

The *Quilombo* newspaper, Abdias Nascimento, and human rights activism in Brazil

O jornal Quilombo, Abdias Nascimento, e o ativismo dos direitos humanos no Brasil

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Resumo: Este artigo examina a importância do Jornal *Quilombo* em relação à dinâmica política que Abdias Nascimento representa, não só como organizador da revista mas também dentro do contexto maior de assuntos culturais afro-brasileiros, como o das relações raciais transnacionais. Enquanto críticos do culturalismo brasileiro como Michael Hanchard (1994) e Pamela Alberto (2011) questionam o simbolismo do ativismo em contraste às estratégias socio-libertários ativistas, as contribuições da revista *Quilombo* neste número especial facsímile são salientadas, especialmente, no que diz respeito ao papel crítico de Abdias Nascimento no jornal. Como uma figura singular pan-africanista que tem liderado a luta pela dignidade política e cultural dos afro-brasileiros, este estudo antecipa um diálogo mais engajado com a “democracia racial”, bem além dos simbolismos folclóricos do hip-hop, samba, futebol, e carnaval.

Palavras-chave: *Quilombo*, imprensa negra, mídia social, ativismo político, e relações raciais.

Abstract: This essay examines the significance of the *Quilombo* newspaper in relation to the political dynamics that Abdias Nascimento represents as its editor and in the larger frame of Afro-Brazilian cultural affairs in transnational race relations. While critics of Brazilian culturalism such as Michael Hanchard (1994) and Pamela Alberto (2011) question the symbolism of activism as opposed to direct socio-liberational strategies and action, the contributions of the *Quilombo* newspaper in this special facsimile edition, are highlighted, especially the place of Abdias Nascimento. As a larger-than-life Pan Africanist, who has spearheaded the struggle for the dignity of Afro-Brazilians, politically and culturally, this study anticipates a more engaged dialogue with racial democracy well beyond the folkloric symbolisms of hip-hop, samba, soccer, and carnival.

Keywords: *Quilombo*, black press, social media, political activism, and race relations.

Introduction: Perpetual Dreams of Black Social Mobility

Afro-Brazilians may well account for 60% of Brazil's population (relatively more depending on how individuals self-identify, especially those of mixed race). Notwithstanding that fact, they are yet to seize political power with the same degree of mobilizing vitality expended to date, due in part to the long history of social oppression, economic disparities, and persistent disadvantages in terms of socio-economic opportunities available to them. Despite having Brazilian-style Affirmative Action laws in the books, Afro-Brazilians are still struggling to take advantage of this new academic disposition as gaining college admission is only the easy part. Being able to remain enrolled and afford the financial resources to buy books and remain committed to education and graduation in the face of an extended family to support, as well as keeping a job, constitutes another challenge. If Affirmative Action in Brazil seeks to redress the unequal distribution of economic resources and opportunities to Afro-Brazilians, the reality is that most of these admitted students are often compelled to drop out of college by choosing daily survival over long term benefits of getting an education. On the other hand, the critics of the Brazilian "quota system"¹ (same as Affirmative Action) suggest that unlike the miscegenation thesis where race is non-relevant to success in a so-called "race-less" society, the new dispensation is actually polarizing Brazil—thus seemingly creating a black and white divide that the laws are supposed to redress.

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In the final analysis, Afro-Brazilians now have the burden to prove themselves as black enough and thoroughly economically disadvantaged in order to benefit from the so-called "quota system"; the same way that they must prove themselves as deserving of the opportunity given them to enroll in the university—while hoping that the education thus gained, would be a point of departure to overcoming institutional racism and redressing socio-economic inequalities. I recall interviewing then Senator Abdias Nascimento himself in the new millennium in Rio de Janeiro: His sense of pride and fulfillment in terms of the cumulative achievements of the black struggle in Brazil when compared to the days of slavery and unbearable flagellation struck me as decisive and remarkable when he proudly made a statement while seeing me off in the elevator within his office: "I want to be able to work on the streets of Rio de Janeiro with my chin up; not looking

¹ For a detailed analysis of the history and social implications of the new quota system for Afro-Brazilians, see SISS (2003).

down; not worrying about anyone calling me a nigger! I am a dignified Afro-Brazilian, I am a human being!”² Analyzing the singular journey of Abdias Nascimento both retrogressively and futuristically in the context of opportunities won for Afro-Brazilians to date, one can surmise that the cumulative accomplishment of Abdias Nascimento lies in improving the status of the Afro-Brazilian from the deep brutalities of slavery to the on-going regenerative daybreak alluded to by Maya Angelou in her classical poem “And Still I Rise” (ANGELOU, 1978: 5-7).

It is against the foregoing background that the legacy of Abdias Nascimento and the import of *Quilombo* Newspaper must be appreciated as a tool of intellectual empowerment and racial equality. When compared to the current age of “yahoolized” social media, desirable vivid inter-activeness, digital immediacy, and global facility in educational access and retrieval of information at the point of the finger while using the latest gadget, we are indeed comparing the incomparable for in the post-World War II context of the case-study of *Quilombo* (1948-1950), black intellectuals involved in the struggle for equality, must be seen as relatively privileged and a rare breed indeed. Education then, when translated into the power of the pen, as beheld by the conscious black journalist, became the weapon of the few to fight domination, oppression, voicelessness, invisibility, lack of voting rights, discrimination, and other social injustices that tried to maintain Afro-Brazilians as second-class citizens toward an uncompromising quest for freedom. This essay seeks to revisit the legacy of Abdias Nascimento in the context of human rights activism and radical racial politics of the late 1940s and early 1950s, using the *Quilombo* as a reference point (among other such newspapers before it) which laid the foundation for what will become the intellectual arm for such social ideals of freedom that the Unified Black Movement (MNU) will later embrace thirty years later. In metaphorically conflating both the *Quilombo* newspaper and Abdias Nascimento as a “magnificent mirror” through which to see the era of black social movements in Brazil even before the founding of the MNU in 1978, I am indeed celebrating, with a keen critical eye on its singularity and challenges, the trajectory of the struggle for human rights in Brazil with particular reference to Afro-Brazilians and their place in Brazilian cultural, pan-African, and political history.

Through his myriad *oeuvre* in poetry, painting, theatre, social-activist and scholarly-pedagogic essays and books, a shared trend that runs through Abdias

² Interview with Abdias Nascimento in Rio de Janeiro, June 2000.

Nascimento's life and works can be summed up as follows: (i) protest invisibility and marginality; (ii) create sustainable visibility through empowering agencies of change and political negotiation; (iii) question racial stereotypes regarding African descendants in Brazil while encouraging informed solidarity with the Pan-African world as well as building alliances with well-meaning white democrats; (iv) seek recognition in the political arena through participation and representation; and (v) ultimately ensure the social upliftment of black Brazilians as a non-negotiable priority and ideal. The bibliography³ by Nascimento is as extensive as the literature review on his works. While critical and social studies abound on Nascimento's political discourses on Negritude, Quilombismo, as well as on the Black Experimental Theater (TEN⁴), not much has been published on the role of the *Quilombo* Newspaper which was recently compiled and published in facsimile form. Despite the accusation of "anti-nationalism" and anti-Brazilianism" sentiments levied against the Newspaper, Antônio Sérgio Guimarães (2003b:11-15) would argue in consonance with the views of Roger Bastide that *Quilombo* Newspaper was indeed responsible for the awakening of "Brazilian and nationalist Negritude" (GUIMARÃES, 2003b: 12), which later translated not only into ideological commitment, but also into the negotiation of racial and cultural identity.

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The *Quilombo* Newspaper: Context, Theory, History

In order to fully appreciate the significance of *Quilombo*, one must assess the history⁵ and state of Brazilian black press before and after its inception in order to

³ To gain a sense of the magnitude of Nascimento's profound activism and productivity, see for example, the Bibliography of this essay for a sampler of published works by and on Abdias Nascimento, excluding, of course, unpublished papers, theses, and translations.

⁴ Black Experimental Theater (TEN) came into existence in 1944 as conceived by Abdias Nascimento, as a response to the absence of dignified roles for blacks in mainstream Brazilian theater. To counter these stereotypical roles, TEN sought to give black actors befitting roles that make them proud as black actors. To gain a full sense of the life and times of TEN, see for example, Nascimento (2004) and Müller (1998). See also most of the plays produced by TEN as collected in a classical anthology Nascimento (1961).

⁵ For the specific purposes of this essay, the limitation of space would not allow an extensive analysis of the history of the black press in Brazil. Suffice it to state summarily that black "press" (even during enslavement that meant oral tradition and non-verbal articulation) had always existed in one form or the other over the course of Brazilian history although the politics of the day determined the extent of the characteristic expression, articulation and contestation of each of the five generic phases. In the first phase, from the 1500s through 1600s, the Drum (*batuque*) and the Berimbau were equally considered instruments of communication amongst slaves. In the second phase, from the 1700s through 1800s, the series of revolts in Bahia (*Búzios* and *Malês*) was a testament to the ability of Africans to organize themselves through such a vehicle as *Boletins Sediciosos* (1828). The third phase (1800-1900) was marked by pre-abolition sentiments which saw the publication of such newspapers as *O Homem de Cor* (1823) and *O Bahiano* (1833). The fourth phase (1915-1945) coincides with post-abolition campaigns and the World Wars which

ascertain the weight of its contributions to anti-racist mobilization as well as its strategic forum for Pan-African dialogue and mutual intellectual engagement. The crux of the issue for such a news outlet must be premised on the bestial state of affairs where the slave, considered an object, is used, abused, beaten, and left to feel less than human. Following the abolition of slavery, that treatment continues even psychologically and economically—a reality that makes W.E. B. Du Bois to ponder the question in *The Souls of Black Folk*: “what does it feel to be a problem?” (DU BOIS, 1994: 10). The social rejection of the Afro-Brazilian from slavery through post-emancipation lies at the root of the need to have a “black press” geared towards redressing such stereotypical and demeaning images of the black Brazilian. Two major scholars have attempted a periodization of the black Brazilian press, namely, Roger Bastide in *Estudos Afro-Brasileiros* (1973) and Miriam Nicolau Ferrara in a mimeographed work, *A Imprensa Negra Paulista, 1915-1963* (1986). Since deliberate omission and structural invisibility are part of the strategies deployed by biased white scholars, Nelson Werneck Sodr e’s supposedly comprehensive history of Brazilian press, *A Hist ria da Imprensa no Brasil* (1966), would omit the existence of a black press. Thus when Roger Bastide in 1973 provided a two-part historicism, namely “First Period: 1915 through 1923” and “Second Period: 1924 through 1937,” it was the first time that cultural marginalization of Afro-Brazilians in Brazilian press would begin to be redressed. As a matter of fact, it took Miriam Ferrara’s study of 1986 to add a third period (1945 through 1963), including *Quilombo*, which is of particular interest for this study.

Intriguing and decisive as the color of the skin could be in the making or the undoing of a being born into a society filled with prejudices and discriminatory practices such as Brazil, the theme of the black press was predicated on that very necessity to challenge the hypocrisy of a country that claims to be a “racial democracy,” while actually treating its Blacks as second class citizens. No wonder then that the black press emerges as a direct response to marginality and invisibility—as an alternative voice to silenced black collective “fenced” away in the *favela* of life where as the subtitle of *Quilombo* appropriately captures, the “problems and aspirations” of Brazilian Blacks constitute the ethos of survivalist spirits destined to overcome the odds of racism and socio-economic oppression. Conceptually, *Quilombo*, as invoked by the TEN group, seeks to be the voice

saw black activism on the rise and produced such newspapers as *O Clarim da Alvorada* (1924) and *A Voz da Raça* (1933). The last phase is the era of political agitation and consolidation that saw the publication of such classics as *Quilombo* (1948-1950) and *Raça* (1996 to date) among others.

of reason for black masses who may not have the intellectual preparation to speak for themselves. It is to the visionary leadership of Abdias Nascimento, the editor, that *Quilombo* owes its existence and its current lasting impact for those interested in recuperating vital moments of black struggle and civil rights activism in Brazil of the 40s and 50s through the power of the pen and the written word. The entire list of black newspapers covering the three periods⁶ delineated by Miriam Ferrara includes the following: *O Menelick* (1915); *A Rua e O Xauter* (1916); *O Alfinete e O Bandeirante* (1918); *A Liberdade* (1919); *A Sentinela* (1920); *O Kosmos* (1921); *O Getulino* (1923); *O Clarim da Alvorada e Elite* (1924); *Auriverde, O Patricínio e Progresso*); *Chibata* (1932); *A Evolução and A Voz da Raça* (1933); *O Clarim, O Estímulo, A Raça* and *Tribuna Negra* (1935); *A Alvorada* (1936); *Senzala* (1946); *Mundo Novo* (1954); *O Novo Horizonte* (1954); *Notícias de Ébano* (1957); *O Mutirão* (1958); *Hífen e Níger* (1960); *Nosso Jornal* (1961); and *Correio d' Ébano* (1963).

Whether it is *O Bandeirante*, which was published in Campinas-São Paulo, in 1910, *O Melenick*, which was published in the city of São Paulo, *O Clarim da Alvorada*, also published in the city of São Paulo between 1924 and 1927, *A Voz da Raça*, (São Paulo, 1933), *Quilombo* (Rio de Janeiro, 1948), *Jornegro* and *Cadernos Negros* (São Paulo, 1978), or more recently, *Raça*, (São Paulo, 1996), among many other regional others, a configurative commonality emerges as follows: (i) the black press needed a forum to respond to Afro-Brazilian issues and concerns of their days and times, which were not being addressed by mainstream Brazilian press; (ii) the black press sought to support black community's initiatives by creating a sense of Afro-Brazilian community; (iii) the black press needed a Newspaper that would project Afro-Brazilians as equal partners in the formulation of a national identity; (iv) the black press felt Afro-Brazilians, having fought in the Brazil-Paraguay War of 1864-1870 deserved to be portrayed as dignified Brazilian heroes worthy of recognition since they have contributed to the process of nation-building; (v) the black press saw in Afro-Brazilian heroes not only national sources of pride but also masters of Brazilian progress and social advancement;

⁶ For a further analysis of these periods, see for example, (MOURA, 1988: 204-217). In his own quadripartite analysis, Moura suggests four main arguments: (i) black press emerges in the context of protest against non-existent "racial democracy"; (ii) black press projects the Afro-Brazilian as an indispensable hero within the constellation of Brazilian national identity; (iii) the Afro-Brazilian rejects the socially imposed mantle of "good nigger" to assume that of a consciously proud black; and (iv) the Afro-Brazilian moves from ethnic isolationism into the political participation arena. See also, (GUIMARÃES, 2003b: 247-270); (SANTOS, 2011: 143-160); (PEREIRA, 2013: 149-167); (HANCHARD, 1994: 104-109); and (BUTLER, 2000: 88-128).

(vi) the black press needed to portray Afro-Brazilian writers as having finesse in creative writing, hence equally endowed as their white counterparts to be acclaimed journalists and worthy to be given due recognition; (vii) the black press needed alternative outlets to expand democratic principles and highlight the social position of blacks in Brazilian life and politics; (viii) the black press, especially with *Quilombo*, edited by Abdias Nascimento, became even more political and radicalized by organizing conferences and coordinating Afro-Brazilian activism and internationalization; (ix) the black press in the era of Black Power and African nationalist movements promoted the creation of landmark journals such as *Cadernos Negros*, which emergence coincided with the creation of the Unified Black Movement in 1978, and has remained one of the outlets for aspiring Afro-Brazilian writers to date; (x) the black press must now negotiate how to move these achievements forward beyond the emergence of *Raça* in 1996 and the era of the digital age which is often out of the reach of many poor Afro-Brazilians who languish in the *favelas* of illusory contentment and dreams deferred.

Even as we ascertain the aspirations and frustrations of Afro-Brazilians on the pages of the black press in Brazil over an extensive historical period (1910 through 1996), it is pertinent to identify specific shifts from one period to the other before focusing more decisively on Abdias Nascimento's *Quilombo*. The first period of the black press (1915 through 1923) produced about ten journals of which *O Bendeirante* (1910), *O Menelick* (1915), and *O Clarim da Alvorada* (1924), can be said to be representative, struggled with the reality of restricted distribution in black communities despite concerted efforts to feature the activities of the same community while accentuating the ideological penchant of black Paulistans as they cope with the painful trajectory of anxieties, protests, hopes, and frustrations—which summarily define the condition of being black in a white society. Objectivity was not completely in short supply for even as blacks depicted the social injustices that are perpetuated by a racist society, they were also quick to showcase some of the self-inflicted ills that may also contribute to their social immobility or of not achieving their defined goals and dreams such as excessive tendency to party, alcoholism, bohemianism, and above all, the tendency to blame the Other for all their shortcomings. In essence, the journals of this period were a balanced mix of moral imperativeness for change while deliberately depicting a tantalizing and precarious picture of the condition of blacks that required remedy in order for blacks to be deservedly integrated into the Brazilian society.

The second period of black press (1924 through 1937) was marked by journalistic and political penchants that were more transparent in the then famed organization, Frente Negra Brasileira (founded in 1931), which was to be responsible later for producing *A Voz da Raça* (1933). *O Clarim da Alvorada* (1924), founded by José Correia and Jayme Aguiar, few years after the World War I (1914-1918), sought to consolidate the mini-journals that reflected opinions of smaller recreational or sporting groups in order to have a more crystallized and collective journalistic and political “front” to address black issues. One quick differentiation between the first and the second phase may well be the fact that instead of focusing in simply describing the precarious conditions of blackness as in the first phase, the journalists of the second phase, took it upon themselves to assume the responsibility of “educators” by using the forum of the newspapers to educate the black community as well as gain confidence in themselves as journalists and writers through association with individuals working in established newspaper outlets such as the *Correio Paulistano*. Another challenge during these two periods was that some of these black journalists had to assume pseudonyms for they could not openly declare themselves as “professional journalists” for fear of losing their regular day jobs. Frente Negra Brasileira was far more organized for it had its own “Editorial Council” with twenty members from whom an Editor-in-Chief, an Associate Editor, and a Secretary were elected. While *A Voz da Raça* (1933) was able to secure a moral place for being black in the Brazilian society, it was also faced with the undying question of becoming equal partners with whites through education and awareness of the white ideal to which they were supposed to aspire.

The third period of the black press (1945 through 1963) would turn out to be the most significant in terms of its linkage with the formation of political parties and the electioneering campaigns for possible election of Afro-Brazilian leaders into public offices in the post-World War II era. This, of course, was the era in which *Quilombo* emerged as an offshoot of the Black Experimental Theater (TEN), also directed by Abdias Nascimento. Miriam Ferrara’s periodization was also inclusive of regional newspapers such as *União* in Curitiba, *Quilombo* and *Redenção* in Rio de Janeiro, *A Alvorada* in Pelotas, and *A Voz da Negritude* in Niterói. Pretty much sectarian in its orientation, these newspapers often neglected issues of the more mainstream order, but instead, focused on Afro-Brazilian affairs and the quest for citizenship. In this context, the racial question became volatile and problematic. The dilemma could not be obfuscated by the official propaganda of “racial democracy” for the reality is that blacks were not treated as equals to whites—hence the suggestion that raising the racial question is tantamount to not

wanting to integrate within a welcoming democracy misses the point. Whether “well educated” or not, whether “well-behaved” or not, blacks were victims of racial discrimination that cannot be explained away with the myopic class explanation alone. The simplistic argument was that by doing away with the “race” issue, blacks could more readily become assimilated through culture and education. And by education, not the one expected to be provided by the public school system but by the family in terms of codes of conduct. For a family still saddled with the aftermath of slavery and the implicit poverty, the challenge of social mobility under these circumstances could only be exponential.

As a counterpoint to the foregoing myopic expectations of blacks to become Brazilian citizens, without any related benefits; that is, through the denial of their black race, *A Voz da Raça* (Voice of the Race) as its title aptly suggests, sought to make *race* an issue. Instead of being silenced by the implicit inferiority in the anthropological insinuations of white superiority through eugenics, Afro-Brazilians embraced the idea of the black race and used it to its maximal advantage as in the exaltation of blackness though the concept of Negritude that was popular in the 1930s. The embrace of blackness also meant the rejection of Brazilian “assimilationist” theory. Interestingly, the motto of Frente Negra Brasileira was provocative: “God, Country, Race, and Family”—thus rejecting or modifying the Brazilian integrationist thesis of “God, Country, and Family.” By inserting “race” within the integrationist motto, Frente Negra Brasileira⁷ and *A Voz da Raça* were proud to assert their identity even as a provocation to the status quo. Even as the racial embrace was gaining currency in the larger Afro-Brazilian community, the black press also had to deal with issues⁸ of sustainability and distribution—hence a mix of logistical and financial matters. The newspapers were destined to a poor audience whom had been marginalized and disenfranchised—hence were lacking the social capital to even subscribe to or purchase daily newspapers. This explains why most of these papers not only had restricted circulation but lasted for just a few years. Such an irregularity of production raises an issue of extreme personal sacrifices to even survive for those forty

⁷ For a detailed exposition of the trajectory and politics of Frente Negra Brasileira, see Márcio Barbosa, ed., *Frente Negra Brasileira: Depoimentos*. São Paulo: Quilombhoje, 1998.

⁸ Michael Hanchard argues that Frente Negra Brasileira (FNB) was not as cohesive a group as projected by the organization especially through *A Voz da Raça*. Though shut down as a political organization seven years after Getúlio Vargas assumed the Presidency in 1937, the group was already dealing with internal tensions such as between liberal, petit-bourgeois, and working class members—thus faced with class struggles even before the advent of the Vargas’ Estado Novo which terminated the hopes of having a black political party. See *Orpheus and Power*, p. 105-106.

to fifty years without depending on rich or sympathetic politicians. The financial struggles notwithstanding, these newspapers managed to survive and were even accused⁹ of being led by a black middle class. Even if that were true, does that justify not having a voice for the voiceless? It is against the foregoing background of the sacrifices, achievements, and even nostalgia for the glorious days of the black press that one can make a better sense of the contributive import of the *Quilombo* newspaper specifically.

Political Dynamics of the *Quilombo* Newspaper (1948-1950)

The *Quilombo* newspaper, an offshoot of the Black Experimental Theater (TEN) organization, was founded only four years after TEN emerged in 1944. Its objective, better articulated by Abdias Nascimento himself, was out to ensure the social mobility and political participation of African Brazilians. Considered one of the most important activist-journalists of his generation, Nascimento states of this political journalistic initiative: “Basically, the goal of *Quilombo*, as its title implies, was to take up the African freedom struggle begun in Brazilian territory by the heroes of Palmares and waged by Chico-Rei, Luiz Gama, José do Patrocínio, Karucango, Luíza Mahin, the martyrs of the *Malê* insurrection and the Tailor’s revolt, and so many others in the African history of resistance in Brazil” (NASCIMENTO; NASCIMENTO, 1992: 38). In the same fashion that members of the TEN group were blacks, whites, and of mixed race, so also were those involved with *Quilombo* as long as the collective mission was respected. Such a pluralistic composition speaks to the openness of the organization towards inclusion. There was no particular requirement to be black in order to participate. Thus, articles were written and interviews were granted by such great intellectuals as Gilberto Freyre, Murilo Mendes, Nelson Rodrigues, Rachel de Queiroz, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Roger Bastide among others. By all measures of assessment, the political dynamics were informed by the quests to influence political culture especially as it relates to the Afro-Brazilian community and their perception by the larger Brazilian society based in part on the legacy of racial oppression. To influence political policies as they relate to inclusion and human rights, *Quilombo*, in its ten issues of anti-racist struggles, sought to promote Afro-Brazilian interests in terms of political participation and mobilization.

⁹ For an elaboration of this critique of the black press and its leaders or editors, see (BASTIDE, 1973).

As disparate as the ten issues were, there was a unity of vision, commitment, and a sense of collective mission for black solidarity and advancement. The context was not only historical but political. 1948 was the symbolic era of the demise of the Axis powers, the fall of Getulio Vargas' Estado Novo regime, and the duality of projecting a racial democracy locally while embracing an Anglo-Saxon mindset with the international world in order to secure economic supports from Euro-America. Black activism had resonated with the white middle class—thus, the creation of TEN and subsequent founding of *Quilombo* newspaper were instrumental in solidifying the aspirations of black uplift and social advancement as a considered response to increasing disparities in racial relations and socio-economic equalities. Despite the contradictions of preaching uplift of the black masses and the elitist (if not expedient) collaboration of petit-bourgeois blacks with middle class whites at the expense of the black masses, it is noteworthy that the platforms of TEN and *Quilombo* set the stage for future black political mobilization such as those who led the 1978 Unified Black Movement (MNU), Afro-Carnival cultural groups in Bahia (such as Ilê Aiyê [1974] and Olodun [1979]) and Quilombhoje [1987] (producers of the *Cadernos Negros* series which actually started publishing in 1982). What all these black organizations have in common is an anti-racist stance; promotion of equal rights among blacks and whites; and mobilization towards a rather slow-paced and often frustrating political participation and integration. *Quilombo* was shortlived due in part to financial constraints that were prevalent with the black press in general, at least in those days.

Archival and memorialist in nature, the semi-hardback facsimile edition of 2003 (published by Editora 34 of the University of São Paulo and supported by Ford Foundation), contains all ten issues of *Quilombo* (from December of 1948 through July of 1950), is 127-page document; with exact reproduction (though more of a magazine weight than newspaper weight); a three-page Preface by Abdias and Elisa Larkin Nascimento; a two-page Introduction by Antônio Sérgio Alfredo Guimarães; a three-page cumulative Table of Contents; a one-page bio-bibliography; and a five-page Ontological Index; the impression left of a curious reader is that of a carefully preserved moment in history that now morphs into invaluable, nostalgic, and archival memory. On the one hand, the extensive list of contributors includes Gilberto Freyre (#10); Carlos Drummond de Andrade (#10); Edison Carneiro (#9); Haroldo Costa (#1); Katherine Durham (#10); Murilo Mendes (#10); Abdias Nascimento (#s 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7-8, 9, and 10); Rachel Queiroz (#1); Arthur Ramos (#s 1, 4, 5, 6, and 7-8); Ironildes Rodrigo (#s 1, 2, and 5) Nelson

Rodrigues (#1); Jean-Paul Sartre (#5); and Solano Trindade (#6), among others. On the other hand, the themes and topics written on, range from the national Congresses and Conferences on Black Brazilians; activities of the Black Experimental Theater (TEN); racial discrimination; mayoral candidacy of Abdias Nascimento in Rio de Janeiro; Ruth de Souza; Frente Negra Brasileira; Grande Otelo; Guerrero Ramos; Josephine Baker; Katherine Durham; Marian Anderson; Cruz e Souza; *Présence Africaine*; Black Experimental Theater (TEN); Juneteenth Festivities (São João) in Quilombo de Caxias; Black Brazilian Poetry; Blacks in Elections; to Prejudices in London; Thales de Azevedo; and Struggle for Social Harmony.

In her own seminal study, *O Sortilégio da Cor* (NASCIMENTO, 2003b: 253), based on the totality of career-long political enterprises of Abdias Nascimento and the organizations he was involved with, Elisa Nascimento shares the original “mission” of *Quilombo* in a five-point program of activities that sums up the needs set out by the organization in improving the validation and dignity of Black Brazilians in social, cultural, educational, political, economical, and artistic terms. In sum, the creation of *Quilombo* was a selfless political mission that will yield concrete social dividends in the decades to follow. In that regard, *Quilombo* was a political agency of social change through the articulation of the racial discrimination, the promotion of self-esteem, the need for integration, quest for social integration and citizenship, and ultimately, the contestation of miscegenation and racial democracy. Only in retrospect can one gauge the implications for having such a dynamic news outlet that changed the political landscape of Brazil as we know it in the new millennium, that is, 60 years after it was no longer in circulation; for while black candidates today can now run for political offices and get elected with the support of their respective political parties, the realities of the 1940s, 1950s, up through the 1980s were not as conducive for black participation and political participation as candidacies of Abdias Nascimento, Benedita da Silva, Gilberto Gil, Matilde Ribeiro, Luiza Bairos, Antônio Carlos dos Santos (Vovô), and recently Sílvio Humberto, have testified (rightly or wrongly) about the complexities of racial relations in Brazil. The strategies and flimsy excuses used to derail the candidacy of Afro-Brazilians from political office are worth examining. Even when popularly elected, it does not take long for them to resign, be impeached, or be starved of funds to execute their agendas; to the extent that, at best, what happens is a consolatory soul-searching that either prompts such candidates or elected officials to frustratingly give up their contest, resign from office if elected, or support other candidates that may have a better chance.

Despite the multiplicity of voices that *Quilombo* offers in its limited ten issues within two years, I would like to focus as a case-study on the political trajectory of Abdias Nascimento himself and his many attempts to run for political offices only to be disappointed until 1982 when he was elected as the first African Brazilian Representative in Brazilian history to dedicate his mandate to Afro-Brazilian issues in the National Congress. It is rewarding to not only assess the role played by *Quilombo* in those formative years but also to configure the lasting impact of anti-racist struggles in the legacy of Abdias Nascimento as a political juggernaut. While it would be rewarding for the full-fledged experiences of the aforementioned black politicians to be written and published; in the meantime, only that of Benedita da Silva¹⁰ has so far been documented. Elisa Larkin Nascimento's *The Sorcery of Color* (2005), to a certain degree, may also be considered, especially in the company of Abdias and Elisa Nascimento's *Africans in Brazil* and Éle Semog's *Abdias Nascimento: O Griot e as Muralhas* as a trilogy of Abdias Nascimento's (auto)biography of sorts.

In the context of Abdias Nascimento's political dynamics, the dual edition (#s7-8) of *Quilombo* presents the candidacy of the Editor as Councilman in the elections in 1950. Deliberate or not, the cover of this dual issue is remarkable in the juxtaposition of a Carnavalesquely-clad bailerina, Mercedes Batista, with the political statement of candidacy by Abdias Nascimento, on the same page. A biographical note provided on the bailerina within the newspaper suggested that she had won the coveted "Rainhas das Mulatas" (Beauty Contest); studied at the reputable School of Dance at the Rio Municipal Theater; as well as enrolled in the selective "Corpo de Baile" (Partyesque Body) Theater School; performed with the Black Experimental Theater (TEN) to the delight of Albert Camus (who requested for an encore); and despite all these professional efforts to surmount racial discrimination, the note ended in a frustrating tone: "Mercedes Batista, despite her notable accomplishments, is completely unfulfilled. She is currently taking lessons in Piano, Singing, and Fine Arts. Her dream is to be able to tour Europe with a Brazilian Folkloric Ballet Group. We hope this dream is fulfilled soon."¹¹ What appears to be a simple cover translates into a double-edged weapon which on the one hand, indicts racial discrimination, and on the other, appeals for remedy based on the potential damage

¹⁰ A semi-autobiography by Benedita da Silva details her rise from the *favela* of Rio de Janeiro (slum) to the Brazilian Congress in Brasília, coupled with the challenges, insults, and racism that still persisted even after being elected. See for example (SILVA, 1997).

¹¹ See *Quilombo* (2003: 85). In the original issue, see *Quilombo* #s7-8 (March and April, 1950: 3). This translation and all subsequent translations are mine.

it can wreck on the dreams of hard working Afro-Brazilians such as Mercedes Batista. It is through such a mesh of politics with artistry that *Quilombo* convincingly conveys its message to the perceptive reader. Interestingly, the cover of the previous issue (#6) was equally dedicated to an accomplished African American ballerina, Josephine Baker, who was based in Paris and who was instrumental in facilitating the participation of fellow African Americans artists in performance in France.

Even more provocative was the editorial of the same dual issue that announced Abdias Nascimento's candidacy, appropriately titled, "My Candidacy," in which he declared:

My friends, collaborators, and sympathizers of the Movement that we have founded in order to uplift the Afro-Brazilian culturally and economically, decided to launch my candidacy into the Legislative Assembly of the Federal Territory. They have justified their gesture with the argument that my election to the position of a Councilman is a natural and logical step in the development of a program in search for means to accelerate the integration of blacks and whites in Brazil—thus ensuring the continuity of our tactics and the most effective and powerful weapon in the attainment of such an existential ideal that liberates black Brazilians from all complexes, emotional tensions, and current socio-economic disadvantages.¹²

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In this succinct "manifesto-like" declaration as well as in the rest of the statement, Abdias Nascimento provides a road map to the conquering of political participation in a strategic and systematic manner. Firstly, he lays out the mission as collectively derived and not that of the candidate. Secondly, he makes a case for the inclusion of more candidates—be they blacks, whites, or of mixed race; for the mission is well beyond the capacity of a singular candidate but that of a collectively determined will. Thirdly, Abdias Nascimento inserts an emotional appeal by calling for what he calls "racial fraternity" in order to fulfill the common future of a Brazilian nation. Finally, the candidate challenges the Brazilian people across racial lines by feigning lack of understanding of what "national destiny" mean. As Afro-Brazilians, he says, "whether in the past or in the future, there is no other energy than that of racial harmony that can fulfill such a quest for our common national identity."¹³ Of course, there is no question about the power of oratory

¹² See *Quilombo* (2003: 85). In the original issue, see *Quilombo* #s7-8 (March and April, 1950: 1).

¹³ See *Quilombo* (2003: 85). In the original issue, see *Quilombo* #s7-8 (March and April, 1950: 1).

for Abdias Nascimento but it is less in the “speech” and more in the power of his message that one often finds a rare and savvy intellect who knows the measure and precision with which to carry his audience along. The back cover of the special dual *Quilombo* edition also featured seven photographs that showcased the event of this electoral launching process; a subtle public relations stunt that showed the candidate in a black suit flanked by whites and blacks, men as well as women.

Yet, as the ability for a black Brazilian to run for office is celebrated, one must also be mindful that the path to the political kingdom is always wrought with many obstacles on the way. In his own assessment of the ups and downs in the process of his political becoming in Brazil, Nascimento laments running for office and always losing in the end as an Afro-Brazilian: “It had always been painful for me to observe the absence of Africans in my country’s politics. This had been particularly so when I read Joaquim Nabuco’s statement that Africans alone had built the nation (...) I tried to change black people’s political image. I ran for office several times, for the Federal District City Council, for State and Federal Representative. I ran on different party tickets but always lost” (NASCIMENTO; NASCIMENTO, 1992: 38-39). The question of absence of a presence must be understood as a deliberate process of exclusion. The frustration shared by Abdias Nascimento was enough for the average activist to give up; the same way that many efforts at promoting Afro-Brazilian affairs in arts and politics have often been faced with structural and political barriers. Thus that some of the newspapers even lasted a couple of years is an accomplishment worthy of celebration. It is this stoic resistance against all odds that has brought Afro-Brazilians to the present point in their cultural and political journey.

A further probe into Nascimento’s political career reveals further a catalogue of disappointments along the course of Brazilian political history, even till the time of his death. The excuses were innumerable and multiple. From the demand to have his police records “cleaned” of questionable files that identify him with some organizations that his Social Labor Party could not overlook; delays from the court even after winning a “security clearance” to contest elections; to the Brazilian Labor Party (PTB) of Guanabara State in which the Steering Committee removed him from the ballot and ticket. In the final analysis, it was discovered that the “issue” was because of his Integralist past to which Abdias Nascimento angrily responds: “In that sack of cats that was the PTB, there had never been any ideological coherence” (NASCIMENTO; NASCIMENTO, 1992:

39). As Nascimento was fully aware, these political parties were all fraudulent when it came to black candidates. In trying to run on the more conservative party such as the Social Democratic Party (PSD), the candidate found his candidacy equally derailed. The persistent black candidate even tried the Brazilian Socialist Party (PSB) as well as Brazilian Labor Party (PTB) before going into exile, during which he came up with a slogan: “Don’t vote white, vote Black: Abdias Nascimento” (NASCIMENTO; NASCIMENTO, 1992: 40)—only to attract just a thousand votes. Still on the dual edition of *Quilombo* (#7-8), a small column provides the narrative to the photographs on the back page of the issue as if recapturing the celebratory moments of launching the candidacy of Abdias Nascimento for councilmanship in Rio de Janeiro. In this short piece, the write up insisted in conveying the fact that those present at the event represented the entire Rio community beyond race, class, and gender; thus comprising of laborers, university professors, and writers (local and global). The renowned Brazilian sociologist, Professor Guerreiro Ramos referred to Abdias Nascimento as a “man of action,” and a “philosopher,” who will represent not just black Brazilians but all Brazilians. Indeed, the summation of the piece was that: “The candidacy of Abdias neither implies any racial discrimination nor a racial problem, but indeed, the recognition of the contribution of Blacks in the various sectors of Brazilian life. To value all human life regardless of their color is to appreciate what it means to be Brazilian.”¹⁴

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My deliberate focus on Abdias Nascimento in the foregoing dual issue may give the wrong impression that the entire piece was all about the Editor which is not the case. The 12-page issue may actually be grouped into five main themes: (i) Black Achievements in General; (ii) Activities of Black Experimental Theater (TEN); (iii) Blacks Launching Election Campaigns; (iv) Racial Democracy; and (v) Activities of Blacks in Other Parts of the World such as in the United States and France. What this case-study provides to the curious reader is a synergetic balance between art and politics. The idea to start *Quilombo* must be contextualized within the question of lacking objective coverage, distortion, or denigration of the efforts of the Black Experimental Theater (TEN) to make a difference as it agitated for social change in the appalling contradictions of Brazilian society that preached racial democracy while at the same time discriminating against black Brazilians. When *Quilombo* emerged in 1948, four years after TEN was founded (1944), the theatrical and political organization needed not worry

¹⁴ See *Quilombo* (2003: 92). In the original issue, see *Quilombo* #s7-8 (March and April, 1950: 10).

any longer about distortion of its political goals and mission since it now had a communication arm to promote its ideals. At the same time, *Quilombo* was competing with a more mainstream newspaper such as *O Globo* or a news outlet such as *Veja* magazine with wider national distribution. In his own self-critical assessment of TEN's activities, Nascimento admits that the conscious outreach to white and black elites was a misplaced strategy for in the final analysis, "the white ruling classes control the means of recognition and prestige. So we circulated in surroundings that were not exactly our own, using the language and the contacts of people who not only exploit Africans economically, but ignore and despise our culture" (NASCIMENTO & NASCIMENTO, 1992: 42). Any society that treats members of the same society as less than equal can expect some form of political agitation to redress such an alienating state of affairs. The Black Experimental Theater (TEN) as well as *Quilombo* as directed by Abdias Nascimento, may not have accomplished with the same speed what the US Civil Rights efforts through the *Chicago Defender*, the *Pittsburg Courier*, the *Amsterdam News*, and *Negro World*, among others achieved. Yet, the credit of emerging human rights in Brazil of the new millennium must be given, no doubt, to the fortitude of such heroic figures as Zumbi, Luiz Gama, and Abdias Nascimento, who chose to stand up against social injustices at a time when it was life-threatening to do so.

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Beyond the case study on the political dynamics of Abdias Nascimento in relation to *Quilombo* and the rest of the political career of the Pan-Africanist, a cursory examination of the rest of the issues is appropriate. In its multivalent function as an educational tool, consciousness-raising weapon, instrument of political agitation, platform for socio-cultural awareness, and ultimately, a vehicle for political empowerment and inclusion through demands for anti-racist remedies, *Quilombo* constitutes a liberational strategy for the mobilization of hitherto lethargic Afro-Brazilian spirits who are collectively marginalized, disenfranchised, and disempowered. Surrounding itself with a mix of black and white intellectuals, coupled with those with passionate commitment for the betterment of the lives of the downtrodden, especially black Brazilians, *Quilombo* sets forth the following non-negotiable programs of action: (i) Collaborate in raising the awareness that there are neither superior races nor natural servitude as we are taught in theology, sciences, and philosophy; (ii) Clarify to Blacks that slavery was only a historical phenomenon that has now been abolished and overcome and no deprivations based on the skin color should remind him or her of this ignominious

past; (iii) Struggle to ensure that while education at all levels is not yet free, Afro-Brazilian students should be admitted as wards of the State in all educational establishments and at all levels—whether public, private, or military; (iv) Combat racial and color prejudices which should be deemed contrary to all Christian, Civilizational, and constitutional principles; Agitate for the provision of a law that criminalizes racial discrimination as it is legalized in some states in the United States as well as in the Cuban Constitution of 1940 (NASCIMENTO, Elisa 2003b: 253). With such well-defined objectives, the newspaper (or more appropriately a monthly periodical) adopts a highly technical quality for that time, coupled with a mix of images, artistic renditions, photographs, and the articles themselves.

Structurally, *Quilombo* published a mix of special sections, announcements of graduations, short news items, full features, as well as consistent columns. Frequently, articles in French or English were translated into Portuguese as was the case with the seminal essay by Jean Paul Sartre, “Orphée Noire” (Preface to an anthology of Black African poetry organized by Léopold Senghor in 1948) which was translated as “Orfeu Negro” given its foundational significance to the Negritude movement. Strategically, *Quilombo* equally promoted the policy of alliances and the inclusion of black, white, and mixed raced collaborators—hence the strategy of “color-blind” collaboration, geared towards maximizing the contribution of sympathetic white financiers and intellectuals. Very frequently, the issues that are recurrent on the pages of *Quilombo* included the following: (i) Racial Democracy; (ii) Black Congresses and Conferences; (iii) Racism, Discrimination, and Invisibility; (iv) Pan-African Conscious and International Recognition; (v) Education, Racial Pride, and Self-Esteem; (vi) Political Agitation for Racial Equality and Political Participation; (vii) Promotion of Black Achievement; and (viii) Activities of Black Experimental Theater (TEN). In this regard, *Quilombo* became an agency for the agitation and fulfillment of the aspirations of Afro-Brazilians as they became more aware of their own values and vitality through education. Simultaneously, *Quilombo* also became a tool of equally educating the rest of Brazil about rich African culture in the New World which had continued to be bastardized by the uninformed and stereotypical mindset of a racist society. It is thus quite interesting to see Gilberto Freyre¹⁵

¹⁵ See Gilberto Freyre, “Democracia Racial: A Atitude Brasileira,” *Quilombo* 1 (December 9, 1948), 8; In the 2003 facsimile edition, see page 27.

and Arthur Ramos¹⁶ publish in *Quilombo*; one speaking in favor of “ethnic democracy” and the other refuting the racist and scientific theories of racial inferiority as well as the pathological degeneration of the mixed race individual.

Yet, it would not be the racial question alone that preoccupied *Quilombo*. National congresses and conferences were some of the major events that consolidated the aspirations of Afro-Brazilians on the pages of the periodical while equally fuelling anti-racist mobilization in a coordinated and systematic fashion. Even before the emergence of *Quilombo* in 1948, a few conventions had taken place such as the *Convenção Nacional Negro* (São Paulo, 1945), and the *Convenção Política do Negro Brasileiro* (Rio de Janeiro, 1945). With the creation of *Quilombo* in 1948, the *Conferência Nacional do Negro* (Rio de Janeiro, 1949) coincided with the already active newspaper and was able to take advantage of the outlet to promote the event. Albeit, the *Congresso do Negro Brasileiro I* (Rio de Janeiro, 1950) was the most significant in terms of the breadth and depth of its agendas, namely, History, Social Life, Religious Survivals, Folkloric Survivals, Language and Aesthetics of Black Brazilians.¹⁷ Another event post-*Quilombo*, *Estudos sobre o Negro* (Rio de Janeiro, 1955), also gathered prominent figures and activists, while generating dialogue on the future of Afro-Brazilian life. As a totality, these mobilizing events served as a strategic platform to ponder the directions of Afro-Braziliana and the paradigmatic essences of the emerging new identity of the Afro-Brazilian faced with hegemonic political forces that continued to marginalize Afro-Brazilians. *Quilombo* was thus a formidable arm of combat that had forthright black leadership while leaning on white alliances to fulfill its ideological objectives of inclusive politics.

Conclusion

In the course of this essay, I laid out the significance of the *Quilombo* newspaper in relation to the political dynamics that Abdias Nascimento represents as its editor and in the larger frame of Afro-Brazilian affairs in transnational race relations. While there were palpable contradictions in terms of the inevitable collaboration with whites as a strategic alliance to reach complex political goals, critics of Brazilian culturalism (as

¹⁶ See Arthur Ramos, “Democracia Racial: A mestiçagem no Brasil,” *Quilombo* 2 (May 9, 1949), 8; In the 2003 facsimile edition, see page 34.

¹⁷ For further elaboration and analysis of these congresses, see for example, (NASCIMENTO, 1982).

opposed to uncompromising political agitation for freedom) among whom are Michael Hanchard (1994) and Pamela Alberto (2011) may be rather too harsh in understanding the painful realities on the ground and the subtle exigencies engendered by racial democracy paradox in terms of constant yet elusive negotiations. In re-assessing the contributions of the *Quilombo* newspaper in its special facsimile edition, one can surmise that its existence paved the way for the growing visibility of Black Brazilian political leaders even though there is still a long way to go to reach the ultimate political kingdom of racial, economic, social, and political equality. It took a “magnificent mirror” with the stature and commitment like that of Abdias Nascimento to lead such a radical quest for true democracy in Brazil. Now that he has joined the ancestors by morphing into nostalgic memory, there may never be another like him. He was larger than life itself. One can only hope that generations after him will do more than dance samba, play soccer, and entertain the Other while cultural and political exploitation continues unabated in the vicious cycle of Carnivals for the living-dead.

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