

Defining a “national type:” Brazilian beauty contests in the 1920s

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Around the same time Brazilian intellectuals, journalists and politicians “discovered” samba, they invented the national beauty contest. The first national beauty contest was launched in September, 1921, in commemoration of the centenary of Brazilian independence (and just three weeks after the first “Miss America” contest was held in Atlantic City). The second, held in 1929, crowned a “Miss Brasil” to represent the country in the “Miss Universe” contest in Galveston, Texas. By the 1930s, beauty queens and samba queens had become key symbols of Brazilian national identity, thanks to highly self-conscious intellectual rationalization and commercial promotion as well as exuberant popular endorsement. Both beauty pageants and samba dancing at carnival involved mass public participation in spectacles that provided common points of reference for a national debate over Brazil’s racial identity, its ideals of gender and its relationship to modernity. The beauty of Brazil’s women, like the samba dancing of Afro-Brazilians, was recruited in the service of nation building.¹

As beauty contests became mass public spectacles in Brazil, the contestants and winners became celebrated players in a grand, national ritual of self-discovery and self-adulation. Perhaps the most famous “Miss Brasil” – the blonde, blue-eyed Martha Rocha from the northeastern state of Bahia, who was runner-up in the 1954 “Miss Universe” contest – was embraced as “our [Brazilian] muse” by soccer players, intellectuals, politicians, businessmen and writers of samba lyrics. Her name became synonymous with national accomplishment and beauty: a superb soccer player was as likely as an exceptionally beautiful woman to be called (respectively) “o” or “a” “Martha Rocha”. Even a sleek, luxurious, modern inter-city bus was named “Martha Rocha”, as was a famous, soft, sugary bread from the state of Minas Gerais.²

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This paper explores the rise and significance of the early national beauty contests in Brazil. It argues that – more than mere commercial gimmicks or exercises in exhibitionism – these contests provided an important forum for the definition of national identity. By creating an idealized national racial identity as well as an idealized national femininity, they helped establish the terms and values to be used in consolidating disparate populations into a single nation. Conceptualized and organized in the initial stages as “plebiscites,” the national contests also projected an idealized image of an inclusive, democratic culture, thus obscuring the reality of racial, class and gender exclusions and promoting identification with the nation-state. Finally, they affirmed “Progress” as the preeminent national project. The task assigned to “Miss Brasil” was to demonstrate not only Brazil’s equality with the “most civilized nations,” but, equally important, to symbolize its greater innocence, morality, and potential as a world power of the future.

Although new mass-marketing techniques certainly contributed to the success of beauty contests in Brazil, their popularity sprang from deeper roots. The 1920s were an era of political and cultural ferment in Brazil. Rapid urbanization, mass urban strikes, broadening opposition to political rule by the coffee oligarchy, political polarization as manifested in the rise of a conservative Catholic movement and the founding of the Brazilian Communist Party, feminist activism, and artistic innovation as expressed during Modern Art Week held in São Paulo in 1922, combined with the arrival of foreign technologies, images, and styles to undermine past securities. The elite and ordinary folk, the young and the old, men and women expressed anxieties about what it meant to be Brazilian and what it meant to be “modern.” Could Brazil turn its racial heritage, abundant natural resources, youthfulness, and morality into the “civilization” of the future? Were exemplary young Brazilian women distinguishable from the Hollywood film flappers and independent working girls who had become the heroines and symbols of modern life? If so, how so? Were there alternative ways of being “modern” and alternative images of modernity? In short, could Brazilians be both modern and true to their national traditions? “Miss Brasil” proved to be a highly potent visual symbol employed to reconfigure old identities and chart new ones.

The First “Miss Brasil” Contests

National beauty contests were first launched in the printed media as photographic contests, which gave editors the chance to disseminate the eugenic discourse of the time, while they promoted sales by encouraging readers to clip the coupon in each issue and send it in with their vote for the “finest example of

Brazilian beauty.” The idea caught on quickly. Following the September, 1921, announcement, the two sponsoring periodicals, Rio de Janeiro’s newspaper *A Noite* and its weekly magazine *Revista da Semana*, signed on dozens of local collaborators – newspapers and magazines in far-flung corners of the nation – that joined in the search to discover:

In which of our 21 States, in which Municipality of the interior, in which Capital lives this woman elected by God, the most perfect example of her sex, she whom Nature adorned with the most captivating charms? Where does the female beauty most representative of the qualities of our young race live?³

Having promised to organize the contest with “rigorous zeal,” *A Noite* and *Revista da Semana* laid out an elaborate set of rules that established the format for subsequent contests. During the first phase (scheduled to last eight months), local newspapers and magazines in each city and municipality were to solicit readers’ votes for the most beautiful woman in their community. To be valid, votes had to be registered on an official coupon cut from an issue of one of the sponsoring periodicals, and submitted along with a photograph. The sponsoring periodicals were instructed to publish all photographs submitted as well as running tallies of how many votes each candidate had obtained. At the end of the specified time, the names of local winners, along with the number of votes each had obtained and their photographs (with full rights of reproduction) were to be sent to *A Noite* and *Revista da Semana*. At this point, the sponsoring periodicals specified that they would submit the pictures of local winners to 21 state juries “composed of eminent personalities” who would select “the most perfect example of [their] state[’s] beauty.” Finally, the winner of the last round – “the most beautiful woman in Brazil” – would be chosen by a national jury “composed of illustrious personages in the letters, in journalism, and in the fine arts.”⁴ Although the 1921 contest was judged entirely on the basis of photographs, the final round of the 1929 contest introduced an elaborate public spectacle. This involved the parading of the state winners through the streets of Rio de Janeiro and then in front of male judges in Brazil’s largest stadium, all of which prefaced sending her abroad to exhibit Brazilian beauty in the international arena.

In an attempt to confer prestige on their first initiative and to drum up enthusiasm, sponsoring editors informed readers that “sensational and triumphant” beauty contests had already been held not just in France, but also (and note the order of the list of countries) in England, the United States, Spain, Italy, Portugal, Argentina, Belgium, Chile, Poland, and Bolivia.⁵ The winners from each nation would receive invitations to compete in the international “Beauty Olympics” in

Nice. Quoting French journalist Maurice Waleffe (who had organized the beauty contest for the Parisian newspaper *Le Journal*), editors of *A Noite* and *Revista da Semana* insisted that in Nice: “All women with the right to the diadem of Venus will appear: not the diadem of Venus Aphrodite, but of Venus armed and noble, sovereign of men and gods; the (pro)creator [*geradora*] Venus, from whom ought to spring a human race perfect in beauty, morality, and strength.”⁶ Explicitly assuming the banner of patriotism, editors of the *Revista da Semana* went on to pose the questions: “Why [...] should a representative of Brazilian beauty not participate? Is it because in Brazil our race has not yet produced perfect examples of human beauty? Is it because we believe in our physical inferiority?” The answer, of course, was: “Certainly not.” On the contrary, editors declared that “innumerable foreign travelers” had exalted the beauty of the *Brasileira*, and that it was time for her to assume “the prestigious place she deserves in the gallery of female beauty.”⁷

Although a “Miss Brasil” was not selected in time to compete in Nice, the sponsoring editors explicitly construed the contest as one that sought to define and legitimate Brazil not only to Brazilians but also to the key players on the global stage. In an age in which social darwinism and eugenics (the “science” of the improvement of the human race) held the power of scientific truth in Latin American as well as in Europe and the United States, female beauty was conflated with physical “perfection,” moral virtue, and intellectual superiority.⁸ Editors of the *Revista da Semana* proclaimed the seriousness of the first national beauty contest by insisting that it had “eugenic significance”:

The beauty contest is no longer an exercise in puerile vanity, a simple diversion of readers of frivolous magazines, but has attained eugenic significance as an attestation of the physical qualities of a race. As much as strength, beauty is a certification of ethnological worth, a testimony of eugenic fitness. Weak and decadent peoples are incapable of producing models of beauty that represent the summation of superior ethnic characteristics.⁹

By defining and displaying the beauty of Brazilian women to the world, the nation’s intellectual elite would demonstrate the “progress” of Brazil and its capacity for achieving the highest level of “civilization.” If Brazil, a nation-in-the-making, had not yet achieved the same heights of “civilization” as France, it was quickly catching up, assimilating the best that Europe had to offer, while avoiding the evils, excesses, and “degeneracy” of modernity.

Defining a National Racial Type

World War I, which left Europe in physical and spiritual ruins, stimulated a nationalistic awakening in Brazil, rekindling the ideology of *ufanismo*. (This term comes from the title of a book published in 1901 by Afonso Celso, *Porque me ufano do meu país*, or Why I am Proud of My Country.) *Ufanismo* was associated with an exalted pride in the nation and boundless optimism about its future. It was based first on a view that nature had blessed Brazilians with an enormous land of prodigious wealth, beauty, and potential: a land that “gives everything” (*tudo dá*) and that knows no natural disasters (*calamidades*). Second, *ufanismo* was based on the view that the Brazilian “race” (often referred to as “Race”) was formed from the most excellent qualities of the three formative races (Indigenous American, African, and European). Third, *ufanismo* celebrated a national history untainted by defeat or humiliation by other peoples. And yet, deeply intertwined with this optimism was pessimism rooted in fear that racial mixture had doomed the Brazilian people morally, physically, and intellectually. Anxious about negative foreign assessments of Brazil’s racial identity, the intellectual elite struggled to redefine the nation’s history of racial mixing in a positive light, while demonstrating that Brazil was steadily moving toward the improvement and “purification” (or “whitening”) of the “race.”¹⁰

The racial anxieties of the Brazilian cultural elite, as revealed in their obfuscating rhetoric about race, were nowhere more evident than in the propaganda for these contests. The 1921 contest organizers declared that the contests had “transcendental significance,” since they would serve to “offer for contemplation” throughout the whole country the “great richness and variety of types of Brazilian beauty.” This would ultimately help to answer the “fundamental [...] troubling question” of what constituted the highest form of female beauty within the emerging Brazilian “Race.” Editors proclaimed the contests to be highly patriotic initiatives that would foster interest in the “evolution” of the still-young Brazilian “Race,” promote national self-awareness “in this tumultuous instant of our ethnic formation,” and contribute to “exalting the race.”¹¹

They further appealed to the intellectual elite to use these contests as the basis for serious ethnographic studies of “*Nosso Povo*.”¹² Dozens of Brazil’s most prominent professionals and intellectuals paid homage to the beauty of Brazilian women, and they were quoted as declaring that the contests would prove that under the different climatic, social, and historical circumstances of the Americas, the human race could achieve just as aesthetically “perfect” and “noble” types of beauty as had been achieved by the “old pure races.”¹³

Emphasizing the richness of Brazil’s racial mosaic, the editors of the sponsoring periodicals buttressed the myth of racial democracy in Brazil by asserting

that they had absolutely no prejudices or regional preferences: “The most perfect example of female beauty” could just as well come from the rural hinterland as from the national capital, from the north as from the south. At the same time, they enthusiastically promoted the myth of national origin in racial mixing, declaring that the great diversity and variety of types of beauty in Brazil were fusing, creating not only a distinctly new and superior type, but making, at times, the differences between women from the frontier and the capital indistinguishable.¹⁴ In the wake of the 1929 contest, *A Noite* editors triumphantly proclaimed:

Olga Bergamini de Sá [“Miss Brasil”] is today a symbol – a symbol of the grace and the charm of [our] race... a blooming and remarkable flower of [our] race – being fused and shaped of so many disparate ethnic elements into a supreme perfection in which we can see and proclaim in ourselves the charms and splendors of a new people – in a new patria, eternally young.¹⁵

Not surprisingly, the photographs of the “beauties” that filled Brazilian magazines for months reflected the class and racial hierarchies that the rhetoric denied. Although the *Revista da Semana* had promised to “divulge through photographs the diverse types of beauty in each state and region,” demonstrating their claim that “feminine beauty is multiform as the flower,” in practice the results confirmed dominant prejudices. The photographs of contestants – who were said to represent the great variety of regional “types” – documented what elite men considered “the superior qualities of our Race,” and portrayed Brazil according to their notions of its “most aesthetic human aspect.”¹⁶ Not just serious contestants, but virtually all the contestants whose photographs were reproduced in the pages of the sponsoring periodicals were white, perhaps a more or less conscious affirmation of the speed and success of racial transformation and “improvement” in Brazil.¹⁷ “Whitening” was triumphing; the “national type” or “Race” was approximating the highest (European) standards of biological superiority. Held up as the representatives of the community at large, the elected “Misses” represented an illusory unity, in which a small minority was privileged through a collective ritual to represent the nation as a whole.¹⁸

Defining a National Femininity

But beauty contests were also about defining an idealized feminine identity for the rapidly modernizing nation. In representing the different regions and states of Brazil, the elected “Misses” represented the “natural,” conservative, and eternal (i.e. feminine) elements of the nation. The sponsoring editors claimed:

“‘Miss Brasil’ ... is a symbol. She is the splendor of tropical Nature.”¹⁹ Like the prodigious beauty, richness, and vast diversity of the Brazilian territory, the land’s women – often referred to as its “flowers” – were said to exhibit a spectacular abundance of different types of hair, skin colors, eye colors, sizes, and shapes. Editors associated the particular beauty of each regional “type” with the perceived characteristics of the region’s geography. Ultimately, however, they assigned unity to this variety. Just as the Brazilian nation encompassed and benefited from vastly different geographical conditions, so too did it encompass a wealth of human varieties, none of which, according to the editors’ rhetoric, were any more “Brazilian” than the rest. All, they declared, were equally Brazilian.²⁰

Being so closely associated with “Nature,” Brazil’s women were attributed with appropriate character traits: innocence, simplicity, and modesty. Interestingly, the winners in the various rounds all proclaimed their total surprise (“utter stupefaction” in one case) at having been chosen, their lack of any egoistic ambitions, their gratitude to those who had helped them, and their sole desire to represent and glorify the nation as best they could.²¹ The 1929 “Miss Brasil,” Olga Bergamini de Sá, confessed that her life contained “nothing of interest” and “nothing extraordinary.” She explained that she got up early, went to bed early, did chores “appropriate for a young woman [*moça*],” studied a little bit, took a piano lesson on Saturday morning, napped after lunch, talked with her family at dinnertime, went to church, and for a special treat accompanied her family to a private party or to the movies. But the male journalist who interviewed her reported that as she spoke of her life, she became ever more beautiful and radiant: indeed, she seemed to be wrapped, like an “unconscious goddess,” in a “halo of simplicity and modesty.”²² In short, beauty queens were conceived (and by extension, the ideal female type in Brazil was defined) as representing all that was inert and virgin – in other words, Brazil’s potential – which, like the land itself, was filled with promise to be realized with the active intervention of men.

This same journalist went on to laud Olga’s physical “qualities:” her “natural” softness, graceful harmony, perfect serenity, and the sparkle of her eyes.²³ Such physical traits “naturally” and inevitably went along with highly refined sentiments, charitable impulses, chastity, and absolute virtuousness. In the words of the sponsoring editors, the contest finalists were:

above all ... the very image of the Brazilian family, in its traditional scrupulousness. The ‘misses’ express the brilliant height of society, in its civility and spirit. We take pride in the modesty and reserve, simplicity and charm of the contestants. ... The contest rewarded not just beauty, but also noble sentiments and generosity.²⁴

In demonstration of their virtuousness, “Miss Brasil” contestants were always described as having had a “sterling upbringing,” as being perfect models of “discretion” and “modesty,” and as being great defenders of morality as well as devoted (and practicing) Catholics. In demonstration of their generosity, “Miss Brasil” contestants made mandatory appearances at charity teas, expressed concern for the plight of poor children, visited female prisoners, and so on. Thus, if they suddenly stepped out of private family life into the public realm, they did so as models of beneficence. Their social engagement was praiseworthy to the extent that it contrasted with dangerous models of independent working women and feminists.

But the 1929 “Miss Brasil” was also cast as a modern girl who loved the movies “like everybody,” played national music on her guitar, read romantic novels, wanted above all to own and drive a car, and was a “great fan of tennis ... and dance.”²⁵ Such preferences, however, did not undermine her commitment to guarding traditional national standards of morality. Although Olga praised American women for their independence and spirit, she stated that Brazilian women would only be happy by preserving their own customs. *A Noite* speculated that her modesty would place her at a disadvantage in the “Miss Universe” bathing suit contest – a price they seemed willing to pay. And editors further praised her for neither smoking in public nor exploiting the commercial potential of her position by accepting contracts. She remained to the end a “beautiful expression of femininity” and a “symbol of our [Brazilian] family.”²⁶

The prominent use of Greek imagery was laden with both racial and gender meanings. Publicity for the 1921 contest reflected the wishful anticipations of some Brazilian eugenicists that Brazilians, becoming ever more “perfect,” would be “transformed into pure Greeks.”²⁷ Flanking the *Revista da Semana*’s announcement of the first national beauty contest were Ionic columns wrapped with ribbons displaying the names of Brazil’s 21 states and the Federal District; above and below the columns were heads of Greek statues.²⁸ In 1929, sponsoring editors described the victorious “Miss Brasil” as having the “classical features of a Greek statue.”²⁹

The analogy of beauty queens with Greek statues lent respectability to the enterprise. Like the beauty of Greek statues, the idealized national femininity was natural, unspoiled, and utterly devoid of sexuality. As an embodiment of the nation, “Miss Brasil” (like a Greek statue) symbolized all that was genuine, virtuous, and pure: the eternal forces of nature, uncorrupted by modernity. Symbolically connected to the land – its sun, sky, waters, rich soil, wealth, and flowers – , she stood for the immutable existence of the nation and its people. But frequent references to the increasing “perfection” of the Brazilian race – its rapid approximation to the “pure” (European) races – simultaneously positioned

Brazilian beauty queens as the symbols of progress. “Miss Brasil” was conceptualized as both the national and the modern embodiment of the “(pro)creator Venus” – the virtuous virgin/mother whose sexuality was to be employed in the service of bringing to birth a eugenically superior nation.³⁰

Discovering the “Popular Will”

The conceptualization and organization of the contests as national plebiscites is also fascinating, both in its denial of the actual political and cultural disenfranchisement of the majority of Brazilians, and in its self-conscious goal of promoting a sense of national popular unity and collective identity. The deadlines for the first national contest were extended numerous times, since, according to the sponsoring periodicals, the contest had been embraced with vast enthusiasm not only among all social classes, but also in the most remote corners of Brazil, where carrying out the contest involved overcoming difficult logistical problems, including the precariousness of the mail service and the scarcity of itinerant photographers.³¹ So, in the declared interest of allowing “the authentic expression of the popular will of the *whole* country” to be taken into consideration, and in fulfillment of the promise to publicize the results of as many different regions as possible, the final election of “Miss Brasil” took place almost nineteen months after the contest was first announced.³²

In 1929, editors of *A Noite* reemphasized that they had given considerable thought to the ideal form the contest should take in order to ensure that it rested “on direct popular suffrage,” and would thus have “unquestionable representative force.” They promised Brazilians that their national contest would be different from those held in France, Portugal, Germany, Italy, Spain, Belgium, and Luxembourg, where “imperfect electoral procedures” had given judges too much power and had led to “elitist” results.³³ Later, after the final judging, which was staged in Rio’s largest stadium, editors apologized that “compact waves of *povo*” had left no space for the parading of the contestants. But since they had promised that the contest would be “of the people, for the people,” they took credit for having opposed all attempts to disperse the tens of thousands (in some estimates 100,000) jubilant people who thronged inside the stadium, and “the rivers of human beings” that flowed through the streets outside. In the end (and after endless delays), judging took place in a private room within the stadium.³⁴ Lauding the national sponsors, the *paulista* newspaper *A Gazeta* editorialized: “the people ... through their vote, exercised in all its fullness, their sovereignty.”³⁵

Despite the rhetoric, national beauty contests were organized as “plebiscites” only in their initial stages at the local level. Even at this level, however, most

Brazilians were excluded by virtue of the fact that they could not afford to buy, and often could not read, newspapers. Moreover, those who participated would have been keenly aware of which contestants had a chance in the national – and international – arena. The final winner was chosen by a distinguished jury of “eminent personalities:” “illustrious [all male] personages.” They included sculptors and painters of the School of Belas Arts, members of the Brazilian Academy of Letters, professors of anatomy, art critics, journalists, and prominent politicians – serious men whose professional status lent prestige to the event. The president of the national jury in 1929 was Coelho Neto, president of the Brazilian Academy of Letters and an ardent nationalist.³⁶ Although the judges were charged by the sponsoring periodicals with respecting “the aesthetic sensibility of the *povo*, [by] identifying ... with rigor and loyalty, the essence of the popular vote,”³⁷ it was ultimately elite Brazilian men who defined the ideals of female beauty and who construed women as the symbolic bearers of the nation. It was they too who placed “Miss Brasil” in competition in the international arena, and thereby entered into competition with the foreign male elite to demonstrate their own nation’s “progress.” In anticipation of sending off the 1929 winner to compete in Galveston, Texas, editors of *A Noite* claimed: “For foreigners, who do not know us, or who imagine us in a state of semi-barbarism, in the solitude of virgin forests, [“Miss Brasil”] will exhibit, with her beauty and graciousness, our credentials for Civilization.” And they added: “all our hearts will pray for her, on the altar of the *Patria*.”³⁸

“Miss Brasil” as Symbol of Modernity and Progress

The winner of the first Miss Brasil contest, “Zéze” Leone from the port city of Santos in the state of São Paulo, was perfectly situated to symbolize Brazil’s “Progress” as exemplified by economic dynamism, racial “whitening,” social democratization, and the triumph of bourgeois respectability. Editors of the *paulista* magazine *A Cigarra* boasted:

In all things and endeavors, São Paulo has the destiny to be always first among the states. In the capacity for work, initiatives of all kinds, production of wealth, sports, in everything, after all, it is always first, and the admiration of the country is focused on it. São Paulo claimed also the destiny ... that here, on this blessed soil, the most beautiful woman of our race was born and raised.³⁹

And in even greater self-aggrandizement, they declared: “we” [*Paulistas*? Brazilians?], unlike “inferior peoples in the first stages of their evolution or degenerate peoples [neither of whom] cultivate human beauty,” ... “we are capable when faced with a perfect human type, to let our intelligent eyes linger and to understand its value.”⁴⁰

Coming from the most economically dynamic state in Brazil (that had just recently surpassed Rio de Janeiro as Brazil’s largest industrial center), “Miss São Paulo” was by definition a partner in her state’s modernity and progress. It was no coincidence that her father was of Italian background, which emphasized the link between São Paulo’s success and the massive influx of European immigrants to the state since the late nineteenth century. It is significant here to mention that Italians were perceived as having contributed not only labor and capital, but also their genes, which supposedly fostered the “whitening” – and therefore enhanced the potential for progress – of Brazil’s population. Zéze’s “perfections” were said to include, in addition to an unspecified “thousand personal graces:” “the color of her thick hair, which is a rare fiery chestnut and gives her head a something divinely elegant; her fine red lips; her admirable straight white teeth; the harmony of the lines of her body.”⁴¹

Equally important, the womenfolk of São Paulo had the reputation of being innocent, modest, respectable, and sincerely devoted to their homes and families – in contrast to their more sophisticated, and often corrupted (or even “degenerate”) counterparts from the more cosmopolitan Rio de Janeiro. In short, “Zéze” Leone represented the perfect combination of tradition and modernity. She represented the promise of future “evolution” (in the terms that were used at the time) along with national morality and authenticity. Like the manufactured goods produced in São Paulo by Brazilians for Brazilians, she represented local potential untainted by the foreign commercial connections and cultural pretensions (vices) of Rio de Janeiro.

She (and her parents), who lived in a modest but tastefully decorated house, also represented the epitome of the *paulista* bourgeois ethic of hard work, pragmatism, responsibility, and respectability. Her mother, a descendent of the *paulista* aristocracy, had received the best traditional education. But when she married a tailor of Italian background, her family cut her off. Undaunted, the couple was said to have overcome innumerable obstacles, thanks to their love, fierce determination to succeed, and boundless optimism. Upon falling into financial difficulties, Zéze’s mother “helped out” by giving piano lessons. Zéze, in turn, internalized all the best values of her parents. Because of her beauty, the stylishness she had learned from her father, and the family background of her mother, she began to receive invitations to frequent “society;” but when jealous rivals insulted her father for being a poor tailor, she stopped accepting invitations.

Upon winning, Zéze declared that she would use her new wealth to buy a small modest house in Santos, but would remain the same person she had always been. As for her father (who was still strong), he would continue working in his trade; her mother (who was said to need rest) would stop working.⁴²

The editors of the Rio de Janeiro newspaper who had launched the 1921 contest concluded by claiming that “public opinion sees in Zéze less a beautiful young woman than a vision of our race of tomorrow.”⁴³ Whether or not this was an accurate reading of public opinion, it places beauty contests in the realm where they belong: in the service of nation-building.

Commercialization and Nation Building

Beauty contests quickly became enormously popular throughout Brazil, attracting widespread attention, participation, and commentary. The sponsoring periodicals pronounced the first national contest a resounding success among “all social classes,” and it became a topic of considerable – often heated – public (and private) discussion. Radicals joined conservatives in denouncing beauty contests as “funerals of modesty,” shameless commercial exploitation of women, and humiliating debasement of women to the level of “inferior species.”⁴⁴

Social commentators ridiculed the new social ritual by exposing the manipulations used by some families to ensure victory for their daughters. In a chronicle by Lola de Oliveira, the ugly daughter of a small-town *coronel* – described as having the mouth of a tea-kettle spout, a nose turned up as if it had been made in a kiln, crooked legs, and enormous feet – won the local beauty contest thanks to the fact that her father and fiancé had bought up local issues of the sponsoring magazine and had mobilized all their friends and dependents, including the *jécas* [rude countrymen] on the *fazenda*, to sign and send in votes on the clipped coupons.⁴⁵ Such problems seem to have been widespread, as acknowledged by the *paulista* newspaper *A Gazeta*, that resorted to printing coupons on the verso of the front page so as to make it impossible for newspaper sellers to clip the coupons and sell them separately from the papers.⁴⁶

But despite corruption, ridicule, and moral and political objections, the commercial success of beauty contests was irresistible. In the 1929 national contest, *A Noite* calculated that 13,673 young women were competing for the title of “Miss Brasil” in 1,300 localities.⁴⁷ And it recorded that the leading candidate, who was from Rio de Janeiro’s affluent Botafogo neighborhood, had accumulated 46,618 votes, followed by front-runners in five other neighborhoods, each of whom had accumulated over 30,000 votes.⁴⁸ Dozens of local newspapers and magazines throughout Brazil cashed in on the fad by launching their own beauty

contests, filling months of issues with photographs of eligible candidates, and tallying up thousands of votes submitted on clipped coupons. Creative adaptations proliferated. Editors of the *Revista da Semana* sponsored spin-off contests; for example, the magazine asked its male readers: “How do you declare your love in a letter of twenty lines or less?” and its female readers: “How do you respond in a letter of twenty lines or less?”⁴⁹ *A Cigarra* (the magazine that claimed the largest circulation in São Paulo) ran almost continual contests beginning in 1921, instructing readers to clip the coupon at the bottom of the page and to send it in with their vote for the “finest example of Brazilian beauty,” or the most beautiful blond and brunette, or the young woman best endowed with social graces and intellectual prowess, or the most eligible bachelor, or their favorite movie stars, and so on.⁵⁰

In its exploitation of contests as commercial gimmicks, and in the introduction of the mass spectacle of the public parading and judging of beauty contest finalists, the print media helped to bring ever wider circles of the public into the growing capitalist commodity marketplace, and by extension, into the national community. From the very beginning, the national winner was offered not just cosmetics, precious jewels, silver tableware, and the latest in fashionable clothing (the ultimate wedding trousseau), but also lengthy stays in Rio’s best hotels, luxury automobiles, trips to Europe aboard luxury ocean liners, contracts to star in national films, and so on.⁵¹

As promised, the Rio sponsors also exploited the commercial success of the contests to promote a sense of national collective identity. While regional collaborators reiterated the rhetoric of the national sponsors for local consumption, *A Noite* ran frequent, grandiose, full front page articles displaying the titles and logos of participating periodicals from all over the nation.⁵² In these articles, the national sponsors devoted an extraordinary amount of space over an eighteen-month period to lavishing praise on regional periodicals for their enthusiastic collaboration, quoting any new rhetorical twists or flourishes they introduced, citing the endorsements of prominent local intellectuals and politicians, and celebrating the superlative beauty of “the most voted” candidates from all corners of the nation. The São Paulo sponsoring magazine for the 1929 contest, *A Gazeta*, quoted *A Noite*’s extravagant praise for their state’s finalists and boasted that “Miss São Paulo,” who came not from the capital city but from the small town of Barretos:

...is an intoxicating prototype of civilization, in her very modern fashions ... in her Greek poise ... in her supple sylph-like gait. And she is not even from Hygienopolis, nor from the Avenida ... nor from other aristocratic and fashionable neighborhoods! She is from

Barretos. This demonstrates that the beautiful and fortunate city that gave us Queen Yvonne is, like all the *paulista* cities, the nucleus of elegance and civilization, of beauty and wonders!⁵³

Although organized as competitions, the contests were conceptualized as rituals of national integration: “festival[s] of female fraternity.”⁵⁴ The sophisticated cosmopolitan readers in the nation’s capital were introduced to the names, views, and “superior qualities” of their fellow countrymen (and women) from the hinterland (who were widely maligned in elite circles as irredeemably uncivilized or even degenerate). At the same time, those from the hinterland were encouraged to identify with the larger nation. And all Brazilians were called on to participate in the collective task of defining and celebrating the “authentic qualities” of the nation as a whole. Although women participated in the early beauty contests as contestants and voters, not sponsors or judges, their enthusiastic endorsement was key to the success of the ritual. It was not only girls of the social elite who clipped coupons, submitted their most glamorous photographs, and delighted in gossiping about who *was* winning and who *should* win.⁵⁵ Zélia Gattai remembered that girls in her modest neighborhood were also eager to enter the contests (desiring at least to see their photographs in print) and anxiously took their measurements to compare their figures with those of the elected “misses.”⁵⁶ Even Patrícia Galvão (Pagu) – who became the muse of the *paulista* avant-garde by the late 1920s and joined the Brazilian Communist Party during the 1930s – entered a beauty contest sponsored by Fox Films in 1927.⁵⁷ In 1930, a male spectator among the crowds of people straining to get a glimpse of “Miss Brasil” as she paraded through the streets of Rio de Janeiro remarked: “There are only two professions in Brazil: soccer star and beauty queen.”⁵⁸

What was the appeal of beauty contests to so many young Brazilian women? Lois Banner has suggested that in the United States, early beauty contests were rituals of identification, communication, and bonding among women.⁵⁹ Sarah Banet-Weiser, in her study of U.S. beauty pageants in the 1990s, interprets contestants’ participation as a form of liberal agency in which women can distinguish themselves and construct themselves as distinct individuals (within given boundaries).⁶⁰ Both factors are evident in the Brazilian context. On the one hand, where very rapid socio-economic modernization was undermining past securities and where foreign images were introducing new standards, many women embraced beauty contests as an arena in which to participate in defining what it meant to be simultaneously modern and Brazilian. To what extent did the “finest example of Brazilian beauty” emulate the image of the Hollywood film star? What was her body type? Did she have a paying job, practice sports, diet, use make up, bob her hair, smoke in public, sunbathe in the new revealing

maillots, and so on? Given the great importance of image (as was dramatized by the flamboyant stylishness of the female members of the *paulista* avant-garde of the 1920s), the rise of a feminist movement in Brazil, and the proliferation of new public roles available to middle-class women, it is no wonder that many ordinary women worried about how to behave and how to project an appropriately modern, fashionable image without crossing acceptable boundaries. On the other hand, within the rising competitive social order, beauty contests also offered “respectable” women a degree of public exposure and a safe realm in which to prove their “success” as individuals without compromising their femininity or morality. Since beauty was conceived by eugenicists of the period as a personal trait that was as much achieved as innate,⁶¹ winners could take pride in their superior ability to combine physical fitness, good taste, and modern sophistication. Moreover, they could attribute their instant wealth as well as success in attracting plentiful suitors, followed by the “achievement” of a “good” marriage (the female path to security and status) to their individual skill.⁶²

At a wider social level, how should we understand the groundswell of participatory desire and assess its impacts? At the grass roots, local communities could – and did – appropriate the ritual of beauty contests to define their own aesthetic preferences. When movie theaters in working-class neighborhoods invited ticket purchasers to cast their votes for a “beauty queen” to represent the theater, voters freely set their own criteria for “beauty” without any concern about the winner’s chance at success in the national or international arena.⁶³ Similarly, when labor unions began to crown queens, the winners were praised for the “honest paid work” they did for their families and country.⁶⁴ When African-Brazilian social clubs organized their own contests, they envisioned a different end result to the story of national origin in racial mixing. The 1930 “Miss Progresso,” Malvina Alves, declared she was proud that others saw in her not just a beautiful woman, but one who “incarnated all the virtues of the self-sacrificing [*abnegada*] *Raça Negra*, of which [she was] happy to belong.”⁶⁵ And when Japanese-Brazilian social clubs crowned kimono-clad queens, they stretched the ethnic boundaries of national inclusion even further.⁶⁶

It must certainly have been at this level – at the point of articulation between national rhetoric and local preferences – that the cultural impact of beauty contests was most significant. There is ample evidence that subaltern communities used beauty contests to exalt models of beauty that were excluded at the national level. At the same time, their decision to participate in the ritual itself reflected consensus about the terms on which a national community should be formed. The election of light-skinned “queens” by African-Brazilian social clubs – who were awarded titles such as “Miss Progresso” and “Miss Renaissance” – indicated a degree of acceptance of dominant norms and a desire for inclusion that prob-

ably characterized the contests among most subaltern groups.⁶⁷ Similarly, when Waltenira Camões was crowned “Queen of the Workers of Barreto” on May Day, 1929, she received a dowry (in the form of a savings account) substantial enough to attract a “good” husband and (presumably) to stop working for wages.⁶⁸ In short, beauty contests provided a powerful structure of mediation. Through them, challenges to the dominant norms could be expressed; but while differences were acknowledged (and even celebrated), they were ultimately subsumed in the common experience of participation in a unifying modern ritual.

In conclusion, national beauty contests in Brazil helped to reconcile three competing, and often conflicting, strands of national identity: Catholic, liberal, and scientific. First, the “Misses” represented the defense of religion and traditional morality, seen by many to be the true (or “purest”) foundations of the *Patria* and the essential elements distinguishing Brazil from Europe. Above all, “Miss Brasil” was the epitome of moral integrity and discretion: she was a devout Catholic and churchgoer, and a loving and loyal daughter whose life revolved around her family. As such, she was a symbol rooted in the past; but, like the Virgin Mary herself, she also embodied hope for the future. Second, beauty contests were presented as eminently democratic popular exercises in which women and men of all social classes and races were invited to participate, and in which public opinion supposedly reigned. Even if Brazil’s political leaders didn’t represent the *povo* (the disenfranchised masses and women), “Miss Brasil” would. Disenfranchised at home, but “elected” to represent Brazil in the international arena, she helped to mediate the tensions of expanding claims to citizenship. Third, the pseudo-scientific and eugenic rationalizations of beauty contests popularized the modernizing project of Brazil’s urban elite. Ultimately, “Miss Brasil” was constructed as a symbol of the new nation in-the-making, evolving toward the heights of modern civilization by assimilating all the best of modernity while avoiding its evils, excesses, and degeneracy.

At first glance, the beauty queen and samba queen might appear to be contradictory symbols of Brazilian national identity. The elevation of the samba queen to a symbol of national identity would seem to imply a celebration of Brazil’s African roots and a definition of the nation as rooted in lower class, popular culture. In contrast, “Miss Brasil” symbolized the aspirations of the Brazilian elite to achieve international status by demonstrating the nation’s “civilization” and potential for “progress,” defined in European terms as economic modernization, racial whitening, and bourgeois respectability. To extend the contrast further, the samba queen was the quintessential symbol of the prostitute: the sensual *mulatta* woman of the street who had escaped the sexual control of male family members and freely paraded her semi-naked body in public, seducing unknown (often white) men. She was the object of illegitimate desire, and the

prize that conferred masculinity on men. “Miss Brasil” was the quintessential opposite: the chaste, highly discreet (in practice, white) virgin whose sexuality was carefully controlled by her male family members and preserved for the exclusive service of family and nation. The role of “Miss Brasil” required the sublimation of sexuality; her feminine virtue and innocent beauty were precious assets deployed by men to win national status in the international arena. Rather than an object of desire, she was cast as a “tutelary angel:” a powerful normative model of morality and respectability.⁶⁹

And yet the common threads that tied these two symbols together reveal the deepest, most persuasive guiding fictions of modern Brazilian national identity. These fictions helped to bind individuals to the national community by providing essential common reference points for debates over national goals and the appropriate means to achieve them. First, as I have shown, the symbol of the beauty queen, like that of the samba queen, rested on the myth of national origin in racial mixing, even if the distinct skin colors of the two symbols belied the idealized image of a unified national “race.” Second, both rested on the myth of social leveling. In the samba dancing of Carnival, opposing classes, races, and sexes came together (even if on very unequal terms and very temporarily) in an exuberant national collective festival. In the national beauty contests, Brazilians of both sexes and of all classes, races, and regions were invited to participate in a vast “plebiscite” to choose collectively (even if in highly unequal roles) the woman who most perfectly symbolized Brazilian-ness. Third, both the samba queen and the beauty queen symbolized an exuberant, eternally youthful nation striving optimistically to invent a glorious future (even if this future was envisioned in quite different ways). These guiding fictions should be understood as both ideological tools forged and wielded by the national elite in the project of co-opting and controlling the masses, and as potentially empowering mythologies that could on occasion provide excluded groups with the language and legitimacy to contest racial, gender, and class hierarchies.

NOTES

1. On the history of samba in Brazil, see John Charles Chasteen, “The Prehistory of Samba: Carnival Dancing in Rio de Janeiro, 1840-1917,” *Journal of Latin American Studies* 28:1 (1996). For a sociological analysis of samba and carnival, see Roberto da Matta, *Carnivals, Rogues, and Heroes: An Interpretation of the Brazilian Dilemma*, trans. John Drury (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991). An interesting collection of articles by anthropologists on contemporary beauty contests around the world is Colleen Balerino Cohen, Richard Wilk, and Beverly Stoeltje (eds.), *Beauty Queens on the Global Stage: Gender, Contests, and Power* (New York: Routledge, 1996). On the important role

of mass public spectacle in creating the “imagined communities” at the base of modern nations and states, see: Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 370-378. My work, like much work on nationalism in the “Third World,” builds on the work of Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 2nd ed. (London: Verso, 1991). However, in the case of Brazil and other countries where illiteracy was very high well into the twentieth century, imagined national communities were built on public spectacle, other forms of popular culture, and/or on participation in military campaigns. It is unlikely that beauty contests would have succeeded in Brazil to the extent they did had they not expanded beyond the print media into public spectacles.

2. Martha Rocha published a fascinating autobiography, *Martha Rocha, uma biografia, em depoimento a Isa Pessõa* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Objetiva, 1993). See pp. 60-63, 81, 92-93, 96-97, 100-102 for the information cited here.
3. “Qual é a mais bella mulher do Brasil?” *Revista da Semana* 22:39 (1921). The contest was announced simultaneously in “A mais bella mulher do Brasil,” *A Noite*, 23 Sep. 1921, 1. In regular, front-page reporting about the contest, *A Noite* quoted statements from regional periodicals that had signed on as collaborators. See, for example, the editorial by federal deputy Gonçalves Maia from the *pernambucan* paper *A Provincia*, reprinted in *A Noite*, 7 Oct. 1921, 1. On 10 October, *A Noite* editors declared (also in a front page article) that they had received 43 letters from periodicals in Rio Grande do Sul alone requesting designation as local collaborators; on 22 October, they claimed to have been contacted by 55 periodicals in Minas Gerais.
4. “Qual é a mais bella mulher do Brasil?” *Revista da Semana* 22:39 (1921); “A mais bella mulher do Brasil,” *A Noite*, 23 Sep. 1921, 1.
5. *Ibid.* In the United States, photographic beauty contests had become all the rage by the late 1880s to 1890s, when the development of the half-tone plate permitted the reproduction of photographs in newspapers. Mass circulation dailies and even some of the early women’s magazines, including the *Ladies Home Journal* (that condemned the practice until 1911) discovered beauty contests to be highly successful promotional devices. See Lois Banner, *American Beauty* (New York: Alfred A. Knoph, 1983), 256-258. It is interesting that the propaganda for the 1921 “Miss Brasil” contest did not specifically mention the “Miss America” contest that had just been held in Atlantic City.
6. “Qual é a mais bella mulher do Brasil?” *Revista da Semana* 22:39 (1921); “A mais bella mulher do Brasil,” *A Noite*, 23 Sep. 1921, 1.
7. *Ibid.* For similar rhetoric, see “Chronica: Olympiadas da formosura,” *A Cigarra* 8:170 (1921).
8. On the eugenic movement in Brazil, see: Nancy Leys Stepan, *“The Hour of Eugenics:” Race, Gender, and Nation in Latin America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991).
9. “Qual é a mais bella mulher do Brasil?” *Revista da Semana* 22:39 (1921). Baby beauty contests were also very popular in Brazil during the 1920s. Invented by Dr. Moncorvo Filho in the first decade of the century to reward poor mothers for good mothering, they became more commercialized in the 1920s. Arthur Moncorvo Filho, *Histórico da protecção à infancia no Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro: Empresa Graphica Editora, 1926), 156. For an example of the typical eugenic rhetoric used to promote these contests, see

- “Na era de puericultura,” *A Gazeta* (São Paulo), 25 Feb. 1929, 3. In 1927, a “Concurso de Eugenia” paid homage to the empress D. Leopoldina on the centenary of her death by selecting three children who came closest to the eugenic ideal. See Renato Kehl, *A eugenia no Brasil: Esboço histórico e bibliográfico* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Sodrê, 1929), 26-27.
10. On *ufanismo*, see Lucia Lippi Oliveira, *A questão nacional na Primeira República* (São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1990), 24-25, 95-109, 129-131. Brazilian intellectuals modified European racial theories, asserting that race mixture could have an elevating, or “whitening” effect on the national population. On the consolidation of the “whitening ideal” during the 1920s to 1930s, see Thomas E. Skidmore, *Black Into White: Race and Nationality in Brazilian Thought* (New York, 1974; Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), Chapter 6. On the creation of the myth of racial democracy in Brazil, see Emilia Viotti da Costa, “The Myth of Racial Democracy: A Legacy of the Empire,” in *The Brazilian Empire: Myths and Histories* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 214-246. On Brazilian myths of origin, see Richard G. Parker, “Myths of Origin,” in *Bodies, Pleasures, and Passions: Sexual Culture in Contemporary Brazil* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1991), 7-29. As Nancy Stepan has also shown, “efforts at reevaluation of the national self were carried out in the name of race, not in rejection of race.” Stepan, *The Hour of Eugenics*, 137.
 11. “Qual é a mais bella mulher do Brasil?” *Revista da Semana* 22:39 (1921); “A mais bella mulher do Brasil,” *A Noite*, 23 Sep. 1921, 1.
 12. *Ibid.*
 13. Augusto de Lima, as quoted in *A Noite*, 8 Oct. 1921, 1. *A Noite* published laudatory statements about the contest by dozens of Brazil’s most prominent intellectuals. See, for example, other statements quoted in front page articles by Coelho Neto (13 Oct. 1921), Goulart de Andrade (21 Oct. 1921), and Basilio de Magalhães (12 Nov. 1921).
 14. “Qual é a mais bella mulher do Brasil?” *Revista da Semana* 22:39 (1921); “A mais bella mulher do Brasil,” *A Noite*, 23 Sep. 1921, 1. The rhetoric surrounding the contest was repeated over and over by the sponsoring periodicals in Rio de Janeiro and reiterated with few or no changes by regional periodicals throughout the country. In 1928, the sponsoring periodicals offered a \$10,000 cash prize (in dollars) to the winner, explaining that their intention was to open the contest to *all*, not excluding those who would be unable to afford to travel to Galveston for the “Miss Universe” contest without the prize money. “‘Miss Brasil’ comparecerá ao concuso mundial de belleza,” *A Noite*, 22 Nov. 1928, 1.
 15. “As ‘misses’ attractivos de todas as festas,” *A Noite*, 14 May 1929, 1.
 16. The quotes are from: “A belleza brasileira: As mais lindas moças do Brasil,” *Revista da Semana* 22:13 (1921). In 1929, *A Noite* reprinted an article by T. de Souza Lobo that admitted that while the female characters in national literature exhibited a vast variety of racial types, the “beauties” the states sent to Rio were the “daughters of the most powerful racial group:” the female descendants of those who brought to Brazil “science, art, literature, Christianity, family organization, work, capital, government institutions, language, and culture.” “‘Miss Brasil.’ Comparecerá à grande parada esthetica de Galveston,” *A Noite*, 15 Apr. 1929, 7.
 17. I attempted during July 1995 to examine photographs of beauty contestants from Brazil’s

- most rural (and non-white) states, especially in the Northeast. But the regional magazines in the collection of the National Library in Rio de Janeiro had almost all been taken out of circulation due to the very poor condition of the paper, and none were microfilmed.
18. Interestingly, various critics commented that the 1954 “Miss Brasil” – the blonde, blue-eyed Martha Rocha from Bahia – while undeniably beautiful, was not a suitable representative of the ideal Brazilian “type.” In response, an admirer commented: “She was a young woman full of colors; she was not a graceless white. She was a fiery, happy, delightful [*gostoso*] woman.” Rocha, *Martha Rocha*, 101-102.
 19. «Na vespas da partida de Olga Bergamini de Sá.” *A Noite*, 2 May 1929, 1.
 20. This point is made throughout the publicity for the contests. But it is especially emphasized in the article printed on the eve of the final national judging of the 1929 contest: “‘Miss Brasil.’ Comparecerá à grande parada esthetica de Galveston,” *A Noite*, 15 Apr. 1929, 6-8.
 21. See, for example: “‘Miss Brasil’ comparecerá ao torneio de Galveston,” *A Noite*, 1 Apr. 1929, 6; “A eleição ‘Miss Brasil’,” *A Noite*, 3 Apr. 1929, 1; “*A Noite* ouve Olga Bergamini de Sá. As preferencias de ‘Miss Brasil’,” *A Noite*, 26 Apr. 1929, 1.
 22. “Em vespas da partida de Olga Bergamini de Sá. ‘Miss Brasil’ diz que não tem historia. ‘Sou uma moça como as outras’.” *A Noite*, 25 Apr. 1929, 1.
 23. *Ibid.*
 24. “Nas vespas da partida de Olga Bergamini de Sá,” *A Noite*, 2 May 1929, 1.
 25. “*A Noite* ouve Olga Bergamini de Sá. As preferencias de ‘Miss Brasil’,” *A Noite*, 26 Apr. 1929, 1; “Está constituído o jury de Galveston,” *A Noite*, 8 June 1929, 1.
 26. “A poucas dias do seu regresso á patria, a gratidão e a admiração dos brasileiros envolvem o nome de Olga,” *A Noite*, 4 July 1929, 1.
 27. Octavio Domingues as quoted by Stepan, *The Hour of Eugenics*, 135. Eugenicist Renato Kehl praised beauty contests for helping to “reestablish Hellenic culture.” Renato Kehl, *Formulario da beleza: Formulas escolidas* (Rio de Janeiro: Francisco Alves, 1927), 54-55.
 28. “Qual é a mais bella mulher do Brasil?” *Revista da Semana* 22:39 (24 Sep. 1921). Greek motifs were also used by *A Noite*, although the newspaper presentation was not as elegant. See: “A mais bella mulher do Brasil,” *A Noite*, 23 Sep. 1921, 1.
 29. “Olga Bergamini de Sá embarcará, amanha, ás 16 horas, no ‘Western World’,” *A Noite*, 7 May 1929, 1.
 30. On the importance of Greek imagery for nation-building in nineteenth-century Europe, see George L. Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality: Respectability and Abnormal Sexuality in Modern Europe* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1985), 14-16, 30-31, 49-50, 138-139. In nineteenth-century Germany, however, the Greek ideal of beauty was defined as a male, not a female, ideal.
 31. “Qual é mais bella mulher do Brasil?” *A Noite*, 6 Sep. 1922, 2.
 32. For a summary of the one-and-a-half-year history of Brazil’s first national beauty contest, see the four-column-wide, front-page article in *A Noite*, 4 Apr. 1923. The large, bold-faced, capitalized title was followed by three subtitles: “IMAGEN QUE DESLUMBRA. Foi acclamada a mulher mais bella do Brasil! O concurso sem precedentes da *Revista*

- da Semana e da A Noite e o julgamento dos mestres. As que figuram na phase última da escola.”*
33. “‘Miss Brasil’ comparecerá ao concurso mundial de belleza! Como se organisaram as bases do concurso apoiando no suffragio directo do povo,” *A Noite*, 7 Nov. 1928, 1. See also: “‘Miss Brasil’ comparecerá ao concurso mundial de belleza!” *A Noite*, 9 Nov. 1928, 1. Editors reiterated their criticism of the national beauty contest in France, and praised the organization of the “Miss America” contest, which they claimed was more democratic and more successful in eliciting patriotic enthusiasm and pride.
 34. “Escolhida a embaixatriz do Brasil para o torneio de Galveston,” *A Noite*, 17 Apr. 1929, 1-3.
 35. This “brilliant editorial” was quoted by *A Noite*, 18 Apr. 1929, 8.
 36. The judges for the first national contest included Baptista da Costa, Corrêa Lima, and Raul Pederneiras. See “IMAGEN QUE DESLUMBRA,” *A Noite*, 4 Apr. 1923, 1. The judges in 1929 were: Rodolpho Amoedo, Rodolpho Chambelland, Cunha Mello, Raul Leitão da Cunha, and Coelho Neto. See: “As estrelas do Brasil,” *A Noite*, 13 Apr. 1929, 1.
 37. “Escolhida a embaixatriz do Brasil para o torneio de Galveston,” *A Noite*, 17 Apr. 1929, 1.
 38. “Nas vespervas da partida de Olga Bergamini de Sá,” *A Noite*, 2 May 1929, 2.
 39. “Chronica,” *A Cigarra* 10:206 (1923).
 40. Ibid.
 41. Ibid.
 42. “A vida mais bella do Brasil. Commovente a historia da familia Leone,” *A Noite*, 16 Apr. 1923, 1. In fact, Zéze went on to become an actress. See: *Nosso século, 1910/1930: Anos de crise e criação* (São Paulo: Abril Cultural, 1981), 264.
 43. “A formosura em roda vida. Santos infatigavel nas suas manifestações mulher mais bella do Brasil,” *A Noite*, 13 Apr. 1923, 1.
 44. Crysanthème, *Minha terra e sua gente* (Rio de Janeiro: João de Rio, 1929), 36-42; Domingues Ribeira Filho, “O concurso de belleza: A sua ethica e a sua esthetica,” *Renascença* 1:4 (1923); Costa Rego, “As desvantagens de ser bella,” *Revista do Brasil*, anno 6, vol. 18, no. 71 (1921). Interestingly, Costa Rego expressed his abhorrence for beauty contests in the language of eugenics so popular at the time: according to him, they interfered with the process of “natural selection.”
 45. Lola de Oliveira, *Passadismo e modernismo*, 2nd ed. (São Paulo: Rossolillo, 1932), 77-80. Oliveira wrote a second chronicle in the same book (pp. 106-107) in which a young woman brags that she was the leader in a local beauty contest for a number of days since she has innumerable friends and a “colossal” number of relatives, all of whom sent in votes for her. But in the end, she laments, she lost to the fat matronly daughter of a stocking factory owner who bought up all the local issues of the sponsoring magazine and offered a free pair of stockings to the workers who would cast their votes for his daughter on the clipped coupons he supplied.
 46. “Concurso mundial de belleza: O commercio de ‘coupons’,” *A Gazeta*, 24 Jan. 1929, 1. The problem continued to be discussed in front-page articles on 26 January and 29 January. Since beauty queens were supposed to have no egoistic ambitions, and since

- they were supposed to represent the popular will, the practice of buying coupons and votes was a considerable embarrassment to the sponsors.
47. These figures were cited by *A Gazeta*, 25 Feb. 1929, 1.
 48. “A eleição de ‘Miss Brasil’. As victoriosas no grande pleito do Districto Federal,” *A Noite*, 6 Mar. 1929, 1. Even “Miss Ilhéos” accumulated 25,371 votes. “‘Miss Brasil’ comparecerá à grande parada esthetica de Galveston,” *A Noite*, 8 Apr. 1929, 6. Beauty contests were accorded almost daily – sometimes three to four column-wide – front-page coverage by *A Noite* for over eight months, until the conclusion of the “Miss Universe” pageant in June 1929. Only a few events such as the airplane crash of Santos Dumont and U.S. President Herbert Hoover’s visit to Brazil pushed coverage of the contest off the front page.
 49. “A declaração do amor: Concurso da *Revista da Semana*,” *Revista da Semana* 22:1 (1921).
 50. See, for example: “Qual é a moça mais bella de São Paulo? Concurso de belleza d’*A Cigarra*,” *A Cigarra* 9:180 (1922); “Qual é a moça mais culta de São Paulo? Outro concurso d’*A Cigarra*,” *A Cigarra* 9:182 (1922); “Os concursos d’*A Cigarra*: Louras e morenas,” *A Cigarra* 13:270 (1926), 30; “Concurso cinematographico d’*A Cigarra*,” *A Cigarra* 14:275 (1926), 19; “O melhor partido de casamento,” *A Cigarra* 14:285 (1926). See also: “Inquerito d’*A Vida Moderna*,” *A Vida Moderna* 25:365 (1919); “As enquetes d’*A Vida Moderna*,” *A Vida Moderna* 24:527 (1927).
 51. See, for example, the front-page articles in *A Noite* on 14 Oct. 1921, 15 Oct. 1921, 17 Oct. 1921, 22 Oct. 1921, and 3 Dec. 1921. Companies such as Jantzen sought publicity and financial gain by offering Brazil’s finalists bathing suits. “A eleição de ‘Miss Brasil’,” *A Noite*, 6 Apr. 1929, 1. The 1929 “Miss São Paulo,” Yvonne Freitas, declared upon receiving a “Reo Flying Cloud Master” automobile that of *all* the cars she had driven, none could match the performance of the “Reo Flying Cloud Master.” “Senhorita São Paulo; A sua permanencia nesta capital,” *A Cigarra* 16:345 (15-30 Mar. 1929).
 52. See, for example, “Qual a mais bella mulher do Brasil?” *A Noite*, 5 Dec. 1921, 1, 4.
 53. “O concurso mundial de belleza,” *A Gazeta*, 20 Mar. 1929, 3.
 54. “‘Miss Brasil’ comparecerá ao concurso mundial de belleza!” *A Noite*, 15 Nov. 1928, 1.
 55. Oliveira, *Passadismo e modernismo*, 106-110.
 56. Zélia Gattai, *Anarquistas, graças a Deus* (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 1979), 164.
 57. See her photograph in Augusto de Campos (ed.), *Pagu: Patrícia Galvão: Vida-obra* (São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1982), 298.
 58. “Dona na sociedade: O desfile dos ‘misses’ na avenida,” *O Cruzeiro* 2:90 (1930), 44. Soccer was first introduced to Brazil by British and U.S. schools, and until the late 1920s was still an elite sport, practiced in elite clubs. But working class teams also formed outside the elite clubs. By the 1930s, soccer became the sport of the masses, and the first African-Brazilian players entered the best teams.
 59. Lois Banner, *American Beauty*, 256-258.
 60. Sarah Banet-Weiser, *The Most Beautiful Girl in the World: Beauty Pageants and National Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 208-209.
 61. See: Kehl, *Formulario da belleza*. In this book, the author – founder of the Eugenic Society of São Paulo – attempts to define what is beauty with 27 pages of photographs

- and long lists of signs (or characteristics) of physical “perfection” and “imperfection.” The vast bulk of the 254-page book includes “recipes” for achieving eugenic “perfection.” See also Renato Kehl, *A cura de fealdade: Eugenia e medicina social* (São Paulo: Monteiro Lobato, 1923). This book (the title of which translates as “A cure for ugliness”) was reprinted in many editions.
62. This was certainly the case for Martha Rocha in 1954. See her autobiography, *Martha Rocha*.
 63. *Vida Paulista* (Jan. 1923), no title, no page. This issue included an announcement of the results of the Cine República’s beauty contest.
 64. “A rainha dos empregados no commercio,” *Boletim da Associação dos Empregados no Commercio* 3:19 (1927), 240.
 65. “‘Miss Progresso’,” *Progresso* 3:27 (1930), 3.
 66. Personal communication, Jeffrey Lesser, October 1996.
 67. The first contest was announced in *Progresso* 2:17 (1929), 4, and almost every issue of the magazine carried publicity and photos of the contestants until a winner was announced in *Progresso* 3:27 (1930), 3. Three months later, in *Progresso* 3:30 (1930), 2, the second “Miss Progresso” contest was announced. The titles awarded were revealing of the aspirations of upwardly mobile African-Brazilians. Rio de Janeiro’s elite African-Brazilian social club, the Renaissance Club, crowned a “Miss Renaissance.” And São Paulo’s 220 Club crowned a “*Bobequinha de Café*” [literally, “Little Coffee-Colored Doll”]. On the popularity of African-Brazilian beauty contests during the 1940s to 1960s, as well as the continuing power of white standards of beauty in selecting winners, see George Reid Andrews, *Blacks and Whites in São Paulo, Brazil, 1888-1988* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), 215. An African-Brazilian woman did not win the title of “Miss Brazil” until 1986, and it was a scandal even then.
 68. “Como Nichteroy vae festejar o ‘Dia do Trabalho’,” *A Noite*, 29 Apr. 1929, 8.
 69. On the symbolism of samba as representing the street (as opposed to the private realm of the house), see: Matta, *Carnivals, Rogues, and Heroes*, 63-64, 107-108.