INTERVIEW

# "Structural racism must be addressed from the depths, not the surface": an interview with Dennis de Oliveira

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*Abstract:* Dennis de Oliveira has been a professor for more than two decades at the School of Communications and Arts at the University of São Paulo. He is a journalist, with a PhD in Communication Sciences, and a researcher in the areas of Journalism, Culture, Social Movements, Ethnic-Racial Relations and Decolonial Theories. In October 2024, he was qualified as a Full Professor, when he presented a class on the topic "Media, Technology and Diversity," structured in the format of a samba school plot that earned him a ten. He is coordinator of the Center for Latin American Culture and Communication Studies (CELACC) and author of several books. In this interview for *Comunicação & Educação*, the professor tells a little about his career as a black journalist, professor and researcher at the largest public university in the country.

*Resumo:* Dennis de Oliveira é professor há mais de duas décadas na Escola de Comunicações e Artes da Universidade de São Paulo. É jornalista, doutor em Ciências da Comunicação, e pesquisador das áreas de Jornalismo, Cultura, Movimentos Sociais, Relações Étnico-Raciais e Teorias Decoloniais. Em outubro de 2024, foi habilitado como Professor Titular, quando apresentou uma aula sobre o tema "Mídia, Tecnologia e Diversidade", estruturada no formato de um enredo de escola de samba que lhe rendeu uma nota dez. É coordenador do Centro de Estudos Latino-Americanos de Cultura e Comunicação (CELACC) e autor de diversos livros. Nessa entrevista para a *Comunicação & Educação*, o docente conta um pouco da sua trajetória como jornalista, professor e pesquisador negro na maior universidade pública do País.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The year 2024 was a remarkable one for Professor Dennis de Oliveira. In November, he received the Luiz Gama Trophy in the category "Dean of Journalism," alongside Valdice Gomes (FENAJ). In April, he was awarded the "Outstanding Personality in Journalism Education" prize by the Brazilian Association for Journalism Studies, adding to the honors he had received in previous years. Also in 2024, he successfully applied for a full professorship at the University of São Paulo, becoming a Full Professor in the Journalism program, within the field of "Journalism and Social Interfaces," delivering his inaugural lecture entitled "*New Configurations of the Public Sphere*" and "*Ethnic-Racial Diversity*". Dennis consistently emphasizes the importance of bringing cultural traditions into the university; for this reason, he presented his lecture in the style of a samba school parade.

**Comunicação & Educação: Upon becoming a full professor at USP and receiving all these awards, you represent a lineage of Black intellectuals who have struggled to reach this point. How do you perceive your role in this context?**

**Dennis de Oliveira:** I believe that every individual achievement—at least, this is how I see it—is always collective. None of it would have been possible without the support of many people, starting with my family. My mother and siblings attended my award ceremony and were deeply moved. It's a very powerful experience; it brings a flood of memories. I remember the strict discipline my father imposed so that I could study—he was demanding, always. And all the effort involved. I was privileged because my family always had access to books. My father was a graphic producer and also worked in newspapers. He worked in journalism; he used to say he was a journalist and a graphic designer. Although he had no formal journalism training, he handled all the design, layout, and paste-up[1] work for newspapers. He worked at major publications such as *Última Hora*, *Folha de S.Paulo*, and *O Estado de S. Paulo*. He worked nights at the newspapers, and he had a passion: comic books. He participated as an organizer in the 1951 "*Exposição Internacional de Histórias em Quadrinhos* (International Exhibition of Comic Books)," [2] alongside Álvaro Moya, and was later honored at an event here at ECA.

1 A manual process that involves cutting and pasting texts, images, and letters onto a layout sheet. This sheet is then photographed to produce printing plates.

2 The 1st International Exhibition of Comic Books was held from June 19 to July 2, 1951, at the Centro Cultura e Progresso in São Paulo. It was conceived by Álvaro de Moya, Jayme Cortez, Syllas Roberg, Reinaldo de Oliveira, and Miguel Penteado. The exhibition fostered debates and reflections that contributed to the recognition and appreciation of comic books in Brazil.

***C&E*: What was your father's name?**

**DO:** Reinaldo de Oliveira. He has a contribution in Álvaro Moya's book *Shazam*, explaining the printing systems—offset, rotary—because that was his passion. He often brought work home, worked nights, and did small freelance jobs for publishers, creating illustrations. Comics would come from abroad, and he had to translate the speech balloons. He would draw the balloons using India ink and brushes—entirely by hand. He was an artist. By working in graphic production, mainly with originals, he eventually collaborated with some major publishers, which allowed him to provide books for us at no cost. At school, all six of us—my siblings and I—had free access to books. My father insisted we read extensively; he even gave books as Christmas gifts. He was passionate about reading and cultural production. I think there was a frustration because he could not study by himself; he had an obsession with higher education and wanted us to pursue it. Growing up in this environment, in a hardworking Black family, was crucial for my development and propelled me toward the university. Everything I have today is largely due to that effort. Imagine my father working 14 to 15 hours a day just to have books at home so his children could study—it's incredible. Ideally, access to education should be a universal right. My mother was a seamstress; my siblings worked, and I did as well, starting early. I also had support from my primary school classmates in Brás, from my university peers with whom I collaborated on projects, and from colleagues in social movements. In my acceptance speech for the Luiz Gama Trophy, I said that if we now have awards for Black journalists—you're right, it's not a huge number, but there is a significant pool from which to choose—it's because so many people fought for it: for affirmative action, racial quotas, and diversity debates. Today, it's possible to hold events with corporate sponsorship, with companies increasingly aware of diversity issues. All of this is a collective achievement. While I am deeply honored by the recognition, I also feel a strong sense of responsibility. This is due to collective effort, and I hope it encourages more people to enter journalism and communication and to pursue academic studies. I believe that is the commitment we carry.

***C&E*: At any point in your journey, did you feel isolated for being the only Black person in these environments?**

**DO:** It was… here at the university. I even included this in my Professorial Memorial. For instance, my undergraduate cohort had 85 students when we entered. The Communication program was entirely integrated at that time. The first year was foundational, and in the second year, we chose our specialization. The following year, separate entrance exams were introduced for each specialization, in 1983. I was part of the last cohort in which everything was integrated. Thus, we attended many courses together, the foundational ones. Out of the 85 students, for example, I remember that nine or ten of my classmates came from Bandeirantes School; they were already friends, so they came here together. Several others were from Rosário School. Only three or four, at

most, were from public schools—myself and two or three others—and I was the only Black student. So, you really feel alone. There was one episode during my undergraduate studies that I always mention, and it was quite amusing. In the 1980s, I often went with my sisters to Chic Show dances[3]. My routine on Sundays was to attend the São Paulo Chic dance in Barra Funda, during the funk groove era. Artists like Jimmy "Bo" Horne, James Brown, Kool & the Gang, and Earth, Wind & Fire—I was passionate about this whole scene. I still consider myself a huge fan [laughs]. I wore my hair in a Black Power style—I had a full head of hair back then. I arrived at the university wearing a Jackson 5 T-shirt, ready to make an impression. My peers mocked me, saying, "How ridiculous." It felt awful. I had no one to share my interests with; everyone else enjoyed different music and had different tastes.

***C&E*: Interesting, because today that T-shirt would be praised…**

**DO:** Yes, today is cool! It was really challenging. Many students had cars, while I relied on the bus. USP was terrible in the 1980s. If commuting is difficult today, back then it was far worse—no buses, no subway service. Nights were particularly hard; services barely operated. On top of that, the university had very high academic demands. I was working, and balancing work and study was extremely difficult. The workload was intense, and I sometimes failed courses because I couldn't keep up. At that time, some laboratories were even open on Saturdays until noon. Laboratory work required dedication beyond classroom hours, which I struggled to provide, so I had to improvise, working on Saturdays and Sundays. Eventually, you reach a point where you want to give up entirely. I remember being in my second or third year and telling my mother, "Mom, I'm done. I'm tired; I'm going to quit." My father was also present, and he said something very meaningful: "You have to make the university your project; don't delude yourself." I still carry this phrase with me today. Only those who delude themselves become frustrated. If you don't want to be frustrated, don't delude yourself. That's the point: do what you need to do without worrying about others. My mother also reminded me of "the effort we made for you to be here." That motivated me to persevere. What helped me a bit was engaging in student movements. It was the 1980s, and I finally found minimal social support. I participated in the Central Student Directory at USP, served as director of the State Student Union (UEE), and was an activist in the PCdoB at that time, in a faction called Viração, which later became the Socialist Youth Union. However, even within the student movement, participants were often very elitist and difficult to interact with. It wasn't entirely smooth—I quickly realized this… Although there was some welcome, it was limited. Certain issues I raised were not well-received. Yet, through the student movement, I met other Black students who shared similar experiences. One of them, for example, is Carlos Alberto, known as Carlão, who studied Journalism at Metodista in the 1980s. He served as UEE president and currently lives in Salvador; he is a close friend. I also met students from PUC São Paulo; we often gathered at Riviera[4] in the

3 A black party that emerged in São Paulo nightlife in the 1970s, at the Sociedade Esportiva Palmeiras sports club. Created by Luiz Alberto da Silva, known as Luizão, the Chic Show dances were important in creating a black scene in São Paulo. Chic Show began as a team in the hall of the Cooperativa do Carvão, in the west of São Paulo. It then moved to Mansão Azul, in Jabaquara, and became established at São Paulo Chic, on Brigadeiro Galvão Street. On Sundays, the Chic Show dance party brought together almost two thousand dancers.

4 Traditional bar in the city of São Paulo, located on Paulista Avenue.

evenings after classes. I frequently went to JBSambar near USP and also to Rei das Batidas. This allowed me to establish at least minimal social connections. To give you an idea, I never dated anyone from USP. All of my romantic relationships were outside: at dances or in the neighborhood. I never had a close relationship within the university.

***C&E*: Today, you work and conduct research in the areas of communication, culture, social movements, ethnic-racial relations, and decolonial theories. Do you think there have been advances in research projects on these topics, both at the undergraduate and graduate levels?**

**DO:** Yes, there have definitely been advances. I believe that the topic of diversity has grown considerably in recent years within the field of communication. It has become a prominent issue, particularly due to the broader progress of affirmative action. This has influenced the field of communication and internal discussions at the university, especially following the introduction of racial quotas at USP. With this debate, Black students have increasingly positioned themselves more assertively. Today, the university is even moving toward institutionalizing these discussions. The Office of Inclusion and Belonging at the University of São Paulo, along with various inclusion committees, has increasingly welcomed these conversations. The very fact that my own tenure application focused on diversity was particularly significant. It opened a research line within the department on this topic, which was very rewarding. Now, the question arises: how should this topic be addressed? Why is it being discussed now, and how should one approach it? There are many ways to address it. My perspective, for example, is that when discussing racism—structural racism—you must delve deeply into the foundations of society rather than engaging superficially. Recently, what I have observed—Eric Hobsbawm also discusses this—is a tendency to focus excessively on the present, losing historical depth and future perspective. When racism is analyzed only through its contemporary manifestations—which are important to document and denounce—the crucial point is to understand how and why it occurs, not just to identify isolated incidents. I see this happening frequently now because, suddenly, some White individuals who were previously unaware of these issues are being confronted by them. For us, this is a constant part of our history, so it is not shocking—it simply exists. Nevertheless, it is important that others become aware of and are impacted by it. It is essential to examine the historical foundations of racism; we need to retell the story of Brazil to educate the Brazilian public. The difficulty in recounting our history from the foundations of racism stems from the fact that our epistemological perspective is still largely Eurocentric. That is why I have turned to decolonial approaches, although I do not fully align with all decolonial theorists—not all of them appeal to me. However, I consider it important to adopt an alternative epistemology, one rooted in our historical foundations and particularities. What I have been discussing, particularly, is the need to examine the foundations of modernity that underpin democratic society, liberal thought, our conception

of the subject, knowledge, and journalism. Journalism, after all, is a modern activity tied to the public sphere. Modernity is often portrayed as the pinnacle of human progress, marking the human break from the theocentric worldview during the so-called Dark Ages in Europe. However, Brazil did not experience the Middle Ages, nor did Latin America in general. Modernity arrived here in an extremely oppressive form. I am fond of a quote from the Cuban poet Alejo Carpentier, who said that in the Americas, modernity arrived with the noose. That is the reality of modernity. When Latin American peoples attempt to build projects based on principles of freedom and classical modernity—projects led by local peoples—they are brutally repressed. The Haitian Revolution is the clearest example: it was led by formerly enslaved Black Haitians, who sought to establish a liberal society grounded in the principles of French modernity. France, however, brutally repressed it, and Haiti continues to pay the price for that audacity. The same occurred with the Bahian Conspiracy in 1798 here in Brazil, which has largely been forgotten. In contrast, the *Inconfidência Mineira*, led by White intellectuals, is widely remembered, while the Black-led Bahian movement is not.

***C&E*: There is even a public holiday for the *Inconfidência Mineira.***

**DO:** Yes, a holiday and all that, but nobody remembers the names of the leaders of the movement in Bahia[5]. Not even that. I think these examples are interesting because they illustrate the following: the concept of modernity is Eurocentric and only valued when led by White people. This occurs in political processes—the examples of the *Inconfidências* are very telling—but it is also evident, for instance, when one normalizes having a country with a 58% Black population yet must fight fiercely to ensure that this demographic is also represented in universities, in the Supreme Federal Court, in the National Congress, in political spaces, and in journalism. You constantly have to fight for this representation, when it should be natural—and yet it is not. There was an interesting episode here at USP. I was with Professor Eunice Prudente, and we were working on rebuilding the Interdisciplinary Center for the Study of the Black Brazilian (Neinb) at USP. We wrote a reconstruction project and went to speak with an advisor at the USP Office of Research. He received us very kindly, took the project, said he would forward it, and mentioned that he was very sensitive to the cause we were defending because he was a descendant of Jews who had suffered the horrors of the Holocaust in Germany. He said something along the lines of: "My parents went through a very difficult period; I am sensitive to this, and we will help make it happen." Leaving that meeting, I commented to Professor Eunice: "We are in Brazil, and we have to ask a person who is the child of Jewish Holocaust survivors to acknowledge that the Black racial issue is important." Now, imagine the reverse: Jewish people at Tel Aviv University discussing the importance of the Jewish issue with a Black rector. That would not happen. Yet we normalize situations like this in Brazil. This demonstrates the point: the structures of modernity—including education,

5 Names of the leaders of the Bahian Conspiracy or "Revolt of the Búzios": Luiz Gonzaga das Virgens, Lucas Dantas, Manuel Faustino dos Santos, and João de Deus Nascimento. All were hanged and quartered on November 8, 1799.

universities, knowledge, systems of power, and journalism—are normative in White terms. And it is this structural racism that we must address. Racism is not only immediate, overt prejudice, which is the most visible and easily identifiable form today—it exists within the structures. This is the central element of structural racism. Therefore, we need to rethink how it was constructed and consider how to confront a situation far more complex than it may initially appear.

***C&E*: We would like to discuss another topic that motivates you as a professor. How did you become involved with *Notícias do Jardim São Remo*[6]?**

**DO:** I took the public tender exam here at ECA in 2003. Professor Manuel Carlos Chaparro had created the newspaper in 1994, and when he retired in 2001, Leonardo Sakamoto took over. Sakamoto was an adjunct professor because he had not completed his master's degree, so he stayed only for a short time. He was responsible for transforming the newspaper from a bulletin board format into a printed publication that was distributed. Once Sakamoto left, a position opened up for this course, and I applied. I had no idea at the time that it would involve this kind of production. I found it interesting because I had already worked in community newspapers and union-related publications. My professional journalism career was largely in the area of social movements. After finishing my degree, I worked with the chemical workers' unions, producing newspapers for popular movements, and spent most of my career in this area. Although I also worked briefly in journals—I spent a short time at Editora Abril and did an internship at TV Bandeirantes—the bulk of my work was in social-movement journalism. So, I found this very engaging and began interacting with members of the community. However, there were some challenges. The original concept of the newspaper was that of a neighborhood paper. Chaparro had extensive experience with neighborhood newspapers, which focus primarily on local issues and typically show little ideological difference from mainstream media. Our approach, however, was to examine a community that has a love-hate relationship with USP. This community has a historical connection to the university because it was established during the construction of the *campus*, with the workers involved in its development. At one point—before the campus walls were built—residents could enter and leave freely. Many of them still work at the university. The community had a very close relationship, but since the walls were built, conflicts intensified, amplifying a more contentious dynamic with the university. The university attempts to implement certain projects, but they often operate more like academic laboratories. Chaparro aimed to break away from that model. He said: "Let's use the newspaper to establish a somewhat more dialogical relationship, although I never believed it could be fully dialogical, at least minimally closer to the community." We proceeded with this approach, and I began to notice a recurring discussion—one that even generated criticism regarding *São Remo* newspaper: "A community newspaper is one actually produced by the community." Initially, I tried to create more effective participation channels for the local residents. We established initiatives

6 *Notícias do Jardim São Remo* is a printed newspaper produced by first-year Journalism students at ECA/USP as a mandatory laboratory activity. It is an extension project coordinated by Professors Dennis de Oliveira and Luciano Guimarães.

such as suggestion boxes and open editorial meetings, but the community did not engage; they simply were not interested. Over time, and through a largely empirical observation, we realized that they preferred that we produce the newspaper ourselves, because it conferred a certain prestige: "USP produces and distributes this newspaper here, which makes us important."

***C&E*: Did anyone say that to you directly?**

**DO:** They did. A woman said it, and once I was distributing the newspaper in the community on a weekday, late in the afternoon. There was a bar— I don't think it exists anymore—at the very end of the street leading to Corifeu (Avenida Corifeu de Azevedo Marques), and it was a women-only bar. The owner was a woman, and there were only women there, playing billiards, drinking beer—it was quite a sight! I thought it was very interesting. I went there in the afternoon, and two women were sitting and talking. I handed the newspaper to one of them. One said: "What is this you're giving me?" and I replied: "It's the *Jardim São Remo* newspaper." Her friend added: "It's from our community. Don't mind her; she's not from here. She's from Paraisópolis. Paraisópolis is a little favela where Globo makes a soap opera. Ours is the USP newspaper [laughter], we are more important."

***C&E*: It's the pride of belonging.**

**DO:** Pride, indeed. Hers is the Globo soap opera; ours is the USP newspaper [laughs]. It's a form of recognition. They talked about self-esteem and their determination to advocate with the city hall. This is a very organized community. There was a project by USP's Institute of Advanced Studies (IEA), sponsored by the Tide Setúbal Foundation, to conduct a census of communities surrounding the university campuses. We looked at Jardim São Remo and Jardim Keralux, which are near USP Leste. Interestingly, Keralux has a more contentious relationship with USP Leste. It is much more critical of the university than here. Residents there complain that USP has increased local living costs and inflated commercial prices. They say it complicates commuting to the train, since you have to pass through campus and show identification—many criticisms, far more than in Butantã. Here, there are also criticisms, but we have the University Hospital, which serves the community, a dental clinic, and some people consider the campus a park where people fly kites, while others actually work here. We asked: "What do you do in your free time?" The number of people who read the newspaper is significant. I don't know the exact percentage—it's not the majority, of course—but it is much higher than we expected for a peripheral community. We attribute this to both the newspaper and the evangelical church, since some people read the Bible. It is interesting to see the importance of recognizing oneself in print. One thing we noticed is how important the printed newspaper still is. We have tried to move online, but nobody accesses it. First, because of internet limitations: 4G plans with restricted data. People use their phones and 4G primarily for WhatsApp

and Facebook, which are unrestricted; they don't navigate to websites or type "www." That just doesn't happen. They will use apps for games. But printed newspapers—they keep them. A printed paper is a document; it has a certain significance. Some even collect newspapers, keeping them as records: "Look, I appeared ten years ago." You find people who do that. They have this profile. I realized that newspapers can foster another type of relationship between the university and the community. For me, however, *Jardim São Remo* newspaper is primarily a learning experience for the students.

***C&E*: And how is this experience for the ECA students?**

**DO:** We realized that, rather than primarily thinking of a neighborhood newspaper experience, local as it was originally conceived—those kinds of neighborhood newspapers are disappearing today, and only a few remain—I see it more as an opportunity to expand the journalistic agenda in general. This was partly discussed in my associate professor, when I explored Paulo Freire's ideas in journalism[7]. In that discussion, I use Freire's concept of the "Culture of Silence," which highlights how journalists silence certain voices and sources. When journalists restrict themselves to a limited number of more official or mainstream sources, they are silencing a significant portion of the population. This concept is particularly relevant for racial discussions. When it comes to São Remo, I tell students: "Look, this is a valuable experience for you to think about how to broaden your agenda of stories and sources." For example, if you are reporting on an increase in the Selic interest rate, as recently happened, traditional journalism tends to consult economists tied to the financial market or business owners. However, the rate hike also affects people who have financing with Casas Bahia, those planning to buy a home, and small business owners—voices that are rarely heard. Consider the ongoing debate about the Continuous Cash Benefit[8] (BPC); it is outrageous to cut the BPC. Has any journalist interviewed the recipients? No one has. These individuals, who rely on modest salaries to support their families, are ignored—they are seen only as costs. Observing these silenced voices, *Jardim São Remo* newspaper becomes an exercise in breaking down barriers and inspiring journalism students to expand their sources and challenge the silences that traditional journalism imposes.

***C&E*: It's an unfamiliar field for them. Where are the editorial meetings held? In the community itself?**

**DO:** Yes, because there is something very challenging that students experience firsthand. People in São Remo refuse to give interviews by phone, cell, or WhatsApp. You must go there because they don't trust remote communication. They ask, "Who is sending me this message?" They want to see the person; the relationship is personal.

***C&E*: We get the sense that *São Remo* is a microcosm because they are critiquing fake news.**

7 Published as "*Jornalismo e emancipação: uma prática jornalística baseada em Paulo Freire*" (Editora Appris, 2017).

8 The BPC, established in the Organic Law of Social Assistance, guarantees a monthly minimum wage to elderly individuals aged 65 or older or to persons with disabilities of any age.

**DO:** Exactly. A politician has a press office and is used to being interviewed remotely. But someone at home, being interviewed, asks, "Why are you sending me a WhatsApp message? No! Come here and talk to me." Even as a sign of respect. You use WhatsApp to schedule, but you have to go to their home, have a coffee, and converse.

***C&E*: Why did you feel the need to create a style guide for *Notícias do Jardim São Remo*?**

**DO:** We created the style guide for São Remo. We also developed a portal, *Central Periférica*, during the COVID-19 pandemic when classes were online and the *São Remo* newspaper could not be produced—it was on pause for a year. As it was a laboratory activity, we created this portal with news from peripheral neighborhoods, because students were scattered across Brazil—even outside São Paulo State. The idea was for each student to produce news from peripheral neighborhoods near their residence. When in-person classes resumed, we maintained the portal as an initial laboratory for quicker news production, while São Remo continued as a more established newspaper. We produced style guides for both platforms. These guides will be made freely available online, with a limited print edition for the library and some students. Access will be open to anyone.

***C&E*: Throughout your career, you have hosted *Farofa Crítica*, participated in the *Fórum* portal, produced the *Ação Negra* program, engaged with *Café Filosófico*, appeared on *Roda Viva*, and created podcasts and Instagram videos. What is your relationship with social media? Do you see this as an educational movement?**

**DO:** It depends, I suppose [laughs]. Not necessarily. I try to be, but it has mostly been shaped by circumstances. I am not particularly inclined toward social media or being an influencer. For example, I am not familiar with, nor do I master, many techniques; I struggle to understand things like clickbait[9] or SEO[10], I don't know. I have a team that helps me with these aspects—people who are more in tune with the digital landscape. Circumstances gradually drew me in; I was invited, and I just started doing it. *Farofa Crítica* began in a playful way. First, the name—which was very funny. I was at home, and one of my passions is cooking. I made a dish, a citrus farofa, following a recipe based on a citrus juice, lemon and orange, which results in a farofa with a slightly sour taste. I posted it on my Facebook: "I made a recipe here, citrus *farofa*." A former student of mine, now graduated, Babel (Babel Hajjar), commented: "*Farofa Crítica* (critical farofa)? What's that?" I replied: "No, citrus, man." "Ah, citrus! But it's a great name for a program." Later, while I was chairing the department, Alexandre Gennari, from the laboratory, suggested: "Let's create a program here in the lab, it's a bit idle," and I said: "Okay. How about calling it *Farofa Crítica*?" "Cool name," he said—and that was it. We began producing the program, interviewing a few people. If you watch the early episodes, they

9 A tactic used on the internet to generate online traffic through misleading or sensationalist content. Also referred to as *clickbait*, this term describes the breach of user expectations after being "lured" by such a click-driven trap.

10 An acronym for *search engine optimization* (SEO), which refers to the process of optimizing websites for search engines. It is a digital marketing strategy aimed at improving a website's ranking in search results.

are terrible. I am very inexperienced on television, extremely awkward in front of the camera, and very nervous. Over time, I became more relaxed and found my rhythm. But I eventually stopped *Farofa Crítica*—there is just too much to do in too little time [laughs].

***C&E*: And what about other platforms, like Instagram?**

**DO:** Well, Instagram is actually managed by a student who helps with the postings. I have a research assistant taking care of it. And *Ação Negra* on *Fórum* is a program we created with colleagues from the Black movement. Some of my colleagues—Juninho (Joselício Junior), Fábio (Fábio Nogueira, professor at Uneb-Bahia), Danilo (Danilo Benedicto), Tatiana Oliveira, Tâmara Pacheco—formed a network. Initially, we built a network of intellectuals focused on Black Marxism, discussing Clóvis Moura and works of lesser-known Black Marxist scholars. From that, we wanted to develop a program. Renato Rovai, from *Revista Fórum*—I served on his editorial board, we are friends—invited me some time ago to create a program, giving us the Saturday slot, and we began producing the program on Saturdays.

***C&E*: Which of these media do you prefer?**

**DO:** I prefer print. I am committed to print, to text. I enjoy reading newspapers; I still subscribe to print newspapers. I love reading; it is a passion of mine—I am incorrigible.

***C&E*: You have authored the books *Jornalismo e Emancipação* (2017); *Jornalismo e os dilemas da sociedade da inflação de informações* (2018); *Iniciação ao ensino de jornalismo* (2020); *Racismo estrutural* (2021); *and Periferias insurgentes* (2021). This sequence gives us the impression of a thematic continuity. Is that the case?**

**DO:** Yes. The *Periferias Insurgentes* was the outcome of a collective research project at the IEA, under the Sabbatical Year Program. I have been deeply engaged in studying this subject: peripheral collectives in communication and culture. It is something that greatly fascinates me. Since 2014 or 2015, I have been examining these issues, because I see in them alternative forms of social organization, particularly in how they employ information and communication technologies. My partner, Eliete Barbosa, studies Black women in the peripheries. Her book, in fact, is on this topic: *Negras Lideranças* (Black Leadership). Both her master's and doctoral research focused on this, and we frequently exchange ideas on the subject. Black women have always created networks—how so? They move into public spaces—health, education, or others—because sexism forces them into family care roles. There, they encounter other Black women, and gradually they come together, one by one, discovering shared experiences and struggles. An interesting observation—which I only realized later, based on her research, and which directly connects to journalism—is that in television news programs, such as *Bom Dia São Paulo*, when reports highlight complaints

from the peripheries, like water shortages, it is always women who voice these concerns. Always women. In fact, in nearly every peripheral movement, women are at the forefront. In São Remo as well, it is predominantly women. It is remarkable, because as one ascends the hierarchy toward positions of power, the space becomes increasingly masculinized. At the grassroots level, you find women—mostly Black women—but at the top…

***C&E*: In leadership positions?**

**DO:** Exactly. Take Guilherme Boulos, the leader of the Homeless Workers' Movement (MTST)—a white man. But at the base of housing occupations, it is all Black women. The solidarity kitchens are run exclusively by Black women. They are the ones who organize the housing movements, prepare the meals, and care for the children. As Eliete pointed out, even when there is a march or a protest in front of city hall, who organizes the buses and the food? It is the women who take charge—mobilizing participants, gathering names, and leading everything.

***C&E*: Returning to the sequence of your books, we observe that your work always departs from journalism toward marginal and social themes—race, peripheries, populations. What other issues affect you that might become the subject of a future book?**

**DO:** I am currently writing a book titled *Ação direta do capital*. I am already halfway through it; it was supposed to be finished by the end of the year, but I will not be able to complete it in time. I began this discussion with *Racismo Estrutural*, the core idea being the erosion of structures of political intermediation. Large capital conglomerates increasingly decide matters *a priori*, without any form of mediation or debate, and I am writing extensively about this. Take, for instance, the case of Uber. When Uber arrived in Brazil, there was no regulatory framework for app-based transport, so regulation only followed after the practice was already established. This has been happening for quite some time—consider financial capital or genetically modified organisms. Corporate groups determine what must be done and how it must be done, imposing patterns of sociability, while institutional powers are too weakened to respond effectively, merely chasing after what has already been put in place.

***C&E*: You have witnessed numerous struggles and major achievements, whether regarding affirmative action policies or the economic issues faced by the population. Recently, in an interview, you remarked on the emergence of several critiques of so-called *identitarianism* and *identity politics*, voiced not only by the political right but even within academia. In the labor sphere, for instance, there is ongoing debate around diversity—a goal achieved only very recently—which is already being abandoned by US corporations, as companies dismantle their DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) programs under directives from President Donald Trump. To what do you attribute this shift in agenda?**

**DO:** The United States is undergoing a particular phase; they were in the *color blindness* paradigm… There are several factors. First, something I have been emphasizing for a long time: we must understand the differences between the United States and Brazil.

***C&E*: Yes, but eventually those issues will reach us.**

**DO:** Indeed, by influence. However, even the framework of the US antiracist agenda that arrives here does not adequately \address our dilemmas. It does not, because, first, the Black population in the United States constitutes 15%, whereas here it accounts for 58%. Second, historically speaking, slavery in the United States was residual, confined to the economically less developed South of the colonial economy, whereas in Brazil it was central to the colonial economy. Third, in the United States, there was a national project that freed the enslaved population—the North against the South—through the Civil War. Thus, when the American capitalist project was being consolidated in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it required the abolition of slavery. Later, in the 1960s, at the height of US economic growth, it was in the interest of certain sectors of the American bourgeoisie to incorporate part of the Black population into the consumer market. For that reason, the Kennedy administration at a given point supported affirmative action—not out of antiracist commitment, but because, at that historical moment, it was advantageous to integrate a segment of the Black population as consumers. Indeed, today there exists a substantial African American consumer market. I spoke with the director of an American advertising agency, *Burr Communications*[11]. This agency specializes in producing advertising campaigns targeting Black consumers, managing accounts from Procter & Gamble, Pepsico, and the US government. They conduct research on what African American consumers expect to see in order to engage with products—such as McDonald's—and the material they produce is remarkably polished. This outcome reflects over fifty years of affirmative action. With the election of Barack Obama, some considered the process complete—that affirmative action had fulfilled its role. Thus, the *color blindness* paradigm emerged: no further need for such policies, now it is every individual for themselves, as American liberalism has already absorbed diversity. This is the discourse being promoted. In this sense, Brazilian *racial democracy* has now been exported there. Yet, within certain sectors of the African American movement, there is a growing debate that diversity policies are no longer sufficient. Consider Michelle Alexander's book *The New Jim Crow*. What does she define as the "new Jim Crow"? For her, it is a subtler form of segregation. She notes that while Barack Obama occupied the presidency and a Black middle class thrived, there was simultaneously mass incarceration of African Americans. The racial policy framework thus maintains a racist structure, though no longer as overtly racist as the segregationist Jim Crow era. That is the trajectory that unfolded in the United States.

11 BURR COMMUNICATIONS. Available at: https://www.burrcommunications.com/. Accessed in: 25 Jan. 2025.

***C&E*: Do Americans therefore assume that diversity policies are no longer necessary because they believe everyone is now on equal footing? And will meritocracy be the prevailing principle from now on?**

**DO:** Exactly, they have already had opportunities. And there is another aspect here, which is the discussion raised by Nancy Fraser when she speaks of *progressive neoliberalism*. This model preserved the liberal foundation but incorporated certain sectors of diversity—LGBT, Black, and others. She argues that this project was designed by US financial capital, the same financial capital that funds the Democratic Party—not just a faction, but the party as a whole. And she poses the question: What is the problem with this agenda? The issue is that it not only fails to resolve the problems faced by Black people, LGBT communities, and women, but it also generates tensions with the white working class, which tends to move toward the far right. We witnessed this in the election of Trump, who won through popular vote. White workers voted for Trump, as did some Black workers and immigrants. In fact, we saw the incorporation of sectors historically more aligned with the Democrats into the far right. And that is a problem. Fraser anticipated in her text that this would happen. In Brazil, the situation is somewhat more complex for the following reason: in addition to the historical issues I have already mentioned—demographics, among others—affirmative action here did not emerge in opposition to an official segregation policy. Rather, it emerged as a counterpoint to the ideology of *racial democracy*. That is the key difference, because Brazil lived for decades under the narrative of racial democracy. Thus, the first step was to racialize the debate, since denial was widespread. The immediate counterargument to affirmative action was: "No, Brazil is not racist. Everyone is equal. Anyone can succeed if they try." That was the reaction. "Brazil doesn't have that issue; it's a US problem." This was the rhetoric of those who opposed racial quotas. And that is quite revealing. What we confronted in Brazil was racial democracy, and we had to deconstruct it by explaining that such a notion did not hold true, while demonstrating how racism actually functions in Brazil. Working with affirmative action here is often more complex, more difficult. And the criticism against affirmative action almost always attempts to draw on US references. Take the case of *identitarianism*, for instance. Of course, one can find individuals in Brazil's Black movement who draw upon the US identitarian framework, but they are a minority. To me, labeling the movement in this way is an intellectual and political dishonesty. With all due respect to sociologist Jessé de Souza, who criticizes *identitarianism* as being responsible for the left's defeats—with all due respect—it is a dishonest assessment. The movement is not identitarian. If you examine the agendas advanced by the Brazilian antiracist movement, they are centered on public policy: education, healthcare, and so forth. The majority of Black congressmen and congresswomen elected put forward precisely these agendas: the improvement of public services, which have historically been lacking in Brazil. Therefore, it is inaccurate to qualify the Black movement as a whole

as identitarian. In fact, *identitarianism* is far more prevalent among white groups than among Black ones—that is what we see.

***C&E*: This movement toward diversity was very short-lived, especially in Brazil.**

**DO:** It is quite revealing, because in Brazil, racism has a very clear and explicit purpose: it serves to sustain a system of brutal labor exploitation. That is the underlying idea. In the United States, for example, diversity was even discussed as a paradigm of corporate management. In Brazil, this has never even been considered—it is entirely off the table. Consider the debates around the constitutional amendment (PEC) against the 6×1 work schedule[12]. The reaction of many was striking: "Impossible, we must keep working; child labor is necessary." Brazil has an entrenched culture of brutal exploitation, inherited directly from slavery. That is the crux of the problem we face here. What we confront in Brazil is much more complex, much more difficult. Thus, whenever so-called identitarian agendas appear in corporations, they do so under intense pressure, and even then, they remain minimal—and now, there are efforts to dismantle them altogether. This is no exaggeration.

***C&E*: Many people complain that corporate diversity courses and programs are generally directed at minorities, who already feel prejudice in their daily lives. For them, it is whites who truly need this training.**

**DO:** Exactly, because people do not assume responsibility for this issue. The discourse is always: "I have nothing to do with it. I am not guilty."

***C&E*: You have stated that you believe human rights policy should be developed as a State career project rather than through partnerships with the third sector, as has traditionally been the case in previous administrations. Could you elaborate on this? What would such governance look like?**

**DO:** I believe the Brazilian State must take on Human Rights not only as an ethical commitment but as an effective public policy. This would entail, for instance, implementing a cross-cutting project that permeates public security, education, healthcare, and other areas. It cannot be confined to a separate "box," with Human Rights being treated as an isolated sector, activated only when a problem arises to mitigate damages. Instead, it must be integrated into the overall governance framework. I understand that this is a challenge, since the culture of violence is deeply rooted in Brazil, and many still equate human rights with "criminals' rights." But that is not the case. Human Rights must be understood as the foundation of a balanced relationship with people, and that is what we advocate. What typically happens is that human rights policies are outsourced to the third sector. It is not that I am against the third sector, but I have serious reservations, since this model reflects a neoliberal project that ends up outsourcing the State's obligations. If a government is truly committed to Human Rights, then it must assume them as an internal policy. In other words, they must become a State career path, a transversal theme embedded

12 The 6×1 PEC is a proposal to end the six-day work week in favor of one day of rest. The PEC establishes a four-day work week and three days of rest.

across all areas: healthcare, education, public security, and justice. It should not be restricted to the punitive dimension, as some believe. Of course, prisons and police apparatus are part of it, but so is the disrespect to Human Rights when patients are forced to sleep on the floor of hospitals waiting for medical care. That is a violation of rights. Or take the case of someone living in a peripheral neighborhood where shootings prevent them from leaving their home—this too constitutes a violation of rights. Thinking of Human Rights as State policy means the State must act as the entity responsible for society, ensuring more balanced conditions for everyone.

***C&E*: You have always emphasized ethics as a central axis of journalism. Do you believe that journalism, as it is currently practiced, maintains an ethical posture?**

**DO:** What is the problem with journalism today? Journalism was born out of the idea of being the *watchdog* of power, holding it accountable. Over time, it became increasingly commercialized, and today it resembles much more of an institution seduced by the allure of being close to power, to the upper echelons, rather than genuinely acting as a watchdog on behalf of citizens. Of course, media companies bear responsibility for this, but it is also closely tied to the broader crisis of democracy. It often seems as though we no longer believe in democracy or in the modern project—it needs reinvention. The problem is that democracy cannot be reduced to its formal or procedural dimensions. For someone living in the periphery or in a favela, voting every four years means very little if they still live with open sewers, no access to daycare or schools, and daily violence. What kind of democracy is that? For the majority of Brazilians, democracy has become an empty word. And because it has lost meaning, all democratic institutions fall into crisis, journalism included. So, what does journalism become? Often, it looks more like a stage for political celebrities than a space of dialogue and negotiation among political and social forces. That is the real problem—it has turned into a field of seduction, of proximity to power. That is why the journalism we practice in São Remo, which I mentioned earlier, is very different—it involves "getting your hands dirty." We say: "If you don't ride the bus, take the subway, go to a soccer match, or spend time in a neighborhood bar, you cannot be a journalist in Brazil, because life is out there." Let me give a concrete example from my book: I once went to a Santos soccer game with my nephew. The water supply at Vila Belmiro stadium ran out on a scorching hot day. Fans resorted to pouring ice cream over their heads to cool off. The bathrooms were filthy, with no running water, reeking, and in appalling condition. And yet, the next day, not a single line appeared in the newspapers about this. The reporter went, interviewed a player, and published the same empty commentary as always. But the fan—the paying, passionate supporter—was absent from the coverage. How can a team provide such deplorable conditions to its supporters, and yet journalists, who are supposed to be watchdogs, ignore it? Why didn't anyone investigate or report it? The answer is

clear: fans are absent from journalism. And who are those fans? Workers, poor people who love soccer. Their absence and silencing reveal the larger problem. Because of this, democracy is in crisis. People no longer perceive journalism as a space where their voices can be heard or their complaints addressed. Journalism has been reduced to a game of celebrities. As Venício Lima observes, television soap operas have become far more influential in shaping public debate than newspapers. Soap operas introduce discussions on racism, LGBT issues, and other topics that journalism ignores. It is astonishing: a work of fiction, through a television character, now channels popular grievances more effectively than a journalist or reporter. At that point, journalism has collapsed. This problem is not exclusive to Brazil—it is global. I believe journalism is vital for democracy, but it must be reinvented. Ethics must be understood as a public commitment. Ethics is not only about formal procedures—listening to both sides, and so forth. Journalists still do that. But ethics is fundamentally about public responsibility. If journalists fail to honor this commitment, even if they comply with formal codes of ethics, they grow increasingly distant from the public. What happens then? Other forms of information emerge—fake news networks. And while they spread lies, they succeed because they create alternative channels of connection with a distant public, thereby legitimizing themselves. Fake news often mimics journalistic aesthetics and circulates according to the logic of social media, which is very powerful: it comes from someone you know. Its credibility lies not in the information itself, but in the person who shares it—your uncle, your friend, your partner. This interpersonal trust lends legitimacy, even to falsehoods. Meanwhile, journalistic institutions—whose role should be mediating between the public and power structures—grow increasingly distant, failing to correctly interpret society's dilemmas, and thus lose relevance. The issue is not the internet *per se*. Suggesting otherwise is a shallow argument. If that were the case, the audience of *Folha* would have migrated to *UOL*, and that of *Globo* to *G1*. But that has not happened. The problem is not simply a platform shift. Fake news thrives because of journalism's distancing from society. This is the self-criticism that news outlets refuse to undertake. Instead, they dismiss the public as ignorant, insisting that their way is the only correct way—and that is the end of the conversation.

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