?
26. Have you ever changed your race or color classification? If so in what ways and why?
27. What did you study if you went to college?
28. Why do you tourists come to Brazil?
29. What in your opinion characterizes Brazil
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