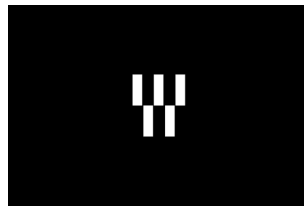


WE ARE ZUMBI

**A CARTOGRAPHY OF RACISM
TO THE URBAN YOUTH**



FRENTE 3 DE FEVEREIRO

Frente 3 de Fevereiro is a research and artistic intervention group concerned with racism in Brazilian society. The group's goal is to create a new understanding and contextualize the fragmented information the general population receives via mass media. The group's artistic interventions create new forms of protest pertaining to racial issues.

New strategies are required to think and to act in a constantly changing reality permeated by cultural transformations on a diverse scale. Frente 3 de Fevereiro connects with the artistic legacy of generations that thought out new ways to interact with urban space in light of the history of the Afro-Brazilian struggle and resistance.

www.frente3defevereiro.net.br

About Cartography By Frente 3 de Fevereiro

Frente 3 de Fevereiro was founded by artists, a filmmaker, a graphic designer, musicians, a historian, a sociologist, a dancer, a lawyer, a set designer and actors. It was born out of this group's mobilization after a real occurrence: on February 3rd, 2004 when a young black man, Flávio Sant'Ana, was mistaken by a thief and murdered by the São Paulo military police.

To us, the murder of Flávio, a young, recently graduated dentist, was more than a mere fact: it was an exemplary case, a denunciation of social contradiction. The idea of idealized racial democracy in Brazil is perpetuated, affirming a discourse that this is a mixed-race country, which is therefore automatically "free" of racism. On the other hand, Flávio's death brings forth the daily racial profiling of a young black man as a "suspect", as a "threat." Therefore, Flávio Sant'Ana's murder reveals racial democracy as a deliberate attempt to deny perverse social practices punctuated by legacy of slavery.

Following this event, the group began to observe how the media narrated the story, and we noticed that most of the time, the racial factor easily disappeared in the news, describing the murder as "yet another case of violence." That was our catch: how to racialize this occurrence? How to expose the racism behind the police's violent action legitimized by a society that is equally racist and violent?

We performed several actions: we built a horizontal monument in the exact spot where Flávio was murdered—a plate on the floor observing the occurrence in remembrance; we pasted posters throughout the city claiming: "Who polices the police? Police racism."

Thus we began our cartography trying to decompose the historical thread that has been rendered "natural" through new social practices. But how are these practices

structured? What are the limits of the slave legacy in our quotidian experience? How can we break free from this logic by inscribing other forms of sociability?

Cartography is to us more than a map. It is writing understood in a larger sense, a stance before the world. We are cartographers when we recognize and organize that which instigates us to act, giving us hearing, a voice and form to our anxieties and desires, poetically expressing and inscribing onto reality that which moves us.

It is not enough to unveil the past in the present. It is necessary to invent new ways of reading and writing our desires, therefore inventing new forms of sociability. Once we own our daily practices, believing in what we feel, we abandon a place of constant reactions to what is socially reproduced. That way, we recognize our historical legacy and move to an active place where we produce new practices, a new logic, and new maxims, always yet to be invented.

“Everything that voices the movements of desire, everything that serves to coin expressive material, is welcomed. All entry points are good, so long as there are multiple exits. That way the cartographer uses a variety of sources, not only written or theoretical [...]. The cartographer is a true cultural cannibal: always expropriating, appropriating devouring and giving birth, trans-valuing. The cartographer is always seeking elements/nourishment to compose his/her cartographies.”¹

Zumbi Somos Nós: Cartografia do Racismo para o Jovem Urbano (We are Zumbi: A Cartography of Racism for Urban Youth) is not a treatise about racism in Brazil. On the contrary, it is an attempt to create a device for dialogue through our paths, doubts and desires. *We are Zumbi* presents a sketch of our itinerary, the organization of a gaze attentive to quotidian experience, constructed through diverse layers of understanding: our actions, poetic manifestos, text fragments, interviews with scholars, research, newspaper articles, etc.

The group’s artistic actions synthesize different “areas” from this cartography. Our focus on urban space re-signifies quotidian elements through a symbolic “detour.” The power of direct action without institutional mediation, and the creation of poetic situations open to the subjectivity of possibilities to build a different future.

¹ Rolnik, Suely. *Cartografia Sentimental. Transformações Contemporâneas do Desejo*. São Paulo: Estação Liberdade, 1989.

Conductor Thread

By Frente 3 de Fevereiro

In Brazil, considered a diverse country, of many cultures, many races, the country of diversity per excellence, a young black man had just seen his fiancé and was walking along a busy boulevard in São Paulo when, suddenly, his life was taken. He had been mistaken for a thief, and was murdered by military police officers tragically, without a chance to respond.

This occurrence would have gone by unnoticed, like thousands of others do, if it weren't for a distinct aspect: he was a young middleclass black man who had recently graduated as a dentist. Nevertheless, neither his class position, nor his educational mobility prevented him from being mistaken as a suspect. Thus a revelation: young Flávio Sant'ana died because he was black.

It is clear that there is a racist slant in the police's reaction, which is evidenced in the expression "suspect of standard color." When we investigate the roots of police racism, and the origins of the police force, especially in Brazil, the police's repressive function becomes explicit, as well as the control of the disenfranchised population, and the protection of the elite's property, instead of the protection of all citizens. The police and the police officers end up reflecting the social organization in general, which in Brazil reflects a strong legacy of slavery.

What legitimates this function of the police force is a sentiment disseminated through fear. This is a "white fear" that in the past was used to keep a large part of the slave population under control—population who was kept in insulting living conditions. In the transition to today's society, this fear belongs to the elites and brings with it the same political tendency of social control, which is only becoming stronger and more efficient. And the suspect individual is a key element since he or she identifies a clear profile as a suspect: young, black and poor. And this profile elicits suspicion throughout the city.

Therefore, reality continuously deconstructs the myth of racial democracy. This myth is configured as a peace strategy and as an omission of a structure of racial exclusion that exists in Brazil. The perversity of this strategy lies in its capacity to internalize the idea of inferiority through self-persuasion, which is constantly reiterated in young black people's daily life.

During a soccer match (Libertadores Cup, São Paulo vs. Quilmes), there was another exemplary occurrence: after a field discussion, the soccer player Grafite denounced another player, Leandro Desábato, for his racist offenses. It became clear at that moment that not even soccer, which is idealized as a space devoid of prejudice, ruled by racial harmony, can confirm the myth of racial democracy. There were heated debates to evaluate whether or not there was a racist incident here, always according to the Brazilian model: only others are racist, better yet if they are from Argentina.

These exclusionary mechanisms insert themselves into a larger context—characteristic of urban planning for the modern city—which classify prosperous areas, associated to all positive ideas, and associating backwardness with negativity. This way of delineating the city, gradually created "exclusionary pockets" which are defined by what they lack: they lack basic plumbing, sufficient public transportation, pavement, adequate street lighting, etc.

The increase of social differences and the eventual growth of “exclusionary pockets,” in addition to fear utilized to legitimate repression, results in the creation of “security bubbles.” They are justified by safety; however their logic is to prohibit, especially in São Paulo, any individual contact that is not based on a power and control relationship. It is important to highlight that, on a daily basis, the disenfranchised cross the walls of that bubble to service the residents as cooks, cleaners, maids, nannies, etc.

Brazilian society is not organized on cooperation, but on exclusion, with an extremely segregated and violent sociability model. Sooner or later this will implode, and will become unbearable. That is what seems like happened during the PCC attacks in May 2006, when the city was split, and it was forced to face the exclusionary zone’s reality in a new power dynamic. Security devices were not enough because the city, with its ideology of exclusion, with its unlivable architecture, generated (consciously or unconsciously) a moment of chaos.

Once again, the dominant elite lost its chance to review this unbearable lack of conviviality and opted for more control, more criminalization and more confinement.

But not everything is part of the “History of the Dominant Practices.” We can identify gaps in the system. In the past, that was manifest in a variety of forms of resistance. Slave protest was always present in the History of slavery. Slaves were always open about their dissent, even much earlier than the nineteenth century. Quilombo² of Palmares is an example. Not to mention the innumerable rebellions—the most important among them being the Rebellion of Malês because of its organizational power, where the slaves learned how to read and write, while the slave masters were often illiterate.

Therefore, it is up to us to bring resistance to the present and to collaborate within its locations and strategies. Going from the occupation of a downtown building by the Movimento dos Sem-Teto do Centro (MSTC—Downtown Homeless Movement,)—which creates a direct connection to an urban *quilombo* on Avenue Prestes Maia, to the discussion of racial quotas in the universities.

Thus everything depends on our gaze and our gestures, individual or collective. We are Zumbi, all those who seek to convert violence in a symbolic resistance towards collectivity, reinventing forms of conviviality into our social practice.

Translated by Alessandra Santos

² *Quilombos* were runaway rebel slaves’ settlements in Brazil. The most famous *quilombo* was located in Palmares (in the present Recife region in Northeast Brazil), which was established in the 17th century. Zumbi was one the most prominent leaders of Quilombo of Palmares.

