

TEORIA E MÉTODOS EM ANTROPOLOGIA

TEXTOS AULA 7

what I would suggest is a more conscious and objective awareness of the fact that blackness is constructed through the shared experience of discrimination and prejudice and is thus a product of oppression. It is in this latter sense, especially, that the discourse on race disavows the platitudes of *democracia racial*.

These metadiscursive narratives are theoretically appropriate for the additional reason that the discourse on race is neither a totalizing nor even a dominant one but is, in places like Morro do Sangue Bom, subterranean. Its reality as both a kind of hidden discourse and a cultural vision, I believe, is fully illustrated by the consistent way in which my informants deconstructed their own language. The employment of euphemisms in the service of a universally understood etiquette, the often conscious manipulation of semantic ambiguity, and the desire to eschew references to blackness were all framed as forms of linguistic agency that in one sense or another comment on the implicit understanding that "there are only two races."

As will be seen in the following chapter, all of the discourses I have described are embedded within a larger arena in which silence, rather than talk, is most evident. *Democracia racial*—whether we call it a myth, an ideology, a discourse, or a dream—is a fragile dam that requires careful tending. As this chapter suggests, people in Morro do Sangue Bom participate in its upkeep through their everyday talk, even as they sometimes undermine, in quiet and subterranean ways, its foundation.

Sheriff 2001

Chapter 3

Silence

Racism and Cultural Censorship

AFTER SPENDING FIVE and a half months in Brazil in 1940 and 1941, the African American sociologist E. Franklin Frazier wrote, "There is in Brazil, little discussion of the racial or color situation. It appears that there is an unexpressed understanding among all elements in the population not to discuss the racial situation, at least as a contemporary phenomenon" (qtd. in Hellwig 1992, 131). More than half a century later, Frazier's observation remains essentially accurate. While some scholars and black movement militants have been developing sociological analyses of racism and espousing antiracist discourses since at least the 1930s, their numbers remain small and the contexts in which these discourses are articulated continue to be extremely limited. The discussion of issues related to racial prejudice and discrimination in everyday discourse is, relatively speaking, a rarity, and this appears to be true, as Frazier noted, of all colors and social classes in Brazil.

In the discourses of *democracia racial*, the lack of talk about racism in Brazil is taken as *prima facie* evidence that racial prejudice and discrimination, as a set of social and/or political problems, are not significant enough to provoke discussion. Observations such as Frazier's are regarded, moreover, as ethnocentric judgments, made because North Americans obsess over their own dilemma to such a degree that they fail to understand that no such dilemma exists for Brazilians.

Although Frazier himself appears to have been partly swayed by this argument (see Hellwig 1992), his comment does more than simply underline the

political and sociological differences between Brazil and the United States. In referring to unexpressed understandings, he suggests if not censorship (which did, in fact, occur during the military dictatorship of the 1970s) then a kind of tacit, unexamined, and yet deeply pervasive etiquette of silence. This silence, I want to argue, is meaningful; it is not merely a lack of talk or an unmarked absence, as has been suggested, but a perceptible lacuna within discourse.

"The law for the negro is to keep his mouth shut," Dona Janete told me one day when we were talking about the fact that she and others in her community were acutely aware of racism but rarely, if ever, spoke of it. What required explanation, and the question at the center of this chapter, is why did Dona Janete, by her own admission, decide not to talk about the realities of racism with her sons, her husband, and the many friends she had in the community? This silence, as I will argue, is best conceptualized as a form of cultural censorship that has deep roots not only in the specious claims of democracia racial but also in the psychology of oppression.

Theoretical Treatments of Silence

Silence represents a particularly difficult puzzle, both in the realm of ethnography and in theory building.¹ In the social sciences, it tends to be discussed in relation to one of two issues: the macro level of discourse (or the lack of discourse) in public domains and the micro level of sociolinguistics and the analysis of speech acts. In the former case, discussions of silence usually center on censorship. While censorship is sometimes used in a metaphorical sense (see, for example, Bourdieu 1991), it typically refers to the enforcement of silence by identifiable agents, usually the state and/or its representatives. Censorship is defined as a primary means by which states control opposition and resistance. As one writer has remarked, "A kind of macro silence of oppression is a desirable state for all power groups that are afraid that the mere expression and exchange of opinions or the free flow of information will threaten the existing status quo" (Jaworski 1993, 115). Theories of enforced censorship, however, cannot account for the maintenance of silence in the apparent absence of censors, identifiable agents who police discourse and punish infractions against an official code.

A number of writers have used the concept of linguistic domination to account for the silence of subordinate groups. In Bourdieu's vision, for example, dominance and power are exercised through the unequal distribution of "linguistic legitimacy" and "competence," which are defined as the forms and styles of speech practiced by the dominant group (1991, 71-72). Bourdieu emphasizes the notion that direct control of the speech of subordi-

nate groups is rarely necessary, for the members of such groups share the beliefs, assumptions, and values of the linguistic markets in which their speech is (negatively) judged.

The most fully developed work on muted or silent groups remains that of feminist sociolinguists. At the macro level of analysis, a number of writers have focused on women's limited access to the arenas of public discourse, their internalization of beliefs about the inadequacy of girls' and women's speech, and the historically entrenched unofficial censorship of women's political criticism (see, for example, Harding 1975; Houston and Kramarae 1991; Lakoff 1975; McConnell-Ginet et al. 1980; Thorne and Henley 1975). Houston and Kramarae note that "silencing is used to isolate people disempowered by their gender, race, and class, even in the speaking contexts of their daily lives" (1991, 338).

Silence that is embedded within conversation has been examined by sociolinguists, who assert that it is, in some contexts at least, a communicative act. As one writer has noted for such occasions, "similar inferencing processes are employed to interpret the meaning of what is not spoken as in interpreting what is said" (Saville-Troike 1985, 7). In a perceptive analysis of silence among the Italian families he studied, George Saunders argues that silence is one of two expressive styles. Drawing on the anthropology of emotions, he writes that "silence may be an indication of conflicting or problematic emotions, emotions which must be monitored, controlled, or inhibited in expression because of their potential consequences" (1985, 175; see also, Basso 1970, 1979). In ethnographic studies such as these, silence is seen as a code choice similar to that assumed to operate in linguistic production.

An additional, more recently elaborated area of scholarship that may bear a relationship to silence is that which focuses on history and the production of social memory. As a number of scholars have noted, the production of social memory is anything but a neutral process. Discussions of history and memory suggest an overlap with the issue of silence in that social memory, as a politically motivated representation of the past, presupposes the coexistence of forms of collective forgetting or, in the terms I am outlining here, of lacunae within discourse. As one writer has observed, "As remembering is a social act, so too is forgetting. The contemporary landscape of memory is created through the modern *ars memoria*, which involve not so much feats of hypermnesia as of strategic forgetting" (Kirmayer 1996, 191). In a similar vein, another writer has remarked, "The absence of memory is just as socially constructed as memory itself, and with an equally strong intervention of morally and ideologically grounded claims to truth" (Irwin-Zareka 1994, 116). In *Between History and Histories: The Making of Silences and Commemorations*

(Sider and Smith 1997), Sider has provocatively argued that the "creation of culture is also, simultaneously and necessarily, the creation of silence . . . we can have no significant understanding of any culture unless we know the silences that are were *institutionally* created and guaranteed along with it" (1997, 74–75, emphasis in original).

All of these works articulate a general recognition of the fact that various sorts of patterned silences play roles in constructing the shape of social and political life; and, to differing degrees, they suggest a set of theoretical questions that partly overlap with those that motivate my discussion of silence in Morro do Sangue Bom. The silences they describe, however, differ in fundamental ways from the silence my informants practice. This chapter is primarily concerned with the fact that people in Morro do Sangue Bom tend to refrain from discussions of racism even in the contexts of community and family—in those places, in other words, where state-sponsored surveillance and coercion are absent. Poor Brazilians of African descent do not represent a silent or muted group in the sense described by feminist sociolinguistics because as working-class people they often speak volubly about the injustice of poverty. Their silence is highly specific rather than totalizing.

The silence that surrounds the issue of racism in Morro do Sangue Bom (and in Brazil generally) is properly conceptualized, I would argue, as cultural censorship. Although there are meaningful, even profound psychological motivations underlying my informants' silence, the censorship is socially shared, the rules for its observance are culturally codified. As will be seen in chapter 6, in which I discuss middle-class whites, the cultural censorship surrounding racism in Brazil crosses social boundaries. It is not, however, seamless. Different groups in Brazil—particularly those as divided as poor Brazilians of African descent are from middle-class whites—have markedly different interests at stake in the suppression of talk about racism.

This chapter focuses on how people in Morro do Sangue Bom account for the silence they practice in their own community. Although, according to the familiar literary tropes, "silence is palpable" or "pregnant with meaning," it is, in and of itself, difficult to describe in ethnographic terms. As was the case in the previous chapter, then, my discussion of cultural censorship relies, to a great degree, on metadiscourse: the ways in which informant's acknowledge, frame their explanations for, and describe the experience of silence.

Accounts of Silence in Morro do Sangue Bom

As I have noted in the first chapter, I rarely heard impromptu discussions of racism in everyday conversations in Morro do Sangue Bom, particularly dur-

ing the early months of my fieldwork. Later, when I conducted in-depth interviews with people, the issue of the lack of talk about racism, as well as the denial of racism, was often broached not by myself but by informants. When it was not, I asked direct questions about the issue. For example, after informants described personal experiences that involved racism, I often asked them if they had recounted these same experiences to others, such as friends and family. Much of what follows is based not on silence itself but on informants' comments about and descriptions of silence and their accounts of why people "don't want to talk about it" and choose to *ficar calado*, or stay silent.²

Very few of my informants in Morro do Sangue Bom told me that they tended to discuss racism, even with their intimate associates. Yvonne, for example, was typical in her assertion that the issue was not discussed within her family; yet, atypically, she told me that she and her friends sometimes conversed about it. The manner in which she framed her comments is instructive: "No. You know why, Beth? Because I don't dwell on it. (*Eu não ligo.*) But also because [in my family] we almost never talked about it. Oh, but with friends I have. . . . I have [other] friends also, who live nearby, who talk a lot about this, right? And they always think that it really exists, this horrible prejudice, here in Brazil, and that it's never going to end."

When Yvonne says that she and her friends discuss racism, she points out that "they always think that it really exists." Yvonne's allusion to a cultural argument that centers directly on the question of whether or not racism truly exists in Brazil was immediately familiar to me, for it framed so many of the comments that people provided in response to my questions. While this may have been partly due to the way I often posed my questions, this initial framing of the issue would continue to dominate people's narratives—particularly their comments about silence—long after it was conversationally established that I was entirely persuaded by the authority of their claims and had responded to their narration of painful experiences.

After Jonas, a man in his late twenties, spoke with considerable frustration about his experiences with racism, I asked him if his friends tended to recount similar experiences to him. He responded rather curtly, "Some tell what happens; some don't tell. It's like I already told you, the subject is rarely touched on, but I believe [racism] exists." The comments of Analucia show a similar concern to carefully assert the reality of racism while acknowledging the silence surrounding it. She had finished telling me the story that I describe in the previous chapter, in which several white women, believing that Analucia was white also, made racist comments about a black man. Analucia scolded them. I asked her if any of the other people present who had witnessed the exchange had said anything to her after the confrontation, either

in support or refutation of her angry comments: "No, they stayed silent. I mean, it's like that Beth. It's concealed, but there is racism. Here in Brazil, it will never end, never end; it's never going to end. Many can say, 'Oh no, there's none of that, there isn't prejudice against the negro.' They won't say anything because, I think, here, no one accepts [the reality of] this business of discrimination against negros."

Silence and/or the discourses that deny the existence of racism in Brazil are highlighted in these comments. As other informants had, Analucia, in fact, imitates and mocks the discourse of denial. I believe that my interviewees did not, for the most part, feel that I was in need of suasion or had failed to understand the import of their words. Rather, particularly when they referred to silence, they framed their comments as a kind of defensive counterargument against an invisible interlocutor. If at times I had the impression that they had never before discussed their experiences, interpretations, and opinions in such detail, I also had the sense that both their narratives of racism and their comments on silence were spoken from a private history of tortured inner dialogue, a kind of *esprit d'escalier*, or staircase wit. Although their comments were generously intended to enlighten a foreign researcher, they were also, at identifiable moments, directed toward all of the people who had denied their experience and misread their silence.

My awareness of the dearth of explicit discussions about racism was repeatedly confirmed by people's responses to my direct questions about the extent to which racism was a subject of conversations within families and between friends. When I asked Paulinho, a man in his forties, if his parents had ever discussed racism in his presence, his response was typical. Although he described a childhood spent in the Bahian countryside, his comments were echoed by others with more urban origins. The all-consuming demands of day-to-day survival left no time or energy for the discussion of issues such as racism: "No, there was that whole thing at home, that business of being in the country, all that, planting manioc, making manioc flour, that whole thing. So everything was more or less just consumed with this, and fishing, you know? . . . When I was nine years old, I felt that [awareness of racism]. I came home and I said to my mother, 'Mom, someone called me a monkey!' You understand? And she just said, 'Answer back, insult them back.' . . . So, like that, after that business of throwing insults, it starts up, that whole thing, right, and it's too much."

His mother's response, Paulinho suggested, was hardly adequate.³ Other informants told me that during the time they were children, cross-generational conversation was, in general, very restricted. Elena, who grew up in the countryside of Espirito Santo, said, "It's not like today. There was a lack of

information, and parents didn't converse with children as they do now." Like Elena, a number of informants suggested that their parents lacked the sophistication to engage in discussions of racism.

I also asked many of my informants if they had heard stories about slavery when they were growing up. When I asked Dona Janete, she recounted several but then added, "The adults at that time didn't converse with children, right? It's hard for you to understand this, but we didn't have the right to listen to the conversations of our elders. When the parents were conversing like that, we had to leave, to work, to take care of our younger siblings. So I didn't hear things like that."

The few stories about slavery that Dona Janete did recount were painful ones, involving routine privation and gratuitous torture. When she said that children "didn't have the right to listen to conversations," I believe she was suggesting not only that relations between parents and children were more formal than they are currently but also that children were deliberately shielded from certain conversations.⁴ Very few informants, in fact, were able to recall hearing stories about the slavery era, although the grandparents and great-grandparents of a number of the older people I knew had been slaves. Paulinho, whom I have quoted above, was an exception in that he told me that his great-grandfather would "get the children together and tell stories, so many incredible stories." Although Paulinho referred to the content of these stories in a pained and somewhat vague way, he was able to recall their effect on him: "My great-grandfather told about all that, stories so bad that he would wind up crying, the poor guy, and then he would change the subject, because he was crying so much. This made me so upset and angry. . . . This for me—I was a child and he passed this on to me. I said, 'My God, what was done to my great-grandmothers, my great-grandfathers?' That whole thing. And they died. I didn't get to know them well. And I kept thinking about this: Was it the same for them?"

In Paulinho's last line ("Was it the same for them?") he was referring to stories about rape and beating, the stories that his great-grandfather had reported as happening not to him but to others, his friends of the slave quarters. Paulinho told me that as a result of these stories, which he had heard at the age of seven or eight, he had become a "very rebellious child."

Dona Janete's son, Jacinto, also told me several very truncated stories from the slavery era, stories that his mother had told him. He then said, "My mother told us a lot. . . . She told us so many things. I don't dwell on it (*Eu não ligo muito*). Because it's so sad. I don't like [these stories] from the past. What humans do to each other! I think we should leave those times behind. Oh, but there is slavery still today, right? . . . Slavery is like racism. It hasn't ended; it's

just gotten more sophisticated. And this isn't going to end. It exists today, a concealed kind of slavery (*escravidão embaixo do pano*).

Both men obviously suffered distress on hearing these stories and in retelling them to me, in however abbreviated a fashion. When Jacinto said, "I don't dwell on it," his face became contorted and he waved his arm about as though dispelling a cloud of smoke.

Most people told me, however, that their parents had talked about neither slavery nor racism when they were growing up. When I asked younger informants in their teens and twenties if their parents had ever discussed racism with them, they rarely elaborated on their responses, saying simply, "No, they never talked about it" or "They don't dwell on it."

Some informants, such as Paulinho, suggested that the lack of open discussion (which could hypothetically involve warnings, advice, or reassurance) within the family caused them pain and frustration during their childhood or adolescence. In this regard, the comments of Rosa are worth quoting at length; they recount the searing experience of a sudden confrontation with prejudice and the failure to find sufficient familial support and reassurance. When I asked Rosa if she was able to recall the first time she became aware of racism, she paused for nearly a minute and then began to recount an experience she had had at the age of sixteen or seventeen:

I remember. It was in Belo Horizonte [a major city in the state of Minas Gerais]. I came to Belo Horizonte and worked for a family there [as a domestic servant]. And on the same street, I knew a girl, a very light-skinned girl. So my friend said to me, "Let's go out on Saturday night." I said, "Let's go." She had a white friend. So at 9:30 at night, she came over and we went over to this friend's house to call her to come out with us. . . . But when her friend saw me, she didn't want to go out anymore. She spoke directly to me. "But why don't you want to go out anymore?" I asked. "Oh, because you're black (preta)." She didn't like dark people. . . . And from that day forward, I thought, "What is this difference?" Of whites not liking blacks, blacks not liking whites? You know? There has to be some root to it, from the mother or father. I knew there had to be a reason, but I thought, "How absurd!"

At this point in her narrative, Rosa paused, and I asked her if she had also told her mother or another relative what had happened. She continued:

I talked about it with my mother. My mother just said, "What nonsense, that had nothing to do with it!" [And I said,] "Then why didn't she go out with my friend just because I was with her?" [My mother said,] "Because you were poorly dressed." That's what my

mother said. [I said,] "No, Mom, I was all neat and pretty, just like her." . . . You know? All she said was that perhaps I was poorly dressed. I said, "No, mom, it wasn't because of that, no!" My mother didn't believe me.

Rosa paused again, and I asked, "You were very angry then?" Almost shouting, she responded, "I knew it was because I was a preta! Because I was a negra! This bullshit shouldn't exist, but it does!"

Rosa's narrative culminates in her insistence that despite her mother's denial, she knew beyond a doubt that she had encountered racial prejudice. When she described—in fact, replayed—the conversation with her mother, the speed and pitch of her voice increased and she repeatedly left out the pronouns that indicate who was speaking in the original conversation. In her last statement ("This bullshit shouldn't exist"), I believe Rosa was not merely making a prescriptive moral statement. I had heard such pronouncements many times, and while they were often spoken with some feeling, they had the conversational ring of oft-repeated truisms. Rosa's statement, on the other hand, sounded like "talking back." Speaking, as it were, to her mother and, by extension, to the discourse of denial and to silence, she was saying in effect, "I know it shouldn't exist, but denying that it exists doesn't erase the reality of what really happens." In calling herself first a preta, then a negra, Rosa rejects politeness and euphemism and at the same time speaks in the voice of the other, what she herself, in a different moment of our conversation, had called "what the masters called the slaves." Despite this experience, Rosa told me that she had never discussed racism with her own children.

The silence surrounding racism in Morro do Sangue Bom is not absolute. Although people told me stories about racism, ones they had not told their friends and families, a number of people were able to recount secondhand stories—encounters with racism that were suffered by parents, spouses, children, and friends. Rosa had, in fact, mentioned that her twelve-year-old son had told her that a white neighbor had called him racist names and that the neighbor "didn't like pretos." Clearly, she and her son had had at least one conversation about the issue. For Rosa, somehow, this conversation and others she might have had with her children were not deemed significant or were not recalled.

Although it was not absolute, I often had the sense that the silence observed within families and between families was somehow at cross-purposes. This was especially clear when I interviewed Dona Janete and her son Jacinto on separate occasions. Both had spoken at length about racism. While Dona Janete said, "Thank God, nothing ever happened to me," she felt that both of her sons, in being dismissed from or ill-treated in their jobs, had

been discriminated against. Generally, she felt that racism was very pervasive. Yet when I asked her if she had ever discussed racism with her sons, she said, "Have I conversed with my sons about this? I never said anything because they don't feel this. They think that everyone accepts them. The only thing was [my sons' difficulties on the job]. . . . So they never complained about being discriminated against. And it doesn't enter their heads that they could be discriminated against in some place."

When I interviewed Jacinto, he spoke at length about a variety of situations in which he had felt victimized by prejudice and discrimination, ranging from his reception in restaurants, to his rejection by his future (white) parents-in-law, to being dismissed from a job. When I asked him if his mother had ever discussed racism with him, he told me she had not. I clarified my question by asking, "Did she ever say anything, you know, like, 'You have to struggle because there is racism?'" He responded, "Oh well, [she said] you have to study to be someone in life . . . because of that business—these days you have to study because those of us who don't study won't be anything; it would be worse." I asked him, "Did she ever advise you in a more direct way about racism?" "No, no, she didn't advise me. . . . She doesn't have much of a notion of—she never had—my parents never struggled ideologically, in this movement business, racism, those things. They never did because each one is caught up in day-to-day thing, right? So, she just told us to study, to study because at least you could [get] a job that's more or less . . . but these days it doesn't help!"

Both Jacinto and Dona Janete believe that the other is naive about the realities of racism; and there is a suggestion, though not explicit, in the comments of both of a desire not to undercut this naiveté with open discussions of what both clearly know and feel. Neither, it seems, wants to disabuse the other of a false sense of safety and optimism. In this sense, the silence they observe with each other is protective. Though it is almost certain that Dona Janete and her son Jacinto have, on occasion, at least mentioned issues and personal experiences related to racism, neither recalls, or wants to recall, these conversations.

"Trying Not to Remember": Accounting for Silence

My interview with Guilherme, Daniel's youngest brother, was particularly revealing. Guilherme was somewhat shy, and like many such people, he occasionally made parsimonious but astute comments that got right to the point of topics that others approached with more circumspection. I asked him if, dur-

ing his childhood or adolescence, his parents or others in his family ever talked about the issue of racism. "No, never," he replied. I asked him, "Why do you think it is that people don't talk about it very much?" He responded, "Oh, well, people want to forget and let it pass. That's why people don't talk about it. It's a form of forgetting, of trying not to remember."

Guilherme then abruptly brought up the issue of slavery: "These days, people will even say to you, 'Give thanks to God and Princesa Isabel that you are free. Because you are a negro. A slave.' That happens; there are people who say that to you. I mean, it's racism. It doesn't do to keep talking about it. It doesn't resolve anything. It doesn't change things. If racism comes from the big person, right, on top, well, it's hard for the person on the bottom to say anything."

For Guilherme then, the relative silence surrounding racism is not a mere absence of talk. Within this silence there is a kind of purposefulness, the involvement of agency, for it is a "form of forgetting" or, more precisely, of "trying not to remember." Several overlapping meanings are suggested in Guilherme's mimicking of the racist jibe, "Give thanks to God and Princesa Isabel that you are free. Because you are a negro and a slave." (Princesa Isabel is credited with abolishing slavery in Brazil in 1888.) Given the context of our conversation, Guilherme was suggesting that if one does speak openly about or against racist mistreatment, one is likely to meet with such a comment—the force of which people in Morro do Sangue Bom refer to as "putting one in one's place." There is, of course, a sense of threat carried in the insult—it is a command really, to *ficar calada*, or keep one's mouth shut. This sense of threat is carried further in Guilherme's reference to the "big person," the "one on top" whose power compels silence.

What was especially notable in Guilherme's response to my question was his abrupt shift between his reference to *talking about* racism (among intimates, for example) and references to *talking back* to a racist interlocutor. This shift occurred in the responses of a number of other informants. I felt certain that Guilherme understood that my question concerned conversations *about* racism, such as those that might occur with one's family and friends. Yet for him and others, the acts of talking about and talking back, while certainly separate, were closely related. His comments on the ineffectiveness of talk, its failure to accomplish change, were also echoed by many.

During my conversation with Jonas (whom I have quoted earlier), I asked him, "Why is it that people don't talk much about racism?" He replied, "There isn't a way for it to be resolved. If someone mistreats me because of my color, am I going to punch him? I can't do that. You just have to let it go. Let it go,

right, let it go (*deixa pra lá*). You can't even—you can't lose your temper (*esquenta a cabeça*) over it. You forget what's happening. It passes. I let it go. I think this is the best way of resolving it."

Jonas had arrived at this apparently complacent position through a painful route. He had told me about an experience in which he had gone, literally in tears, to the police station to make a formal complaint of racial discrimination. The police had told him to "calm down" and to "not lose his temper" or get "hotheaded" (*não esquenta a cabeça*). In the end, precisely as Jonas asserted, nothing was resolved. Like Guilherme, Jonas understood my question, yet he responded not with an explanation for the lack of talk among friends and family but by commenting on the impotence one feels in face-to-face encounters with racism. Neither talking about nor talking back mends the injustice, and physical violence is, if not impossible, certainly untenable. In the absence of redress, Jonas thought it best to "forget" and "let it go."

Tomas, a young man of nineteen, made similar comments. After he had described a number of occasions in which he felt he had been harassed or discriminated against because of his color, I asked him if he had told anyone else about what had happened. "No, no, I didn't tell anyone, no. I got really sad (*fiquei triste*) about what happened," he said.

Because of my own cultural assumptions about painful emotions and the consequent desire to unload one's feelings by talking about them and the events that provoked them, I asked him, "But didn't you want to tell someone?" "I didn't want to tell anyone, no," he responded in a soft voice. "I got very sad." Pressing further, I asked, "But why didn't you want to tell anyone?" "Because it doesn't do any good. It doesn't do any good (*não adianta*), no. It does nothing, nothing, nothing. And to whom will I complain? There is no one to whom I can complain. I know that we have human rights, right? But to complain—there's no way, so you have to let it go. It doesn't do any good."

Evidently, Tomas did not share my psychoanalytic, essentially hydraulic model of emotions and talk; he implied that telling the story would not relieve his feelings but would lead to a painful reliving of them. The word he used, *triste*, like the word *nervoso*, is often used as a gloss for a host of emotions in Morro do Sangue Bom. While *nervoso* may suggest a kind of fearful anxiety, as the word *nervous* does in English, it frequently implies an emotion closer to an incapacitating anger or perturbation, the kind that can provoke tears of pent-up frustration. It may also suggest a fear of losing control, of unleashing one's anger. Thus, when Jonas described his feelings on arriving at the police station to lodge a complaint, he used the word *nervoso* and implied that his attempt to seek legal redress might have been more successful had he

not been crying and in a state of pent-up rage. *Triste*, on the other hand, may describe anything from an abstract and vague melancholy to despondency and grief. It implies, at any rate, a passive withdrawal into the self, a private and quiet nursing of wounds.

Although I had asked Tomas why he did not tell his friends or family what had happened, he turned for elaboration and explanation finally to the impossibility of accomplishing legal or moral redress. There was, in fact, no one to whom he could complain, especially given the fact that most of his stories involved police harassment. Who could he trust to champion and defend what he appropriately called his "human rights?" Once again, the futility of discussing experiences with one's intimates is tied to the futility and even danger of direct confrontation and protest.

The danger of talking back was also described by Dona Janete, although her comments were more equivocal. After she had reported to me that her sons had been discriminated against, I asked her if they had protested their treatment. She said, "No, no one talks, no. Because I think that here in Brazil there is a problem of everyone keeping silent. Many people feel it, but they stay silent. They never shout (*nunca grita*). They never shout, 'Oh, I want a better job, I want I don't know what all.' They never protest (*gritar*), right? I think that here in Brazil there is this craziness of feeling something and not protesting. A thing of people staying silent, of not talking."

I asked Dona Janete why people stay silent. She replied, "I think they have fear, right, my daughter? Of repression. Because if you want something in a job and any white wants to do something to you there, they aren't going to defend the dark one, even though the little dark one (*escurinho*) is right. They're not going to question the white one, they're going to question the dark one. So if anyone is going to have to go, the white doesn't go, the dark one goes. There is a fear of speaking."

It is clear from these comments that what Guilherme calls the "big person," "the one on top," is not a mere figure of speech for people in Morro do Sangue Bom. These words may refer variously to state-sanctioned force, usually in the form of the police, or to the patrons and business managers who control one's access to informal clientele and formal employment and thus to the material sustenance of oneself and one's family. The threat of force, the possibility of being subjected not only to demoralization but to violence and economic privation as a punishment for talking back, is very real. This fact would seem to offer a powerful explanation for the silence of people such as Tomas. Indeed, political repression, which is primarily constituted by the constant, arbitrary police harassment that occurs in the war-torn city of Rio, exists as a constant backdrop to silence and the kind of self-conscious com-

placency and passivity described by Jonas. Yet, as I have suggested, talking back and talking about are very different acts that occur in very different contexts, and while my informants seemed to discursively draw the two together into one explanatory web, they certainly recognized the distinction between them. The question remained: Why did people in Morro do Sanguê Bom refrain from talking about racism even in the intimate and safe contexts of community and family?

I often had the sense that the telling of these stories involved not only an emotional reliving of the actual experience but also a kind of confrontation with one's powerlessness in the face of the big person, the one on top. In narrating such experiences, one almost inevitably casts oneself as defenseless and dependent. If my informants' narratives of racism sometimes seemed to be articulated in a confessional register, what was being confessed was not only vulnerability but the demoralizing and humiliating failure to defend oneself. Thus, to recount such experiences, even to one's intimates, seems to entail a kind of *vergonha*, or shame.

When I asked Robertson, a young man of twenty, why people tended not to talk about their personal experiences with racism, he said, "Perhaps they feel ashamed over their suffering. They withdraw themselves with shame. Or perhaps when you suffer over something, you don't want to tell people, you don't want to explain, because you're afraid that, afterwards, people will treat you the same way. They might think it's your fault."

The implications of Robertson's comments were echoed by others. A woman in her fifties who spoke articulately about various forms of racism in the public sphere nevertheless responded to my question about her own experience by saying, "I, at least, have always gotten along with white people. I was never discriminated against because I have always tried to get along and people like me. So, that's how I am. I have always tried also to learn and to give. There really are dark people who are very discriminated against when they're badly behaved, when they have no manners. So they become discriminated against."

The notion that people of color may provoke racialized discrimination by behaving badly or presenting an unkempt appearance was articulated by a number of informants. When I asked Tomas if his mother ever talked to him about racism, he said, "My mother conversed with us. Because I like to wear certain clothes, to dress as I please, in shorts and a cap, and to wear my hair [in a fashionable style]. So that's why. People who always go in shorts, without a shirt on, who wear necklaces and wear their hair [like this]—people who have this hair are stopped by the police, you know? [My mother] says, 'It's because

you have this hair that the police stop you. You have go out with your hair combed down, always very neat."⁵

When I asked Tomas if his mother had explicitly said anything else about racism, he responded, "She never involved herself with it, no." It should be recalled also that Rosa's mother insisted that her experience of being rejected by a white woman was because she must have been "badly dressed."

There is thus an ambivalence that is articulated about the social and political nature of racism. At times, racism is figured as an overwhelming, inevitable force, one that variously resides rather abstractly in the society, or in the persons of powerful people who abuse their authority. It may even be seen as residing, as I demonstrate in chapter 5, within one's own family or within oneself. In any case, "it will never end" and one is defenseless and powerless against it. On the other hand, in comments such as those above, it is implied that one may be able to avoid racist mistreatment by controlling one's self-presentation—by behaving well, by serving others, and by wearing neatly pressed, conservative clothing and modest hairstyles.

This issue has implications for the understanding of silence in that it helps to elucidate the notion that *vergonha*, or shame, may play a role in the construction of silence. This shame may be related of the narration of oneself as defenseless, even cowardly, or to the fear that others may turn the blame in the wrong direction, as Robertson suggested. In both cases, to talk of one's one experience with racism involves a negative and uncomplimentary figuring of oneself and, perhaps by extension, of one's community or *raça* (race).

Yvonne, whom I quoted at the beginning of this chapter, acknowledged that, in general, the subject of racism is rarely discussed. I asked her why she thought this was the case: "No, [people] don't converse [about racism]. I think they don't feel unsettled (*não sente incomodado*) by it. I don't know. I don't know how to explain, well, why not, you know? I think it's a little like that—there's no way to change things. Accommodation, right? There's no way to change things; it doesn't help, you know. 'I'm not going to get ahead,' right? . . . It's fear also, you know, fear of competing with the white. I think it's accommodation, fear, a lack of hope, of faith, of not believing in oneself, right? 'I can, I am able, I'm going to go out there, but I'm not going to succeed.' It's a lot of that."

Yvonne's comments, like those of many others on the morro, account for silence in primarily psychological terms. There is in these comments a kind of politics, what Yvonne calls "accommodation." While a collective acquiescence is implied both by silence itself and by informants' accounts of and accounting for silence, I believe that what Yvonne and others refer to is a

more private kind of psychological accommodation. The overriding concern that these comments ultimately express is not with the politics of either discourse or silence but with protecting oneself and one's intimates from the eruption of anger and the festering of emotional pain.

Yvonne also echoed many others in her statement that talking "doesn't help." By now these expressions are familiar to the reader and they deserve comment. In Portuguese, the expressions *não adianta* (it doesn't help, advance, or improve things), *deixa pra lá* (let it go, leave it be, or perhaps more colloquially, don't let it get to you), *não liga* (don't dwell on it, don't concern or involve yourself with it), and *não esquentar a cabeça* (literally, don't get hot-headed, or don't lose your temper) are continually intoned in the context of stories about racism. As can be observed in the above quotes, they are particularly ubiquitous in the comments informants make when accounting for silence on the subject of racism.

These expressions appear, at least partly, to be descriptions of strategies that are consciously adopted at the moment in which encounters with racism occur. As Jonas said, "If someone mistreats me because of my color, am I going to punch him? I can't do that. You just have to let it go." In such moments, it seems, these expressions constitute a kind of inner dialogue spoken to oneself with the intention of quelling the painful emotions, including anger and humiliation, that racism provokes. They muzzle angry outbursts and smother the dangerous impulse to defend oneself with violence. We might call them, in this sense, words of accommodation, but it is a forced accommodation that comes from the knowledge of personal and collective vulnerability in the face of "the one on top."

In accounts of silence, these expressions both refer to and index silence, the impulse or decision to not speak, to not tell of one's own experience or introduce the specter of collective humiliation into ordinary conversations. As Tomas said, "It made me sad. . . . It doesn't help, it doesn't help. . . . you have to let it go, it doesn't help." In psychological terms, it appears that these expressions are an attempt to bring closure to wounding experiences. They also represent a kind of dismissive gesture, a ritualized locution that is meant to dispel the cloud of anger and frustration that inevitably descends on both the storyteller and the listener. In social terms, these expressions signal or command a return to silence. They suggest not only psychological suppression but the closure of social discourse about the realities of racism and injustice.

Ultimately, I feel, for many in Morro do Sangue Bom, silence is directed toward the containment of anger and psychological pain. My own assumptions (shared, in fact, by most middle-class Brazilians and more than a few social scientists) that speaking of one's pain helps to ease that pain and that

the articulation of anger may profitably lead to personal action and/or political mobilization seemed to hold no sway on the morro. Talk cannot overcome but, in fact, evokes what Yvonne called "fear, a lack of hope, of faith, of not believing in oneself."

If it can be said that people on the morro have what Frazier called an "unexpressed understanding" not to discuss the innumerable slights, insults, humiliations, and rejections that are suffered in the day-to-day world (qtd. in Hellwig 1992, 131), they do so not because they lack the words, the analytical sophistication, or the discursive strategies to do so (cf. Twine 1998), and not because they believe racism is insignificant, but because to do so would involve a kind of personal and collective surrender. The paradox of silence resides precisely in the fact that it implies and objectively constitutes a kind of political accommodation to oppression at the same time that it allows people such as those in Morro do Sangue Bom to let it go, to forget, to at least partially contain the wounds of victimization and carve out a world in which to live with dignity and laughter.

Silence and Sainthood: The Legend of Escrava Anastácia

Although silence seems to be constructed and maintained through unexpressed understandings and is indexed in discourse—particularly in expressions such as "let it go," "it doesn't help," and "don't concern yourself with it"—it appears to be, relatively speaking, unmarked and unremarked. It is as though silence, the act of trying not to remember, is itself buried in a kind of forgetting. While the metaphor of psychological repression seems to offer itself at this juncture, it is not a truly apt one, for people in Morro do Sangue Bom know very well that racism is pervasive and wounding—their forgetting, in this sense, is unsuccessful. Still, if silence is meaningful, we might expect it, much in the manner of repressed material, to surface or to be marked, in however displaced a fashion, in genres other than everyday discourse. I believe that the story of silence is, in fact, represented in the figure of Escrava Anastácia, a popular saint whose image and mythical biography are well known in Rio de Janeiro.

I first became aware of Escrava Anastácia (or Slave Anastácia) very early in my fieldwork. Her image is reproduced on placards, religious pamphlets, wall hangings, and religious medals and in the plaster busts that are sold in Rio's religious shops. While Anastácia is believed to bestow mercy on her devotees, there is nothing gentle in her image. She is always portrayed from the neck up. She has the short, tight hair, dark skin, and broad nose of a negra. When she is represented in color, as in the plaster busts, her eyes are blue and

they are said to be very penetrating. Her neck is encased by a thick iron collar and her mouth is choked by an iron muzzle, a device that is called a *mordaça*. As her name implies, Anastácia was a slave woman, and as her image unambiguously reveals, she was a victim of what were once conventional methods of punishment and torture.

The origin of the Anastácia legend is clouded in controversy. The image of Anastácia seems to have originated in an illustration of an anonymous slave drawn by the French artist M. J. Arago, who traveled to Brazil in 1817. Beginning in 1971, Arago's illustration was exhibited in the Museu do Negro (housed in the Igreja do Rosario, a traditionally black church) in Rio de Janeiro. The director of the museum, a man by the name of Yolando Guerra, evidently had a vision about the illustration and began to elaborate what later became the biography of Escrava Anastácia. This, at any rate, is the account given by church authorities who investigated the Anastácia legend. In 1987 they concluded that Anastácia, also called Santa Anastácia, or Saint Anastácia, never existed. Her image was removed from the Igreja do Rosario, much to the consternation of a number of my informants. Aware of but unmindful of the church's pronouncement, devotees of Anastácia now congregate at a temple dedicated to her in Madureira, in Rio's North Zone.

I am not concerned here with the controversy surrounding the popular saint, nor with the religious beliefs and practices that are associated with Escrava Anastácia.⁶ While living in Morro do Sangue Bom, my concern was with the ways in which informants narrated the story of Anastácia and how they explained the presence of the *mordaça*, or muzzle, in which she is depicted.

Like all popular saints, Anastácia is believed to intercede for those in dire need and to perform miracles for her devotees. More than a few of my informants told me that they believed in Anastácia; they had addressed many prayers to her and they were answered. At the same time, however, people in Morro do Sangue Bom were aware of the fact that Anastácia's sainthood was rejected by church authorities. I asked Dona Janete why this was the case. She responded with a hoot of laughter, "Oh, it must be because she is a black woman, right, my daughter? If she were white, she could be a saint but she is a *preta!*"

Other informants, while not professing belief in Anastácia, called her the *protetora dos negros*, or the protector of the blacks, and in one case she was called a great *orixá*, or god of the Candomblé pantheon. Even *crentes*, or Protestants, who did not believe in Anastácia's sainthood were nevertheless able to narrate at least parts of the Anastácia story. This familiarity is due, in

large part, to the fact that a telenovela, or miniseries, about Anastácia was aired on a major Brazilian network in 1990. There are, of course, many versions of the Anastácia story, and the novela's screenwriter no doubt mixed some of the common elements from popular, oral versions of her biography and those found in religious pamphlets with elements from his own imagination.

Elena, who was a *crente*, declared herself immune to the claims of Anastácia's sainthood, but she recapped the novela with considerable enthusiasm. Her narration contains most of the elements I heard in other informants' narrations and thus serves as a template:

Escrava Anastácia was a slave who they say was sacrificed. She was a really beautiful slave woman, really black with blue eyes. She was enslaved by a plantation owner. He put her to doing really brutalizing work, you know? But she did it without complaining. But he wanted her, wanted her as a woman. She didn't want that, no way. So he put her in the stocks and flogged her.

The people in the slave quarters were her friends. She was the leader of the slaves. Anything that had to be done, she was always in front. If, for example, there was a sick person, she went to them to lay on hands and cure them. So out in the slave quarters, she helped the negros.

When the [plantation owner] saw that she didn't want to be his woman, he said, "Fine, you're going to take care of my children. I'll give my children a black doll with blue eyes." So, she took care of the children but he kept bothering her. So, he said, "Since you don't accept me, I'm going to do something so that you will never again speak in your life." So he put an iron collar on her neck and an iron *mordaça*, squeezing her mouth and nose. I mean, because she was always helping her people, he would really enslave her, so she would never speak again. So, she stayed that way and continued to take care of the children, without ever speaking.

She was getting sick and the plantation owner called a doctor. The doctor told him to take the collar and *mordaça* off her. She said, "Put it back on. My hour has come." The doctor put it back on because there was nothing more he could do for her.

So, the plantation owner's son was tubercular. He was complaining, crying in pain. So the man came, the plantation owner, who put the collar on her. He kissed her hands and said, "For the love of God, save my son's life. I don't want to lose my son." She put her hand on [the boy's] head and passed her hands over him very slowly. Once she got down to his feet, she took her hands away and closed her eyes. The boy got up and called his parents. Then they

said, "Thank God, thanks to Anastácia, my son is cured!" So everyone was happy. But they could do nothing more for her because when she finished curing him, she closed her eyes and died.

In Elena's narrative, Anastácia was sacrificed both because she rejected her master's advances and because she was a leader to her people, the slaves who shared her burdens on the plantation. As Elena had, most people who talked to me about Anastácia touched on both of these elements, although some emphasized one over the other. Perhaps predictably and logically, a few of my informants provided versions in which it was suggested that Anastácia did not succeed in repelling her master's abuse; she was raped, yet remained proud to the end (see also Guillermprieto 1990, 179). In such accounts, stoicism in the face of violation is emphasized. Other informants, however, emphasized not Anastácia's victimization but her heroism. Although Jorge expressed doubt about popular saints in general, his attempt to narrate the story of Anastácia was emotional:

"I don't understand it well; I don't understand her story well. I saw a little on television. Anastácia. She was a protector, right? She was a saint. She was a woman who died muzzled (*amordaçada*) for her people, for her race. God! I mean, she was a person who died for her race! You understand, she died for her race. That guy took the mordaça off and it was pure gangrene in her mouth. She died from that. Why? To defend her people, to help her people. She gave her hand to her people."

When informants did not spontaneously bring up the issue of Anastácia's mordaça, or muzzle, I asked them about its significance. The word *mordaça*, as well as its verb form, *amordaçar*, and its adjective form, *amordaçada*, were known by everyone who discussed Anastácia with me. Also called a *folha de Flandres*, the mordaça was a commonly used disciplinary device during the era of slavery. According to most historical sources, its purpose was to prevent slaves from drinking cane liquor and/or from eating dirt.⁷ Both my informants' comments and standard dictionary definitions pose a rather different purpose for the mordaça, however. The *Novo Dicionário Aurelio* defines the word *mordaça* as "an object with which someone's mouth is plugged with the end that they can neither speak nor protest (*grite*)."⁸ Figuratively, the word is defined as "repression of the liberty to write or to speak." The verb form, *amordaçar*, is defined as "to impede speech."

When I asked Yvonne about Anastácia, she did not mention the issue of her master's sexual advances or abuses. She said that Anastácia "struggled for the race, right, for the slaves, and after she died, I think that people continued believing in her." When I asked her, "What is the significance of that thing

she has?" Yvonne replied, "The mordaça on her mouth, right? . . . Now, it is said that there are people who talk too much, and it is said that she talked a lot; she really talked so . . . It's because she talked so much that he put that mordaça on her."

Other responses were similar but lacked Yvonne's hesitance. A number of people told me that Anastácia's master locked her into the mordaça to prevent her from telling others about his abuse. A man in his thirties told me, "I think she suffered because she was used as an object; her master used her like an object. . . . That mordaça, they say that it was so that she could not protest." A woman in her forties told me that Anastácia had "already done many miracles" for her, and she said, "It was so she couldn't tell [others] what the master did with her, you know? He muzzled her mouth. . . . Because of what she had gone through, she couldn't say anything to anyone with that iron mordaça on her mouth. I believe in her."

Susana, Joia's half-sister, made similar comments. She told me that Anastácia's master tried to rape her. She resisted and he put the mordaça on her: "Because then she didn't shout. It was so she couldn't call for help. Because she was muzzled, she didn't yell, you understand? So he muzzled her so she couldn't protest, and from that she died bit by bit, without food, without speaking, and without drinking, right?"

In all of these comments, the purpose of the mordaça was related to a literal muzzling of Anastácia. Specifically, it prevented her from telling others, her friends and supporters in the slave quarters, what was being done to her. In these narratives, Anastácia was muzzled not only as punishment for her (possible) resistance or outspoken leadership in the slave quarters but also so that she could not *gritar*, or reveal, the abuse she had suffered. Although we might expect that the master would be, in a sense, omnipotent—not required at any rate to justify or defend his actions, however brutal—his exploitation and abuse of Anastácia must be kept a secret.

Other informants also explained, although in more general terms, the logic of the mordaça in terms of the prohibition that was imposed on Anastácia against speaking. A woman in her sixties said, "He didn't give her the right to express what she was feeling. He muzzled her so she had no way of speaking. She became mute." A woman in her twenties told me, "She was a person who had a facility in speaking, for communicating messages. People believed in her prayers. And the mordaça signified a form of impeding her speech." A teenage boy simply said, "She had power in the word. She was muzzled so she would not speak anymore." When I asked Analucia about the significance of the mordaça, she said, "Because the mordaça prevents the person from speaking, right? . . . You can't say anything of what you know and what you have

heard. . . . I think this is what happened to Escrava Anastácia. She didn't get to tell her story."

As she had on other occasions, Dona Janete pulled the threads of these ideas together into a masterful interpretation. She had not seen the *telenovela*. Much to her consternation, her husband and sons were given to compulsive channel surfing on the family television. She told me that Anastácia was sacrificed because of her beauty. "She was killed, little by little, right? . . . He put that mordaca on her face, right on her mouth." "And why did she have the mordaca?" I asked Dona Janete. She replied,

It must have been for her to suffer from not speaking. Like here, everyone shuts their mouths, right? So, they shut Anastácia's mouth. The first thing they did was to put that mordaca on her and she didn't speak anymore. . . . She had it here, around her head and everything. Meaning, the law for the negro is to really keep silent (*de calar mesmo*). It has been thus since slavery, right? The law for the negro is to keep silent. It began through Anastácia, right? They put it right on her mouth. Why didn't they put it some other place, around her middle, on her legs, in some other place? They put it right on her mouth. . . . She was sacrificed little by little and she could say nothing. . . . So I think it was clearly this. They put it on her so she couldn't speak of what was happening to her, and it was like that until the end of her life.

As my quotations suggest, informants' explanations of the significance of Anastácia's mordaca were remarkably consistent. It is clear, however, that there are many ways of reading the Anastácia story. For Alma Guillermoprieto, a Mexican journalist, the story is, in a fundamental sense, about the cultural erotics of race in Brazil. As she writes, "I was interested in Anastácia because her legend was explicitly concerned with the relationship between black women and white men, and while that relationship is at the center of the Brazilian universe, it is rarely addressed from the black point of view" (1990, 179).

The extent to which Guillermoprieto's brief analysis represents or comments on "the black point of view" is questionable, but her suggestion that Anastácia's blue eyes imply miscegenation has recently been elaborated by Burdick (1998). It may well be that some of Anastácia's devotees view her as a stereotypical model of the beautiful mulata and that the legend logically incorporates an overvaluation of white characteristics. Yet close attention to the precise ways in which my informants in Morro do Sangue Bom talked about Anastácia suggests that, regardless of the implication of her blue eyes, she is viewed as a negra. Generally speaking, people in Morro do Sangue Bom

claim her as one of their own, and they refer to her not as a mulata, but as a preta and a negra, and it is said that she "died for her race."

In a very different interpretation, the story of Anastácia can be read as a parable about servitude, particularly the domestic servitude of women. Nearly all of the women I knew in Morro do Sangue Bom had worked as *empregadas*, or maids, at some point in their lives; most, in fact, worked in the homes of white middle-class families from the time they were teenagers. As I indicate in the following chapter, women often describe situations in which they feel slighted, exploited, and insulted while performing domestic service for others. Usually, they have to hold their tongues. Talking back, of course, can lead to abrupt dismissal. Although Anastácia was a slave and a saint, her life was not so different from theirs.

Within such a reading, Anastácia represents the picture of the (nearly) perfect servant. As Elena said, she was put to "really brutalizing work . . . But she did it without complaining." Although abused and shackled, she "continued to take care of the children." While condemned to a slow, painful, and unjust death, she roused herself to save the master's son just before expiring. For these generous, saintly, feminine, and submissive qualities, it seems, Anastácia is revered. For the dominant, she is the model of one who provides good service; and for people such as those in Morro do Sangue Bom, she suggests that long-suffering patience and subordination are rewarded in the spiritual realm. To bear one's burdens without complaint, moreover, is thought to demonstrate dignity of character.

This is, perhaps, the most ambiguous angle of the Anastácia story. On the one hand, she is revered for her resistance, and on the other, she is lauded for her ability to turn the other cheek and to suffer in a silence that, while forced, is maintained in dignity. Read crudely as a political parable, it could be said that the message of the Anastácia story is that this is what happens to you when you try to resist your exploitation. What such an equation leaves out is the other message: that the dignity and humanity of the slave remain inviolable. The master, while a monster, is a pitiable one, alienated from his own humanity.

While Anastácia's blue eyes may touch the cultural nexus of meanings associated with miscegenation and the superiority of the mulata, and while Anastácia does model the dominant vision of servitude and black womanhood, these readings do not address what seems to be the dramatic motif at the heart of narratives about Anastácia: her forced silence. Anastácia's story is far more explicitly concerned with the brutality of slavery and, by extension, with the reality of racism—and the silence surrounding it. For Dona Janete, it seems, the Anastácia story is somewhat like a myth of origin: Anastácia "suf-

fers from not speaking," and this is compared to "Like here, everyone shuts their mouths." The significance of Anastácia's torture is that it dramatizes "the law for the negros," which is "to keep silent." As Dona Janete further remarks, it has "been thus since slavery."

The parallels between the Anastácia legend and the silence surrounding racism in contemporary Brazil are fairly obvious. Her silence is directly linked to the overwhelming force of domination, just as my informants' explanations for their own silence are repeatedly linked to the very real danger of talking back in encounters with racism. Anastácia's story is thus analogous to the concealment of contemporary forms of racism, forms said to be *incubado* (literally incubated, or covert), *embaixo do pano* (under the cloth), and *mascarado* (masked). All of these expressions refer to the more or less covert practices that support and constitute racism as well as to the unexpressed understandings that undergird silence and the discourse of denial. Anastácia's story thus also enacts and depicts, in symbolic form, the social, cultural, and psychological injunctions against talking about racism even in nonconfrontational, intimate contexts. She symbolizes the wounds of racism and exploitation as well as the muzzling that is manifest in the self-censorship of people such as those in Morro do Sangue Bom.

Like Escrava Anastácia herself, poor Brazilians of African descent are entangled in a cultural, ideological, and psychological web in which neither resistance nor resignation are ever absolute. We cannot sum up their position with facile references to false consciousness because they know the truth. Nor can we romanticize their attachment to Anastácia and claim that it unambiguously expresses solidarity and active resistance, for like Anastácia, they remain, for the most part, silent about what is happening to them. I believe that the popularity of Escrava Anastácia is due in large measure to her ability to symbolically represent both the oppression of African Brazilians and the muzzling or silencing of their voices—their inability to talk back and talk about what is really happening under the concealment and obfuscation entailed in the discourses of *democracia racial*. From what people call her *força*, or strength, and from her "penetrating gaze," she tells their story without words. Escrava Anastácia is, in the direct spiritual sense that frames her sainthood among poor people of color, one who listens to their *grita*: their shout, their protest, their call for help.

As will be seen in the following chapter on narratives of racism, my informants in Morro do Sangue Bom were acutely conscious of racism, and while middle-class whites (and some scholars) might interpret their silence as an acceptance of the platitudes of *democracia racial*, my quotation of their reflections on the issue demonstrates the existence of a far more complicated

cultural, political, and psychological scenario. Although it is something of a misnomer to refer to the silence they hold even among intimate associates as a choice—for cultural censorship carries a great deal of force, even if it is not based on explicit coercion—they nevertheless describe it as a strategy of protection and defense. While the practice of cultural censorship appears to mask the existence of anti-hegemonic consciousness, I argue that it does not, at the same time, preclude it.

Rather than conceptualizing dominant ideologies such as *democracia racial* as monolithic, internally coherent models which subordinate groups can either entirely accept or entirely reject, I would argue, finally, that successful systems of power—composed of contradictions, platitudes, blind alleys, and ambiguity—entangle people such as those in Morro do Sangue in precisely these kinds of deadlocks. The silence my informants practice is simultaneously a public form of accommodation and a private (if at the same time communal) form of resistance.