

called it my daughter." Black dolls have only recently appeared.

At the 10th Conference of Black Women in Brazil which took place in Sao Paulo in August 1984, Benedita da Silva spoke of her own anguish as a black girl: "I would like to tell you something very difficult. I once bathed myself in detergent because I wanted to whiten my skin. I did this because I thought that if detergent could whiten clothes, that it would do the same to my skin." Declarations such as this one reflect the reality of black women in Brazil. There are millions of people who do not see themselves reflected in society. They are not visible on television because to become models of beauty they must look similar to Xuxa, the queen of kids in Brazil - and now of all of Latin America. Very few Brazilian black women are photographed for either masculine or feminine magazines. Almost none are executive secretaries, lawyers or doctors.



#### White Communication

The impossibility of fleeing from colour through the mirror leads many people to disguise their black identity. In an article for *Retratos de Brazil* [Portraits of Brazil], the sociologist Clovis Moure stated that non-white Brazilians responded to the 1980 census using 136 different colours to avoid being labelled as black. According to Moure, the use of terms such as "chestnut, dark brown, sunburned, mulatto, brown," among others, shows how "Brazilians flee from ethical truth, seeking through symbolism to put themselves as close as possible to the model established as superior." Helena Theodoro Lopes writes in *Cadernos de Pesquisa* [Workbook of Investigation] 63 (1987) that "to affirm themselves as a person, the black person has to negate their identity, but

because they need their own personality, they live a total contradiction. . . To be black in Brazil is one of the most cruel things on earth, because it means living in permanent conflict within the family and in social, cultural and professional contexts. It is very difficult to come to an adequate resolution of this problem at a personal, social and professional level."

The media in general, but television in particular, reinforce the ideology of "whitening." Black women, who are almost never present in advertisements or T.V. programs, play a part only when the objective is to signify sensuality and to awaken the desires of the (male) viewer. To herald the opening of this year's Carnival programs on the Rede Globo, sculpted mulatta and black beauties were chosen. They appeared totally naked on the screen with their bodies painted in bright colours. Thus, on a national network it was once again reinforced that this is what black women are good for: to drive men crazy with their bodies; they are insatiable and they dominate the arts of pleasure. They are not humans, but objects. The black militant Vanderlei Jose Maria, who also participated in the 10th Conference of Black Women in Brazil, states that: "the entire European representation of romance, of romanticism, of passion and of love was always conceived with the white woman as muse. . . How do we look at black women? We look at them as erotic fruit waiting to be eaten."

#### Resistance

The barriers to active participation in society, independent of skin colour, do not mean that black men and women are not struggling against discrimination in Brazil. With Benedita da Silva and Gloria Maria (reporter at Rede Globo), singers such as Sandra de Sa, Lecy Brandao and Elza Soares, as well as many others, women have representatives who will help them sing, chant and revindicate their right to appear and to be - to be who they are in all of their colours.

Resisting and organizing have enabled the black population to develop mechanisms of participation to construct their own history. Among the accomplishments of the Brazilian Black Movement it is important to emphasize the changes to the Constitution. It is now against the law in Brazil to discriminate against either ethnic or racial groups or individuals who are part of these groups. Also, changes to the educational system have addressed the inequality of the sexes, the struggle against racism and all forms of discrimination. The history of black people must now be included in school curricula.

Knowing that the Constitution has laws guaranteeing the citizenship of black people does not mean that the struggle is over. Benedita da Silva argues that it is necessary to develop the consciousness of the black community. Says da Silva: "Our work continues, and moves on to the growth of black consciousness and the recovery of Afro-Brazilian cultural memory."

**Marcia Cruz** is a black Brazilian journalist who is currently freelancing.

# Women's Radio in Mexico City\*

by Sonia Riquer  
translated by Pilar Riaño

\*Presentation at the Union for Democratic Communications conference, "Feminism(s) and Cultural Resistance in the Americas," Trent University, Peterborough, Ontario, 7-10 May 1992.

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Alternative women's communication in Mexico is integrally linked with the feminist movement which emerged in the 1970s in our country, as in Europe and North America. Those who first opened the doors to feminism in Mexico were journalists, writers and academics. The first newspaper article on feminist demonstrations appeared in 1972. This report inspired a group of women to form the first feminist organization in the nation. From the beginning it was important to create new channels of communication for the new ideas, for the new images, and to combat the traditional images of women as housekeepers, good mothers or sexual objects. In this spirit emerged the first feminist publications, the first attempts at alternative communication. And radio in Mexico, as in the rest of Latin America, was the ideal medium to reach women who often did not know

how to read and who listened while doing domestic or manual work.

The first alternative radio programme for women in Mexico was produced in 1972 by Aliade Foppa. She is a very important woman for all of us, but especially for us in Latin America, who acknowledge her as one of the symbols of the Latin American feminist movement. She was a pioneer in communications and created FEM, the first feminist



magazine in Mexico. She created the first feminist radio programme and taught the first feminist courses at the National

University. She was an art historian and a poet. She was a Guatemalan woman who was assassinated in 1980 by her government when she returned to her country.

Because of all this, the Aliade Foppa Centre for Alternative Communication was named after her. The centre has existed for three years

but the work of the women who constitute it has been going on for ten years. We work for a government-funded educational radio station. The first series of programmes we made was called "The Women's Cause." The series originally ran for six months. The interest of women listeners was so great that they put pressure on the station and the series lasted for six and a half years. We also produced a weekly news report for women, and we have extended our work into cinema, video and audiovisuals. I am very interested in discussing ideas about how we could extend our work on a low budget in alternative communication. Because alternative media exists in a marginal space, what we would like to achieve is autonomy and to have our own centre funded by our work.

Recently, with women in Germany, we organized an exhibition which gives an overview of women's organizations in Mexico City. Approximately sixteen organizations were represented, among them indigenous women, domestic workers, artists, communicators, lesbians and punk girls. This exposition was shown in Mexico and is now in Europe. We believe that alternative communication may help us to live in harmony, in a more democratic way.



Photo: Jesús Romeo Galdamez



### Remembering Aliade Foppa\* by Bertha Hiriart

When at last I was fortunate to meet Aliade Foppa, I felt a little as if I were her daughter. Not only because I was the same age as her children, but because I was indebted, like many other women, for the spaces that she opened up for debate and to spread feminist ideas. My image of her had changed over time.

When FEM first appeared in 1976, my friends in the movement considered the women who produced it to be motherly, comfortable people. Aliade and the other women who wrote in the magazine appeared to us to be bourgeois women and the publication seemed academic and elitist. We twenty-two year olds felt that only a cheaply produced magazine, distributed by hand, had any value. For some years we did not read FEM very carefully, nor did we discuss its contents. Like most

young people, we were not interested in the words of our elders. We had to say our own thing, with the fantasy that our group was absolutely different from the other groups.

But one day in 1978 we met Aliade. We were invited to a feminist round-table discussion in which she also participated. You at once had to notice her intelligence and other qualities. She left early but I met her the next day while taking a walk and we talked. A year and a half later when she was assassinated, I regretted all the conversations I didn't have with her, the meetings I didn't participate in with her, the classes I didn't take from her.

When I left behind the spirit of adolescence and became a member of the FEM group, I came to appreciate the value of the early issues of FEM. They are a storehouse of information, reports and investigations. The first contribution by Aliade should be included in highschool textbooks. It is a discussion of the origins of sexual discrimination which everyone should read. You could

say the same about all her other contributions: on the family, women writers and many other themes. But the most important thing about Aliade is that she opened up spaces which we today occupy.

In spite of the tragedy of her death most of the spaces she opened remain alive. This is the case for FEM and for university courses on women. Here we are in university radio where there is space for all of our struggles. Her radio work continues in Michoacan and Oaxaca and in eight years of feminist programmes at Educational Radio in Mexico City. This particular work, now suspended because of the economic crisis and lack of interest by the authorities, is being continued by the Aliade Foppa Centre for Alternative Communication. In this way we remember her.

**\*From a radio program produced by the Aliade Foppa Centre for Alternative Communication and Radio UNAM to remember the 10th anniversary of the assassination of Aliade Foppa.**



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