Article

'Whose Place of Speech?' Brazil's Afro- and Queer-Centric *YouTube* Channels and the Decentralization of *TV Globo's Telenovela* Discourse

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Abstract: For several decades, Brazil's *Grupo Globo*, which controls radio, TV, and newspaper, served as the hegemonic voice controlling the audio, visual, and narrative dimensions of social phenomena that formed and informed social, political, and cultural attitudes among Brazilians. Of all their divisions, none has been more influential than the *TV Globo* network. Lately, with the popularization of free access to digital media, such as those offered by *YouTube*, *TV Globo*'s viewership has substantially declined. This paper discusses the concept of controlling images to analyze examples of *TV Globo*'s constructed visual image of the hypersexualized Afro-Brazilian female body in the network's soap operas. It also analyzes cases of *TV Globo*'s constructed narrative over another subaltern Brazilian group: the LGBTQIA+ community. Recently, Afro-Brazilian and Queer-centric *YouTube* channels have attracted subscribers by emphasizing content centered on *negritude*, gender politics, and place of speech while deconstructing and de-normalizing Eurocentric and patriarchal controlling images. Against examples of *TV Globo*'s normative discourse of the past decades, the *YouTube* channels discussed in this paper represent alternative mediums for agency, visibility, and unbiased representations of gender and racial identities in Brazil.

Keywords: telenovela; discourse; *TV Globo*; controlling images; race; queer; *YouTube*; identities; gender place of speech

1. Introduction

For almost fifty years, beginning in 1965, one Brazilian media group ranked first as the country's most listened to, read, and watched vehicle for radio shows, news, TV series, and *telenovelas*. Albeit not state-controlled, and dependent on advertisers, *Grupo Globo* would until recently stand as the hegemonic voice controlling the audio, visual, and narrative dimensions of social phenomena that formed and influenced social, political, and cultural attitudes in most of the millions of Brazilian households that consumed *Globo*'s daily media. Of all their divisions, none has been more influential than the *TV Globo* network. Lately, with the advent and popularization of alternative and more democratic (through policies of free access) forms of visual and discursive media, such as those offered via *YouTube*'s platform (where Brazil ranks third worldwide in the number of users[1]), *TV Globo*'s viewership has substantially declined. For the last few years, Afro-Brazilian-centric *YouTube* channels have attracted subscribers by emphasizing content that empowers Black Brazilians. Similarly, Brazilian queer *YouTube* channels have appeared as alternative mediums for agency, visibility, representation, and the discussion of gender identity and gender politics in a country where the killings of LGBTQIA+ persons still rank among the highest in the world.[2] The specific channels studied here consciously create content that deconstructs and de-normalizes Eurocentric and patriarchal controlling images that have only served to reinforce Brazil's social markers, which have inherently been linked to patriarchal views on gender, race, and sexuality.

2. Materials and Methods

This work analyses specific cases of Brazil's *TV Globo*'s use of the hegemonic discourse to perpetuate characterizations of Afro-Brazilians (in particular, of Afro-Brazilian women) and to create misrepresentations (or underrepresentations) of LGBTQIA+ identities in the network's *telenovelas*. Patricia Hill Collins' concept of controlling images, which are "part of a generalized ideology of domination, [where] stereotypical images of Black womanhood take on special meaning" (Hill Collins 1990, p. 69) is used herein to describe *TV Globo*'s constructed visual image of the 'seductive mulatta;' the hypersexualized Afro-Brazilian female body in specific examples of the network's high-budgeted and wildly popular *telenovelas* It also provides a theoretical framework to analyze *TV Globo*'s audiovisual discourse over LGBTQIA+ or other marginalized and subaltern Brazilian groups. Following up on Patricia Hill Collins' concept of 'controlling images,' this paper compares its framework against the centrality of Djamila Ribeiro's concept of 'place of speech,' or one's social locus. Ribeiro's argument is that what one says and how that is said and received by others is directly informed by the individual's social locus:' "*saber o lugar de onde falamos é fundamental para pensarmos as hierarquias, as questões de desigualdade, pobreza, racism e sexismo*" ("knowing where one comes from is fundamental in comprehending hierarchies, inequity, poverty and sexism")[3] (Ribeiro 2019, p. 64). This work analyzes place of speech in examples of Afro-centric and queer-centric Brazilian *YouTube* channels.

Patrcia Hill Collins argues that controlling images of Black bodies are the result of opposing binaries shaping understandings of human differences. These understandings, in turn, are rooted in an ideology of race that is always normative. In her book *Black Feminist Thought (1990)* she explains that,

> in such thinking, difference is defined in oppositional terms. One part is not simply different from its counterpart; it's inherently opposed to its 'other.' Whites and Blacks, males and females, thought and feeling are not complimentary counterparts—they are fundamentally different entities related only through their definition as opposites. . . Objectification is central to this process of oppositional difference. In binary thinking, one element is objectified as the Other, and is viewed as an object to be manipulated and controlled. (Hill Collins 1990, p. 70)

Although speaking directly about Black feminism in the U.S., Hill Collins' argument can be employed to illustrate how controlling images of hyper-heterosexual Brazilian women of color would stand as oppositional to the 'normal' sexuality of white women. Normative heterosexuality also extends to the discussion of controlling images of other gender identities, where "within assumptions of normalized heterosexuality, *homosexuality* emerges as a second important category of 'deviant' sexuality. In this case, homosexuality constitutes an abnormal sexuality that becomes pathologized as heterosexuality's opposite" (Hill Collins 1990, p. 129).

Challenging existing controlling images of gender and race requires a conscious effort to recognize and situate one's place of speech while channeling them into social and political agency. In 2017, Djamila Ribeiro introduced in Brazil the concept of place of speech (*lugar de fala*) through her work on Black feminist thought. Ribeiro argues that every individual has a social locus in the world, a place of speech, and that what one says and how that is said and received by others is directly informed by the individual's place of speech. In her book, Ribeiro establishes a dialogue with the works of Angela Davis, bell hooks, Patricia Hill Collins, Lélia Gonzalez, and others who have challenged the universal approach of a hegemonic feminism and the inequities of its dominant epistemology (Ribeiro preface). It is thus, mainly drawing from Hill Collins' theory of a 'feminist standpoint', that Ribeiro elaborates on the concept of place of speech:

> -our argument is that, from the concept of feminist standpoint, one can talk about place of speech. By claiming different viewpoints and by affirming that one of the tenets of Black feminism is to situate one's place of speech, we realize that

we must situate it to understand the realities that are implicit in the hegemonic normative[4]. (Ribeiro 2019, pp. 44–45)

3. *Telenovelas,* Racial Democracy, and the Mulatta

Since its foundation, *TV Globo* has produced its own serialized melodramas, the *telenovelas,* thereby offering a national product that the network viewers could identify with. *TV Globo*'s competitors relied heavily on imports. By creating its own domestic product rather than relying on imports, *TV Globo* quickly amassed a substantive audience spanning across varied socio-economic classes and age groups. Soon enough, that approach saw the network climbing up to the top position among national TV broadcasters, a position *TV Globo* holds to this day (Meimaridis 2023). From the start, *TV Globo*'s original fictional content would center exclusively on the production of soap operas, known in Brazil as *telenovelas.* As argued by Melina Meimaridis, "*TV Globo*'s (*Grupo Globo*'s broadcast network) domination of the resolutely commercial Brazilian television system has structured their operation of this market. Historically, *TV Globo* has monopolized national imaginaries about 'what it is to be Brazilian' and 'what Brazil is' (Vassallo de Lopes 2003; Porto 2012), however flawed and partial these imaginaries may be (Nogueira Joyce 2012). It has also established a common audiovisual experience around a particular television format, the *telenovela*, and actively promotes the audience's engagement through various media, including dedicated television shows, magazines, and newspaper sections. Engaging with *telenovelas* by commenting on storylines, expressing thoughts and criticism, and discussing programs is a popular pastime among Brazilians, and a nationally specific audience practice" (Meimaridis 2023, p. 2).

TV Globo is one of the top producers and exporters of *telenovelas* around the world (Carter 344). Of the hundreds of soaps produced by *TV Globo* and its monopoly of the *telenovela* genre in Brazil, starting as early as the 1970s and resulting in unbeatable primetime ratings for the decades that followed, no other Brazilian *telenovela* has ever gathered as much of an audience, domestically and internationally, as the period piece *Escrava Isaura* The theme of *Escrava Isaura*, a 1976 TV adaptation of the 1875 eponymous romantic novel by Bernardo Guimarães, reproduced and reinforced Brazil's national imagination over its slavery past. Whatever critical of slavery and the patriarchal system that supported it—Guimarães was himself an abolitionist (Testa Muñoz 2015)—the book's narrative on the economy of the female body explicitly follows racial categorizations deeply rooted in Brazil's colonial history of subjugation and violence against the Black female body. Unsurprisingly, so does *TV Globo*'s adaptation of Guimarães' novel. In the book, the protagonist Isaura's light skin, virginity, and noble sentiments all define and are defined by the disproportionate material and symbolic power carried by whiteness. In contrast, Isaura's nemesis, a dark-skinned young woman named Rosa, the only other enslaved biracial female in the story, is portrayed as a sensual and mischievous mulatta, and with none of the 'noble' attributes that defined Isaura. In the television adaptation, a white Brazilian actress, Lucélia Santos, plays the role of Isaura, while Rosa is played by the late Afro-Brazilian actress Léa Garcia.

Inasmuch as *TV Globo* cultural production narrates the nation (Vassallo de Lopes 2003), its racial portrayal of Black and white femininity in *Escrava Isaura* unapologetically reinforced Brazil's long-held perception of itself as a racial democracy; a term employed in Brazil to imply a mixed-race country bereft of racial conflict. So effective was the racial democracy ideology in molding racial perceptions and social practices in Brazil that for most of the twentieth century, its sway dominated the country's intellectual and popular discourses alike. The systematic racist culture that in the 1930s created Brazil's ideology of racial democracy had, in sociologist Gilberto Freyre, an important ideologue. The theoretical framework proposed by Freyre in *Casa Grande e Senzala* (Freyre 1933) and in his later *lusotropical* theory centers the mulatto subject as Brazil's unequivocal national symbol. Freyre's *lusotropical* theory describes Portuguese colonization as benevolent and harmonious—as opposed to English or Spanish colonialism—thereby resulting in what he

calls the mulatto race. Nonetheless, the mulatto race's validation would depend exclusively and unequivocally on their identity being shaped by white markers: *mestiçagem* and *embranquecimento* (miscegenation and whitening). In his preface to Lima Barreto's *Diário Íntimo*, Freyre describes the nineteenth-century writer as falling short of turning into a "sociologically white mulatto."[5] Lima Barreto lived a short life affected mostly by mental health illness, poverty, and alcoholism. He also was an outspoken critic of racial inequalities and discrimination in Brazil.

Mestiçagem and *embranquecimento*, common denominators for social mobility in Latin America, have shared their roots in colonization, slavery, and the socio-political hierarchical structure put in place by the colonial powers of Spain and Portugal. While Indigenous and Black people occupy a subaltern social position, privileges associated with whiteness are not entirely unachievable to those of mixed race and light skin complexion. Upward mobility, if any, signifies escaping a marginal inferior status, becoming another, and accessing the physical and intellectual spaces representing the 'ideal citizenship' of white hegemony. The literature on *mestiçagem*/*mestizaje* in Latin America ranges from early advocates such as Sarmiento, Jose Vasconcelos, and Freyre, to recent criticism, such as the one proposed by Marshall C. Eakin's latest book. Eakin traces the history of the discussion of Brazilian *mestiçagem* to the formation of *Brasilidade*, or Brazilian national identity (Eakin 2017). Effectively, the *mestiçagem* that privileges light- over dark-skinned individuals finds in the 1895 painting *A Redenção de Cam* (Cam's Redemption) by Modesto Brocos, an early visual representation of *embranquecimento* in Brazil. The painting shows the gradual whitening of three generations of Brazilians. Standing on the left and raising her hands in an attitude of thankfulness is the Black grandmother. Sitting to her right is the woman's light-skinned daughter, holding a white baby, whom she points to her mother. Sitting next to them, a white man, presumably the child's father, complacently looks down at the baby. As the title seems to suggest, redemption or rather 'racial' redemption is only achievable from interracial relations.

While the ideals of *embranquecimento* and racial democracy populated Brazilian thought throughout most of the twentieth century, emerging questioning and criticism of the social structure that served in fact to camouflage racism in Brazil began to arise in the last quarter of the century. Out of the extensive literature on the subject coming out of Brazil and the United States, some cannot be overlooked: Thomas Skidmore for example, writes about the racial realities and racial thought in Brazil after the end of slavery in 1888 and the dynamics of Brazil's "whitening solution" (Skidmore 1990). His additional scholarship continues to explore the role of Getúlio Vargas' authoritarian *Estado Novo* in setting up policies for creating and fomenting a new Brazilian national identity in which the whitening ideal would replace the previous scientific racism protested by Nina Rodrigues and other Brazilian proponents of eugenics. Not missing in Skidmore's precise analysis is a comparison between racial perceptions and politics in the United States, F. T. Twine talks about Brazilian racism under the disguise of racial democracy. Renato Ortiz analyses how the Brazilian government has attempted and (mainly during authoritarian regimes) succeeded in controlling the country's media industry (Ortiz 1985). Robert Stam's work on media representation, including (but not limited to) cinema, of race and the Brazilian mulatta is another pinnacle in the early literature contributing to the debate around the intersection between race, politics, and culture in Brazil which came out in the 1990s (Stam 1997). The new millennium has seen a new wave of scholarship on the representation of gender and race in Brazilian *telenovelas*. Some new authors include Cristina Ferreira-Pinto Bailey, whose work analyzes representations of the female body in twentieth-century Brazilian literature (Ferreira-Pinto Bailey 2006); Jasmine Mitchel, whose work compares how the media in Brazil and the U.S. represent women of mixed race (Mitchell 2020); Cheryl Sterling, who researches cultural movements in Brazil as part of the African diaspora (Sterling 2012); and Samantha Nogueira Joyce, who writes about Afro-Brazilians in Brazilian television (Nogueira Joyce 2013).

The narrative around Brazil's promotion of racial democracy and *embranquecimento* for nearly a century fostered a culture that praised the mulatto person's whiteness while simultaneously negating their Blackness. *Escrava Isaura*, produced during arguably the most repressive period of the authoritarian regime that ruled Brazil from 1964 to 1985, represents a pinnacle in the cultural history of Brazil's serialized television fiction. Controlling images such as those presented in *Escrava Isaura* would have a far-reaching effect: whitening as a desirable step in Brazil's social climbing ladder; and the continued exploitation of the Black female body.

For Cristina Ferreira-Pinto Bailey, the myth of racial democracy in reality "meant the hegemony of a '*cultura morena*' (brown culture) and the effacement of the Black subject from the national discourse." Still, according to her, as she cites Abdias do Nascimento, "one of the very ideas that constitute the core of 'racial democracy' is that one day [Brazilians] will all be '*morenos*' (brown), or in other words, people with olive skin, straight hair, features considered fine, and ideologically associated with some version of Western culture, even though [Brazilians] may show secondary features that come from African or indigenous cultures"(Ferreira-Pinto Bailey 2006, p. 297). To corroborate, Florestan Fernandes, in his critique of Gilberto Freyre's proposition of 'sociologically white mulattos,' argues that "it is clear that the acceptance of the Negro and mulatto is governed by images and appraisals constructed by whites" (Fernandes 1969, pp. 337–38).

From reading the book, one forms a picture of Isaura as 'passing.' But the *telenovela*'s high primetime ratings and its daily visual impact (serialized six days a week for four months) of a romantic white heroine vis-à-vis a Black sensual villain (who were both enslaved) fed into the existing oppositional binary white versus Black femininity. The physical dimension of that controlling image promoted a narrative centered on Eurocentric beauty and body standards. In psychological terms, it promoted positive manners and sentiments normalized as social capital associated with whiteness (or with mixed-race or biracial individuals who, because of their 'whiteness,' could be socially accepted).

In one scene, Rosa and Isaura's heated argument about Isaura's white privileges turns physical. The camera closes on Rosa, portraying her as passionate and violent. Isaura is shown as defensive and contained. In another scene, a group of enslaved people gather around a bonfire. The character Rosa is the only one up. She dances, swinging her hips and attracting the attention of Leôncio, her master. Rosa is portrayed as seductive and manipulative. The constructed images of these two female characters conform to the hegemonic discourse on the economy of Black, white, and mixed-race women's bodies in Brazil.

A year before *Escrava Isaura* aired, another *TV Globo telenovela* captured the TV sets and minds of millions of Brazilians. *Gabriela*, based on acclaimed Brazilian writer Jorge Amado's 1958 novel *Gabriela Clove and Cinnamon* aired daily on prime time, for six straight months, from 14 April to 24 October 1975. Brazilian literature has long been a source of inspiration for *telenovelas*, yet no Brazilian author has ever had as many of their books adapted for the small screen as Amado. Ratings for *Gabriela* translated into enormous profits for the network, thereby making it the network's first *telenovela* for export. It opened the way for *Escrava Isaura* and for most of the *telenovelas* that came thereafter to reach an international market. According to the *TV Globo*'s online memory repository, "*Gabriela' foi a primeira telenovela a ser vendida para Portugal e abriu as portas de outros continentes para a compra de novelas brasileiras*" ("*Gabriela* was the first *telenovela* sold to Portugal and as such it paved the way for other continents to begin buying Brazilian soaps").[6]

The reception to *TV Globo*'s telenovelas—commodified products created at once for domestic consumption and as a product for export—represents more than mere entertainment. In Brazil, *telenovelas* have influenced opinion. They have embodied the concept of symbolic, or soft power proposed by Bourdieu: language is both a method of communication and a mechanism of power (Bourdieu 1992). As such, cultural and social domination represents the symbolic or soft power exercised by empowered individuals or groups in everyday social habits over a group of conscious subjects. The *telenovelas* have been that everyday

social habit reinforcing the dominant discourse. They have controlled the image of the subjects they choose to put on the screen.

Patricia Hill Collins divides the classification of controlling images into five categories. The fifth classification she calls jezebel; which is "central in [the] nexus of controlling images of Black womanhood. Because efforts to control Black women's sexuality lies at the heart of Black women's oppression, historical jezebels and contemporary 'hoochies' represent a deviant female Black sexuality" (Hill Collins 1990, p. 81). Jezebel, defined by Hill Collins' discussion of Black feminism as the image of an oversexualized Black woman, is a pivotal point in the intersection of class, gender, race, and sexuality in the United States. Here I propose extending the term to discuss the Black diaspora in Brazil.

Thus, and arguably more so in the *telenovela* than in the book, Gabriela is jezebel in both the textual and the audiovisual representations of the character. Despite following most of the book's narrative, the TV adaptation is evidently more effective in adding a stronger (and spicier) visual dimension to Gabriela, a young woman of color played by Sonia Braga. Just like in the book, the character is portrayed as innately sexy, and always available. In one of the most iconic scenes, Gabriela, in a playful mood and in a loose short dress, is seen climbing up a roof to retrieve a kite. Down below, a crowd gathers up to watch her, stupefied. The men watch her with lustful eyes. The camera alternates between a high-angle shot of Gabriela's body, a close-up of her joyous face, and a shot of the onlookers. As the town folk gathered below to watch her, so did millions of TV sets across Brazil at the time. Despite the undeniable sexualization of the character Gabriela present throughout Amado's novel, that scene in particular was never part of the book. Evidently, Gabriela's fetishization takes a step further with the way her image is controlled on the screen.

If the sexualized woman of color or mulatta had precedents in Brazilian literature prior to Jorge Amado (for example, Rita Baiana in Aluízio Azevedo's 1890 novel *O Cortiço*), in Ferreira-Pinto Bailey's view, the popularization of the Brazilian mulatta in the nation's imagination has undoubtedly come with the Bahian author: "One image commonly associated with Bahia (and Brazil), both in the national imaginary and abroad, is that of the *mulata,* thanks in large part to Jorge Amado's popular novels, in special *Gabriela Clove and Cinnamon*. . . Gabriela has become synonymous with a sensual, child-like woman of color, willing and ready to satisfy the white male's sexual appetite. . ." Brazilian mixed-race women, inscribed in the discourse of *mestiçagem*, represent one of the many contradictory aspects of the country's myth of racial democracy, as they can be simultaneously presented as "objects of desire, idealized images of the nation, and objects of oppression and violence" (Ferreira-Pinto Bailey 2006, p. 306).

Isaura, Rosa, and Gabriela are objects of white men's desire, but only the pale-skinned Isaura and the brown-skinned Gabriela would conquer the men's love. In the novel as in the *telenovela*, Gabriela marries up-and-coming bar owner Nacib, a Syrian man—in Brazil's permeable racial classifications, a white man. In the book, Isaura happily ends up becoming Álvaro's property. On the small screen, Tobias, the rich abolitionist, and Isaura wed in the *telenovela*'s finale. A happy ending is not reserved for Rosa, who is Black. Her role is simply that of satisfying the sexual urges of her masters. In one scene, Leôncio asks Rosa: "*O que sente uma escrava quando é acariciado por seu Senhor?*" ("how does a slave feel when caressed by her master?"). With a close-up of her moving body and her smile, Rosa answers, "*Sente-se bem, muito bem*" ("she feels good, very good"), adding with a seductive smile: "*É uma honra*" ("it's an honor"). Rosa is another example of the jezebel image because her representation as a sexually aggressive Black woman serves to justify Leôncio's lust for her, "thus providing a powerful rationale for the widespread sexual assaults by White men" (Hill Collins 1990, p. 81).

Reinforcing the discourse of *mestiçagem*, further racial mixing for Isaura and Gabriela, who already are the product of miscegenation, means either immediate advantages or the possibility for upward mobility. Social mobility from the racial mixing of Black or biracial women with white men, according to Jasmine Mitchell in her analysis of more

recent Brazilian soaps, demonstrates the theme of *mestiçagem* as one of historical continuity (Mitchell 2020). With Rosa, the narrative and the images that support its discourse validate the argument of permissive and consensual sexual encounters between enslaved women and their masters. Evidently, these images fail to address the historical sexual violence against the female Black body and the unequal power relations represented by slavery and colonialism. If in the Western, white-centric feminism proposed by Beauvoir, woman is the other of man, then Black women, as counter-argued by Black feminists such as Gadra Kilomba, must be understood are the other of the other (Ribeiro 2019). This is evidenced in the subaltern, yet unequal femininity ascribed to Rosa, Isaura, and Gabriela.

Another legacy of colonialism can be seen in the representation of Black families in *TV Globo's* earlier *telenovelas* (or rather, the lack thereof), where images subscribe to patriarchal and racial markers. In *Escrava Isaura* and *Gabriela*, we either see the erasure of families (Isaura's dead mother and the absent discussion of Rosa's family) or their place as the dysfunctional/abusive other (Gabriela's uncle). Under representations, negative images or the outright absence of Black families in *telenovelas* mark the historical invisibility of Black families as part of the normative social structures present in the *TV Globo's* *telenovelas* well into the 1990s. As Mitchell points out, "by the mid-2000s, the use of mixed-race female figures in *telenovelas*, accompanied by large scale engagement with social issues during the administration of Lula da Silva, presented a potential opening within the racial national imaginary. The *telenovelas* coincided with the economic and political advancements of Afro-Brazilians and low-income groups, yet containing Blackness continued to be the dominant dynamic displayed" (Mitchell 2020, p. 156).

If today *Globo* has made strides to clean up its past discourse and advance a more progressive and inclusive agenda, it has still been a slow process. According to Jasmine Michell, despite advancements that place women of color in the center as protagonists of *telenovelas*, and seemed to conform to the new public discourse on race, that only meant the reconfiguring of the mulatta into a new framework: "as these hegemonic ideologies of racial democracy and *mestiçagem* began to fray in public discourse. . . *telenovelas* frame racially ambiguous women of African descent within national narratives, and thereby fit them into logics of racial management and Black containment" (Mitchell 2020, p. 156).

4. *Telenovelas* and LGBTQIA+

Similarly, *TV Globo's* visual narrative of LGBTQIA+ identities has often shown stereotyped images and representations. Djamila Ribeiro stresses the importance of not confusing representation with place of speech (Ribeiro 67). Representations based on heteronormative expectations imply the impossibility of allowing other gender identities their agency. As agency is indissociable from voice, voice reflects the speaker's social locus. Often, those speaking from a heteronormative place of speech misrepresent or under-represent other gender identities. As such, stereotyped gay characters abound in *TV Globo's* *telenovela* repertoire[7]. Using Patrcia Hill Collins's argument that Black stereotypes are controlling images (Hill Collins 1990, p. 69), the concept will be used here for analyzing LGBTQIA+ stereotypes in *TV Globo's* *telenovelas* (mainly in their productions from the last quarter of the twentieth century) as another form of controlling images.

Up until 1969, the topic of homosexuality was mostly absent from Brazilian television. But beginning in 1970, and through to the mid-80s, the political censorship imposed by the military government as well as public reaction fomented in part by AIDS misinformation, all guided by rigid patriarchal and heteronormative values, contributed to problematizing *telenovelas*' LGBTQIA+ characters in different ways. As is in the case of Blackness, LGBTQIA+ representation in Brazilian *telenovelas* has been the subject of extensive research, both in the United States and in Brazil. Many books and essays supported by queer theory and influenced by the works of Judith Butler, Denílson Lopes, James Green, Stuart Hall, and other gender and cultural studies scholars have been published. Leandro Colling, in his study of gays in *telenovelas*, lists three groups: the criminal gay character, the effeminate

gay character, and the gay man character whose attitudes are molded by expectations of heterosexual behavior (Colling 2007).

Acknowledging the aforementioned studies, this paper limits the analysis to the second group proposed by Colling. As will be argued henceforth, the effeminate gay character manifests as an intentionally controlling image, that is, of comic-relief stereotyped gay characters in otherwise serious dramas. In Brazil in the 1970s, this type of image created performative and one-dimensional gay personas expected to adhere to specific *telenovela* characters: the hairdresser, the fashion designer, and the butler. Their one commonality: being flamboyantly feminine.

The first unambiguous gay character explored by *TV Globo*'s *telenovelas* was in the 1970 hit *Assim na Terra como no Céu*. Rodolfo Augusto (played by Ary Fontoura) doubles as a hairdresser who, during the carnival months, also works as a fashion designer. Both occupations would become recurring images of LGBTQIA+ characters in Brazil's *telenovelas* of the 1970s and 1980s.

The gay butler was another recurring stereotype in *TV Globo*'s soaps. The histrionic gay butler Everaldo (played by Renato Pedrosa) appeared in the 1978 primetime drama *Dancin' Days*, which ran for six months.

Produced during the military government that ruled Brazil from 1964 to 1985, *Assim na Terra como no Céu* and *Dancin' Days*, like all other cultural products for media consumption at that time, were subject to the regime's censorship.[8] Considering that Brazil's military regime was not only authoritarian, but also highly bureaucratic, the regime actively instituted mechanisms to consolidate control of cultural content, regulate the media, and fish out perceived subversives. One requirement to receive the stamp of censorship approval was (besides the obvious absence of politics) the exclusion of any material that would be interpreted as an attempt against Brazil's *bons costumes* (good manners), in other words; what the regime could see as threats to the country's heteronormative national identity (Borelli et al. 1998). Flamboyant and effeminate, but not aggressive, the gay butlers, fashion designers, and hairdressers of the *telenovelas*, without partners or families, were limited by a continuous performance. They represented what heteronormativity viewed as non-binary; the hysterically innocuous image of a gay man. These images reproduced conservative and patriarchal values that were the pillars of the military regime. Yet, however determinant, censorship should not absolve *TV Globo* from creating these stereotypes. At best, they were willing participants in the same discourse of heteronormativity produced by equally powerful sectors of Brazilian society, such as the large landowners and the urban business elite who, like the *Globo* conglomerate, supported the dictatorship. The heteronormative discourse permeated the patriarchal foundations of Brazilian society across social classes.

Given that these two *telenovelas* were not book adaptations, they would be exempt from obeying rigid plot lines, limited characters, or definite endings. Therefore, before airing, screenwriters could make changes to the script at any given time. This format, according to Samantha Nogueira Joyce is what still makes *telenovelas* an open text (Nogueira Joyce 2012). During the dictatorship, scenes would be scripted to please the censors, but they would also swing to the air of public opinion and its reflected ratings. Historically, *telenovela* hits in Brazil have been known to produce daily forums for popular discussion, both in the public and private spheres of society. Thereby, during the military dictatorship, the characters' fate depended on the censors, but their fate was also influenced by the audience's response to them.

In the 1970s, what made Rodolfo Augusto and Everaldo accepted by the public was not their sexuality, but rather the absence of it. Everaldo is a secondary character, the villain's sidekick in *Dancin' Days*. His performativity is non-sexual and thus non-threatening. He is projected as essentially asexual. There is no mention, implicit or explicit of Everaldo having, or ever having had a partner or love interest. In fact, it is the butler's effeminate image that makes him amusing and, therefore, appealing to the audience (as long as that image is not sexually charged). For Rodolfo Augusto in *Assim na Terra como no Céu*, the final episode shows the hairdresser's asexuality suddenly disrupted. In Rodolfo's very final moment

in a *telenovela* that had run for eight months, there is a hint of sexual tension between the character and an unnamed newcomer. The meaningful interaction happens mainly through fleeting eye contact. While the scene is left unresolved, it can also be interpreted as open-ended. Surely it was a daring scene to be included at the time, but being Rodolfo is a secondary character, the scene lasting but a few minutes, and it being the last installment of an eight-month-long production, this short final scene would scarcely pose any serious political or financial consequences for the network. In the *telenovela*'s finale, neither the ratings nor the military could any longer control Rodolfo's non-conforming sexuality.

In the 1970s there were 14 LGBTQIA+ characters in Brazilian *telenovelas* and miniseries. In the 1980s and 1990s, the numbers were 32 and 34, respectively. From 2000 to 2009, the number of LGBTQIA+ characters on TV jumped to 70. All throughout, most of them were male.[9] In the early 2000s, debates on race and gender equality promoted questions about the role of the traditional media in the representation and inclusiveness of minorities. In a study on the limitations of *TV Globo*'s 'progressive' LGBTQIA+ agenda, Nogueira Joyce addresses the "inherent bias of the Brazilian television medium [...] as it relates to representations of homosexuality and homosexual love." The author also compares the possibilities for LGBTQIA+ representation in Brazilian and U.S. television. American television is ahead of Brazil in presenting more sensibly developed and diverse storylines, whereas Brazil has been slow in introducing less stereotyped characters and plots (Nogueira Joyce 2013, pp. 48–51). La Pastina's work on the representation of the sexual other in prime-time Brazilian *telenovelas* discusses the history of gay and lesbian characters in *telenovelas*, demonstrating that although homophobia in Brazil can be traced back to Catholicism, the media has posed a far greater impediment to the development of non-stereotypical images of the sexual other. The study also accounts for the effects of censorship, public pressure, and advertisers on how LGBTQIA+ images appear on Brazilian TV (La Pastina 2002).

5. *YouTube*, Representation, and Visibility

The new millennium has seen a bloom of digital media platforms that proved capable of providing private citizens with equitable access to creating and releasing independent uncensured content. That, along with new recording technologies would result in an ever-increasing array of audiovisual discourses independent of traditional media conglomerates. As pointed out earlier, on *YouTube* alone, Brazil ranks third place in the number of viewers; only behind India and the United States. Naturally, *YouTubers*' engagement with their created content, the incentive for new material, and the audience's reception is a complex phenomenon (monetization being a key factor) and deserving of a study of its own. What this paper proposes is to show how *YouTube*, as a free access platform for uploading content, comes as an alternative to the cultural monopoly exerted by the *Globo* network. Notwithstanding the difference in genres, 'reality *YouTube*' provides the discursive space that fiction *telenovelas* have either refused to address, incorrectly presented, or have been slow in introducing to the viewers. Demographics is also an important element in the decentralization of *TV Globo*'s symbolic power. Younger Brazilian viewers do not watch open TV as often, (with perhaps the exception of reality shows) favoring instead online platforms such as *TikTok*, *YouTube*, and streaming subscriptions. This tendency is not limited to Brazil but seems to reflect a new world trend for the consumption of audiovisual content (Meimaridis 2023).

This article proposes four cas studies of Brazilian *YouTube* channels, the first of which is *Tempero Drag* (which translates as Drag Spices). Created in 2015 by actor and teacher Guilherme Terreri first as a culinary channel, *Tempero Drag* currently has over a million subscribers, with new videos posted every Thursday. The didact format of the videos covers a variety of themes, ranging from gastronomy to politics to society, using a combination of critical pedagogy, intersectionality, gender politics, Marxism, and media activism. In *Tempero Drag*, Guilherme Terreri is Drag Queen Rita Von Hunty. In an interview with GQ Portugal, Rita talks about gender, politics, resistance, and her newfound fame: "The Beatles

are famous, I'm a teacher wearing a wig. My drag has a lot to do with belonging. It's about robbing back all that was taken from me."

Denilson Lopes uses the term '*travesti*' to discuss performativity: "It must not be forgotten that it was through the *travesti*–perhaps due to being the most visible facet of a gay subculture, though not constrained by it–that most of the issues of homosexuality entered the social sciences, particularly anthropology, ranging from the classical studies of Harold Garfinkel and Esther Newton on drag to recent works on the Brazilian *travesti*" (Lopes 2002, p. 130). Asserted in her place of speech, Rita Von Hunty's performative activism is iconoclastic: "All things have a shape. Classes, spine, video, cinema, film, conversation, flirting, sex. Things have shapes. I'm interested in de-shaping them. . . It's about understanding that certainties are stupid, but that doubts are smart."[10] Critical thinking is at the basis of each one of Ritinha's videos (as she is affectionally called).

Tempero Drag gained in popularity during the presidency of ultra-right Jair Bolsonaro, a time that saw the overriding of Brazil's previous policies on gender equality and inclusion, and a new setting of state-sponsored homophobia. Challenging the Brazilian carnival image of the *travesti*, Rita Von Hunty stands up as an intellectual. Her videos are not limited by the discussion of gender or queer studies. She is not constrained by her identity; she has already established who she is. In a display of performative performance, Rita starts the video titled "*Quem pode narrar a propria história*" ("who can narrate their own history?") dressed as Carmem Miranda.[11] She is explaining to her off-camera student Roxelly that all lives are the product of a heterosexual cisgender culture: "*There's an African proverb that says that as long as lions cannot tell their own stories, hunters will be heroes, and that is the same for the LGBTQIA+ community.*" To prove that she is not limited by her identity, Rita, in another video, lectures on capitalism. In others, she discusses Kant, colonialism, and a variety of social issues.

Presently, there are several Brazilian *YouTube* channels by LGBTQIA+ people discussing issues relevant not only to their community but to anybody interested in what is being discussed. Their numbers of subscribers range from a few hundred to 5 million and growing.[12] The second case study proposed in this study is *Conto Contigo* (which translates as I'm Counting on You). The channel has yet to reach the 10,000 mark, but Marcus Moraes, who goes by Marketito, offers content that supports our previous analysis of some of *TV Globo*'s *telenovelas* discussed herein. *Conto Contigo* started in 2018. So far it has posted almost 500 videos. One of their special segments is called "*Armário na TV*," which translates as "Closeted TV." In each video, as the name suggests, Marketito discusses the representation of an LGBTQIA+ character in a Brazilian television show. The video showcasing butler Everaldo in the *telenovela Dancin' Days* includes scenes with Everaldo along with magazine articles and interviews with the actor Renato Pedrosa. In this and in other videos of the segment "*Armário na* TV," Marketito comments on stereotyped representations of LGBTQIA+ identities in Brazilian TV shows of the last century in the context of patriarchy and the political repression imposed by the military dictatorship.

Responses to *YouTube* videos, such as the "like/dislike" features and viewers' comments, represent the audience's engagement with the content of the video. On *YouTube*, viewers can often interact with the content creator, without intermediates. *YouTubers* can go live with their audience. They can also reply to public comments on their videos. There is an immediacy to digital media that did not exist with traditional media outlets. Thereby, it promotes an ongoing and accessible forum for the exchange of ideas. *Conto Contigo*'s "*Armário na TV*" video about the character Everaldo shows about 35 comments.[13] The interaction between *YouTubers* and viewers, and viewers with other viewers generates engagement and visibility to the issues being addressed.

The next case study is one of the oldest Afro-Brazilian *YouTube* channels running and it is called *Papo de Preta* (Black Woman's Chat). Created in 2015 by college students and friends Natália Romualdo[14] and Maristela Rosa, *Papo de Preta* has close to 200,000 subscribers. The channel has posted over 700 videos in eight years. Their statement says that *Papo de Preta* exists to "*dar vez e voz à mulher Negra*;" "to give Black women their turn

and their voice." A recent study conducted a survey among subscribers of the *Papo de Preta* to evaluate the channel's role in the formation of a Black collective identity. The results show that, "*para a maioria dos usuários, o canal é uma fonte de autoconhecimento ou autoconsciência do povo ou de ser negro*" ("for the majority of its subscribers, the channel is a source of self-knowledge or self-consciousness about belonging, about being Black")[15] (Santos Ribeiro 2022, p. 153). One of the channel's most accessed videos is "Frases racistas do cotidiano" ("everyday racist phrases"). In it, Natália and Maristela discuss and deconstruct the racist tone of common Brazilian phrases. Their relatability to their viewers' daily experiences with Brazil's systemic racism has gathered, so far, over 300,000 views and 3500 comments. Djamila Ribeiro sees the potentiality of digital media in creating narratives that come from the subaltern groups' place of speech: "*Friso que mesmo diante dos limites impostos, vozes dissonantes têm conseguido produzir ruídos e rachaduras na narrativa hegemônica...*" ("despite imposed limitations, dissonant voices have been successful in creating noise and cracks in the hegemonic narrative...")[16] (Ribeiro 2019, pp. 65–66).

Familia Quilombo, the last of the case studies proposed here, is another relevant Afro-Brazilian *YouTube* channel breaking the institutional barriers of silence. The channel, created in 2016, was initially named *Família Nutela*, a name created to challenge the invisibility of Black families in Brazilian TV commercials, the most (in)famous among them being the Doriana commercial. The Doriana family commercial shows a happy white middle-class family sitting together to eat breakfast. The commercial became a representation of the patriarchal, white, heteronormative Brazilian family and an example of the invisible space that Afro-Brazilians have historically occupied in the media. As the creators of *Familia Quilombo* explain,

> we began our *YouTube* journey as Família Nutela in opposition to the idea of Família Doriana. The repercussion was bigger than we expected. Three months later, we changed the name of the channel to Família Nutela: a place where we protect each other, we care for each other and where we can build on strategies to exist in this world[17]. (*Família Quilombo*)

They end by saying that yes, Black families not only exist; Black families resist: "*Sim, a família preta existe e segue resistindo!*"[18] *Família Quilombo* is named after the *quilombos*, communities of Black people who resisted slavery all over Brazil. The word signifies resistance, but also empowerment.

The channel has close to 25,000 subscribers and about 130 videos have been posted so far. The creators are Adriana Arcebispo, a social worker and writer; Jones Silveira, an employee in the subway system, and their two kids: Akins (10) and Dandara (6 years old). *Família Quilombo*'s content centers around parenting, family relationships, and the education of anti-racist attitudes and behaviors. Their view of the world comes from their own experiences, from their place of speech.

6. Conclusions

In conclusion, controlling images are images designed to normalize social injustices rooted in race and gender inequalities. Place of speech situates the image's discursive power in the intentionality—overt or subliminal—of its socio-historical loci. Place of speech and controlling images are directly connected to the symbolic power of language; Combined, they represent the maintenance of hegemonic power. In direct opposition to one another, place of speech has the potential for the iconoclastic destabilizing of controlling images set forth by hegemonic power structures.

As has been argued, *TV Globo*'s hegemony in Brazil's *telenovela* genre meant controlling images that for decades subscribed to and reinforced the hegemonic discourse of heteronormativity and racial ideologies. Television hits *Escrava Isaura* and *Gabriela* are both adaptations of iconic Brazilian literary works. The first one forms part of the canon; the latter has been downcast as popular literature. Notwithstanding their academic classifications, these two examples provide insight into more regimented *telenovelas*. Creative license is limited by the linearity and conclusion of each story. Their script for TV is, for the most

part, constrained by the narrative of each book from which they have been adapted. Yet, as has been discussed, each of these two *telenovelas* subscribes to hegemonic narratives of race and gender. They evidently conform to, and visually reinforce, the social discourse in the Brazilian literature of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that fostered the imagining of Black and white femininity in opposition to one another. They also foment, through their representation of the mulatta, a narrative of appropriation in which the economy of the biracial woman's body becomes dissociated from their very own place of speech. Equally important, images of LGBTQIA+ identities and families have also been controlled. That manifested either through stereotypes or through their silence, as exemplified in Rodolfo's and Everaldo's characters.

For many decades, *TV Globo*'s overreaching visual power as Brazil's main form of television entertainment offered *telenovela* representations that were infused by gendered and racialized hierarchies. Their images were interwoven into the audience's daily social interactions. As a result, they would shape Brazilians' social, political, and cultural discussions and interactions with the potential to affect an unbiased understanding of the country's colonial legacy as it relates to race and gender dynamics.

The more inclusive tone of *telenovelas* produced by *TV Globo* after the year 2000 possibly reflects the impact of ideological debates and progressive public policies as important steps in deconstructing the myth of racial democracy. Beginning in the late 1990s, *telenovelas* have transitioned to portraying LGBTQIA+ identities in less confined representations (but the controlling image of the gay butler persists[19]). Yet, millennial remakes of *Gabriela* and *Escrava Isaura* by *TV Globo* have not yielded the expected high ratings of their predecessors. Nor has less stereotyped representations of LGBTQIA+ identities succeeded in securing the same ratings achieved in previous decades. Perhaps it is the audience that has changed. Demographics and mobile technology have made people less dependent on the scheduled airing of TV shows, which, as a result, has translated into destabilizing *TV Globo*'s hegemonic discourse.

TV Globo's *telenovela* ratings have significantly declined in the last decade, despite the network's concerted efforts towards a more progressive agenda. That is especially true among young viewers who do not feel attracted to open TV's fixed scheduled programs and who prefer the convenience of streaming services. Free access to digital media platforms, such as *YouTube* and *TikTok*, makes this trend even more appealing. Millennial YouTubers such as Maristela Rosa and the late Natália Romualdo, creators of *Papo de Preta*, and the Arcebispo-Silveira family of *Família Quilombo* have understood the power of free access digital platforms for challenging controlled images of Afro-Brazilians while affirming their own place of speech. Similarly, *Tempero Drag* and *Conto Contigo*, while challenging heteronormativity, foment debate on gender politics through a variety of themes. These four *YouTube* channels represent but a small fraction of the rising cultural resistance present in digital media and the declining hegemonic control of *TV Globo*.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: No new data were created or analyzed in this study. Data sharing is not applicable to this article.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflicts of interest. The funders had no role in the design of the study; in the collection, analyses, or interpretation of data; in the writing of the manuscript; or in the decision to publish the results.

Notes

[1]   Retrieved from https://forbes.com.br/forbes-tech/2023/05/brasil-e-o-terceiro-pais-com-mais-usuarios-do-youtube-em-2023/ accessed on 3 October 2023.

[2]   "Although transphobia appears in Brazil's legislation as a crime since 2019, the country still has the largest number of trans and queer people murdered in the world. In 2021, Brazil led the list for the 13th consecutive year." Retrieved from https://www.brasildefato.com.br/2022/01/23/brazil-continues-to-be-the-country-with-the-largest-number-of-trans-people-killed accessed on 3 October 2023.

[3]   My translation.

[4]   "*Nossa hipótese é a de que, a partir da teoria do ponto de vista feminista, é possível falar de lugar de fala. Ao reivindicar os diferentes pontos de análise e a afirmação de que um dos objetivos do feminismo negro é marcar o lugar de fala de que o propõe percebemos que essa marcação se torna necessária para enterdermos realidades que foram consideradas implícitas dentro da normatização hegemônica.*" My translation. See (Ribeiro 2019, pp. 44–45).

[5]   In the 1954 preface to Barreto's posthumous *Diário Íntimo*, Freyre writes that Lima Barreto was "poor and obligated, by his economic condition, to be, in large part, sociologically a man of color, with no chance of transforming himself into a sociologically white mulatto." See (Lima Barreto 1954).

[6]   Retrieved from https://memoriaglobo.globo.com/entretenimento/novelas/gabriela-1a-versao/noticia/bastidores.ghtml accessed on 3 October 2023. My translation.

[7]   Retrieved from https://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lista_de_personagens_LGBT_em_telenovelas_e_seriados_brasileiros accessed on 5 October 2023.

[8]   Law 5536 of 21 November 1968.

[9]   Retrieved from https://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lista_de_personagens_LGBT_em_telenovelas_e_seriados_brasileiros# accessed on 5 October 2023.

[10]   Interview with Marcus Leoni for the segment "First Person," GQ Portugal on 8 December 2021. My translation. Retrieved from https://www.gqportugal.pt/primeira-pessoa-entrevista-rita-von-hunty accessed on 5 October 2023.

[11]   23 March 2023. My translation. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Oxt3f9KfAv4 accessed on 10 October 2023.

[12]   The NGO Grupo Dignidade has listed the five most popular LGBTQIA+ Brazilian channels on *Youtube*. Retrieved from https://www.grupodignidade.org.br/canais-brasileiros-lgbti-do-youtube/ accessed on 10 October 2023.

[13]   Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gdq2oPr8g04 accessed on 20 October 2023.

[14]   Natália Romulado, journalist, anti-racism activist, and co-founder of Papo de Preta passed away unexpectedly on 11 December 2022. Retrieved from https://g1.globo.com/mg/zona-da-mata/noticia/2022/12/12/quem-era-natalia-romualdo-jornalista-e-ativista-antirracismo-que-morreu-aos-29-anos.ghtml accessed on 20 October 2023.

[15]   See notes 3 above.

[16]   See notes 15 above.

[17]   "*Começamos nossa jornada no* YouTube *como Família Nutela para fazer um contraponto à ideia da família Doriana. A repercussão foi muito maior do que esperávamos... Três meses depois, mudamos o nome do canal para Família Quilombo: lugar onde nos protegemos, nos cuidamos e construímos as estratégias para existir nesse mundo.*" My translation. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/@familiaquilombo7354. accessed on 20 October 2023.

[18]   Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/@familiaquilombo7354/about accessed on 25 October 2023.

[19]   The butler Crô (played by Marcelo Serrado) in the 2011 *telenovela Fina Estampa*.

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